

Notions of the Self and Ethics in Education

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Abstract

In a time of unprecedented outpouring of writing about the self, the subject appears in a striking multiplicity of perspectives. Various descriptions in such terms as fractured, decentred, and minimal, or roundly denounced as illusory, the self in shadowy form often assumes the role of a background participant in discourse, making fleeting appearances in discussions of theory and practice across a broad range of disciplines within education. This study seeks to trace some of those forms and, in examining discussions that deal particularly with ethics and moral development, to contribute to an understanding of how variant notions of the self influence conceptual economies of meaning that travel into classrooms.

Assessing how notions of the self vary, and attempting to understand their influence on particular approaches to ethical deliberation, invites engagement with questions of language, epistemology and ontology and the conceptual incommensurables that inhabit them. The study examines various aspects of selfhood under such descriptive categories as ethical agency, identity, experience and the dialogical, and discusses how

these are rendered problematic by essentialist and anti-essentialist views. Based on a presentation of opposing approaches to the self, the study argues that an appreciation of the relationship between the theoretical and the practical becomes the site of a process in which individual ethical integrity may flourish.

An examination of the various ways in which the self is understood through narrative focuses on the concept of narrative knowing as it appears in the writings of Jerome Bruner and Donald Polkinghorne. A critical appraisal of their views and the instantiation of these in the literature of educational research includes discussion of insights from the work of Paul Ricoeur, David Carr, and Martha Nussbaum. The phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives they bring to an understanding of the relation between self and ethics in narrative, serves to preface a review of the formidable contribution of feminist writing.

Feminist writings on the self, and particularly the ethics of care as presented in the work of Nel Noddings, offer important challenges to educators steeped in more traditional deontological ethical approaches; in this work they also serve to underscore the recurrent theme of the role of consciousness in making meaning of experiences in which human connection with others and the environment is central. Feminist insistence on the crucial role of relationship and on the consideration of the affective, embodied aspects of experience, also invite timely questions about the role of spirituality and religion in ethical perspectives.

In contemplating notions of the self as spiritual, the study brings together views from outside and inside religion in an appreciation for the nuanced character of a polymorphic consciousness in confronting the summons to ethical deliberation. Various

recommendations concerning the inclusion of the spiritual in curriculum are advanced in support of the principal contention of this work: that the challenge of pursuing an understanding of the elusive self in its many guises offers an indispensable opportunity for ethical development in education.

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Finally, those sections of the writing which touch upon drama and music reveal the influence of my parents, John and Penny Arril, and memories of them for which I will always be thankful.

Dedication

To my brother

Donald William Arril 1950 — 1976

Notions of the Self and Ethics in Education

Introduction

The following work proposes to identify and describe notions of the self as they are implicated in discourses of ethics, principally in education, and to examine these in light of their importance for pedagogy and curriculum. Two fundamental questions drive the inquiry: What is the relationship between views of the self and ethical systems? How, and in what ways, can thinking about notions of the self and their affiliation with ideas of ethical agency enrich educational experience? The first chapter outlines the problem by discussing its scope and key terms and offering a rationale for the inquiry. The rationale includes discussion of the approach taken and its limitations, and illustrates how the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of variant views of the self can affect the understanding of two crucial dimensions of ethics: agency, and consciousness.

Chapter II will focus on the theoretical issues involved in profiling notions of the self in educational discourses. A proposed descriptive schema is discussed in terms of the problem of applying theoretical constructs in the research process; identifying and describing notions of the self—particularly those embedded tacitly in discussions of subjectivity—leaves the inquiry open to a charge of ‘essentialism’ at worst, or ill-defined interpretive license at best. Since the application of a set of particular descriptors itself constitutes the use of a hermeneutic tool, I will discuss the grounds on which inferences concerning tacit versions of the self are made. The inquiry’s two central questions will then be situated in the context of current research by identifying and describing models of the self as they are found in the literature of ethics in education. Although no claim will be made for comprehensive treatment, attention will be given to selected contributions

from a variety of discourses including autobiography, moral education, early childhood education, language studies, narrative inquiry, spirituality, psychology, and environmental education.

Chapter III will discuss that notion of the self most favoured in educational discourse: the self as a narrative construction, with its emphasis on the social and linguistic aspects of selfhood. The discussion includes extended consideration of the work of Bruner and Polkinghorne and its importance for education. Self, narrative and ethics are linked through a consideration of the insights of Ricoeur and Nussbaum and their examination of the experiential aspects of first-person perspective.¹ Whether these approaches are ultimately complementary will be considered along with the problems of truth and reliability claims.

Chapter IV will present a summary appreciation of the work of feminist scholarship in education so far as the self and ethics are concerned. In a detailed analysis of the field, Meyers (1997) notes that a striking feature of feminist work is “the inextricability of metaphysical issues about the self from moral and political theory” (p. 17). The voices of Alcoff (1995); Benhabib (1992); Britzman (1991); Gilligan (1982); Grumet (1987, 1988, 2000,); Miller (2005); and Noddings (1984), among many others, have signaled the foment and variety in feminist critique of the normative foundations of dominant philosophical theories of the self. Overlooking the political assumptions and implications of esoteric philosophical views of the self, has led, Meyers argues, to

¹ Zahavi (2005) distinguishes between the narrative conception of the self as reflected in such sources as Ricoeur (1984) and MacIntyre (1984), and the experiential approach which has its roots in the phenomenology of Husserl. My investigation involves an examination of how Ricoeur and Nussbaum understand the relationship between narrative and experience to influence identity construction.

“considerable mischief.” Precisely how strategies of resistance are linked to reconceptualized understandings of gender and agency in various notions of the self will be reviewed.

Particular attention will be given to the ethics of care and the way in which feminist investigations of the contested relationship of emotion and reason have issued in concrete suggestions for understanding the self in a pedagogical context. Along with other feminists, care ethicists have raised crucial questions regarding the body and its constitutive role in self-making (Meyers, 1997). At issue in the discussion is the question of practical engagement in the world around us. What is the relationship between intersubjectivity and embodied subjectivity? How does it come about that my experience of another embodied self lays empathic claim upon me? Does empathy as ‘caring’ refer to the establishment of intersubjectivity or is it the disclosure of an already existing intersubjectivity? Such questions—and the different ways in which they are now being considered—clearly have significant implications for pedagogy and curriculum.

Chapter V will set forth some considerations for conceptions of the self in “the fourth R”—the sphere of religious and spiritual education. As a field of contemporary inquiry the domain of religious education would seem to include a summons particular relevance in the modern multicultural world. “The term “spiritual” connects self and community to a glimpse of that which transcends the limits of space, time and value” (Alexander, 2003, p. vii). The aim of this chapter will be to explore the ways in which views of the self in spiritual education hold potential for nurturing connections between the individual, the community and the transcendent (Huebner, 1999).

Chapter VI, the conclusion, will revisit the subject of the ‘ethical teacher’ to discuss insights emerging from the literature of the self and the ways in which they might benefit educators through an appreciation for what I have termed “pedagogical inflection”. This concept, which describes the turning of attention inwards in a mindful, watchful fashion to anticipate meaning as emergent property of intersubjectivity, aims to bring together the insights of a phenomenological approach to the self with the situated character of ethics in education. Some of the practical implications of contribution of notions of the self will be addressed against the background of a broader issue: the role of theory in understanding practice and the experience of ethical engagement with others in the learning process.

Chapter I

Purpose and Rationale

Why examine notions of the self in the literature of ethics in education? Despite a recent and “remarkable convergence of attention to the moral self from diverse perspectives” (Bergman, 2005, p. 40), the undertaking of such an inquiry might well be questioned. During the past four decades, the intense investigation of the self in a range of disciplines from literary theory, philosophy, and education, to psychology and neurobiology, has yielded little agreement about the nature of the “I.”² As Holstein and Gubrium (2000) have noted, “The self has fallen on hard times. After decades of attention to self awareness, self-improvement, and self-esteem, an embattled self cascades from all quarters” (p. 3). Indeed, pursuit of the self has been described as “a discredited research program that has been intellectually bankrupt for the last fifty years” (Zahavi, 2005, p. 3).

Despite this dour assessment, the aim of the following inquiry is to demonstrate that a journey through a wide variety of discourses, often involving views of the self founded upon apparently opposed and mutually exclusive epistemological positions, can yield new perspectives and raise crucial questions for educators. Indeed, for anyone concerned with education as a crucible of moral debate and the school as in influence in the construction of ethical worldviews, the discussions which follow may well be tinged with a certain immediacy. For as this investigation into notions of the self wends its way through the insights of thinkers representing different philosophical traditions, one insight

² In cognitive science: Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1997; Perlis, 1997. Feminist literature: Griffiths, 1995; Neurobiology: Changeux, 2000; Sociology: Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, Educational research: Reichert & Kuriloff, 2004.

returns to invite consideration at progressively deeper levels: the vitality of the regard in which a personal sense of self is held, and the care with which that sense is nourished by an understanding of intersubjectivity, lie together at the heart of the challenge to educate in a way that serves both the personal and the public good. Such an assertion is not meant to offer a convenient formula: pay attention to the self and all will be well. Neither is it intended to gloss over or minimize the formidable task of weighing complex arguments concerning selfhood, ethics and education; there are no short cuts to a textured appreciation of the wisdoms of diverse traditions. However, it is to underscore the centrality of the self and the personal in education; and it recommends the appreciation of trends in contemporary educational thought that have called into question the self in its many guises, as grist for any mill purporting to operate under democratic principles.

In educational discourses, debate about the nature of the self appears animated by an epistemological shift over the past forty years from research into knowledge possessed by teachers—their skills and methods—to teachers' thought processes and understanding of themselves (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Particular attention has been accorded to views of the self, subjectivity, and identity in relation to the ethics of pedagogy, (Bruner, 1986, 2004a, 2004b; Fenstermacher, 1994; Grumet, 1976a, 1980; Noddings, 1984; van Manen, 1994; 2002); psychology (Bruner, 1986, 2004a); autobiography (Graham, 1991, 1992; Graham, 1976a, 1981, 1999; Grumet, 1976, 1981, 1988; Pinar, 2004; Slattery & Rapp, 2003); and postmodernism (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000).

A plethora of competing notions of self found in the scholarly literature of education, as well as such other fields as nursing, counselling, philosophy, and ethics, has lent a Pandora's Box aura to the study of subjectivity, identity, and reflexivity. The

twentieth century's move away from a Cartesian transcendental view of a sovereign autonomous self, and the ascendancy of the "deconstructive turn" of poststructuralist and postmodern currents of thought, have precipitated a search for new understandings of how the experience of subjectivity informs pedagogy.³ Some scholars have sought to call attention to the ethical selfhood of teachers by focusing on 'empirical illustrations' of their knowledge as evidenced in narratives (Campbell, 2003; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Such an approach may include an underlying endorsement of "neo-classical objective principles of universal worth" (Campbell, 2003a, p. 19). Others have brought the work of Foucault to bear on autobiographical accounts (Graham, 1991) and the formation of ethical identity (Infinito, 2003), noting that a deconstructive textual analysis casts a long shadow over the notion of a transcendental, essential self on which any claims of universality are typically based.

The naïve realism of an empirical view of autobiographical accounts is often called into question as a poststructuralist perspective tends to repudiate the idea that narrative constructions can represent any independently accessible reality. The self is viewed as a construction emerging from inherited narrative forms and is generally regarded as "complex, situational, fragmented, nonunitary, nonlinear, noncoherent, and constantly in flux" (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 121). Despite the sharpness of the deconstructionist critique, the study of narrative understandings of educational experience represents a cogent effort to bring definition to the self. Narrative, in its many forms, has been presented as the fundamental vehicle for the understanding of human life (Greene,

³ Robert Graham, 1991 (p. 153), referring to C. Norris, *The Contest of Faculties* (1985).

in Witherell & Noddings, 1991).⁴ However, debate about the self and the social, linguistic, cultural, political, psychological, and neurobiological influences that condition it, has resulted in views of subjectivity, identity and the authorial “I” which touch the most extreme philosophical poles. The Cartesian edifice of a transcendental, unchanging self, mirroring an ordered natural world, stares across the void at a spectral poststructuralist self, a lexical construction corresponding to a set of interrelations within the cultural text by which it is generated. Bruner (2004a), asks whether new views of selfhood, shaped by contemporary rhetorical device may affect societal values and behaviour.⁵ Amidst other declarations that there is no self (Metzinger, 2003), or that there can be no defined problem about something so undefined (Olson, 1998), perhaps the most optimistic response comes from Graham (1991) who wonders whether “each new age or epoch demands a new image of selfhood, one more in keeping with the way that age conceives of itself” (p. 154). If Graham is right, sifting through the evidence for this new image or images may raise provocative questions concerning the quicksilver filaments that link society and school, community and individual, culture and curriculum, within a web of multiple discourses.

A more pressing question, however, calls for immediate address: Can this new image or images of selfhood be recovered from a conceptual swamp bordered by a stand of shaky agreements, vigorous oppositions, and outright denials about the definition of

⁴ Maxine Greene cites MacIntyre (1981) and Taylor (1989) in support of the notion that narrative is the inescapable form through which the meaning of human life becomes intelligible. See also Polkinghorne, (1988, p. 107) and Bruner, (1986, p. 39) who suggest that narrative is not only descriptive of the perception of the structure and meaning of a life, but exercises a crucial role in fashioning both.

⁵ Addressing the issue of rhetoric, Bruner (2004a) asks, “Do we invent tools to further our cultural bent and then become their servants, even developing ourselves to fit them?” (p. 5).

the topic under consideration? My rationale for embarking on such a venture is three-fold, and includes certain general features of discussions about the self. The first point is **theoretical affiliation**: that notions of the self and ethics are inextricably linked, the issues unavoidably multi-disciplinary, and the analyses—at their best—resonating with the accumulated wisdom of specialized fields.⁶ Moreover, the affiliations present problems in ways that are richly aporetic, sometimes complementary, and almost always heuristic. The second reason concerns **individual consciousness and agency**. Pondering such recurring problems of the self as consciousness and agency offers the possibility for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the ethical dimensions of educational experience. The third element of my rationale touches the relationship between **theory and practice** as it finds expression in educational literature; a review of discourses of the self and ethics seeks to identify and probe points of reciprocity between theory and practice and to raise questions that potentially render both more meaningful.

A. Theoretical Affiliations: The Link with Ethics

In expanding the rationale, and laying the groundwork for this study, I wish to discuss how notions of the self, variously inscribed in the literature of education, are implicated in ethics and how, in turn, ethical presentations reflect particular views of the self. As the following discussion will illustrate, an examination of the self and ethics exposes a nexus of reciprocal influence that opens up important questions for educators.

⁶ One has only to peruse such works as Changeux and Ricoeur (2000)—*What Makes Us Think: A neuroscientist and a philosopher argue about ethics, human nature, and the brain*; or Sean Gallagher, (1997)—*Models of the Self*—to witness the ways in which psychology, history, linguistics, and a variety of scientific fields including neurobiology are brought to bear in ways that, if not complementary, at least effect clarifications of old questions and raise new ones.

The literature of ethics in education, touching an enormous range of topics across its constituent disciplines, has reflected, more recently, particular concern with contemporary challenges to the role of the school in the ethical formation of both teachers and students. Books such as Kilpatrick's (1992) *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong*; Robertson's (1998) *No More Teachers No More Books*; or John Taylor Gatto's (2002) *Dumbing Us Down* raise strong concern about the ways in which traditional ethical values in public education are being threatened. Along with other writers they draw attention to such factors as the rapidity and constancy of social change, and its negative effect on the process of identity formation (Bers, 2001), the commodification and virtualization of experience (Piper, 2004b); the invasion of education by 'the corporate agenda' (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Pinar, 2004; Robertson, 1998); the relentless logic of consumerism and privatization (McLaren, 1989); and contemporary social instability with its attendant 'adolescent antinomianism' (Nucci, 2005, p. viii).

These pressures from outside the system are paralleled by significant tensions within the educational community. Kilpatrick (1992) considers the problem to be the abandonment of 'character education' in favour of a 'decision making' approach. Campbell (2004, p. 410) identifies "Unresolved philosophical controversies regarding definitions and interpretations of ethics and morality" and the tensions of competing analytical frameworks as key factors underlying different visions of schooling. Sidorkin (1999, p. 2) sees the lack of a common language among educators and a "conceptual shortfall" in research as a major impediment. Pinar (2004) speaks of the institutionalization and bureaucratization of education in which "teachers are forced to "instruct" students to mime others' (i.e., textbook authors') conversations, ensuring that

countless classrooms are filled with forms of ventriloquism rather than intellectual exploration, wonder, and awe” (p. 186).

Two general features of these discussions deserve note. First, there is seldom a hard and fast distinction made between ‘ethics’ and ‘morality.’⁷ Some writers explicitly state their belief that there is ample warrant in scholarly discussion for a generally interchangeable use of the terms while others proceed to use the terms synonymously without explanation.⁸ The approach here will be to point out where specific definitions or distinctions are offered, but will otherwise use the terms as loosely synonymous. Second, in most discussions, no explicit reference is made to a model or discrete paradigm of the self; attributes of personality and cognitive characteristics may be mentioned, but without reference to an overarching theory. However, I will endeavour to illustrate that a careful reading of these presentations suggests that a tacit, underlying view of the self is usually present. Discourses of ethics in education often eschew abstract and speculative matters in favour of a more practical focus on teachers and students and the means by which individual selves develop a sense of right and wrong.

Tacit and bereft of definitional consensus though they may be, notions of the self are nonetheless very much alive in these discourses of ethics—and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.⁹ In the view of some theorists “every educational moment,

⁷ Martha Nussbaum (2000), in *Why Practice needs Ethical Theory*, comments that, “There seems to be no generally agreed distinction between the two” (p. 232).

⁸ See Elizabeth Campbell (2004, p. 17); Sidney Callahan, (1991, p. 4); William Ayers (2005, p. 57); *Who in the world am I?* in Larry Nucci (2005, Ed.) *Conflict, Contradiction, and Contrarian Elements in Moral Development and Education*.

⁹ Bergman (2005) provides a useful summary of works in moral psychology, moral philosophy and moral education that focus on the self. Notably absent from the list is any reference to the extensive work of feminist scholars in each of these domains, for example, Gilligan (1982); Meyers (1997); and Noddings (1984).

from pop quizzes to pep rallies, is laden with ethical import” (Higgins, 2003, p. 133). Precisely what this means, however, can vary significantly. Campbell (2003a), for example, acknowledges the ‘embedded and implicit nature of much of teachers’ moral practice’, but considers the teacher as a ‘moral professional’ whose conscious knowledge of her own standards and what she wants to present and model to her students together constitute agency (p. 2, 3). Professional ethics “is the realization of good and the struggle against bad as they apply to the everyday practice of teachers as individuals and as a collective professional group” (p. 9).

Higgins (2003) considers such a view too narrow. Certainly we want teachers whose practice demonstrates Campbell’s list of common sense principles: kindness, honesty, fairness, protection of the weak, respect for all people. But is this enough? Higgins argues that the attempt to cultivate in students dispositions and cognitive capacities to do ‘the right thing’ is principally about developing a reasoned capacity and desire to treat others well. It answers the question—one of practical morality—How can we all get along? He acknowledges that this is an important question and that it supports the understanding of moral professionalism as principles of conduct, duties entailed in the roles and relationships of teaching and deliberation over dilemmas encountered in practice. While all of these are necessary he declares, they are not sufficient. The *sine qua non*, and a “mainstay of educational philosophy from Plato and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Paulo Freire and Maxine Greene” (p. 133) is the question, How shall we live? As R. S. Peters (1967) expressed it, “Education involves the initiation of others into worth-while activities....Science, mathematics, history, art, cooking, and carpentry feature on the curriculum, not bingo, bridge, and billiards” (p. 71). For Higgins and Peters, the ethical in

education is necessarily bound up with asking the larger questions about what is worthwhile; Higgins (2003, p. 136) describes this process as considering what promotes “human flourishing.” This approach emphasizes *aretaic* concepts—from the Greek for virtue or excellence—over deontological concepts or judgments concerning moral obligation and principles.

For MacIntyre (1984), reflection on the fundamental questions of ethics in the context of professional practice serves as one of the main sources of our ethical knowledge. In MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian view, there is no emerging from a shadowy cave to behold the good in the light of day; we learn what good is through apprehension of its piecemeal intimations in the gritty practices of daily existence. MacIntyre makes a careful qualitative distinction between activities however; farming and architecture represent a systematic extension of human powers in the striving for excellence and the good; tic tac toe, and planting turnips do not (1984, p. 187). These differing points of view—emphasis on teacher knowledge of ‘principles’ or on teacher understanding and questioning of how to live—suggest, in effect, a different view of a self that develops and appropriates meaning through experience.¹⁰ It will be illustrative to consider in somewhat greater detail what these tacit views of the self entail.

In one presentation it is a self that can reflect upon its own knowledge of particular virtues and principles that it wishes to put into play. While such reflection is desirable, it is not a necessary condition of moral agency: “for the most part

¹⁰ Campbell (2003, p. 20) explains that ‘principle’ does not mean a law or precept, but is rather a “descriptor of the knowledge and conduct of the ethical teacher.” However, this is an unsatisfactory and circular definition. If ‘principle’ describes what a teacher knows about ethics, then all such knowledge, whether of precept, virtue, or awareness of behaviour becomes ‘principle.’ This collapsing of distinctions obscures the importance of how we think about differences in ethical stances.

fundamentally good people remain noticeably unaware and even unconscious of the ethical ramifications of their own actions and overall practice” (Campbell, 2003, p. 1). In an alternative presentation, the self’s capacity to engage in conscious deliberation and questioning becomes the principal source of the knowledge of excellence; the emphasis is on the conscious awareness and deliberative ordering of factors pertaining to the self’s efficacy as a moral agent.¹¹

An even more crucial distinction is that in the framework of deontological ethics the self is primarily occupied with the application of principles to situations in which others will benefit. The ethical dilemmas offered, for example, in narrative illustrations, are often concerned with conflicts between what a teacher knows will be best for her students and what the administration has dictated.¹² Although this dilemma could arise equally in the aretaic or character education approach, the emphasis is typically different; ethical questions, however situationally informed, are self-referentially framed; ‘How shall I live?’ or ‘What is it excellent to become?’ are presented as terms of inquiry in a discourse in which neither student nor teacher can be left behind.

One tacit presentation of the self, then, includes the capacity to reflect upon its ethical knowledge, as well as the requirement that this knowledge be submitted to critical review in which a larger frame of ethical reference (How shall I live?) is held in tension with the exigencies of particular circumstances (What shall I do now?). The relationship of the general and the particular, the theoretical and the practical, thus becomes the site of a process in which ethical integrity develops. Another tacit notion of the self focuses on

¹¹ For Alexander (2005), Socrates’ question concerning how to live “prioritizes aretaic over deontological concepts by placing inquiry into the nature of the good life at the centre of moral discourse” (p. 4).

¹² See Campbell (2003, p. 66); Connelly and Clandinin (2000, p. 88).

the capacity to mediate received principles that are the end-product, either of unconscious socialization, or intentional acceptance of a social or institutional standard.

An additional distinction arises in how the self represents itself to others. In one view, teachers may “run but cannot hide” when it comes to revealing their thinking about what they value most: “What teachers prize or how they live is rarely lost on students” (Higgins, 2003, p. 136). In another account the emphasis is on a ‘professional’ self, responsible for editing and concealing personal opinion according to the dictates of circumstances (Campbell, 2003a).

In both of these presentations, no model of the self is explicitly described, yet the self as *a particular kind of individual consciousness* represents the locus of the ethical activities of judging and deciding, and finally, the convoluted terrain on which resolutions of meaning appear and on which their representation will be negotiated. Whether I am working out the circumstantially defined application of a precept, struggling to understand a theory of the ultimate good, or choosing how to articulate an account of my ethical position, it is the writhing of consciousness and its multiple faces and layered connectedness - that conspire to keep me awake at night. Here in consciousness, courts of appeal are held, ideas stand in the dock, discernment, and appropriation of meanings disperse or fuse into resolve. Here, conscience nips at complacency; here, an understanding of one’s relationship to the natural, social and spiritual world becomes the soil from which fresh intent pushes forth. The very nature of consciousness then—the consciousness of individual teachers and students—necessarily presents itself as a subject for examination.

B. Individual Consciousness: Questions Concerning Knowledge, Agency, and Experience

Consciousness.

This inquiry questions whether there is an inherent compatibility between certain views of the self—as an agent possessed of a particular quality of consciousness—and particular ethical paradigms. Reference to some examples of discourses of ethics in education in which the consciousness of the self is a key element may serve to open up the discussion.

“The first step for teachers is consciousness...consciousness brings about the possibility of change” (Gilbert, 1993, p. 53). That teachers should become more conscious of the power of their utterances or the implications of their actions would seem a laudable, if common-sense assertion. Yet, such a view immediately raises critical questions, including the meaning of the term consciousness itself.

Consciousness emerged in English from the Latin *consci-us*, where *con* means together and *sci* indicates knowing. The state of being conscious is “a condition and concomitant of all thought, feeling, and volition; ‘the recognition by the thinking subject of its own acts or affections.’¹³ However, this recognition on the part of the thinking subject, or what might be termed ‘self-awareness,’ represents only a beginning. Many questions have been posed concerning the factors—psychological, social, linguistic, and physical—which bear upon how this awareness develops and is exercised.¹⁴ As Zahavi (2005) has noted, certain of these analyses suggest that the kind of reflective self-

¹³ This, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989 online 2nd edition).

¹⁴ See Zahavi (2005, pp. 13-17), for carefully-catalogued views of the relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness.

awareness that allows a person to discriminate between mental states, and to evaluate them, requires a theory of mind.¹⁵ Although a more detailed analysis of whether, and how, theory might bear upon the exercise of subjectivity in ethical matters lies at the heart of this inquiry, the important point for the moment is that the presence in consciousness of abstract information (i.e., other than immediate sense perceptions), including theoretical constructs, can exercise a potential influence on the process in which meaning develops. The contrasting views of the self presented above would seem generally to confirm this view of the role of theory.

In those views the focus of an individual's consciousness may vary significantly, in one case, consisting of the knowledge of personal principles and intentions, and in the other, embracing awareness of the need to use a larger and more inclusive referential frame in deliberating about an issue. Seen in this way, the role of consciousness in debates concerning the self and ethics raises other questions. Is consciousness understood to have access to universal principles and an 'objective' reality? Is it instead engaged in constructing ethical meanings that are entirely relative to itself and its own socio-cultural, historical and neurobiological situation? Is the concept of an ethical self a semiotic construction, a crucible of forces issuing from a confluence of temporal contingencies? Is it some combination of these elements? And more crucial for this inquiry, could this consciousness, within the broad paradigms of constructivism and objectivism, equally espouse a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, utilitarian consequentialism, Kantian

¹⁵ Here, Zahavi makes reference to the work of P. Carruthers (1996) in *Language, Thought and Consciousness*.

deontology, care theory, neo-pragmatism or a social justice ethics?¹⁶ Or, is the move to deconstruction and poststructuralism most compatible with the logic of the pragmatist agenda (Graham 1991, p. 153), and the conviction that rhetorical strategies are not structurally distinct from ethical commitments (Cherryholmes, 1999).¹⁷

The linking of rhetorical strategy and ethics also involves the broader question of whether such strategies and genres themselves implicate particular views of consciousness and the ‘who of self-presence.’ Carr (2004b), for example, citing Wordsworth’s famous definition of poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquility” notes of the relationship between language and experience: “it takes the poetic...image to fasten our attention on that experience, as the camera fixes the image on the photographic negative”(p. 233). Carr goes on to suggest that consciousness of the ethical dimensions of our relationship with the natural environment could be encouraged through a “judicious combination of environmental and arts education” (p. 237). He is critical of the Kantian heritage of instrumentalist reason and its lineage in the cognitivist theory of Kohlberg where mature moral agency depends on the development of an impartial, affectively disengaged judgment. For Carr, the ethical self is, conversely, an affectively engaged self whose awareness is rooted, not in a detached instrumentalist anthropocentrism, but in the transcendent register of a view of nature *sub species aeternitatis*. In the end, it is Aristotle’s affectively grounded view of moral virtue and the robust engagement of an ethics of ‘care’ that will carry the day. The crucial element in this account is that the

¹⁶ As Campbell suggests (2003, p. 19).

¹⁷ See also Michael Glassman, (2004) in *Running in Circles Chasing Dewey*, in which he defends the link between postmodernism and pragmatism by reference to such common factors as the instrumental nature of meaning, the uncertainty of truth and the struggle against realism (pp. 338, 339).

self—an ostensibly unitary entity—is put in touch with emotion—a process in which consciousness is first focused on the mediating element of language in the case of poetry, or symbol in art. Rhetorical strategy is thus a key component in an educational approach whose support derives from a virtue ethics paradigm. The self so viewed possesses a consciousness inherently amenable to ethical suggestion, not solely by discursive means, but in concert with the potentiating power of the affections. The modality of consciousness of which the self is capable thus becomes a key feature in the ordering of pedagogical means which aim to stimulate ethical awareness.

Heshusius (1994) opens yet another dimension to the discussion of modality by addressing the link between the self and ethical awareness through the concept of ‘participatory consciousness.’ This mode of consciousness occurs when there is a complete turning of the attention: “the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention” (Heshusius, 1994 p. 17). Heshusius offers the example of Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock, a geneticist who described how, in the intense absorption with the chromosomes she was studying, a profound forgetfulness of herself was accompanied by a sense of oneness with the organisms she was observing. Relating this mode of consciousness to the connected knowing of Belenky et al. (Belenky, 1986), and knowing as caring proposed by Noddings (1984), Heshusius points to the ethical quality of participatory consciousness: “When one forgets self and becomes embedded in what one wants to understand, there is an affirmative quality of kinship that no longer allows for privileged status. It renders the act of knowing an ethical act” (1994, p. 19). Here, the attentiveness of consciousness focuses on the non-judgmental observation of personal reactions—an act requiring “one’s full, somatic, and

immediate presence.” Heshusius calls for a better understanding of the complex relationship between different modes of consciousness, and a more holistic approach to the “larger reality in which self and other unite” (p. 21).

For Heshusius, as for Carr, the self-transcending capability of consciousness figures as an inherently ethical feature of the self. However, Heshusius’s introduction of the somatic dimension of the self with its questions regarding the reorganization of self–other boundaries, opens out onto a field of epistemological inquiry that foreshadowed the contemporary concerns of cognitive science and neurobiology. An embodied knowing also paves the way for an affirmation of the intrinsic value of the environment, humans and living creatures based on a more robustly earthy kinship—one which takes account of shared space, time and the experiences of pain and death; this understanding also expressly repudiates the ‘masked ideologies of power’ (Heshusius, 1994, p. 19) that flourish in symbiosis with a purely instrumentalist reason. Moreover, the self, understood as a consciousness that, in its capability for attentiveness, can leave the ego behind, is not seen as a ‘fixed entity’ (Heshusius, 1994).

Heshusius’s provocative contribution to the discussion regarding subjectivity and objectivity in educational research illustrates the challenge of tracing lines of affiliation between conceptions of the self and ethical systems. The self she depicts is profoundly ethical in its capacity for self-transcendence, as in Carr’s Aristotelian formulation; it is open to be enriched affectively and changed in relationship as in a ‘care’ ethic; and it is also expressly multiple as is the case with the feminist and postmodern conceptions that appeal to pragmatism. In addition, the self’s capacity for participatory consciousness—its openness to an ethical ‘beckoning’ from the other—is actuated by a deliberate quality of

attentiveness rather than through reaction to an externally located ‘rhetorical strategy,’ whether text or symbol. This notion of attentiveness also invites intercultural dialogue as it resonates with non-Western conceptions of the self, subjectivity, and consciousness as in the work of Krishnamurti (1975). Heshusius’s conception of consciousness also raises questions concerning the ways in which deliberation and conscious intentionality are linked to an understanding of the meaning of embodiment. These will be considered below in the context of embodiment in feminist thinking.

There seems to be general agreement that conceptions of consciousness associated with the self as a unified enduring substratum are, for the most part, odious to postmodern approaches and particularly to postmodern feminism.¹⁸ As Schrag (1997) comments, “A description of the who of discourse as present to itself as it shifts from one genre of discourse and one language game to another, would do well to begin with an *explicatio via negativa*” (p. 33). In a feminist echo, Meyers (1997) observes, “What the individualistic, unitary conception of the self as rational chooser and actor excludes is precisely what many feminists have thought most important to emphasize” (p. 2). For many feminists, the transparent unitary self ignores the ways in which the social forces of gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation contribute to a constructed self. More importantly, the self conceived as a unitary free agent denies the complexity of the intrapsychic world of the unconscious with its fantasies, fears, and desires, and the ways in which that world can intrude into conscious life. These complex considerations of issues in which problems involving consciousness and identity are mired, nevertheless

¹⁸ The complexity of feminism renders generalizations risky; some feminists such as Mary Daly (1990) do embrace an essentialist view.

present a common factor: they seek to ask about, and to describe, the relationship between two basic human experiences, subjective reflection and the drive to resolve conflict regarding perceptions of right and wrong. The rich multi-faceted character of human experience is therefore understood to be the ground from which a descriptive tracing of the fine lines of affiliation between theories of the self and ethical systems might emerge. However, discussion of the relationship between the experience of subjectivity and ethical reflection requires some clarification.

First, the emphasis here is on the apprehension and articulation of meaning in the description of relationships between the nature of the self, consciousness, and agency. Second, for the present discussion, I am going to make a provisional assumption that it is possible to identify an individual self with that individual's consciousness, although it needs to be acknowledged this is by no means without complication.¹⁹ The provisional position that an individual self can be identified with that self's conscious mental experience—including the judging and deciding integral to ethical reflection—is not to offer some definitive account of the self. Consciousness, as it will be discussed below, may be identified with the self, but does not necessarily constitute the whole self.²⁰

In the philosophy of education, the question of consciousness focuses, not on verifiable links between mental experience and empirical phenomena, but on *the difference the experience of consciousness makes in the delicate conceptual economy of*

¹⁹ This is not to ignore that such an assumption constitutes a problem for philosophers. See, for example, Susan Pockett (2004).

²⁰ Pockett (2004) considers that to identify the self who wills or intends with the consciousness of the person willing or intending is a "putative error" (p. 24). The identification should be with sub- or preconscious brain activity. My identification of self and consciousness here does not preclude these other factors, nor does it deny the possible influence of the sub-conscious; however, it does place an emphasis on the experience of consciousness as integral element of agency.

meaning-making. Piper (2004a), for example, has called for greater recognition in curriculum and teaching of the ways in which selfhood and agency are eroded by “foreclosures of self-experience that come about within the reductionistic view of the self implicit within the subject-object dichotomy” (p. 287). It is precisely the self’s capacity for conscious self-identification that permits manipulation by positivistic projects that may either inculcate a blind automaticity of thought, or reinforce a binary I/me or author/text distinction. Consciousness of “multiple levels and forms of self-awareness occurring in everyday life” (p. 287) are unwittingly hindered or blocked through the application of a perspective that is culturally conditioned. Piper denies that the self, always under construction, can ever be fully known in the binary terms of subject-object dynamics. As will be seen in the various presentations of the self to be discussed in detail below, binary conceptions, subject-object relations, and the presumed limits of consciousness itself may be viewed as stumbling blocks, compromising the very depth and richness of the experience of selfhood (Giddens, 1991; Heshusius, 1994; Piper, 2004a, 2004b).

The importance of the different ways in which particular views of the self as a conscious being are implicated in ethical discourse, may be further illustrated by reference to the notion of ethical agency.

Knowledge and ethical agency.

One of a few points of agreement among commentators on the self is that a construal of the nature of the self appears in most accounts—though not all—to be inherently linked to views of ethical agency. Gallagher (1997), for example, in looking at the ethical self, refers to “a first-person reflective consciousness that is embedded in a

pragmatically or socially contextualized intentional attitude” (p. 294). This connection between a self that can reflect back upon its own consciousness as it ponders practical action is also described by Taylor (1989): “...because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our live, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a ‘quest’” (p. 51). For MacIntyre (1981), the self is the author whose natural predisposition to narrative allows human actions—and the stubbornly adhesive problems of responsibility associated with them—to be rendered in an intelligible form. Higgins (2003) agrees with MacIntyre and Taylor that the terms ‘self’ and ‘good’ are inextricably linked: “we cannot give a satisfactory account of who we are without indicating where we stand in relation to what is most important to us” (p. 141).²¹ Strawson (1999; 2004; 1997), one of the leading philosophers of the self of our time, likewise acknowledges the connection between views of the self and ethical positions.²²

In the field of education, Campbell, (2003) acknowledges that teaching is an inherently moral activity, but that teachers are often unaware of the ethical implications of their actions. She cites Jackson et al. who conclude that teachers may be “unconscious of the ethical ramifications of their own actions and overall practice” (p. 1). For Campbell, however, some awareness concerning the moral aspects of professional practice is crucial, as she defines moral agency as explicit knowledge, consciously experienced by a teacher:

²¹ However, Higgins vigorously opposes the questing self in question—a construction that has suffered much, he believes, from an anti-hedonistic asceticism.

²² However, Strawson denies our ultimate capacity to make moral choices.

Its essence is expressed through both their knowledge of what is ethically important for them to do in the course of their professional practice and their knowledge about what they want students to achieve, internalize, or learn related to principles of right and wrong and how they can facilitate and inspire such learning. (Campbell, 2003, p. 2)

Campbell seeks to ground this view of moral agency “in principle and virtue” (p. 2). So understood, agency requires a conscious commitment from teachers, on one hand, to particular ethical standards and, on the other, to the presentation in act and word of those standards in teaching.

The idea that consciousness of explicit personal knowledge of ethical principles resides at the heart of agency appears also in the work of Lawrence Kohlberg (1981): “What Plato called opinion or conventional belief is not virtue. An individual may believe that cheating is very bad but that does not predict that he or she will resist cheating in real life...however, true knowledge, knowledge of principles of justice, does predict virtuous action”(p. 44). On this account, ethical agency comprises two elements: right knowledge and right action. To know correctly is to act in a predictably ethical fashion. Moral turpitude indicates cognitive failure. It is once again clear that an underlying epistemological view of the self is at work.

Yet another conception of agency can be illustrated in a personal anecdote. Early in my teaching career I was asked to do a rough survey of the teachers in a private school setting in order to determine how they integrated ethical or moral elements into their teaching. The response was generally one of annoyance and, occasionally, outright

hostility: “I teach my subject; discussions of moral issues have no place in my classroom and, as a professional, I keep personal ideas to myself.” Such a view, wary of subjectivity and emphasizing a link between professionalism and ‘objectivity’ resonates with modernist tones and positivist epistemology. It is a position which may be reinforced in an organizational context that skirts discussions regarding values in favor of provisional agreements about ethics as rule-based codes of behaviour. Arthur (2005) has suggested that this accommodation may influence organizational efficiency so far as ethical policies are concerned:

However, real, shared values are profoundly different from ‘agreements’ which are the result of some procedure reached on practical ground. Agreements are really an accommodation of individuals who have different values with the purpose of producing set of rules that are used to guide moral conduct and are upheld by teachers and inspectors on behalf of the larger society. A communitarian view (Etzioni, 1995) would give emphasis to the ‘shared’ nature of values that in turn help enhance the ability of a school to formulate specific policies on character education. (p. 252)

In the politics of accommodation to a rule-based ethics, teachers may consciously avoid working through the underlying theory which justifies these aims. Instead, focus is on expediency and “a thin layer of shared values” (Arthur, 2005, p. 254) inscribed in agreements which are used to produce rules of conduct for a common public morality. The result is a missed opportunity for stronger and more cohesive community. Where teachers are willing to work through and negotiate the more complex issues of broader

theoretical questions, the result can be a deeper level of what Arthur terms “commitment to core shared values” (p. 252). Underlying such a suggestion is the requirement for hard work, not only in coming to understand ethical theory and how it might be applied, but in coming to an act of reflective self-appropriation in which one reaches a conscious decision about an issue with a view to contributing a voice in the community.

Both Campbell and Arthur view conscious knowledge as a crucial constituent of their conceptions of ethical agency. Yet the quality of that consciousness and its knowledge differ significantly. For Arthur, the emphasis is on knowledge of the broader theoretical constructs and principles of ethical considerations rather than a set of rules. With this knowledge comes recognition that the application of these principles in a relational context requires negotiation and the inevitable struggle with contradiction and compromise. In short, there is an acknowledgement of an interactional self, conscious of its relational embeddedness within a community. Although Campbell’s ethical teacher-self is also involved in relationships, the emphasis is on knowledge of the principles to which she subscribes, and knowledge of what she wants to achieve among students in terms of the transmission of these principles. The broader theoretical context—the consideration and engagement of potentially contradictory frames of reference—is sidestepped as is the matter of negotiation and compromise.²³

Two observations might be made concerning these views of conscious knowledge and its implication in ethical agency. First, if knowledge of principles, as Campbell suggests, means an embracing of honesty, fairness, and kindness, one would have to

²³ Derek Allison (2004) comments that Campbell’s work does not link its rich narrative illustrations of teacher awareness of ethical issues to the broader theoretical literature.

acknowledge, in a multi-cultural context, that the manner in which these ideals are embodied might be considered differently according to particular systems of thought or cultural norms. To be fair, one would have to face the challenge of grappling with difficult, different and possibly competing theoretical notions of fairness, and what they look like in practice. This is not to suggest that every teacher must become an expert in ethical theory or epistemology. But it is to raise the question about the relationship between the capacity to act virtuously and the possession of knowledge. A self whose consciousness is informed by unexamined notions of North American white middle class fairness will be equipped differently from one who has considered the provenance of his or her own understanding of fairness in light of other, and perhaps, quite varied conceptions.

For the latter self, *knowledge* is related to agency in a far more complex manner—one that involves an emergent act of self-definition—an act of processing which integrates knowledge of past decisions, ethical theory, cultural factors, current circumstances and future possibilities. Such an act facilitates, at least potentially, the opening of a space for the self to be newly and more richly articulated in its judgments and actions. Campbell's alternative approach in which knowledge of standards combines with knowledge of objectives to constitute agency is admittedly more straightforward. It appears in the presentation of a self that is trim and poised, constrained by its orientation to knowledge of standards and their realization and, accordingly, less apt to stumble into contradictions and complex deliberations of the sort that arise at a deeper level of reflexivity.

A second observation concerning knowledge as integral to agency has to do with the provisional character of that knowledge. I might find myself aware, for example, that I was reconsidering particular aspects of pragmatism or virtue ethics in the light of certain classroom experiences. If the teacher is, as in Campbell's view, a moral model, an exemplar, rather than a purveyor of ethical theory, then consciousness of the ways in which her own thinking about principles has developed over time through the interplay between reflection and experience also counts for inclusion in a construal of agency as ethical knowledge. It seems likely that teachers who hold in awareness the provisional character, and ultimate incompleteness, of their own knowledge, would relate to students differently than those who consider their own views as the last word on any given subject.

The other issue implicit in Campbell's formulation of agency is that of instrumentality. No teacher would spend time reflecting on, and considering how to be a model of particular ethical principles if she believed that she could not have an influence on students. And further, it follows that the teacher who intends to model virtue by example, already has some idea, however indeterminate or unconscious, about the means of achieving this end. The underlying assumption is clearly that modelling is both possible and meaningful since virtue can be taught by example—a position which raises Meno's ancient question to Socrates about whether virtue is learned by teaching or by practice.²⁴ It is well to note that the literature of moral education continues to simmer with discussions about the acquisition and development of ethical constructs and the

²⁴ See Rich (1991) in *The Conflict in Moral Education: Teaching Principles or virtues?*; his attempt at rapprochement concludes that moral principles presuppose the virtues needed to put them in practice.

paradox identified by Peters (1981) as the inevitable opposition between habit, tradition and ‘being properly brought up’ on one hand, and intellectual training, critical thought and choice, on the other. If the efficacy of modeling is accepted, Campbell’s reference to ‘setting an example’ actually implies complex knowledge about how others are influenced and what might constitute meaningful ways of addressing their condition.

Although Campbell repeatedly uses the term ‘empirical’ it seems clear that an assessment of the efficacy of specific methods of influencing students in matters of ethics is quite different than in mathematics where outcomes can be specified with precision and their achievement calibrated. The determination of ethical outcomes or the evaluation of ethical agency as ‘empirical knowledge’ would appear to be a complex matter, one that defies conventional means of quantitative assessment. The point here is that the depth and emphasis of an epistemological stance adopted as regards agency reflects prepossessions about the kind of self involved; and that in turn may influence the way in which ethical meanings are appropriated and problems considered. A brief consideration of how epistemic differences in the view of a teacher-self can shape the approach to thinking about ethical matters will serve to illustrate.

Van Manen (1994) has noted that pedagogy in the phenomenological sense includes the capacity for sensitive insight into the character of children, but even more importantly “implies distinguishing between what is appropriate or inappropriate, good or bad, right or wrong, suitable or unsuitable for children” (p. 139). These distinctions are made in two modes: one as a function of improvisational decision-making in the heat of the moment in classroom interaction (reflective practice), and the other in the context of deliberation over past actions and resolutions for the future (thoughtful practice).

It is worth noting that in an educational context, judging the extent to which students have learned what is good and appropriate involves an assessment which is apt to depend heavily on the perspective of the very person whose agency is implicated. The teacher as agent—exemplar and evaluator—is accordingly required to exercise more extensive knowledge than a firm grasp of standards and a sense of target outcomes. This teacher must also possess a deliberative capacity for self-judgment, which monitors critically her own perceptions of the success of her ethical teaching. Van Manen (1994) emphasizes the relational character of teaching and its demand for ‘people-knowledge’ or perceptive understanding; he argues that teachers demonstrate an “improvisational immediacy, a virtuelike normativity, and a pedagogical thoughtfulness” (p. 139) that is qualitatively different from that of practitioners in other fields.²⁵

The self implied in such a description draws its knowledge principally from the influence of experience—both past and present: “by interpreting the meaning of our lived experiences and what certain experiences mean to the children we teach, we may gain pedagogical thoughtfulness and tactful intuition” (van Manen, 1994, p. 161). This species of intuition is linked to a teacher’s personal experience of family, culture, and society as well as education and continues to grow through conscious reflection. Van Manen’s view of the self emphasizes a narratively structured developmental process in which interactional acumen is continually fine-tuned by reflection on events in the past, distant and proximate, and by consideration of the complex environmental influences that have contributed to individual perspective.

²⁵ M. van Manen (1994), observes that “in several important respects teaching seems to differ from many other professional practices with which it is often compared” (p. 139).

For some critics, the narrative basis of such a view “will not cut the epistemological mustard” (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 219). The fundamental problem is that “Stories and narratives replace canons of inference, forms of argument, and due regard for evidentiary review....Where are the checks against deception, illusion and falsification?” (pp. 217, 218). Fenstermacher sees a link between narrativity, a weakened role for reason, and what he regards as a tendency in modern virtue ethics to lean toward moral conservatism. In short, he suggests that the conception of the teacher as a self that finds meaning principally in narrative constructions is a self on “the side of habit and nonintellectual orientation to practice” (p. 219).²⁶

Van Manen’s appeal to the transcendent qualities of writing in human science research and reference to the poetic elements of pedagogical tact would seem only to reinforce Fenstermacher’s calls for a more ‘robust theory of reasoning’ to support the war on misperception, illusion and self-deception. What is evident here is that the respective teacher-selves in question are distinguished epistemologically, in virtue of the kind of knowledge they possess, and ontologically in the nature of their relational interactions. Although both scholars appeal to Aristotle, and both support a virtue ethics position, the phenomenological perspective which van Manen brings to the framing of his tactful self clashes with Fenstermacher’s rational self—a being in whom the integrating factor is discursive intelligence. While both agree on the centrality of the pedagogical relation, differences in the epistemic dimension of these selves will have explicit implications for

²⁶ This view of a narratively oriented self seems curiously at odds with the sophistication of van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenology, and the complex considerations of the relationship between emotion and reason in narrative knowing which figure prominently in the work of such ethicists as David Carr and Martha Nussbaum.

how a teacher thinks about and prepares for, classroom engagement. One will focus on the task of reflecting on, and questioning experience hermeneutically; the other will be principally occupied with propositional reason and argument. Some of the difference of opinion surveyed here apparently arises from problems inherent in a narratively structured view of self and ethical development. These will be considered in greater detail in chapter III.

As will be evident in the work that follows, ethical writing in education includes a broad range of tacit as well as explicit assumptions about the self. Particular understandings of consciousness and ethical agency at play in these discussions provide insights with meaningful implications for the practice of teaching—an observation grounded in the idea that self- knowledge is an important constituent in considering ethics.

Knowledge and experience.

The second reason for attempting to excavate notions of the self rests squarely on experiential grounds. Concepts of the self are embedded in views of subjectivity, reflexivity, and agency in pedagogy. It is generally acknowledged that, for receptive, adaptable practitioners, experience remains a good, if not the best, teacher. However, the precise role of experience as a source of knowledge in moral matters is very much in dispute.

The truism that the craft of teaching is best learned on the front lines of classroom practice, implies that reflecting on experience is a significant means of reaching a deeper understanding, not only of the meaning of past events, but of the manner in which one is apt to engage in the reflection itself. A singular approach to autobiographical reflection

on experience that takes account of this subtlety, and has generated considerable discussion over the past thirty years is the method of *currere*, proposed by Pinar (1976).²⁷ The method entails a free associative exploration of memories, an imaginative projection of oneself into the future and an analysis and synthesis of resultant insights in the present. This emphasis on experience, reinforced by *currere's* roots in the phenomenology of Brentano, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, offered advocacy for an approach to education that integrated subjectivity in ways that complemented deep questioning of values and matters of social justice. However, engaging students in reflective exercises and encouraging them to review their own backgrounds and to question their beliefs and preconceptions posed formidable difficulties such that Pinar (2004) no longer recommends the use of the method in schools.

Nonetheless, *currere* raised the possibility of a method involving an autobiographical exercise and a critical reevaluation of self with the power to promote personal and social growth.²⁸ It also raised a host of questions: What kind of reflection, or rather, what kind of experience of reflection does it take to shake the foundations of an individual's thinking? In ethical terms, what would be required of such a method to make it an effective bridge in the classical paradox of moral education—between habit and 'proper upbringing' on one hand, and the autonomy of critical decision making on the other? Does the temporal structure of the self that the method implies support the

²⁷ See also Madelaine Grumet (1975, 1976b; 1980; 1981, 1999); R.J. Graham (1989; 1991; 1992; 1994); J. Kincheloe, in W.F. Pinar (1998), Marilyn Doerr (2004).

²⁸ For some teachers, attempts to use *currere* were productive. See Marilyn Doerr (2004). My own use of a modified form of *currere* in academic counseling of high school aged boys often proved to be salutary; a review of their past experience frequently provided useful talking points and context for decisions regarding future directions.

development of ethical awareness? What are the roles of memory and imagination in this process and how does their interplay alter perspective? What kinds of conceptual reviews, or ways of undertaking them, are likely to be salutary? Different approaches to autobiography and narrative inquiry entail controversy about the process of writing, what the product might signify and to whom, and whether, and in what sense, any form of ‘self’ can be considered to have been inscribed in such work. Focused on the interpretation of written accounts of personal experience, these questions lend themselves to a more hermeneutical approach to the connection of notions of self and theories of ethical agency.

C. Theory and Practice

The third element of my rationale for attempting to trace the lines of affiliation between theoretical constructions of the self and ethical systems is that, ultimately, the choice one makes, either of a model of the self, or of a system of ethics will make a difference in practice.²⁹ As noted above, this is not to advance the thesis that theory, or consciousness of it, somehow causes behaviour. It is, however, to engage in exploration with the background idea that findings may change the way in which one goes about the work of deliberation—the conceptualizing, imagining, speculating, judging and deciding—that are indispensable elements of preparation for ethical teaching. It is to suggest also, that the findings may affect the meaning of those activities in several different ways and, in turn, the very experience of engaging in them. I offer three reasons

²⁹ I acknowledge that some philosophers, such as Galen Strawson (1997) do not believe that the idea of independent choice in any strong form is ultimately tenable. My own position here is that, since the scope of this project will not permit engagement of the argument for free will in any philosophically rigorous fashion, I propose to adopt the provisional notion that without an assumption of some measure of free choice, the conversation would be preemptorily shut down.

for this suggestion. The first, concerns the link between language and ideology; the second, between language and perspective; and the third, between theory and practice.

Language and ideology.

As an introduction to the power of discourse in the construction of subjectivity, Bentham's idea of the panopticon—a prison in which the inmates can be observed at all times from every angle—is illustrative. Behind Bentham's prison design was a creative attempt to solve the problem of referentiality between words and things (Zimmerman, 1998). In the sealed environment of the panopticon, a reality could be constructed for which language would be perfectly referential. The distinction between words and things, language and being, would be collapsed in an environment in which language would establish reality. Appearance would no longer harbour some deeper reality. Word alone would create and destroy. Moreover, the panopticon would provide an admirable laboratory in which to conduct experiments on perception—a 'metaphysics' of legislation.³⁰ Indeed, Bentham alludes to the 'panopticon school' in which "the world could be made to appear to the students however one desired that it appear: "Two and two might here be less than four, or the moon might be made of green cheese; if any pious founder who were rich enough, chose to have her of that material" (cited in Zimmerman, 1998, p. 76).

It was probably not lost on Bentham that the word panopticon, in both Russian and German, meant a cabinet of curiosities or waxworks. In the public spectacle of the panopticon, waxen psyches would be imprinted by those forms of language

³⁰ Bentham referred to the study of the relation between language and reality as "metaphysics." See Zimmerman (1998, p. 75).

corresponding precisely to the legislated realities of governance. Writ large, the image of the panopticon embraces a global formation of the self in, by, and through discourse.

“Discourses are ways in which people coordinate and are coordinated by language, other people, objects, times and places in order to take on particular socially recognizable identities” (Gee, 1993, p. 360). The formation of the self is bound up with the various identity kits imparted by participation in the discourses which populate a culture. Several points follow from this.

The ideological character of discourse means that no language stands outside of its legislating forces: “no definition has any authority apart from a purpose, or to bar us from other purposes” (Richards, in Postman, 1995, p. 183). In society, this ideological loading of language is understood to favour power elites whose manipulation of discourse aims at inculcating beliefs and values that serve their own interests (Carspecken, 1996; Gee, 1993). How does this occur?

Gee (1993) cites the work of Brown and Campione (1992) to illustrate how the use of particular pedagogical methods effectively allows teachers to control students’ activities and effectively colonize their understanding. He argues that students in Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development are especially vulnerable and “lean on the cognition of others and the cognition built into materials, technologies, and organizational settings before they can operate more ‘on their own’” (p. 376).³¹ When it comes to making choices with ethical implications, participants in a discourse who do not have any say in the goals or visions of the ideology which constructs that discourse may

³¹ The ZPD, as described by Brown et al. (1993, p. 4), is “the region of activity that learners can navigate with aid from a supporting context, including, but not limited to people.”

react with partial compliance (Gee, 1993) resistance strategies; (Munro, 1998), unwitting complicity (Applebaum, 2004), or what Bandura (2002, p. 101) terms “selective moral disengagement” in the exercise of moral agency. Darker dimensions of accommodation include pathologies of the self (Gallagher, 1999; Radden, 1998; Sass, 1998), and the conundrum of self-deception (Levy, 2004; Nyberg, 1993). The latter topic constitutes an important issue in the examination of narratively based construction of the self and will be considered in that context.

The entwined nature of discourse and ideology suggests that all language concerning the self harbours conceptual elements that predispose its users to view matters in particular ways; if only for this reason, attention to patterns of discourse may yield another and perhaps useful perspective in discerning relations of influence between notions of the self and ethical understandings.

Language and perspective.

The epistemological implications of the notion that language constitutes a cultural lens filtering our perceptions, impugning the objectivity of a ‘scientific observer’ and threatening to cast us in the role of ethnocentric jester, has haunted ethnographers for decades (Kluckhohn, 1944; Maanen, 1988). Translated into the context of pedagogy, the problem might be summarized in the question: how is what you are as a teacher, affected by how you think you know? Denzin & Lincoln, (2000), have noted the embedded character of our knowing, “The way in which we know is most assuredly tied up with both what we know and our relationships” (p. 182). In this view, the interrelational and “moral trajectory” of the teaching self comes to definition on the precarious interface

between ontology and epistemology (Palmer, 1969). Some explanation of the constructivist underpinning of this view is required to set the stage.

Even if they are unfamiliar with Locke's 'tabula rasa' or Kant's 'forms of the mind' view of cognition, or with Mead's (1934) ideas concerning social interactionism, many teachers have some background knowledge of the phenomenon of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' and have heard of studies establishing a correlation between teacher expectation and student performance (Cade & O'Hanlon, 1993). However, few would likely declare that in dialogue with students they are in the process of constructing a reality that includes both the selves of the students and their own. The reality of a student self, is more likely thought to reside in the student's history as presented in the record of grades and evaluations, current performance and behaviour in class, and anecdotal reports from other sources including parents and colleagues.³² The student as a person enmeshed in a nexus of cause and effect, may be held accountable for, or exonerated of, personal responsibility for progress depending on the teacher's interpretation of the data presented. It is worth noting as an ethical corollary, that, in the shadows of this objectivist framework, the door is left ajar for causal interpretations based on factors such as social class, race, religion or anything else that the credo of ultimate truth might endorse (Guba & Lincoln, 1990).³³

³² This observation is itself anecdotal and based on hundreds of hours over 16 years spent in staff meetings in two private schools where the cases of problem students were discussed with teachers and counselors. As a both a teacher and counsellor, I discovered that my views were often considered to be authoritative and "more objective" because I had studied a student's paper record and could cite standardized test scores.

³³ See Guba and Lincoln (1990): *Can there be a human science?* (Person-Centred Review 5(2), p. 130-153).

Epistemology likewise affects how language use is considered. In a constructivist view, language is understood as the tool which conceives reality. That construct becomes a point, and not necessarily the end point, in a process in which our perceptual apparatus is continually at work. This apparatus includes our sensory capabilities as well as the part of us that does the understanding, judging, and deciding involved in the work of interpreting sense data. The constructivist position has a variety of sub-species including a radical form that denies external reality and embraces the assumption that all cognition occurs within an experienced world of a goal-directed consciousness (Watzlawick, 1984). A softer version of constructivism, represented within social or interactional constructivism, affirms a reality with physical and social components including language in a reciprocally influential relationship.³⁴

In a teaching context, the implications of constructivist views are profound. There is no externally available blueprint of reality; that reality is constructed in the interface between teacher and student. The nature of communication, and the manner in which language is employed, assumes an immediacy denied in a paradigm that prioritizes underlying causal linkages—as identified by those in power. Language becomes the vehicle which enables teacher and student to access each others' worlds, find a 'fit', negotiate some common ground and co-create a meaningful reality. Words possess a power to shape and alter constructs in ways that create possibilities for change. Through careful use of language, learning becomes a process in which discovery represents the

³⁴ Schwandt (2000) terms this “weak” constructionism, and illustrates it by reference to the work of Longino (1993) who steers a middle course “by acknowledging that scientific knowledge is in part the product of social negotiation without claiming that such knowledge is *only* a matter of social negotiation” (p. 199).

emergence of new or modified constructs based on the experience of interpreted perceptions.

The teacher in a constructivist classroom assumes a role in which subject-specific knowledge is harnessed to an awareness of the ways in which language enables conceptual midwifery. A more apt metaphor might be the teacher and the student as collaborating engineers: one specializing in facilitating solutions through deployment of language, the other an expert on local topography (the inner landscape) where bridges need to be constructed. However painstakingly described, this picture remains highly problematic, for it means taking account of the complicated ways in which epistemological theory affects the apprehension of meaning and how it plays out in human relations.

Knowing that there are many theories of knowledge, and as many different approaches to the dilemmas of ethics, can be discouraging on the practical level. There is the matter of the time required to sort through complicated arguments and peruse expositions of the way in which competing epistemologies are related to views of ontology. For busy teachers, the advance knowledge that there is neither a final Archimedian vantage point nor an ultimate principle yielding a definitive solution to ethical dilemmas can obviously serve as a strong disincentive. Moreover, our habitual notions about “how things really are” fit like comfortable old slippers. The constructivist self, as a theoretical concept, may be a dynamically growing and shifting entity, but on the level of daily experience, the task of returning to philosophical foundations to for a deeper understanding can be daunting, despite the gauntlet thrown down by Guba and Lincoln: “if the constructivist has a moral imperative, it is not simply to be open to the

arguments of other constructors but to seek them out and to be challenged by them” (Guba & Lincoln, 1990, p. 149).

Theory and practice.

The issue of the relationship between theory and practice is especially germane in an inquiry in which a variety of disciplinary perspectives are involved in considering one subject. Schwab (1971) pointed out the danger of applying the theoretical perspective of only one specialized discipline to the complex problems of curriculum. Of Bruner’s cognitional theory as it was taken to apply to curriculum he writes:

A theory of mind and knowledge thus solves by one mighty coup the problem of what to teach, when, and how; and what is fatally theoretic here is not the presence of a theory of mind and a theory of knowledge, though their presence is part of the story, but the dispatch, the sweeping appearance of success, the vast simplicity which grounds this purported solution to the problem of curriculum. (1971, p. 7)

The problem for Schwab is that theories are both blinding and binding. The multi-disciplinary character of educational inquiry becomes problematic when the specialized perspectives of particular disciplines are applied without any attempt at reconciliation or, more importantly, complementarity. The nub of the problem resides in the inherent generality of theory itself. Theory functions as a perceptual template, filtering perceptions, and highlighting as well as obscuring, aspects of situations. It allows the researcher to approach a problem from a certain angle, ask pointed questions, and affords a view of the problem conditioned by the character of the science upon which it relies.

Each approach asks different questions, ‘sees’ different aspects of the problem, and proposes different solutions. Each is necessarily incomplete since its principles of enquiry or its methods may leave out facets of the problem under consideration (Schwab, 1969). Matters are made worse by the pseudoindependence of communities of enquiry and their tendency to ignore the “skein of myriad threads” by which their interests are linked.³⁵ Schwab calls for an application of an ‘art of the eclectic’ which aims at engaging theory in such a way as to ready it for practical use, to ‘bring it to its case.’ This involves the delicate capacity to construct a case through a judicious accommodation of both principle and situational detail—a rapprochement of the general and particular. In the end, it is by bringing a variety of theoretic strands to bear on a concrete case that a wider and more judicious view of considerations can be achieved.

As much as it might seem straightforward common sense, the catholicity of Schwab’s project immediately raises some practical questions for the present work. How can a multiplicity of theories about the self and ethics drawn from different disciplines, be understood, related, and coordinated in such manner that their common focus yields complementary insights? How can notions of the self and the demand for action which ethics implies be reconciled, both at the level of the general and the particular? This challenge is keen in education where the generalities of ethical theory are summoned to action by particular selves in very specific and difficult circumstances. In a territory pock-marked by what MacIntyre has termed ‘incommensurable premises’ what approach to presenting a host of differing viewpoints about self and ethics might be most helpful?

³⁵ “All communities of enquiry are controlled by principles of enquiry which distinguish in the awful complexity of the world lesser complexities with which enquiries can deal” (Schwab, 1969, p. 502).

The first rejoinder is that a brief foray into the literature will reveal that Schwab's observations of disciplinary insularity are as apt today as they were 35 years ago; schools of thought continue to exclude each other, ignoring viewpoints that might enrich and deepen their enquiry. Writers, accomplished in their fields, and intimately familiar with particular approaches, seem inclined to omit others which might have deepened and reinforced their work. Early in my research, for example, it became evident that contributions to the literature of subjectivity and identity from feminist scholars, those writing in a postmodern vein, or those, such as the 'reconceptualists' writing from the periphery of mainstream educational discourse, were often ignored. This seemed, *prima facie*, a curious phenomenon in a field where one of the few points of agreement was the inherently multi-disciplinary character of the undertaking.

The move to consider a problem by presenting a variety of vantage points admittedly requires some clarification if it is to avoid the charge of being a simplistic cataloguing exercise. Assembling a gallery of theories does not imply that by sheer volume, one approximates a position of superiority resting on the inclusion of all possible perspectives. It seeks rather, to test a peculiarly postmodern view, one that advocates 'richness, recursion and rigor' (Doll, 1993).³⁶ In terms of the present project, it is the thesis that multifarious questions, creative problematizing of issues, and diverse theoretical trajectories of inquiry, when focused on a point, may generate significant insight and important new questions.

³⁶ See Doll, 1993, who alludes to "Schon's messes, Prigogine's chaos, Dewey's problems, Piaget's disequilibrium...Kuhn's anomalies" (p. 148) in his call for a curriculum 'rich in diversity, problematics, and heuristics'. His appeal rests on scientific ideas concerning self-organization and the emergence of order out of chaos in the physical realm (p. 158 ff).

Speculation about the nature of the self and its ethical dimensions has attracted writers from philosophy and literary theory, to cognitive science and neurobiology. While there would be little hope of including points of view from all the fields in which thinking about the self has occurred, the idea that the application of theory to practice in education might be enriched through a generous discussion of varied perspectives remains, I believe, viable. A more detailed consideration of the relationship between theory and practice will be undertaken in the next chapter in connection with the difficulty of using theoretical constructs to profile notions of the self. Overall, the bringing of diverse theoretical perspectives to bear on a problem as complex and far-reaching as the self bears some similarity to the task of rendering ancient texts into contemporary language—a hermeneutic venture involving a judicious synthesis of idiom and concept and a quest to reinterpret meaning for one’s own time. In this context that reinterpretation involves more than asking what light can be shed on the complex question of the “I”; it entails as well, an attentiveness to the ineluctable summons to act in fiercely complicated ethical circumstances—challenges facing any self aspiring to teach and to learn.

Chapter II

Approaching Notions of the Self

The principal objectives for this chapter appear in its first three sections: first, to present a series of descriptors to be referenced as general categories in comparing notions of the self; second, to discuss challenges involved in profiling notions of the self using these descriptive categories, including the difficulty posed by the conceptual disparity underlying the use of terms commonly found in the literature; and third, to consider the difficulty of infinite interpretive regress in the exposition of variant views of the self.¹ The third section examines insights from works representing divergent stances on questions of language and epistemology and investigates a view of transcendence as a way of seeking to understand some commonalities in essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches. The fourth section explores a concept of transcendence that involves “transversal unity” (Schrag, 1997, p. 133) as a communicative achievement in the attempt to reconcile the conflicting language and conceptual paradox with which discussions of the self are often beset.

I. Descriptive Categories

The objective of profiling—identifying and describing—variety of notions of the self, whether explicit or implicit, suggests the need for a framework that might permit the

¹ By notion I mean, following the OED, (“notion, *n.*” [OED Online](http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/cgi/entry/00299371). December 2003. Oxford University Press. 10 Dec. 2003 <http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/cgi/entry/00299371>), a general concept, category or designation. I would also wish to include its subsidiary meanings: “a belief, opinion, theory or view” and “a form or guise in which something appears and is thought to consist.” The term is thus used broadly to capture the range of meaning suggested in views of the self inscribed in various discourses in education.

drawing out and comparative analysis of distinguishing features. While all notions of the self found in educational literature are not amenable to analysis under precisely the same rubrics, I have chosen to employ five descriptive categories to provide some comparison of common features. The questions under each of the following categories are not inclusive of all possible issues that could be brought to bear on questions of ethics in education, although the range is sufficient to encompass most of the epistemological, ontological, ethical, linguistic and hermeneutical problems that figure in this inquiry.

The core self.

The notion of the core self touches the question of whether there is a fixed, enduring entity or unified substrate, said to be the principle by which a self recognizes itself as the same over time. This is the Cartesian cogito, the transcendental ego of Husserl, the self as a distinct principle of identity (Zahavi, 2005). A core self may be considered to be a ‘thing’ (Strawson, 1997)—real, but always under construction; or it may be construed as a constant, but purely semiotic entity, hermeneutically produced (Taylor, 1989).² A key question in the assessment of such ‘monological’ views (Sidorkin, 1999) concerns how the unified aspect of the self might be reconciled with changes in its attributes over time. As a descriptive category, core self is intended to accommodate notions that extend on a continuum from the unified and constant over time to the kind of no-self model offered by Metzinger (2003).

² “We are not selves in the way that we are organisms...we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good” (p. 34).

Identity construction.

How is the concept of identity understood in the theoretical context under consideration? In what way does that context account for the multiplicity of perspectives, public and individual, that are possible? (Hermans, 2001). How does the self come to understand and to formulate an account of its own identity? How can the process be described; what are understood to be the key features and influences? How does the self adapt to the influences of the environment, social and physical, in achieving a sense of identity? What are the strategies of resistance or self-deception that may come into play?

Experience of subjectivity.

How does the self experience itself in consciousness? Is subjectivity something we encounter or is it the very condition of encounter (Zahavi, 2005)? Can we have reflective access to original experiences or are these radically altered in such a process? What is the relationship of language to individual experience: does language constitute experience (Wardekker, 2004; Day & Tappan, 1996) or is it the converse? What are the roles of such interpretive forms as autobiographical writing or self portraiture in the experience of subjectivity or in the formation of a sense of self? What contribution can the descriptive resources of phenomenology make to this analysis?

Ethical agency.

In what sense, and to what degree, is the self considered to possess agential power in ethical situations? Is the self oriented to universal principles (Kant), socially mediated norms (Rousseau, Hume), subjective commitments, or some combination of these? Can we distinguish between 'ethical' and non-ethical or 'instrumental' practices? In what way could teaching be considered an ethical practice? How is moral development understood,

and what are the implications of such understanding for curricular and pedagogical practice? How might claims that virtues can be instilled through teaching be assessed?

The dialogical dimension: Self and other.

How is the self understood as a relational being? What is the understanding of our experience of ourselves as “embodied minds” and our experience of others as “minded bodies” (Zahavi, 2005, p. 9)? Are there distinctive ways in which the self is thought to relate to the other including sentient, and non-sentient forms? What might constitute a spiritual dimension of intersubjectivity?

While these descriptive categories will be used to assist in describing and clarifying different concepts of the self as they are found in educational discourses, they are not intended to be definitively comprehensive. Their application as focal concepts in a theoretical inquiry raises questions which will be discussed below. The salient point here is that these categories will serve the process of an investigation driven by two fundamental questions: What is the relationship between views of the self and ethical systems? How, and in what ways, can a consideration of notions of the self as affiliated with ideas of ethical agency contribute to our understanding of the relations between subjectivity and educational experience?

II. Challenges in Profiling Notions of the Self

Language and concepts: The problem of incommensurable premises.

The position taken in the previous chapter is that theory matters. It matters, as Lewis (2003) has noted, since the ways in which the words ‘self’ and ‘experience’ are made meaningful in a community of speakers can be “reformulated as a question of what experience a concept of self allows that would be impossible otherwise, or what serves a

concept of experience allows” (p. 231). These questions carry certain assumptions. The first is the idea of a relationship between the kind of thinking that theory implies and the actual life experience that the thinker may have in virtue of this thinking. A further consideration might be whether this thinking is ‘about’ theory, as in the deliberate questioning and considering of different aspects of a theory, or whether it is more directly the effect that possession, conscious or unconscious, of a particular theory has on one’s capacity to have experiences. Here I would note that the condition of ‘having’ experiences can be considered also as the interpretive capacity to process experience as meaningful.

Cast in phenomenological terms, for example, one might ask, “How has this particular theory changed what is it like to have certain kinds of experiences.” In the context of educational activities such a perspective can be important; developing an understanding of a difficult theory may permit a teacher to see people, problems and situations in different and more creative ways. A key assumption in this inquiry is that meaning and the processes by which it comes about, do enhance the capacity to ‘have experiences’ and to understand them in ways that are potentially richer in possibility for ethical insight.

The second assertion in Lewis’s comment mentions ‘what serves a concept of experience will allow.’ This statement might also be viewed as assuming a relationship between theory (in this case, a concept of experience) and experience (what it is like to consider, and have a sense of, one’s self and identity). However, ‘what serves’ may also include a theoretical construction. In this case, the implication is that a particular understanding of experience conditions the range of available possibilities for the

understanding—and one might say—construction, of a self, both in theory and practice. There are, then, two possible conditioning relationships: theory-experience and theory-theory; if the first is accepted, it follows that the second also holds potential for influencing experience. In either case, there is good reason to question the theoretical framework proposed as the instrument for presentation and description of notions of the self; for while the investigation will consider theories of the self, of experience and of ethics, what will be of greatest concern is a *theory of the relation* between these three.

An exposition of the theoretical framework for research carries therefore, in the present context, a certain immediacy, since reference to such descriptive criteria as I have offered is open to a charge of essentialism both conceptually and linguistically. On the conceptual level, it might be reasonably asked: What theory of human nature supports the choice of ‘core self, identity construction, subjectivity, agency and the dialogical? And, on what premise will you hang a variety of notions, shorn of their original context (and thus, of their conceptual lineage), on your descriptive hooks, which are, after all, selective and arbitrary?

Such questions echo reactions to particular concepts of human nature that surface repeatedly in discussions concerning the self. Often cited is the Enlightenment view that thinking about moral conduct and experiencing feelings about such matters as killing, honoring parents, or caring for children, represent tendencies of a fundamental, essential human nature (Postman, 1999, p. 112).³ In philosophical terms, the essence of this nature is the “subject-centred reason” (Rorty, 1999, p. 110) of a unitary self or individual mind.

³ For postmodern reactions see James Holstein, Jaber Gubrium (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), *The Self We Live By*, pp. 56, 57; and Ivor Goodson (1995)

This normative view of human nature comes with several powerful assumptions: there is an objective, universal and knowable reality from which the self receives its ‘marching orders;’ language, in specific forms, serves as a map of this reality and functions to communicate truths; and the organization of human society mirrors individual psychic life (Gergen, 2001).⁴

These notions with their connotations of fixed essences, and measures of certitude concerning them, have elicited far-reaching reactions loosely held together under the banner of postmodernism. A salient feature of these has been focus on the power of language to direct understanding of self and the world (Gergen, 2001). On this account, all forms of rational understanding and all schemata, prescriptive or descriptive, are rhetorically constituted, each only fully intelligible within its context of origin.⁵ It follows that a profiling of views of the self or of ethical systems by means of a comparative schema becomes problematic since such a presentation implies an appeal to the primacy of particular interpretive criteria. Such categories as, for example, “ethical agency” or “consciousness,” as described above, are themselves subject to considerable interpretive variation.⁶ As will be seen in the following example, the term “virtue ethics” becomes problematic—a site for conceptual and linguistic confusion—when those using

⁴ Gergen (2001) sees these three modernist themes as mainstays of traditional psychological science. On the last point he cites Dilthey (1914): “The external organization of society in the ties of family, community, church and state, arise from the living nexus of the human mind” (p. 76)

⁵ Alexander (2003b, *Education as Spiritual Critique*) suggests that this applies in the case of radical subjectivism or relativism. Here I am attempting to address the problem generally by declaring my premises.

⁶ Dan Zahavi (2005, p. 17-25), for example, offers a synopsis of higher order and one-level accounts of consciousness and their development.

the term tacitly employ disparate premises and consequently arrive at different conclusions in their application of principles.

An example: A narrative of questionable virtue.

The difficulty of potential disparities in underlying conceptual frameworks can be illustrated by reference to the following exposition of a virtue ethics approach taken from the work of a prominent exponent of character education: “We can assert that virtues are objectively good—not subjective preferences like taste in music or clothes—because they meet certain ethical criteria” (Lickona, 2004, p. 7). The criteria include the promotion of the individual’s happiness and well-being, as well as “the common good, making it possible for us to live and work in community” (p. 7). Lickona’s examples of virtues in action illustrating these criteria include ‘rescuers’ who assisted Jews during the Nazi regime, as well as the Russian scientist, Andrei Sakharov, who opposed the injustices of the Soviet government in the Khrushchev era. There is no reference in the discussion to the experience of rescuers whose personal happiness was, at least on appearance, not well served by their actions—they were tortured and killed. These brave people would certainly have known that both their personal happiness and their service of “the common good,” conceived as a benefit to the community, would have been very much at risk. The case of Sakharov is similar; his actions resulted in suffering for himself and certainly were not understood to serve the common good in the Russian society of his time. So how, and from what point of view, are such concepts as ‘individual happiness’ and ‘the common good’ conceived?

In Lickona’s view, virtues are objective, universal qualities, good for you whether you know it or not. His emphasis on objectivity and universality is ubiquitous, yet his

presentation of ethical situations is curiously infused with a particular bias. In stressing the need to teach children virtue, he emphasizes the importance of modeling good judgment, and offers the example of Monica Lewinski who admitted publicly that she had not considered the consequences of her sexual actions for herself, the President and his family, or the country. In Lickona's mini-narrative, there is no mention of any deficiency in the judgment of the President of the United States, by any standard one of the most powerful men in the world. The matter of asymmetrical power dynamics, gender bias in relational contexts, and the contextualization of ethical situations, lies well below a radar system whose detection capability has been set by a traditional patriarchal view of social roles and responsibility.

In the examples Lickona offers, individuals are presented as acting in importantly ethical, or unethical ways. Yet the showcasing of their exemplary virtues or deficiencies is conditioned by a specific view of the self—a creature oriented by its intrinsically invariable nature to immutable universal principles of good. Thoughts and actions are ethical insofar as they conform to the list of self-evident and “objectively important core ethical values—such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect for self and others” (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1997, p. 2). Moreover, these core values are assimilated in a straightforward process involving rational thought, practice and ‘caring’ or emotional commitment (Hunter, 2002). Failure on the part of the self to grasp the ethical handrails of objective reality invites a host of negative consequences including disease, poverty, psychological problems for the individual, social disintegration for a community or a nation (Lickona, 1991).

For Lickona, ethics is a matter of recognizing virtues and values that transcend the variations of any cultural instantiation; more importantly these objective values are also linked to specific attitudes and positions: notably, condemnation of abortion, pre-marital sex, and homosexuality on the one hand, and robust patriotism and support for democratic government and its leaders on the other. The idea of the “objectively good,” its necessary social manifestations, and the vocabulary of values which flows from them, derives, upon close inspection, from a particular cultural context, social practices, and a historical narrative. That is to say, that the ‘shared intelligibilities’ of this version of character ethics operate in a discourse bearing all the earmarks of a politically right-wing, religiously conservative, white American Christian community.⁷

The chief implication of this discussion is that a bald cataloguing of common language concerning ethics and the self lifted directly from the literatures of separate disciplines would risk glossing over the underlying problem of diverse conceptual premises since language inevitably emerges from the ‘shared intelligibilities’ of particular communities and the linguistic conventions, textual genres, and cultural traditions peculiar to each.

The problem of situated or context-limited language for an inquiry into diverse notions of the self underscores the problem of conceptual incommensurability. Terms such as ‘self,’ ‘identity,’ ‘agency’ are presented and discussed, but with contextually embedded variations in meaning. Any attempt to describe, assess, or critique one theoretical formulation in terms of another becomes highly problematic outside of the

⁷ See James Hunter, *Society* (March, April 2002, pp. 42-53) for a critique of Lickona’s universalism, and W. Wardekker, *Educational Review*, (Vol. 56 (2), June 2004, pp. 183-192) who notes the “conservative overtones” and comments on the “supposedly uncontested” norms that are presented.

linguistic and cultural traditions of the particular community from which they originated and evolved.⁸ Even an attempt to catalogue language lifted directly from various disciplinary literatures, all bearing ostensibly on common topics, would face the same problem: ordering requires criteria that emerge from a conceptual framework which itself is the product of a community of discourse and inevitably reflects its particular values and biases. No value-neutral position is available from which to conduct such an analysis.

One might ask whether the problem of context specificity is one of the reasons for the relative insularity of discourses of the self within education and the apparent reticence of a self-confessed cross-disciplinary field to engage in extended and ongoing conversation with other sub-disciplines.⁹ I want to discuss the awkward matter of positional posture, or operational premises, in somewhat greater detail as it poses a formidable challenge for the theoretical situating of this inquiry as well as its organization and clarity.

Appreciating incommensurability.

The problem, for a consideration of self and ethics, might be more broadly sketched as follows: In education, as in other contemporary fields of research and practice, there is widespread agreement upon some version of the constructivist or constructionist view that humans do not have a fixed nature, but are formed and

⁸ See Hanan Alexander, (2003b, p. 241) "Education as spiritual critique" who suggests that critique can only be predicated on the basis of internal criteria alone.

⁹ For example, it is rare to find among the reconceptualists such as Pinar (Pinar, 1995; Pinar, 2004); Slattery (Slattery & Rapp, 2003); or Miller (2005) detailed consideration of such ethicists as Nucci, Noddings, or Carr. The converse also applies.

influenced by social forces.¹⁰ The corollary of this view, in ethical terms, as Taylor (1991) has noted, is a subjectivism for which the grounds extend beyond soft relativism: the appearance of an epistemologically level playing field in which all views are relative to the constructive influences to which they may be attributed and can only be judged in relation to them.

Taylor examines this tendency in depth as he considers a contemporary North American culture which values above all the moral ideal of individual “authenticity.” As he describes it, this ideal embraces the central notion that the self is somehow impelled—he says “called”—to become everything it can be in virtue of its individual uniqueness (Taylor, 1991, p. 29). Sometimes dismissed as a type of narcissistic absorption, moral laxity, or self-indulgence, the ideal of personal authenticity has been both discredited and sidelined in discussions of ethical probity: you can point out the consequences of actions that target self-fulfillment, but in a relativistic context, nothing further can be said as no universal standard can be brought to bear.¹¹ Under these conditions reason becomes an impotent adjudicator.

In such an environment, the attempt to compare theoretical notions, or make judgments about them, risks becoming mired in “conceptually incommensurable premises” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 10). How, in a relativistic context, could one framework, epistemological, ontological or linguistic, be assessed, critiqued or even described, in

¹⁰ Philosophically, one early form of the argument declared that that existence precedes essence. In this view the ‘whatness’ of things is a secondary and contingent factor. See Jacques Maritain (1947) for the converse—a defense of essence over existence.

¹¹ See Lickona, (1991, p. 10) who, in arguing for character education, describes the “new ethic of self-fulfillment” as responsible for various forms of social destabilization.

terms of another?¹² Seen in this way, the meanings of the proposed descriptors for notions of the self—core self, identity construction, experience, agency, and the dialogical dimension—are at risk of becoming blurred as they appear in separation from their contextual origins. How is it possible to avoid a potentially crippling traducement of meaning?

One possible solution might be the creation of a standard involving common denominators or benchmark concepts. But this too seems beyond reach: in what sense could arguments and descriptions be reduced to a series of ‘common denominators’ since subjectivism declares that all descriptive or prescriptive statements are relative? By what authority would one affix the labels ‘beech, maple, cedar, and fir when there is only agreement that there are trees in a forest? However elegantly imposed, the use of descriptive criteria conjures up a reductionistic recipe for lexical simulacra—orphaned terms bereft of historical roots and current coinage.¹³ How then, are theories of the self, especially those that claim kinship under the banner of postmodernism, to be described and examined in a manner that respects the caveats regarding context-dependent meaning that underwrite their construction? My approach will be to consider three concepts that may serve to situate the descriptors and the process of comparing views of the self. They are generality, polyfocality, and transcendence.

¹² See Hanan Alexander (2003b) who describes the problem as one of “critical immunity: “Each has its own assumptions and concepts that are understandable only within the particular subjective or relative contexts in which they are expressed and that are incommensurable with those of other persons or frameworks” (p. 241).

¹³ MacIntyre (1984) describes the use of key expressions in ethical discussion as “simulacra of morality” (p. 2) since they have been decontextualized from their historical significance.

III. Working at Perspective

Nussbaum's generality and Schwab's polyfocal conspectus.

Two useful perspectives include Nussbaum's (2000) defense of theory as a necessary dimension of practice, and Schwab's (1971) reflections on "The Practical." For Nussbaum, theory provides analytical acuity in the examination of ethical matters: "If you have the illumination of theory, and you understand the point and function of the rules, then you will be able to see the new and particular case more clearly" (2000, p. 238). Theory serves "by articulating the features of the good in a perspicuous way and making the location of likely conflicts evident" (p. 245). Theory provides the point and purpose of rules and allows us to see when we may reasonably diverge from them. Theory also recognizes the potential for two goods that are compatible with one another—one's commitment to children and to career for example—to come into conflict under contingent circumstances. It is precisely that higher order recognition of contextualized ambiguity that can lead moral theorists to advocate for important social changes—or teachers, one might add, to work for institutional reform.

For Nussbaum, the key point is that theory, when applied judiciously, can assist in the filtering of a bewildering wash of value-pluralism and cultural relativism; this is so, she observes, since a "high level of generality" in the articulation of theory and its goals allows for multiple specifications and space for the inevitable pluralism of situated applications (2000, p. 245). In some cases this means power for profound social and individual change:

Had Catharine McKinnon made a series of concrete critical judgments, rather than articulating a theory that offered a systematic, explicit, and abstract account of the

structure of sex relations, the very concept of sexual harassment would not have been forged. Women would have gone on having experiences of it, but without an abstract and systematic conceptual structure we would not have been able fully to name what we were experiencing. (2000, p. 254)

In illustrating the darker side of the power of theory, Nussbaum also points out that for centuries the notion of marital rape was conceptual impossibility, precisely because of a particular theory that had entered the law through custom and religion. If, as the *Book of Common Prayer* (1962) declared, marriage signified the “mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church” (p. 564), then, according to scripturally-based doctrine, a state of organic unity obtains between a man and a woman.¹⁴

In Nussbaum’s account, theory becomes a tool in the ordering of perceptions, the shaping of discourse, and the discerning of the polyvalent possibilities of real-life situations. She points out that it is the very unfamiliarity of the language of theory which is instrumental in affording perspective: “by asking us to look at the logical form of our judgments, and by urging us to describe them in an unfamiliar theoretical language, theory offers us a perspective that can be very valuable as we ask to what extent we have been engaging in self-interested rationalization” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 252).

Nussbaum’s notion of a high level of generality in the formulation of theory might qualify as a guideline in the construction of a comparative schema to examine diverse theoretical constructions. However, the notion that the unfamiliar language of

¹⁴ The scriptural reference is the letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 5:23: “For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”

theory might assist by establishing distance between ourselves and the object of inquiry highlights, rather than obviates, the problem, for such language does not emanate from a value-neutral position—a point that occupied Joseph Schwab (Schwab, 1971) in his consideration of “the Practical.” Since Schwab is expressly concerned with the value of theoretical constructs and approaches to perspective, and since the problem at hand is precisely one of perspective, I want to consider his thinking in greater detail.

For Schwab, the distance between the theoretical and the practical offers a challenge, and an opportunity, to “bring a principal to its case” (Schwab, 1971, p. 504). He deplores the idea of theory as cut off from its practical application in the work of education: “education in general and the field of curriculum in particular have been inveterately theoretic and...this theoretic bent has let education down” (Schwab, 1971, p. 493). Being “let down” in this case, means that theories, even coherent ones, fail to solve practical educational problems since, while they permit some aspects of a problem to be seen, they obscure others.¹⁵ Accordingly, his conception of a ‘polyfocal conspectus’—the strategy of looking at different dimensions of similar problems using various theories—is aimed at a cultivating a capacity to “understand, judge and exploit” a plurality of views. This is contrasted with “mere conspectus” illustrated in a student’s response to the teaching of theory: “So there are three theories. Which one is right?” (Schwab, 1971, p. 506).

¹⁵ “If these truths, once well presented to us by a theory, find their referents in our own experience of men, this resonance of experience with assertion persuades us not only of the “truth” of the theory, but of its whole truth. We not only seek what it tells us to seek, we do not seek and only rarely note what it does not instruct us to search out. This constitutes our problem as educators.” (Schwab, 1971, p. 505)

Polyfocal conspectus is rather concerned with developing an appreciation for what particular theories can see, and cannot see, in virtue of their language and structure, as a principle is brought to a particular case. Polyfocal conspectus also includes development of the capacity to monitor “bad eclectic”—the incoherent mixing of theories (1971, p. 519). This latter feature reinforces the overall impression that Schwab’s ‘bombarding’ of a problem from a variety of angles with the measured precision of carefully defined theoretical perspectives, carries a more than faint ring of scientific procedure and atomic fission.

Both Nussbaum and Schwab are concerned with the problem of sorting out a plurality of theories in order to arrive at guidelines for practical action.¹⁶ For Nussbaum it is social and cultural plurality, divorced from the guiding influence of theory, which threatens to flatten the moral landscape by placing all actions in a relativistic context. Schwab is dealing with a plurality of theories in education, the limits they impose on perspective and their congruity, or lack of it, with practice. Both writers identify the feature of generality in theoretical constructions which are understood as tools to aid perception through the selection and manipulation of elements from the complex particularities which define human situations.

In Schwab’s account, this sorting is achieved by a disciplined and polyfocal approach which he summarizes in the term “deliberation”—the process of arriving at a decision about action in a concrete situation” (Schwab, 1969, p. 20). Schwab does not mention ethics and indeed, his treatment of the practical might, from one point of view,

¹⁶ See Nussbaum (2000, p. 234); also Schwab (1971 p. 494).

be conceived as purely instrumentalist—a method of approaching a problem similar to that of a tradesman who surveys a difficult situation from as many vantage points as possible, and assesses which of the tools available is most congenial to the angle of approach afforded by the circumstances. This is all very well when one is dealing with a plumbing problem, but can it apply as robustly in a process of sifting through a multiplicity of theories? I will argue below that my descriptive categories, deployed as guidelines, resonate, in a complementary fashion, with both Nussbaum’s generality and Schwab’s polyfocal conspectus.

Nussbaum’s theoretical generality and Schwab’s polyfocal conspectus would appear to be resolutely inclusionary conceptual approaches that favour a multi-perspectival approach to the problem of bringing theory to bear on practice. Both approaches are ostensibly open to considering and accommodating a broad range of views in order to arrive at a sensitive and rational application of the theoretical principle judged most congenial to a practical case. Their inclusionary eclecticism must, however, be qualified. Nussbaum (1999), for example, has been quite harsh in her criticism of poststructuralist approaches and what she perceives as the obscurantist sleight-of-hand demonstrated in the focus on rhetorical practices.¹⁷ Whereas Nussbaum views language, including theoretical language, as a means of expressing truth about such realities as identity, poststructuralists would deny the discovery of a “reality” that exists outside of language and power relations. As my project here is an expressly inclusionary approach to how the self is understood in various contexts as a moral being, it is important to ask

¹⁷ See Robert Alan Brookney and Diane Helene Miller (2001): Changing Signs: The Political Pragmatism of Poststructuralism (*International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, Vol. 6, Nos. 1&2, p. 139).

whether the descriptors I have chosen can be applied in manner that also respects poststructuralist concerns.

Theoretical generality and polyfocality applied.

Consider, for example, the descriptor: ‘Dialogical Dimension.’ The reference here is to a theoretical framework that can accommodate a range of possibilities existing between two poles. The first is a monological perspective—a traditional metaphysical western view of individuals as autonomous, self-determined entities that exercise independent choice in virtue of a transcendent status; the second embraces a self that is dialogically defined, reflective of a collaborative dynamic in which psychological attributes such as emotions are seen as enculturated, performative phenomena, understandable only in terms of their relationally and culturally situated character (Gergen, 2001). This is the self, evidenced in language—including art and gesture—that can only be understood as learned and accomplished through exchanges with others (Taylor, 1991). Also, the dialogical dimension, because of its very general nature, can accommodate identity from the poststructuralist point of view as a practice (Brookey & Miller, 2001) rather than an *a priori* reality. That is, the view of identity as constantly coming-to-be in language can be accommodated along with the notion of identity as a pre-existent reality to be discovered.

Likewise, the descriptor ‘subjective experience’ highlights the role of the self’s relationship to itself, a key dimension of ethical theories that value personal deliberation and reflection in the judging and deciding process. In the educational sphere, some accounts of ethics consider the problem of autonomous versus habituated reason, or

‘critical thinking’ versus ‘indoctrination.’¹⁸ The conscious relationship of the self to itself—the reflection on one’s own thinking processes—thus becomes a vital aspect of ethical awareness—at whatever level of reflexive description this might be presented.¹⁹

As a theoretical construct, the notion of subjective experience is pitched at a sufficiently high level of generality as to allow space for discussion of a variety of perspectives from phenomenology, psychology, cognitive science or spirituality. Moreover, such a construct can accommodate both realist and anti-realist positions. Coming from an anti-realist position, Lewis (2003), observes, that the “Social constructionist research... approaches the status of the concept and the questions posed about the ‘self’ (is it real, is it central to experience?) functionally... self and ‘experience’ are made meaningful in a community of speakers; semiotic practices that can be identified and theorized from an empirical approach” (2003, p. 231). As a descriptive category, subjective experience can subsume the self of experience by inquiring about and ordering the ontological status of that experience: is it constructed in language, discovered in language, reflected in language, or some combination of these?

Theoretical generality and polyfocality would appear to be useful as conceptual background in making reference to the descriptive categories I have proposed. The

¹⁸ See Willem Wardekker (2004) who regards Lickona’s (1993) character education approach as a program designed to inculcate automatic responses to moral situations. Wardekker’s position, by contrast, is “that moral education is concerned with enabling students to critically consider and revise their own commitments in a discursive process” (p. 189); see also Kristjan Kristjansson in *Habituated Reason: Aristotle and the ‘Paradox of Moral Education’* (Theory and Research in Education, Vol. 4(1) pp. 101-122).

¹⁹ This alludes to the distinction, for example, between Satre’s view of self-consciousness as presupposing a pre-reflective self-consciousness and Shoemaker’s (1996) view that there is a causal relationship between our mental states and our awareness of these states. See Zahavi (2005, p. 22).

generality of the descriptors appears sufficient to accommodate a variety of theoretical positions on the self and ethics that can be found currently in the educational field.

In the following example (next page), the descriptors are applied to an article by Carr (2001) dealing with moral and personal identity. The article discusses the notion of self as it appears in three major systems of ethics in their most common forms:

Table 1. Author's Analysis of Article by David Carr (2001)

Descriptor	Core Self	Identity Formation	Experience	Ethical Agency	Dialogical Dimension
Kantian Deontology	Transcendental Idealist Metaphysical (non-empirical) - self is beyond sensible experience	- moral identity equivalent to personal identity; - developed through exercise of reason	Feature: cognizance of rational universalizations	- necessary; part of personhood - agency based on intrinsic orientation to the rational response to universal moral law (deontological)	disengaged from social and affective aspects of being.
Utilitarianism	“Empirically conditioned participants in observable modes of association”	- identity based on reason and participation in normative institutions and processes of enculturation	No distinguishing feature noted	Contingent; moral reason is independent of personal motivation. Consequentialist: maximalisation of utility (greatest good for the greatest number)	socially engaged
Virtue or Communitarian Ethics	Empirical	- reason and enculturation development may be in opposition to cultural standards	No single distinguishing feature; moral self developed through “critical reflection”	necessary; part of personhood; - can be both deontological and consequentialist depending on circumstances	Socially engaged

Carr (2001). Moral and personal identity. *International Journal of Education & Religion*, 2(1), 79.

Reference to the descriptors, in this instance in schematic form, facilitates the observation that Carr's presentation does not address certain areas of special interest in contemporary ethical writing. Examination of the "dialogical dimension" indicates that his analysis skirts the manner in which environmental concerns or gender-based matters might be implicated. "Experience," but for a passing reference, sidesteps the self-conscious aspects of living out a particular approach to ethical challenge.²⁰ These are not critical observations: the article itself illustrates precisely the high level of theoretical generality and polyfocality which enables the differences, and possibly the deficiencies, of any one approach to be detected. Carr notes, for instance, that individuals striving to act morally will sometimes choose to promote general welfare (utilitarianism) and at other times adhere to strict principles (Kantian deontology); accordingly "Kantian and utilitarian moral reasoning are both contributory to a larger picture of the logic of moral rationality" (Carr, 2001, p. 92). It is to the postulate of this "larger picture" that I now turn for further support in dealing with the difficulty of the relativity of the inquiry.

Infinite interpretive regress and transcendence.

No matter how carefully descriptors are formulated and applied they are susceptible to criticism on the basis of the social-cultural-historical-philosophical thought frames of the language in which they have been expressed and which consequently guides their exposition. There is, then, an apparently insoluble problem of infinite interpretive regress: every move to explain the basis on which conceptual constructs and their related questions have been formulated—to establish some sort of standard for

²⁰ As will be discussed in Chapter IV in connection with his views on the ethics of care, Carr tends to be chary of approaches, including the phenomenological, that focus on an examination of the affective aspects of consciousness.

comparison—leads to another interpretive language context in which other premises, values, assumptions and questions would have to be similarly explained.

The difficulty is rendered the more acute inasmuch as the stated purpose of the project is to identify insights into the self and ethics that might contribute to an understanding of the relations between them and educational experience. This declaration means, unavoidably, that some elements will be privileged over others. The challenge appears to reside in bringing about some kind of rapprochement between a range of competing discourses with their disparate premises: an assembly in which voices can be heard in a way that overcomes the description of discourses in education as “a series of monologues that do not speak to each other” (Sidorkin, 1999, p. 3). I want, therefore, to investigate an additional concept—that of the transcendent referent—a theoretical construct which complements the notions of generality and polyfocality, but is oriented more directly to the problem of relativity of value and the ontological status of language.²¹

When we embrace transcendence, even if we disagree over its nature and content, intelligible conversation and criticism about truth and goodness is possible. All assumptions are not incommensurable, and key ideas of one individual or context are understandable by other persons and in other contexts because we assume, if only as a regulative principle, that they have a common transcendent referent.

(Alexander, 2003b, p. 241)

²¹ I am indebted to Hanan Alexander for this idea which appears in his essay, *Education as Spiritual Critique: Dwayne Huebner's Lure of the Transcendent* (Journal of Curriculum Studies, 2003, 35(2), pp. 231-245).

If one were to assemble a number of variant views of the self as an ethical agent for example, it might be argued that most of these formulations, however intelligible and coherent within their original discourse communities, would have some contribution to make to a ‘larger picture’—a more comprehensive model lying beyond the limited perspective of any one theory. Such a provisional hypothesis, held at a high level of theoretical generality, might be advanced as a regulative ideal permitting the accommodation of plurality through a subsumption of variations. Approaching variant views of the self with this perspective offers potential for a certain balance: discussion is conducted with the recognition that all points of view are limited, all perspectives tentative—a background understanding that “regulates our belief in the value of our current perspective. Even our most basic beliefs... could turn out to be wrong” (Alexander, 2003a, p. 8).

Such an understanding does not imply that all views need to be understood as having equal validity, although this is admittedly one of the problems inherent in the more radical forms of postmodernism.²² Nor does it ignore the general assertion that in a poststructuralist approach “everything turns on what one expects to learn once one has abandoned the aims of transcendence” (Morris, 2004, p. 121)—a catch-all term for metaphysics, universalism, and well-nigh any theory that seeks to think the whole. What is in question is *how* theory seeks to think the whole.

Poststructuralist resistance to truth claims about reality and final referents for conceptual knowledge arises from the conviction that they are built on transcendental

²² See Wren and Mendoza (2004, p. 248). Concepts, including that of the self, following Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, are “discursive effects, products of our forms or representation.” Taylor describes the relativistic consequence of such a view in terms of a flat landscape (Taylor, 1992).

perspectives—the “poisoned gift” of Platonic forms (Morris, 2004, p. 121).²³ Critique involves exposing the ways in which transcendental notions manifest themselves in discursive practices in people’s lives as unrecognized forms of power effecting entrapment (Olssen, 2006, p. 245), or colonization, and negation of liberating discourses (Davies et al., 2006). The question becomes then, whether all views of transcendence should be abandoned as conspirators against liberation and whether, therefore, evaluation based on some overarching ideal can be meaningfully and usefully realized.

An examination of work by Taylor (1991), and a poststructuralist critique of it by Semetsky (2004) can be seen to suggest that the question of evaluation based on a transcendental ideal merits attention. A further exploration of an alternative model of transcendence as proposed by Schrag (1997) using Sartre’s concept of transversality, will illustrate how more nuanced views of transcendence based on the integration of postmodern insights might support reference to the descriptors as conceptual guides in research.

Horizons of significance and languages of personal resonance.

Taylor (1991) has argued that the choice of any one view over another, while not claiming to be an assertion of definitive propositional truth, *makes sense* because some issues, and, it might be added, ways of dealing with them, appear more convincing than others against what he terms “horizons of significance” (p. 39). He uses this argument in the context of considering the problem of what it means for a pluralistic society to validate free choice and equality of representation. His point is to unearth the usually-

²³ All things are only imitations of pure Forms. Morris (2004, p. 121) notes that Western philosophy is seen to be “infected” with this notion under the guise of transcendental, dialectical and symbolic logics.

invisible background notion that such validations are underwritten by the assumption that some self-transcending issues are indispensable. “Self choice as an ideal makes sense only because some issues are more significant than others....To shut out demands emanating beyond the self is precisely to suppress the conditions of significance, and hence to court trivialization” (p. 40).

In Taylor’s view, choice as an ideal depends, for its reasonableness as a value to be upheld at an individual or societal level, on the background understanding that certain choices are more significant than others, and that the character of these is ‘self transcending’ in a way that implicates relationship with others. So, for example, the decision to order a low fat meal in a restaurant would not be generally regarded as demonstrating the same level of significance as the choice to support an effort to feed starving children, though both might be considered from various angles as ethical matters. In the present context, I want to suggest that Taylor’s communitarian notion of a *self-transcending, dialogical horizon of significance* can be extended to support the idea of a higher order theoretical principle of inclusion which I have introduced here as a ‘transcendent referent.’ Alexander (2003b) has probed this notion with reference to the work of Huebner (1999).

Huebner (1999) has written of a quality he describes as “the fissure in human knowing” (p. 349); this is the residual doubt behind every confidence and certainty: an awareness that what we are and know can never completely contain what we might become or what we might know. It is epitomized in science, “a human activity that at its best keeps looking for negative proofs, novelty, newness and data that upset and overthrow current theories and paradigms” (Huebner, 1999, p. 345). Science

acknowledges the conceptual uncertainty inherent in representational variation: light is described by both wave and particle models. Science also embraces the provisional character of language; Werner Heisenberg once commented that we do not see nature as it is, but only as a consequence of the questions we put to it, a remark that reflects the problem of mapping reality with language—a tool whose structure and content reflect the vicissitudes of social convention.²⁴ Yet, the scientific posture of cultivated doubt, and the recognition of language as a major determinant of our perceptions, judgments, knowledge, and institutions have limits; some understandings are, after all, better than others.

One can use a thousand words, in French or any other language, to show that a belief is a product of habits of language—and graduate students by the carload can join in the fun—blood still circulates through the body and the AIDS virus still makes people sick and the moon is not made of green cheese. (Postman, 1999, p. 78)

The limits of a social constructivist view are readily evident in matters in which scientific method and testing can be engaged. Thus, the notion of a transcendent referent acknowledges that some theories—even the scientific ones behind vaccines and laser technology—are provisional and only approximate ‘ultimate reality’ in their metaphorical significations. But how could this idea of ‘transcendence’ apply to models of the self which, except for the descriptive accounts emerging in cognitive science, do not issue

²⁴ Cited in Postman (1999, p. 70).

from the application of formal testing and are not empirical? ²⁵ My suggestion is that transcendence, in this context, functions as shorthand for the idea that no one particular view—and this would seem to apply robustly to conceptions of the self—squares with everyone’s experience. As Casey (1996) acknowledges: “It seems as though the only agreement about the self is that it is the subject of enormous contention” (1995, p. 213).

Despite the range of views, however, along the way some versions of ethical selves seem to resonate more vigorously than others. Depictions of the self in the writings of Aristotle, Kant, Hume, Sartre, and Nietzsche continue to be discussed in the West; those of Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Gautama in the East. In the discourses of contemporary ethics in education in the West, it would be difficult to find many works that do not refer to Dewey or MacIntyre, for example. With the emergence in the twentieth century of the female voice in Western and in global culture, one might expect that such names as Rachael Carson, Carol Gilligan, Arundate Roy, or Toni Morrison will echo similarly in conversations of self and ethics in years to come.

This is not to suggest that “truth” is a function of duration any more than longevity is understood as indicative of moral virtue. However, the idea of a transcendent referent adverts both to the partial and provisional character of our knowledge—approximations of the ‘larger picture’—and to the subjective phenomenon of experience over time that some formulations come closer to what we might regard, not as definitive, but as more compelling, stronger, or more satisfyingly descriptive, than others. It is at this

²⁵ See Sean Gallagher *Hermeneutics and the Cognitive Sciences* (Gallagher, 2004) who argues that what hermeneutics discovers is not in opposition to what cognitive science discovers.

point that Taylor's (1991) distinction between subjectivation of *manner* and subjectivation of *matter* assumes crucial importance.

Taylor points out that, until the end of the nineteenth century, language used to describe the world could rely on generally accepted "publicly available orders of meaning" (Taylor, 1992, p. 85); this common frame of reference included the Christian interpretation of history, nature as a sacramental sign, the Great Chain of Being, and the analogy of the various planes of creation. With the advent of the nineteenth century, artists and writers abandoned the "pre-existing lexicon of references" in a search of a "subtler language" articulated beyond convention, one that would release the formal power of nature through a radically personal form of expression. In this new context, illustrated by the work of Rilke in poetry and Caspar David Friedrich in painting, the innovative sensibilities of the artists moved from a mimetic language of representation to metaphorical and creative language, thereby generating startlingly different views of the world. Taylor emphasizes that this development represents a "creative *poiesis*" (making), a subjectivation of manner, but significantly, not of matter (1991, p. 63). The artists were striving for a new vision, but a new vision of a reality beyond the self, of things "from within themselves."

The meaning of this for Taylor is that the language and culture of subjectivity must be examined carefully for its profoundly ethical quality. In celebrating the limitless variety of personal expression, authentic subjectivity recognizes and articulates its connectedness with a larger whole in nature and in human society. It is a subjectivity that is profoundly heuristic: "Ah but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a

heaven for?”²⁶ Thus, “languages of personal resonance” (p. 85) become indispensable tools for the exploration of our deepest intuitions about the claims that other creatures and the natural environment make upon us. That is why, Taylor explains, important moral consequences can follow from the failure to appreciate the distinction between manner and matter.

In Taylor’s view, the subjectivation of matter leads to an emphasis on disengaged reason, the serving of “ends of greater control” (1991, p. 105) and neglect of the embodied, dialogical, temporal nature of humans. In the authentic subjectivity of languages of resonance resides immense ethical potential; it is the power to engender sensibilities that propel us toward ecological policies that transcend the narrow concerns of disengaged reason with its myopic anthropocentrism. Authentic subjectivity, understood in terms of the language of personal resonance, offers instead, “an ethic of benevolence towards real flesh and blood people” (p. 107).

I have summarized Taylor’s argument here since it would seem to support a polyfocal approach to theories as views expressing individual variation in language, while affirming overall a certain level of agreement about what, in the end, is of prime significance—that which transcends purely individual concern. It is against the public background of Taylor’s dialogically-based ‘horizons of significance’ that the trivial and the important come into view and against which a plausible ethic of benevolence is predicated. In the context of the multiple discourses of education, these horizons could be considered to have yet greater definition; they comprise the practical and theoretical

²⁶ Robert Browning in *Andrea del Sarto*.

concerns of teaching and learning—the commonly identified issues that appear in the literature of the field.

Against the background of these somewhat more specific horizons with their attendant concerns, Taylor’s “languages of personal resonance” (1992, p. 85) precisely because of their non-subjectivistic register, theoretically provide access to a great storehouse of perceptions and perspectives that could potentially enrich understanding of complex ethical matters. A glaring problem remains however: since these concerns are themselves products of various discourse communities—and thus, relative to time and place—any inquiry is again dogged by the problem of an apparently irremediable circularity which would deny the prioritizing implied by the invocation of any transcendent ideal.

An examination of a poststructuralist rejoinder to Taylor’s work at this point will serve two purposes: first, to appreciate the way in which a poststructuralist approach to the relationship between language and concept, while also appealing to a dialogical framework, challenges the idea of horizons of significance and therefore any notion of a transcendent referent; and, second, to furnish a test question for the methodology proposed here: On what level, and in what way, do these two monologues, apparently grounded in quite irreconcilably disparate views of reality, actually address each other?

Poiesis and autopoiesis: The poststructuralist rejoinder.

Semetsky (2004) criticizes Taylor’s view of languages of personal resonance on several grounds: the notion is founded on a binary opposition between primacy of content and primacy of expression; it reflects a dyadic logic dependent on a signifier-signified correspondence; the limited notion of *poiesis* (making) binds language to the level of

mimesis and representation; and it presents an essentialist version of the self that makes judgments based on an *a priori* sense of identity and certainty.

Semetsky (2004) first objects to Taylor's distinction between matter as content and manner as expression, since it privileges the former, creating a hierarchy of order that breeds dichotomy: "Ranks of order are irrelevant: both content and expression are embedded in a complex, not hierarchical but heterogeneous, system of relations in such a way that one reciprocally presupposes the other" (2004, p. 317). This view is explained by reference to the biological theory of *autopoiesis*, whereby an organism's self regulatory activity sustains its regenerative functions through continuously open-ended interactions with its environment.²⁷ Understood metaphorically, autopoiesis describes the way in which the self is communicatively self-referential: in communication, meaning emerges in a complex process of interactive feedback loops that continuously adapt to changing relations within and between the structural components of a system that includes an inseparable triad of "percepts, affects and concepts" (Semetsky, 2004, p. 321).

In this perspective, language and experience are interdependent structures: "The process's organization is enabled by continuous, recursive and self-referential interactions that defy an absolute dichotomy between such categories as "objective reality and subjective experience" (Semetsky, 2003b, p. 24). This means that thinking operates as a mode of internal communication as it engages in self organization. A concept, then,

²⁷ "An autopoietic system is constituted by movement which is established, in Deleuze's words, "between the part of each system and between one system and another, which crosses them all, stirs them all up together and subjects them all to the condition which prevents them all to be absolutely closed" (as cited in Semetsky, 2004, p. 320). Elsewhere Semetsky (2003b) cites Varela (1979) for the classical definition of autopoiesis as self organization.

does not have an external referent; rather, it “posits itself and its object at the same time it is created” (2004, p. 321). The communicative process then issues in multiple becomings, and, more importantly, *a continuously produced new subjectivity*. On the basis of the dynamics of experience, “the Deleuzian subject...is capable of inventing new concepts and articulating new values contingent on the dynamics of experience” (Semetsky, 2004 p. 322).

In this poststructuralist presentation then, the self is understood as an event or rather, an infinite series of events, rather than an entity. An individual is continually coming to be in a process of dynamic transformation achieved through the reciprocally influential interactions between perception, feeling and intellect. Any notion of a fixed *a priori* sense of self or transcendent horizon is replaced by a “non-representational a-signifying semiotic process” (Semetsky, 2004, p. 318) which Semetsky describes by resorting to two metaphors from Deleuze, and Guattari: the diagram and stuttering.

As a mode of expression, a diagram is a set of interacting lines neither wholly discursive nor non-discursive, vertical or horizontal. Instead, it unites content and expression as “variables in assemblage”—a dance of reciprocity between elements that moves to “pursue different series, to travel along the different levels, and cross all thresholds; instead of simply displaying phenomena or statements in their vertical or horizontal dimensions, one must form a transversal or mobile diagonal line” (Deleuze, cited in Semetsky, 2003a, p. 221).

The importance of this for ethics in education, is, in Semetsky’s view, profound. It means that the linear demands of strict moral codes—implied, she suggests, in Taylor’s appeal to transcendent values—is replaced by the freedom represented by a zigzagging

line—an escape from old habits and ways of seeing things. Linear progression towards some transcendental end is replaced by a dynamic folding and unfolding of relations between “the semiotic machine, the referred object and the enunciative subject” (Guattari as cited in Semetsky, 2003a, p. 221). The self thus becomes ethically responsible and responsive not by progress towards some higher moral ideal or ultimate truth, but rather by an openness to catching things as they are at work in the continuous production of subjectivity. Deleuze describes the unfolding of this language-focused process as the perception that “a spark can flash and break out of language itself, to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things that we were hardly aware existed” (cited in Semetsky, 2004, p. 319).²⁸

Deleuze also explains the power of language to deliver a revelatory jolt in the metaphor of stuttering. In the act of stuttering, normal discourse is disrupted and destabilized; there is a “breaking things open, breaking words open” (cited in Semetsky 2003a, p. 220) from which emerges the potential for a blurring of the binary opposition between content and expression. Here, Semetsky explains, subjectivity expresses itself not by aiming at some ultimate truth or moral ideal, but instead by focusing on catching things right in the middle, as they unfold (2003a, p. 220). In the process, a new property comes to light: “a highly expressive, passionate language, in which an utterance affected by a play of forces becomes an expressive enunciation” (2004, p. 317).

28 Semetsky (2003, p. 218) draws attention to the importance of the French noun ‘*le pli*’—fold—for Deleuze, noting that implication, explication, and complication figure prominently in the production of subjectivity. The breaking open of words I understand as a reference to the experience of the suddenness and unpredictable power of words to open up worlds of meaning.

Understood in this way, the potential of language resides in its immanent production of meanings in a dialogical context.²⁹ Among these, stands, “first and foremost, the sense and worth of self” (2004, p. 324). The autopoietic perspective, with its engagement and honouring of affective elements and its emphasis on experience, leans, in Semetsky’s view, to the ethical position of the care theorists such as Noddings, and, is equipped to react creatively to the stifling features of a modernist educational system in which hierarchical power structures, a centrally administered curriculum and codes of *a priori* ethical ideals represent the external imposition of forceful and often destructive influences.

Correspondences: Two solitudes?

Two views of language appear to be at play in the above arguments: Taylor sees language as a vehicle for creating, in myriad cultural forms, a resonantly authentic representation of a reality that the multifarious sensitivity of human perception affords. In his view, there is a world separate from linguistic or graphic interpretations of it; there is a human nature over and above historically and culturally conditioned expressions of it, and it is this very nature that provides the condition of dialogically resonant communication. Taylor’s views might be understood to suggest that language is engaged in a constant struggle to overcome its own overarching limitation: the structural and lexical poverty induced by the circumstantial vicissitudes of situated influence. The position raises a striking question for ethics at a conceptual level. As Carr (2003, p. 257) asks: “Are slavery or public execution only wrong because people have come to regard

²⁹ Semetsky notes: “The autonomy of the subject is therefore not given, but contingent on the act of shared communication embedded within the experiential situation” (2004, p. 324).

them as wrong (were these not always actually wrong—even when people did not believe it)?”³⁰

In contrast, the poststructuralist view presents a reality that only comes to be in language; word creates, language, “speaks” the subject who is transformed by the complex interactions of the communicative process. For Rorty (1999) this is reflected in the switch in modern philosophy from subject-centred reason to what Habermas has called “communicative reason” (p. 110), a concept that recognizes the historical contingency of all philosophical problems and sociopolitical discourse. In this view the search for an ultimate arbitrating authority is replaced by “the idea of coming to an agreement among ourselves” (p. 110).

Despite his sensitivity to the complex layering of social and historical factors conditioning the construction of concepts, Taylor posits an external reality that includes the world and the selves that populate it. However, if essentialism is understood as “the general belief that there is a certain way that things are” (Wren & Mendoza, 2004, p. 248), then the poststructuralist account with its roots in language and in an insistent denial of anchored externalities appears to share some of the same spirit: a curious passion for the way that things are.³¹ Still, we can ask at what point these two apparently incompatible monologues could possibly engage.

³⁰ Carr (2003) is also concerned to ask whether it is only the element of rational coherence which establishes particular positions as ethical. See “*Rival Conceptions of Practice in Education and Teaching*” (p. 257).

³¹ This is simply to note that poststructuralist assertions appear to assume the paradoxically essentialist form: ‘All theories are relative except for the theory I am now advancing, which is, after all, the way things are’

It would be possible to conclude that these approaches, seemingly resolute in their essentialist and anti-essentialist postures, do not have much to say to each other and that, consequently, any attempt to compare or evaluate disparate views of the self in ethics in education will finally founder on the rocks of two aporias in ethical debate: objectivism-relativism, and its sister dilemma, deontological-consequentialism (Tellings, 1998). Such a conclusion, in addition to shutting down some interesting discussion, would confound the thesis advanced at the beginning of this chapter—that theory matters precisely because some theories are better than others, particularly when the goal of human flourishing is considered, and that a theory of the relation between personal identity, experience and ethics can serve a useful purpose in the field of education. My approach, therefore, will be to ask whether there are commonalities, or any single commonality, in these positions, that could offer support for a transcendent referent—a regulative ideal that might allow appreciation of their varied perspectives despite conflicting assumptions. Several points of apparent correspondence suggest possibilities.

Points of agreement: Language, community, emotion.

Both Taylor's view of 'reality', and that of Semetsky, reflect keen sensitivity to the value-laden character of language.³² Nowhere is this more apparent than in consideration of the nature of human subjectivity—"an activity produced in relations and like every production it requires work to be done" (Semetsky, 2004, p. 322). In education this 'work,' inseparable from its social context, involves the production of new concepts—immanent meanings which chart an infinite universe of unknown lands.

³² Semetsky (2004) appeals to Deleuze for whom "no thinking, no speaking, and no acting, are value free." (p. 322)

Personal authenticity—of the postmodern sort—embraces this boundlessness, placing an ethical emphasis on forms of questioning and evaluation that stress experience with its affective dimension (Semetsky, 2004). The seemingly limitless human potential to invent, to feel and to react, generates new meanings which form the basis for the recognition of ethical claims.

Taylor (1992) likewise insists upon the inventiveness of the human organism, its capacity for perceptive variation and the constant need to develop new expression; words, signs and symbols, like the perceptions from which they arise, are ephemeral, temporally limited in their effectiveness in exploring and representing the world (p. 87). Embedded in a matrix of time and change, we face a continual challenge to interact with the environment in ways that engage our feelings, sense of affinity with nature and, consequently, a deeper ethical perception of our connection to a wider whole. Taylor observes that the anthropocentric language of arguments for ecological responsibility reflect an inadequate response: it is not, finally, all about us; our finer intuitions, he suggests, point to “a sense that nature and our world make a claim on us” (1992, p. 90). Language puts us in touch with our feelings and intuitions and functions as a key element in the discovery of value and, equally, our identity as ethical agents.

In both approaches, the ethical self is indissolubly bound to community, both as its source of expression in language, the very instrument by which its perceptions are mediated and articulated, and for the affective nourishment on which authentic

responsivity depends.³³ For Taylor, language is pre-eminently the medium by which indelibly personal sensibilities resonate in the shared understanding of another person. His horizons of significance loom into view only through the collegiality of socially negotiated meanings. For Semetsky, as for Deleuze, ethical concerns are embedded in experience and the recognition of “the other in me” (Deleuze, cited in Semetsky, 2004, p. 324).³⁴ In a postmodern understanding, ethical agency itself depends upon community: “The autonomy of the subject is...contingent on the act of shared communication embedded within the experiential situation” (Semetsky, 2004, p. 324).

A shared appreciation for the worth of feelings, and their implication in ethical matters, seems to be another point of correspondence between Semetsky and Taylor. Semetsky stresses that the ethical question for Deleuze “consists in evaluation of multiple modes of existence that would not be expressed solely in rational value judgments”, but in affective tones (2004, p. 324). Although Semetsky condemns the spectre of a modernist autonomous moral agent making judgments with bloodless rationality, this creature seems conspicuously absent from Taylor’s work. Indeed, the communitarian approach evinced by Taylor carries the standard virtue requirement to supply moral reason with, as Carr, notes “the perceptual deliverances of well-ordered affect” (2003, p. 258). Moreover, it is “the galloping hegemony of instrumental reason” (Taylor, 1992, p. 112) untutored by affect, that occupies Taylor.

³³ Zygmunt Bauman’s (1992) observation that “Communities are imagined: belief in their presence is their only brick and mortar, and imputation of importance their only source of authority” (p. xix, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 1992, Routledge, London.) does not vitiate, I think, its importance in this context.

³⁴ See also Inna Semetsky, *The Problematics of Human Subjectivity: Gilles Deleuze and the Deweyan Legacy* (in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 22, 2003, p. 216): “The Deleuzian subject is...always open to material forces that construe it by means of interactions with the *Outside*.”

For Taylor, human agency cannot be configured by disengaged reason: “We are embodied agents living in dialogical conditions, inhabiting time in a specifically human way, that is, making sense of our lives as a story” (1992, p. 106). He cites instances of “runaway extensions of instrumental reason such as the medical practice that forgets the patient as a person, that takes no account of how the treatment relates to his or her story and thus of the determinants of hope and despair” (1992, p. 106). Taylor concludes his argument with an invocation of the urgent need for an “ethic of caring” for “real flesh and blood people” (1992, p. 106). The latter reference lends a distinctly paradoxical air to Semetsky’s accusation that Taylor fails to recognize the “real human...flesh and blood” behind the perspectives of leading postmodern thinkers (2004, p. 315).

IV. Transcendence as a Way of Addressing Paradox

Logocentrism and paradox.

The above mentioned points of agreement regarding the importance of community, the centrality of language in values identification, and the indispensability of affect, do not, of course, obviate conceptual incommensurability in the arguments of Taylor and Semetsky. Taylor still refers to “human essence” and transcendence (1992, p. 107); Semetsky, and the discourse she draws upon, still resist any hint of objectivity, *a priori* categories or transcendental perspectives (2004, p. 316). One interpretation of the tension in this version of the modernity-postmodernity debate is that it revolves around the problem of unity and the ways in which reason is applied to achieve it (Schrag, 1997, p. 126).

Kantian and Hegelian models of synthesis fuel the preoccupation of modernity with a problem-solving approach to contradiction that entails an accompanying “grammar

of unity” embracing categorical schemata and binary semantics (Schrag, 1997, p. 127). On these grounds, the contrast between approaches can be stark: modernist calls for problem-solving solutions based on “universality, necessity and identity” are met by the postmodern celebration of “particularity, contingency, and difference” (Schrag, 1997, p. 127). In the field of education this conceptual polarity appears in the linear, sequential approach of the Tyler Rationale (Tyler, 1949) and challenges to it that appeal to “an asymmetrical, chaotic, fractal order” and a view of curriculum as “a passage of personal transformation” (Doll, 1993, p. 3, 4).

At the level of language, the tension funnels into deep suspicion; it also advances theoretical perspectives for understanding and appreciating those differences between the paradigms that offer promise for dialogue. Corradi Fiumara (1990), for example, warns against the degradation of language by the “ineliminable presence of an ‘inner sophist’, constantly waiting in ambush” (p. 180). The rigid dichotomies of modernist discourse require “rebellion against the constrictions of a language that tends naturally towards controversy, more able to ‘battlespeak’ than to listen” (Corradi Fiumara, 1990, p. 110). Kalamaris (1994) also considers the bellicose dimension of discourse; appealing to Derrida, he considers it a “violence” (p. 202) that must problematize itself and “make war upon the war which institutes it” (Derrida, cited in Kalamaris, 1994, p. 202).

For both Corradi Fiumara and Kalamaras, the enemy is the binary, dichotomizing power of language in its mediation of Western logocratic domination that delimits and compromises understanding. According to Kalamaras, such language also obscures the

deeper significance of poststructuralism which, for him, resides in the exposition and appreciation of the generative aspect of paradox (Kalamaras, 1994).³⁵

Kalamaras argues that properly viewed, the revisionist theories of Derrida, Foucault and, particularly Blanchot (1981), embrace a nonoppositional model of reciprocity in which “nonconceptual awareness participates with conceptual capacities, redirecting them from less stable and categorical renderings toward those that are progressively decentred and fluid” (Kalamaras, 1994, p. 206). This means that genuine deconstruction entails an overcoming of the Western failure to appreciate paradoxes such as self / non-self, presence / absence/ and life / death; considered deconstructively they may be seen not as intractable contradictions, but rather, as invitations to a participatory reciprocity between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness.

Corradi Fiumara likewise calls for “a living syntax of reciprocities” in the life of thought—the outcome of practicing an intentional silence as a way of distancing ourselves from the power-obsessed, oppressive, all pervading nature of our logic (1990, p. 21). In a similar vein, David Bohm (1996) argues for the cultivation of a quality of attentiveness to consciousness which he describes as “proprioception” or “self-perception of thought” (p. 79). Proprioception on a physical level is the capacity that allows us to know that our knee joint is bent even with our eyes closed. Transposed to the realm of thought, the concept would presumably encompass an awareness of the character, direction and implications of our thoughts; it is this quality of attentiveness, Bohm

³⁵ In addressing the manner in which poststructuralist theory and its interpretations approach silence, he notes, “this opposition to silence stems from misunderstandings of the status of “transcendence” and “stillness” in silence, as well as binary interpretations—sometimes in the theories themselves and sometimes in interpretations of these theories—that obscure the generative aspect of paradox” (Kalamaras, 1994, p. 203).

argues, that would permit us to recast apparent problems as paradoxes and thus observe their dissolution (1996).

All three scholars see language-borne Western logocentrism as problematic; they all advance theories that enjoin a participatory response in communicative contexts to the discontinuities of our problem-solving proclivities. The caveats of both Kalamaras and Corradi Fiumara regarding the ways in which our cognitions and perceptions are fashioned and entrammelled by language and culture seem evident in the essentialist-anti-essentialist paradigm clash presented above. However, an obvious question is whether these viewpoints, deeply suspicious of language, and demanding an integration of rational and non-rational elements, could support an appeal to a notion of transcendence or a transcendent referent?

One possible approach would be to view the incommensurability of the paradigms as a paradox set within a broader context of human concern: How is it that philosophical positions emerging from passionate convictions about caring, deep respect for language, for community and for the richness of human affect and aesthetic sensibility, find themselves at such odds? Is it the case that virtue ethicists dismiss feelings and accept oppressive power relations or, equally, that postmoderns delegitimize reason and significance and embrace moral inertia?³⁶ Amidst the layers of paradox there emerge at least two over-arching points of agreement—beyond even the matters of caring, community and aesthetics. The first is the element of the ineffable, and the second, the notion of transversality.

³⁶ See Inna Semetsky (2004, p. 315); and Charles Taylor (1991, p. 66) commenting on Derrida, Foucault, and their followers.

Ineffability and transversality as vectors of the transcendent.³⁷

In the work of Deleuze and Guattari, the idea of the ineffable is linked to *haecceity*—a non-qualitative property responsible for distinguishing one thing from another in the writing of Duns Scotus (1266-1308). *Haecceity*, from the Latin *haec* (this), refers to the ‘thisness’ of things as opposed to the ‘whatness.’ In the Deleuzian understanding, this quality effects “the individuation of something that belongs to no kind, but which, though perfectly individuated, yet retains an indefiniteness, as pointing to something “ineffable” (Rajchman, cited in St. Pierre, 2004, p. 289). However much this ineffability is linked to the denial of subjectivity and personhood, it retains an heuristic potential—pointing to and inviting consideration of something yet to be discovered.

An example of this may be seen when Deleuze compares the statement ‘I’m a person’ to ‘The sun is rising’ (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 290)—an allusion as much to the way in which perceptions are mediated and manipulated through language structure as to the susceptibility of propositions to deconstruction (The sun does not rise and the polysemic character of my personhood is indisputable.). More revealing is the assertion that names expressing nonpersonal individuality are like ‘streams:’ “they express themselves in language, carving differences in it, but language gives each its own individual life and gets things passing between them....But we’re not convinced that’s definitely the right concept” (Deleuze, cited in St. Pierre, 2004, p. 290).

³⁷ A vector can mean a straight line leading to a final point, an aeronautical course to be steered, or a carrier as in the case of disease (O.E.D, 1989).

The key point here is not the viability of a particular—and arguably abstruse—articulation of subjectivity; it is the common experience of *the need to point to that for which pointing is at this moment the most apt, if inadequate, articulation*. On one level it is the reasonable suggestion, expressed variously in different discourses, that beyond our metaphors and concepts there is something that they are not or, perhaps, in which they only hold limited share. On another level it is the visceral experience that what the self can, or will become, is partially veiled, both to itself and to others. This play between affective and cognitive elements we will see more clearly in examining the insinuation of the self and its various dimensions, including psychoanalytic, in narrative in the next chapter. In its ceaseless manifestation in language through interactivity, as in its evolutionary transformation through interface with its social and natural environments, the self remains a shadow, “a self that can never finally be taken hold of or subdued” (Graham, 1991, p. 31).

This account of the elusiveness of the self with its hint of strangeness might be linked to the ancient sense of the Greek word for mystery—*μυστήριον* (*mysterion*) (Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich, 1957, p. 532)—intrinsically unknowable in its fullness. This notion of ultimate unknowableness has been described in terms of conscious experience of the holy by Rudolph Otto, as “the numinous” (1968, p. 12) and it has been linked by Schrag (1997) to a notion of the postmodern self in transcendence.

A different kind of unity.

For Schrag (1997), the idea of the holy, relieved of “its metaphysical underbelly” (p. 117) can contribute to a new perspective on transcendence that meets the principal challenge to sketching a portrait of the self after postmodernity. The challenge “is that of

thinking our way through and beyond the protocols that divide the moderns and the postmoderns on the meaning and the role of unity” (Schrag, 1997, p. 127). Some consideration of Schrag’s argument is relevant here as the proposal of a transcendent referent represents, in the end, an attempt to assimilate conflicting elements to an overarching unified view.

Schrag notes that the word “numinous” functions as a lexical indicator, connoting an experience, not an inference (1997, p. 115). It signifies an encounter with a conceptually unknowable alterity that radically transcends the rational categories of cause and effect, perception, aesthetics, and even ethics (Schrag, 1997). Framed in this manner, it would be possible to regard ineffability, unspeakableness, as an element of transcendence: a posture, a bearing, a manner of attentiveness that embraces paradox, and acknowledges that which is, but cannot be fully spoken.

Schrag continues his argument by drawing upon the existentialist views of Sartre, Deleuze, and Guatarri to demonstrate the different ways in which unity may be conceived. He begins with Sartre’s rejection of Husserl’s transcendental ego as the unifying principle in consciousness. Sartre had argued that the unification of consciousness is achieved through an episodic revisiting of past moments of consciousness in “a play of ‘transversal intentionalities’” (Sartre, cited in Schrag, 1997, p. 128).³⁸ This view resists the notion of a fixed, finalized grounding of consciousness—and thus, identity—in any universal principle. The unity is rather one of “thought and communication moving across differentiated belief systems, interpretive viewpoints and

³⁸ Schrag notes that the use of the concept across such disciplines as topology, nuclear physics, physiology, and anatomy has included “convergence without coincidence, conjecture without concordance, overlapping without assimilation, and union without absorption” (1997, p. 128).

regions of concern” (Schrag, 1997, p. 129). The move from a unity grounded in the stasis of telic principles and objectivities to one of dynamically associative chains intersecting transversally represents a shift from a fixed point of transcendence located ‘out there’, to the fluidity of one issuing from the creativity of the perceiving subject. Schrag draws illustrations from the work of Deleuze, Guattari, and Ryle, to clarify.

Deleuze had noted that in Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, reminiscence was presented as a collecting of creative viewpoints from reflection on past experience rather than as a marshalling of solidified truths (Schrag, 1997). In this context, unity is established and grows through the congruity of a transversal play of viewpoints; objects or subjects are not themselves unified or totalized. The sense of this is captured in Gilbert Ryle’s analysis of the difference between “seeing the house from the front” and “seeing the front of the house” (Schrag, 1997, p. 112).³⁹ Seeing the front of the house represents the bald assertion of a purely inferential reality (one in which the category “front” is applied). Seeing the house from the front distinguishes itself by expressing both the relativity of the observer’s position and, by implication, the contingent character of the category “front.” So understood, it becomes a perspective whose integrity *transcends* that of a purely inferential assertion; it signals a kind of transcendence-within-immanence and illustrates how primacy might be applied to the union of a form of conceptual awareness and an awareness of linguistic form.

This immanent dimension—transversality as a communicative achievement—is also illustrated by Guattari who is concerned with “transversality in the group” (Guattari,

³⁹ This example from Gilbert Ryle’s linguistic analysis is cited by Schrag (1997, p. 112) as an illustration of Husserl’s distinction between the perceived object and the object “as meant”. I have used the example here to illustrate how primacy might be posited.

cited in Schrag, 1997, p. 131). He uses the illustration of interpersonal function in the organization of a psychiatric hospital. In such a complex organization comprising many subgroups, unity cannot be achieved by the imposition of power in a vertical, hierarchical fashion. Nor can decision-making power be relinquished to subgroups operating in horizontal autonomy. In order to achieve functional efficacy as well as harmony, the lines of power and communication must issue in a dynamic reciprocity—a fluid, transversal ordering that manifests itself as an acknowledgement and response to integrity and otherness among its constituent members.

Schrag sees in this example of human interaction the achievement of “transversal communication” (1997, p. 148)—a process in which unification emerges from a context of collegial interchange and power-sharing amidst a multiplicity of viewpoints, perspectives and beliefs. Here we see a striving for “convergence without coincidence, conjuncture without concordance, seeking to understand within the context of differences” (p. 148). It reflects a kind of unity that demonstrates a divergent attentiveness that resists the hegemony of hierarchical unification on one side and the chaos of pluralism on the other.

Moreover, what Guattari has described with regard to a group is, for Schrag (1997), precisely what Sartre has identified about individual consciousness. It is the unity achieved within the consciousness of an individual self; it is accomplished “by dint of a transversal function, an extending across and revisiting of past moments of consciousness without solidifying into an identification with any particular moment” (p. 129).

In all of these examples Schrag sees the centrality of the communicative achievement as radical transcendence: “an open textured process of unifying that allows

for plurality and difference and neither seeks the metaphysical comforts of stable beginnings and universal telic principles nor displays an epistemological enchantment with zero-point epistemic foundations” (p. 130). The question remains however, whether an appeal to transversality, and to Deleuze’s notion of the ineffable, can support the sort of unification that the concept of a transcendent referent implies in the present context. Is it possible to reconcile opposing paradigms by assimilating their perspectives to a unity of process that resolves into a recognition of difference and an attitude of reverential attention to paradox?

On balance, the discussion to this point would seem to illustrate that the challenge of working with language representing significant underlying conceptual and linguistic disparity remains and will not be easily obviated by Schrag’s argument. Moreover, the principles of high generality and polyfocality while mutually complementary and useful for thinking about theoretical constructs are still only incomplete strategies for addressing the problem of infinite interpretive regress posed by essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches to language. Still, two important observations can be made.

The first is that Schrag’s attempt to bring together the legacy of modernity with the sensibilities of postmodernity (1997, p. 148) in his search for a postmodern self, involves a “a grammar of aporia and paradox” (p. 139) which seeks to overcome the binary opposition of the ontological with the ethical. That grammar, he suggests, is to be found in an understanding of transcendence as “more like an existential-pragmatic alterity—an alterity that registers its efficacy by making a difference in the experience of ourselves and the world” (p. 138). His answer suits the present purpose admirably since it leads back to consciousness and an understanding of first person experience.

The experience of the not-yet, the necessarily tentative, the radically incomplete and only suggestive of what may come, the strangeness of encounter with that which cannot be fully articulated, all emerge in the discourses of Taylor and Semetsky and Deleuze. These notions, considered as references to experience, could be viewed as a shared horizon of possibilities, one that mandates continuing conversation as indispensable to discovery. Even amidst deeply rooted conceptual differences, a unity of transversal communication concerning the self might be achieved, for example, by considering the point of juncture between the paradigms represented by the question, *What is required of me now?* In the immediacy of ethical engagement, focus moves to the personal experience of being called upon to make a difference in a relational world and to examine the processes through which this might occur. This view of pragmatic alterity suits the purposes of education by placing discussion of the meaning of responsibility clearly within the requirement to take into account one's own conscious experience.

Second, the language and concepts of the descriptive categories proposed for this investigation into the self may be understood themselves as transversal lines of inquiry—relinquishing claim to any crisp definitions and conclusive resolutions in favour of an attempt to contribute a more nuanced understanding of questions emerging from encounters with incommensurable perspectives. This view will be put to the test immediately for perhaps in no other quarter is the self quite so jostled by paradigms as in narrative.

Chapter III

Self, Narrative, and Ethics

This chapter will examine how notions of the self that are implicated in discussions of narrative in education can be linked to ethics. Priorities discussed in the previous chapters will be maintained; focus on the theoretical relations between notions of the self and experience, and the question of how the self, understood as possessing the capacity for a particular quality of consciousness, might be related to ethical thinking.¹ Just as theories matter in virtue of their power to affect perception, so it will be argued here that stories matter in terms of their power to influence ethical reflection. “Is there a teacher of ethics who has not on occasion entertained the suspicion that no work of scholarship could ever match the virtuosity of the literary artist in addressing complex moral themes?” (Barbieri, 1998, p. 361). What is the element in the well-woven story that compels reflection on questions of morality in ways that elude rationalistic approaches? I will contend that this question—itsself part of the “ancient quarrel” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 15) between poets and philosophers about how best to approach ethics—deeply implicates views of the self in their relationship with narrative. A consideration of narrative brings to the fore historic debates about the ethical significance of universals, of contingency, of conflicting obligations, of recognition of the role of reason, passion, and of the imagination. In looking out over the vastness of narrative theory, research, and practice, we can ask what kind of self is caught up in stories of moral perplexity. What

¹ Chapter II (p. 4) and Chapter I (p. 11) above.

are the roles of teacher and learner in the tortuous quest for understanding how best to live? No formula will be advanced in the following, only a conviction: that ethical growth requires experiential learning and that this, in turn, demands the cultivation of that kind of consciousness which nurtures the development of authentic ethical responsiveness. Moral perception, in other words, depends in part on how we grasp the story of who we are and how we know.

By any standard, narrative in education constitutes a formidable domain. Generously populated by theories, perspectives, and methodological approaches, it is a context in which, as Hermans (2001) has observed in researching the self, exciting experiences can be accompanied by a sense of losing direction. In a vast field of inquiry where even the definition of story is “conceptually elusive” (Randall, 1995, p. 86), the risk is considerable of finding notions of the self everywhere, and therefore, nowhere. Nevertheless, the abundance of stories in the literature of education—and increasingly over the past thirty years, stories about stories—means that one is confronted with a variety of claims about narrative as a method of inquiry that yields knowledge about the self, others, and society. Attention here will focus on particular discussions of narrative that present an understanding of the self as a knowing, relational, ethical being.

In the first section of the chapter, I examine the difficulty of establishing perspective in identifying notions of the self in discussions of narrative and the self-conscious activity involved in constructing a descriptive account of findings. These reflections are followed by a review of selected considerations of narrative in education, and their theoretical relationship to notions of self.

The second part of the chapter examines the epistemology of narrative as proposed by Bruner (2004a, 1986, 2004b) and Polkinghorne (1995, 1996, 2000, 2005). Their work on narrative theory and their accompanying views of the self have been widely referenced in the rationale advanced for narrative knowing in educational research, particularly where the focus is on teacher knowledge or teachers' thought processes (Beattie & Conle, 1996; Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Clandinin, 1989, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Olson & Craig, 2005). Their perspectives will serve, therefore, as a useful backdrop against which to explore how the self can be linked to ethics through the epistemic considerations occasioned by narrative. As will be seen below, variant notions of the self and their relation to ethics can be afforded sharper definition through an examination of the differences that surface in considering how narrative reflects, and affects, knowing.

The position will be taken that the accounts of narrative knowing and of the self offered by Bruner and Polkinghorne have played a key role in revolutionizing research and practice in education. The astonishing reach of their thinking in discussions of qualitative research itself attests to the importance of their contribution to the bridging of traditional and postmodern approaches to knowledge. However, their influential views concerning the narrative mode of knowing carry freight; they are based on, and issue in, particular stories of the self. The task here is to consider these stories, the scrutiny under which they have come, and what this might mean for ethics in an educational context.

Certain aspects of the epistemological defense of narrative knowing offered by Bruner and Polkinghorne have generated critical comment for the way in which they affect the interpretation of research (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Nespor &

Barylske, 1991; Phillips, 1994, 1997/1; Willinsky, 1989). Questions regarding the relationship of narrative to life (Phillips, 1994) and the normative dimensions of narrative (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Strawson, 2004) and agency, have to do with the self as a knowing being and therefore a moral one. Narrative, it has been observed, can be understood to represent not only a distinct way of knowing, but an alternative view of human nature (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997).

If telling stories charts the vicissitudes of human intention, (Bruner, 1990, 1996), it is an inescapably moral activity in which the consciousness of the actor is of crucial importance. While narrative offers neither a transparent view of human intention nor an easy understanding or experience of the consciousness of another, it is widely understood in the field of education, to hold immense potential for transformative insight (Barone, 1995); both reading and writing of narrative, whether intended as fictional or true, can alter experience through shifts in consciousness that may involve a more meaningful grasp of ethical matters (Graham, 1991; Winston, 1998).

The central thesis of what has been termed “narrativist ethics” (Barbieri, 1998, p. 362) asserts that our judgments about right and wrong are both dependent on and shaped by the stories we tell: the examined life is a narrated life (Ricoeur & Valdés, 1991). This account of the primacy of narrative with its implicit emphasis on morality’s embeddedness in story—and story’s implication in lived experience—is distinguished from those deontological approaches that seek moral criteria that are largely independent of the contingent processes of cultural shaping and formulation. So considered, discussion about narrative becomes an arena in which to examine particular theories at work in defending their territory. The attention accorded to narrative’s epistemological

dimension in the theories considered below furnishes an opportunity to consider views that profile the self as a creature conscious, at least in part, of its own knowing.

Thus, the focus on narrative knowing as a distinct mode, as it is presented by Bruner and Polkinghorne, is understood to be of crucial importance, since the manner in which knowing comes about shapes potentialities for the self as an ethical actor. Casey (1995), for example, links the postmodern rejection of a unified self to a renewed sense of agency—a striking contribution, she declares, of the new narrative research (p. 214). She is careful to exclude from this praiseworthy category those life histories which “simply seek to obtain more accurate *information*” (1995, p. 240) using a positivistic framework of understanding. At face value, this could be understood to mean that researchers seeking the truth about stories told to them do not enhance anyone’s agency. However, it is more likely an acknowledgement that truth claims in the assessment of narrative are best described by Dewey’s euphemism “warranted assertibility” (1941, p. 169) — an acknowledgement that warrants and discussion around them includes questions about what matters in stories and how that affects audience and teller.² The position here is, first, that notions of the self and ethical considerations are linked by claims concerning how the self comes to its knowledge and engages in deliberations; and second, that a more provocative avenue of inquiry has been offered in Nussbaum’s (1990) exploration of cataleptic knowledge.

The View from Somewhere: Considering the Approach

Scanning the field of narrative, attempting to isolate and describe formulations of the self and linking them to ethical systems, courts immediate risks that have been

² Cited in (Phillips, 1992)

singled out by experienced researchers. Conle (2003), for one, describes “the all-knowing narrator” as one of the salient problems in using narrative as a means of inquiry (Conle, 1999, p. 19). Her allusion to the risk of adopting an imagined superior and impartial perspective based on a supposed distance from the material seems applicable in what follows. For an inquiry proceeding through a highly selective review of discussions in the literature unavoidably assumes itself certain features of narrative form. It includes, for example, a general notion of discussions (events) that have taken place over time, ideas advanced and countered, protagonists shifting positions and conclusions reached. It is an account of an unfolding of insights about stories and how they alter perspective and, potentially, practice in education. Accordingly, a few notes on the substance of the discussion to follow may serve to clarify the spirit of the approach as well as to introduce the kind of ethical considerations that narrative invites and that will be explored in this essay.

For a writer of narrative, the declared consciousness of being in relationship with particular motives which guide the selection of material or the tenor and direction of its interpretation, offers no assurance of judicious choice of texts, fairness of presentation, or equanimity in evaluation. Apart from the question of the subtle and intricate ways in which such choices and judgments seep into a presentation, it seems beyond question that other motives exist outside the field of immediate awareness. In the sphere of narrative inquiry this phenomenon constitutes at once bane and boon.

Consider the convictions that might be obvious here to the writer and his audience: a belief that the relationship between narrative theory and views of the self has potentially profound implications for the manner in which ethical matters in education are

understood and acted upon; a perspective of the feminist voice as having altered the horizons of understanding of narrative, and the manner in which notions of self have been problematized; the view that the teaching self faces unique ethical responsibilities. The latter position, for instance, might be evident in the manner, as well as the matter of presentation, and could exercise influence despite acknowledgements that the view is in dispute in the literature (Fenstermacher, 1994; van Manen, 1994). As one literary theorist has noted, an author makes claims through form; the means chosen for presentation, including how events are set forth, elided or linked, or whose voice is placed in a particular context, all serve to highlight meaning by bringing into focus what is said by what has not been said (Nissen & Morrison, 1999).³ The form employed in narrative as a communicative vehicle is therefore value-laden and, however resolute the attempt at democratic arbitration, or “linguistic awareness” (Bruner 2004, p. 19), convictions, conscious and unconscious, advance to shape storied accounts.

So described, narrative, as a method of research and a vehicle of presentation, could be seen to lack epistemic respectability (Phillips, 1994). This critique too, is part of the ancient quarrel about access to truth: schematic philosophy versus good fiction, the propositional and the poetic, the fit between form and content—all part of “a family of inquiries” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 45) admitting of no final resolution. And yet, part of the rationale for my own narrative of the self and ethics in education is that, precisely here, in

³ Nissen (Nissen & Morrison, 1999) notes in an analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, that such questions as who is given voice and silenced, whose minds the reader is given access to, are all ethical choices. Similarly, Petra Munro (1998) in an essay on *Engendering Curriculum History in Curriculum: Toward New Identities* (William Pinar, Ed.) remarks: “history is the evocation of what makes invisibility possible” (p. 267).

what might seem the grave of validity claims, the birth of new perspective becomes possible.

An optimistic stance keeps thoughtful company. Ricoeur (1984), for instance, suggests that it is in our readiness, capacity and predisposition to refigure narratives that resides the potential for new possibilities; that the relationship between narrative and moral understanding involves a “relation of presupposition and a relation of transformation” (Ricoeur, as cited in Erben, 2000, p. 384).⁴ Life is not only an incipient story, but “an activity and a desire in search of a narrative” (Ricoeur & Valdés, 1991, p. 432). For Ricoeur this implies a good deal more than an accumulation of stories; it entails a revisiting of narratives in ways that permit the relinquishment of an ego “enchanted with itself” and the birth of a self open to the teaching of a narrative wholeness (Ricoeur & Valdés, 1991, p. 437). It also means allowing new insights to develop by reflecting upon our constructed narratives, discovering our culturally and psychologically induced prepossessions, and learning to experiment with narrating ourselves in other ways (Ricoeur, 2005).

Other scholars, who similarly endorse the centrality of a deepened self-knowledge as the basis of ethical sensibility, also point to refiguration of self-narrative as a site for transformative insight. Pinar’s (1976, 1988) work with *currere* reaffirms the importance of a deeply nuanced and reflective self-knowledge as an indispensable condition of understanding others (1988). Witherell and Noddings (1991) assert that the recognition of the embeddedness of the narrator’s own story in language, gender, beliefs, and life history is at the heart of the teaching-learning experience (p. 3).

⁴ Erben is citing from the English edition of *Temps et récit* (Vol. 1 p. 55).

Conle (2003) identifies five areas within curriculum where evidence of the salutary results of using narrative might be found: understanding, interpretive competence, practical repertoires, changes in life, and “visions gained” (2003, p. 11). Understanding is served by an increased appreciation for complexity. Interpretive competence develops with the ability to find multiple interpretations, to see what has been hitherto neglected and to know better what to neglect. Practical repertoires refer to the “personal practical knowledge” which appears “when the need arises in performance (e.g., during teaching),” although it may not be consciously accessed at will (Conle, 2003, p. 11). Changes in life refer to the personal and professional changes that autobiographical narrative inquirers have reported. However, in the present context, the most cogent of Conle’s concepts is that of “visions gained”—the power of narrative to evoke possibility. This is the facet of narrative that Conle identifies with the shaping of moral modeling agendas.

However, the idea of heightened ethical sensitivity as the fruit of narrative practice implies more than the honing of a rational process in which theoretical notions of self and narrative combine to strengthen the lenses through which life events are viewed and reviewed. This sensitivity also includes the effects of the mimetic power of story—the way in which a story can infiltrate thoughts, moods, dreams (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).⁵ It is through the poignancy of story that “the feminine side of human experience”

5 Mimesis is understood here as that aspect of story in which there is representation or imitation of the real world. Witherell and Noddings cite the work of Robert Coles (1990, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and Moral Imagination*), in which the mimetic quality is credited with inciting the capacity of readers to “enter another’s life”(p. 4).

(emotion, intuition and relationships) finds its voice (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 4).⁶ For Witherell and Noddings, narrative, as the vehicle par excellence of the language of feeling, is crucial since it carries the power to illuminate the moral landscape: Through the poignant grip of story and metaphor we meet ourselves and the other in our mutual quest for goodness and meaning (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 4).

Of vital importance for this work is the matter of the processes whereby transformational insights come about, how they can be described, and how, finally, they might be related to the practical terms of pedagogical work. We are considering the possibility of dramatic reevaluation of personal perspectives based on discoveries about the manner in which we have refigured the world around us. This simple conviction concerning the value of narrative is apt to exercise a predictable effect on the work at hand. It means that the exposition will develop simultaneously on two levels: on one plane, it is the setting forth of accounts of narrative that interrelate with ethics and views of the self; on the other, it entails a framing of matters with an admittedly optimistic leaning—a bias toward an underlying teleology embracing elements conscious and unconscious, personal and social, conceptual and affective. As with any narrative, it is apt to become, as Barone (1990) has argued, an “occasion for conspiracy” (p. 305), an episode of “tense negotiations between the self of the reader and the contents of the experienced world (p. 323). I understand this to mean not only that the enterprise is about valuation, about according some elements more weight, profile, visibility or time, than others. But it is also an occasion for an uneasy recognition of the opportunity for a

⁶ One might well ask why these feminist scholars unquestioningly designate feeling as feminine and what view of self is insinuated into their own formulations.

reversal of plot, a change of characters and a metamorphosis of setting: “Fear not, till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane.”⁷

Narrative Theory and the Self

Narrative is, as Barthes (1977, cited in Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004, p. 1) has observed, “a prodigious variety of genres” including language, spoken or written, images, gestures, and combinations of these. It is communicated as “an organized interpretation of a sequence of events” (Bleakley, 2005, p. 536) in such forms as myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass, cinema, comics, news, and conversation. Through these forms, a temporal sequence of events is presented in a manner that spins a plot, characters, and context into a web of meaningful unity. Broad features of the ensemble of these elements include a beginning, middle and an end, though not necessarily in that order (Carr, 1986b), an underlying intentionality (Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 2003; Ricœur, 1984), and a teleological quality (Kermode, 1967; MacIntyre, 1981)—a sense that the sequence is moving towards a meaningful denouement. It has been observed that the complex descriptive schemes offered for narrative structure can generally be distilled into three movements: framing of a situation or character, presentation of a complication, and a resolution (Nespor & Barylske, 1991).

The root meaning of narrative, *narrare*, Latin—to know—finds reflection in the generally held conviction in education that selves are constructed and understood through

⁷ MacBeth, Act V, scene 5: the moment of horror when MacBeth realizes that there has occurred a plot reversal in which the very phrase he had taken as assurance of success now represents his own interpretive blindness, folly, and impending death. The point here is that I am consciously attempting to be open to insights however much they may run counter to dearly-held perspectives. The outcome, I hope, will be somewhat more felicitous than it was for MacBeth.

the medium of stories (Barone, 1990; Bruner, 1994; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As Taylor (1989) notes, we do not have selves in the same way we have livers and hearts; it is in conceiving and relating narrative structures that the self comes into being. Narrative as “a series of events or facts given in order with the establishing of connections between them” (OED), emerges clearly in qualitative research in education: selves are creatures intrinsically disposed to perceive, think about and express themselves in emplotted story form (Chase, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005). That view easily dominates the field and appears to be so well established that scarcely anyone, including such leading proponents of narrative as Bruner (2004b), defends it, despite protest that the universality of orientation to narrative may not be entirely unassailable (Randall, 1995, p. 91; Strawson, 2004).⁸

Casey (1995), in examining what constitutes narrative research, cites 19 varieties of practice in education which, along with similar lines of inquiry in law, medicine, and psychiatry are linked by a common interest in meaning-making.⁹ She regards this phenomenon as representative, in the social sciences, of a widespread movement away from positivism towards a more interpretive posture (Bruner, 1986). In Casey’s view, the turn to narrative and its deployment as a research strategy, along with an accompanying diversity of theoretical perspectives, are linked by two common factors: an increasing interest in the ways that humans make meaning using language and a particular

⁸ Strawson (2005) objects to the suggestion that everyone stories their experience in time; he refutes this description of a universal ‘diachronic’ tendency by reference to human experience (including his own) that is ‘episodic.’

⁹ These include: *bildungsroman*, life writing, personal accounts, personal narratives, narrative interviews, personal documents, documents of life, life stories, life histories, oral history, ethnohistory, ethnobiographies, autoethnography, ethnopsychology, person-centred-ethnography, popular memory, Latin American *testimonios*, Polish *pamiętniki*.

understanding of the self (Casey, 1995). The definitive features of every study of narrative, she contends, depend upon the author's particular view of the self whether implicit or explicit (p. 213).¹⁰ For Wetherell and Noddings, however, it is the converse; they affirm that in the formation of the self it is narrative structure that plays the central role (Wetherell & Noddings, 1991). For his part, Bruner questions the relationship: "Is our sense of selfhood, the *fons et origio* of storytelling, or does the human gift of narrative endow selfhood with the shape it takes? (2004, p. 7). He quickly answers the question with a nod to narrative. Experience, he explains, is distilled through language into "verbalized events" which impart to the chaos of lived experience the coherence upon which notions of self are constructed (2004a, p. 7). The positions taken by these and other scholars (Carr, 1986b; Nussbaum, 1990; Ricœur, 1983), concerning the relationship between narrative and the manner in which it reflects human experience, echo what Nussbaum (1990, p. 10) terms an "ancient quarrel" in philosophy. It is a dispute that raises important questions for this inquiry: how do narrative formulations, whether of an ostensibly 'fictional' or 'real' sort, and an understanding of their devices and desires, inform the construction and interpretation of the self and its capabilities? Or, conversely, in what ways do prepossessions about the self shape how narrative, theoretically defined and employed as a tool in research or pedagogy, offers up its findings as knowledge?

If the position is taken that, as beings inherently predisposed to engage in telling stories, we are genetically imprinted with a fundamental narrative grammar that we use to organize experience, (Randall, 1995), it would be important to ask, as educators, how

¹⁰ "Whether implicit or elaborated, every study of narrative is based on a particular understanding of the speaker's self" (Casey, 1995, p. 213).

development of this tendency might be appreciated in the learning process, and perhaps facilitated or enhanced. It would seem reasonable to suppose that theoretical positions taken in these matters might translate quite readily into attitudes concerning the value of language, literature and the arts generally, in curriculum.¹¹

So far as research is concerned, as Casey (1995) points out, convictions held about the self and narrative have a bearing on how data is organized and interpreted. Polkinghorne, in describing guidelines for conducting narrative analysis, affirms that the validity of the work requires that a researcher's contribution include evidence of awareness of her own constructive influence (Polkinghorne, 1995). This kind of cognizance of intentionality also has important implications for the relationship between a researcher and her subject. Grumet (1987), discusses the alienating effects of narrative: "telling a story to a friend is risky business, the better the friend, the riskier the business" (p. 321). In the unpredictable confluences of intersubjectivity, receiving one's story back from another person can be something of a shock—accompanied by the realization that to tell a story is already to distance oneself from it.

Conle (1999) discusses another twist in narrative research that has direct implications for student -teacher relations. She relates how a teacher's story becomes "frozen" in her repertoire of review and retelling, hardening the attitudes underlying a relationship with students. Her account underscores the matter of how a theoretical understanding of narrative and the self can affect attitudes toward those to whom one is related and for whom one bears ethical responsibility. To situate theoretical questions in

¹¹ I recall vividly as a Guidance Counsellor being present when the head of one of the top engineering programs in Canada declared publicly in 2001 that the arts have no relationship to 'real life' and are lost time for anyone wanting to get ahead with a career.

such a fashion—whether they concern research or pedagogy—raises the question of how these issues, and the conceptual relationships they entail, are drawn into the practical, everyday dimensions of ethical deliberation.

The joke about the aboriginal person who, after a spate of questions from an ethnographer, interjects “Enough about you. What about me?” harbours a wry postmodern reflection; awareness on the part of researchers of their own biases needs to be accompanied by thinking about the nature of collaborative relationships. The understanding of the accountability of researchers has travelled a long way from convictions about recovering the simple ‘truth’ of narrative accounts to an understanding of “blurring of genres” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 18), a notion of responsibility for those represented in research, and concern with voice and empowerment (Emihovich, 1995). In the educational field, the distinction made between ‘cover stories’ (to satisfy formal or administrative demands), canonical or sacred stories (what authority says should happen) and ‘secret stories’ (what teachers really think happens in classrooms) points to the ethical ambiguity with which story-telling is fraught (Conle, 2005). Moreover, as Conle notes, “Rarely do we know our own consciousness well enough to tell it all” (2005, p. 130)—an admission that raises the question about what “all” would look like, or could possibly mean, in any case.

References to the “new narrative research ” (Casey, 1995, p. 211) or the “narrative turn” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. viii) in educational writing seem to reflect general agreement that the activity of constructing and recounting stories is the principal manner in which selves make meaning of life experience (Bruner, 2004a, 2004b; Polkinghorne, 1988). Beyond that assertion, however, the question of how this process

occurs and what sort of self is engaged in it are less than clear. A cursory look at narrative theory in action reveals something of its convoluted character and the challenge of distinguishing traces of the self within its folds. The theory of narrative, as it has been co-opted for support in education, also introduces, more specifically, certain of the epistemological questions germane to any examination of notions of the self and the difference they make.

Conle (2003), for example, acknowledges that the definition of narrative becomes itself an analytical tool. She recruits the literary theory of Genette (1980) to examine the use and effects of narrative in curriculum. Her discussion of Genette's "three defining facets of narrative" (Conle 1980, p. 5) serves to illustrate how the process of constructing meaning involves a self that shifts nimbly from one vantage point to another as it negotiates its way in a tri-partite web of reciprocal influences.

The first facet of narrative involves focusing on how a story is told—its narrative 'statement.' This is the structuralist concept of *sjuzhe*—a perspective which includes the form of discourse and rhetorical strategies that the author, or raconteur in the case of oral production, uses to craft or frame a particular narrative account (Rabinowitz & Phelan, 2005). This might include, for example, the point of view assigned to particular characters, distinguishing features of the voice accorded to them as mediated by role or social standing, and the matter of whose consciousness is accessible to the reader.

The second perspective focuses on the *fabula*—what the story is about, its coherence and the unity of its descriptions of events, characters, and situations. The third view would involve consideration of the telling itself and its particular context: Conle (2003) describes how a Holocaust survivor, who recounts his experience to high school

audiences, discovers that the story alters with repeated telling and according to the context. The speaker also finds, according to Conle, that the process of remembering, arranging, and telling—holding in tension his narrative statements with the recall and use of events—becomes a learning experience.¹²

The importance of context for the way in which understandings pass through cultural and psychological filters, both for the teller and her audience, may seem self-evident. However, as Conle foregrounds the fascinating fluidity of the interplay between the self and its immediate environment—both relational and physical—she illustrates the importance of considering these factors in curricular matters. They raise questions that have to do with what she terms “moral modeling agendas” that are shaped by the creation of vision and possibility. She declares, “In this respect, it does not matter to what extent the narrative is fictional or experience-based, the offer of what might be is made in both” (2003, p. 11). She concludes her article with a chilling reference to an historical context in which a narrative of heroism and hate was used to shape the imagination of an entire nation. Her allusion to the role of narrative in Nazi propaganda raises insistent and not very subtle questions for educators: What are the implications for curriculum of the relationship between narrative and life? What will be the cost to a society, in any age, of relegating this question to the periphery of public consciousness?

Conle’s work, with its careful use of Genette’s narrative theory, asserts the usefulness of bringing multiple perspectives to a research situation in which storied accounts are being examined for particular purposes (Conle, 2003). In Conle’s essay, it is

¹² One Holocaust survivor who spoke at my own school described to me her sense of surprise at the power of students’ reaction to her story to assist in her own healing. In an all boys’ environment, replete with machismo, adolescent members of the audience had come spontaneously to the stage following her presentation to give her a hug.

about understanding the relationship between how narrative is used—the emphasis accorded to particular aspects of it—and outcomes in curriculum. She suggests that, through narratives, students might be enabled to reflect on specific subject areas with a view to understanding themselves, their ethnicity and race, or the social and political conditions of their lives. Connection with personal experience occurs in narrative encounters when “Feelings and memories elicit ‘me too’ reactions”...that “facilitate a potential reshaping of one’s prior experiences” (Conle, 2003, p. 11). However, the manner in which this process is understood necessarily reflects tensions within narrative theoretical approaches. A consideration of the contrasting emphasis in two approaches—“thinking about a story” and “thinking with a story”—will serve to establish the territory in which to search for inscribed notions of self (Bleakley, 2005, p. 537, 538).

Thinking About Stories and With Stories

The following discussion will argue that thinking *about* and *with* stories are approaches which entail different methods based on a supporting cognitional theory which implies a particular view of the self. The position taken will be that epistemic preconceptions have a direct bearing on certain key issues: how selves make sense of experience; how narrative is understood to be a reflection of the inner workings of the self; how narrative is considered as an educational tool for the development of the self; and how narrative can be understood as a medium for ethical deliberation. In short, the distinctions that will emerge in contrasting thinking about stories and thinking with stories will be seen as having implications for the recognition of issues in educational practice.

Bruner, for example, exhorts educators to consider their responsibilities. He summons those involved in education to take cognizance of key factors in human development, “thinking about thinking has to be a principal ingredient of any empowering practice in education” (1996, p. 19). Educators need to pay attention to the vulnerability of students in matters concerning agency and self-esteem—two of the most salient and vulnerable dimensions of the process of growth (Bruner, 1996). Cultivation of the self has long been a contested matter “in that perpetual cockpit of secular moral debate called pedagogy” (Bruner, 2004a, p. 5). Indeed, the school is the site where the inner psychodynamics of selfhood are institutionalized by culture (Bruner, 1996). Through education students learn to view their own power to make a difference in the world—their ‘agentive efficacy’—and their self-esteem or ability to meet hopes and expectations. These factors Bruner understands as crucial in the moral aspect of constructing selfhood. Accordingly, educators have a responsibility to cultivate “linguistic awareness” and an understanding of the constraints of “inherent mental predispositions” and of symbolic systems (Bruner, 1996, p. 39). Education, as an opening up of the risky world of possibility, involves creating “narrative sensibility” and “narrative as a mode of thought” (p. 39).

In these stirring terms Bruner invites educators to serve the good of individuals and society by striving to nurture the impressionable selves for whom they stand *in loco parentis*. In embracing narrative as a major strategy in the enterprise, he wonders whether the teaching of science might also be improved through a narrative understanding of its development within culture (1996). However, when the hortatory tones of Bruner’s argument have faded, the educator is left with serious questions about how to manage this

kind of nurturing. How should narrative be understood and used as a tool to release the emancipatory potential of the “thinking about thinking” that Bruner enjoys? Where, more precisely, in the process of studying and creating narratives, are there nodal points harbouring transformative potential?

There is good reason for pause. For, underlying Bruner’s exhortations, there are lingering questions about the nature of the self as it is understood to construct identity, consider agency, relate to others, and process experience. Is the narrativizing self, for example, “dressing up reality” in accordance with a need to establish the kind of moral authority whose chief interest, conscious or unconscious, is power and manipulation (Carr, 1986b, p. 12)?¹³ Or does narrative reflect a more innocent self, one whose intrinsic predisposition is to wishful thinking and the arrangement of mental matters with satisfying neatness and coherence?¹⁴ Is coherence the prime criterion for assessing narrative competency? As Carr asks, “In order to make my life-story coherent, why not just rewrite (change rather than reinterpret) the past?” (1986b, p. 98). Phillips (1994) wonders about the extent to which we are capable of detecting our own illusory notions about the way things are and; he calls for recognition of contexts in which narrative needs to be assessed using criteria beyond coherency in order to be “epistemically respectable” (p. 21). One might ask as well, what sort of autonomy, if any, the self enjoys as it draws upon cultural discourses to craft its accounts. An examination of the contrasting modes of approach to narrative—thinking *about*, and *with* stories—offers a step toward the

¹³ Carr refers to the position of Hayden White which reflects the structuralist theory of Roland Barthes.

¹⁴ The reference here is to the cognitive theory of Lous Mink which Carr examines in detail for its embrace of the no untold stories thesis (Carr, 1986, p. 9-12) .

clarification of issues that circulate around the problem of the epistemic aspect of self and its implication in narrative.

Thinking about Stories: Paradigmatic Cognition

The first approach has been described as “thinking about stories”—the analysis of the structure of narratives involving a rigorous reduction of their elements to categories that are semiotically and syntactically related (Bleakley, 2005; Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004).¹⁵ Polkinghorne (1995) has described this approach as “analysis of narrative” (1995, p. 13)—an activity that achieves its purpose by identifying particulars as instances of general concepts and by describing relationships between categories of data based on similarities.¹⁶ It results in descriptions of themes that link stories, or in taxonomies of narrative elements such as genres, characters, or settings.

The process, for Polkinghorne (1995), engages “paradigmatic knowing” an expression coined by Bruner (1986, p. 12). The term corresponds to a mode of cognition that focuses principally on classification of particulars through assignment to a category. It involves a combination of deductive and inductive processing upon which the development of scientific knowledge depends. Its epistemic roots can be found in the ancient discussion of the one and the many: how do we know that Macintosh, Spartan, and Delicious are all instances of the general category ‘apple?’ This mode of processing information—whether sensory data or conceptual forms—is concerned with the details of the relationship between the particular and the general. It refers to discourses that seek to

¹⁵ Czarniawska, in a chapter on structural analysis, details the work of Propp (1928), de Saussure (1933), and Lévy-Strauss (1968).

¹⁶ Polkinghorne notes that this “paradigmatic” mode of research can be conducted in either deductive form (researcher imposed categories) or inductively (categories are developed from similarities in the data).

explain, demonstrate or prove statements through formal logic (Bruner, 1986 p. 12). The basis of this function, according to Polkinghorne, is our ability to focus on the attributes of sameness which permit us to classify something as member of a group (Polkinghorne, 1995). It is through the exclusion of attributes of difference and attention to the identification of commonalities that permits the subsumption of particular items or instances of phenomena under overarching categories.

Polkinghorne notes, however, that paradigmatic knowing may involve both inductive and deductive reasoning in a back-and-forth recursive process (Polkinghorne, 1995) as in the application of grounded theory in qualitative research.¹⁷ In education this methodology has typically involved the collection of storied accounts of life experiences; the culling of common thematic elements; and the analysis of these based on conceptual organizers such as cause and correlation.

For Polkinghorne and Bruner, paradigmatic knowing involves engaging in an act of selective perception that rescues the self from the chaos of an unstructured stream of sense data. In considering an object, the mind isolates attributes that qualify that object for membership in a particular category through an operation which assesses a correspondence between the formal abstract notion of a particular quality and the instantiation of that notion in the object of perception. This is the scientific mode of thought par excellence, one which assumes the objectivity of the outer world, and where the workings of an author's psyche are supposed to be rigorously excluded from

¹⁷ Polkinghorne cites specifically Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory as an instance of this procedure. See also Carl Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Investigation* (pp. 380–393) in which the application of deductive and inductive nomological-statistical methodologies is discussed.

inscription in a text in which the coherences of formal logic prevail (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988).

The other mode of cognition, narrative knowing, is also defined by its own particular operational selectivity. This type of cognition, because of the different way in which it treats narrative accounts as knowledge, might be termed “thinking with stories” (Bleakley, 2005, p. 538).

Thinking with Stories: Narrative Cognition

Narrative knowing is generally contrasted with the logical-scientific or paradigmatic mode of knowing in terms of the processes involved in coming to an understanding, and the status of the knowledge produced or acquired. In the field of education, the work of Bruner (1986, 1990, 1996, 2004a, 2004b) and Polkinghorne (1988, 1995, 2005) has shaped discussion about narrative knowing over the past two decades. Their descriptions of narrative are frequently invoked to explain the distinction between the two types of cognition and to provide a theoretical rationale for the use of narrative in research and pedagogy (Kramp, 2004). The work of these two scholars has been built on the idea that the use of narrative, both as a way of knowing about phenomena and as a method of representing that knowledge, is a cognitive scheme with a particular form; this is to say that their presentation of the phenomenon of narrative is founded on a particular view of how selves acquire, represent and use knowledge: specifically, “The idea that narratives index fundamental structures of thought or experience” (Nespor & Barylske, 1991, p. 819).¹⁸ As Kramp (2004), observes, “any

¹⁸ In addition to Bruner and Polkinghorne, Nespor and Barylske also include Gergen and Gergen (1986) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) among those who adopt this epistemological stance.

understanding of narrative as a mode of inquiry is shaped and informed by narrative as a way of knowing and narrative as a genre with formal characteristics” (p. 107).

A striking feature of the complex expositions of the subject of narrative inquiry offered by Polkinghorne and Bruner is an apparent circularity about the enterprise. An epistemic notion of self is advanced as the basis for understanding how narratives can be used to produce knowledge in research; but narrative form itself emerges as the principal manner in which we construct the self, ruminate over it, learn about it, and represent it in talk and symbol. Narrative is at once bricks and builder, house and occupant; it is both the end product and primal source of our thinking about identity and selfhood. What Kramp (2004) has highlighted so discerningly, as she treads into a chapter introducing the uses of narrative in research, is that one is forced to ponder, in accepting the Bruner—Polkinghorne model of narrative cognition, whether what is presented is, to revisit Ryles’s standpoint language, “the front of the house” or “the house from the front.” Are we being asked to accept a tacit view of the self as a knower (what you see is the “front of the house”), or is the presentation one in which the matter of perspective has been fairly problematized by an acknowledgement of its inherent difficulties?

The following investigation deals with the matter of perspective by focusing on an examination of narrative cognition, and by situating it in a broader discussion of views concerning epistemological function. Using this approach, Kramp’s suggestion regarding the significance of prior assumptions about knowing, and their potential effects on the use of narrative, may be viewed against a broader background. A critical examination of the positions of Bruner and Polkinghorne will indicate that crucial differences between their respective epistemic selves raise questions with important implications for further study.

Narrative knowing distinguishes itself by selecting that which is particular, unique, special, and specific about human activity. It is the mode of reasoning by which self construction occurs (Bruner, 1996, 2004a). Where paradigmatic cognition selects attributes of sameness, narrative cognition identifies and examines difference and diversity (Polkinghorne, 1995). Anecdotal detail organized around a plot may serve both to describe and to explain the actions of a particular person in specific circumstances; their aim is verisimilitude—to convince by reasonable appeal to experience as generally understood rather than to conclusions enshrined in formal proofs. The strength of narrative resides in the quality of its witness: rich description of the situated variability of behaviour and a capturing of the nuances of meaning that elude propositional statements, rules, laws, or definitions.

Although the principal focus of narrative knowing is on the specific and unique in human experience, it does allow for a certain qualified generalization. Polkinghorne explains, “Narrative cognition gives us explanatory knowledge of why a person acted as he or she did; it makes another’s action, as well as our own, understandable” (1995, p. 11). This occurs in a somewhat convoluted process. Storied descriptions of experiences in the lives of others may evoke feelings which help us to identify elements in the story that correspond to remembered episodes in our own experience. An analogical understanding develops from this process as new episodes are seen to be “similar to, though not the same as” previously selected episodes (1995, p. 11). The larger the bank of storied explanatory descriptions in one’s possession, the better equipped one is, Polkinghorne suggests, to experience an initial understanding of new situations. The transfer of this knowledge, Polkinghorne contends, does not come about through the

same mechanism of generalization that occurs in scientific procedures, where a vertical appeal is made to a covering law under which the event being studied can be included as a particular instance.¹⁹ The movement of narrative cognition is, rather, lateral: “thought moves from case to case instead of case to generalization” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11). It is therefore a non-reductionistic process; its purpose is to produce stories not formulae. Instead of isolating elements into constituent parts in discursive analysis, it synthesizes data, bringing events and actions together in a selective configuration according to their relationship to the advancement of a plot and, in light of “general concern for the human condition” (Ricoeur, cited in Bruner, 1986, p. 14). Narrative cognition, according to Bruner, therefore tolerates breaches of logical protocols in the interest of identifying formal coherences that serve an expression of global meaningfulness (Bruner, 1988b).

Although the practice of narrative analysis functions to answer how and why happenings occurred, the narrative mode of knowing is understood to involve a different approach to inferences of an explanatory sort where relationships involving causality are under discussion (Polkinghorne, 1995). For example, the statement, “After the company lost money; many officers resigned” reflects an ordering of information in a temporal fashion that infers an explanation of a causal sort. However, as Czarniawaska (2004) notes, narrative reasoning, unlike its paradigmatic cousin, leaves the nature of the inferential connection open (Bruner, 2004a); it remains undefined and without quantification.

¹⁹ See Carl G. Hempel, (1970) *Aspects of Scientific Investigation*, for appeal to inductive and deductive nomological classification.

In narrative knowing, then, the need to establish our uniqueness is considered to drive a perceptual process in which life events are pulled selectively from a stream of consciousness and organized sequentially to achieve the desired end—a coherent, intelligible story, presenting information that is unique in its situated character. Whereas, in paradigmatic knowing, the ability to identify characteristics of sameness permits differentiation of thought-objects through categorical subsumption, in narrative cognition, the salient operation is the capability of the mind to identify and isolate significant difference.

A Closer Look at Narrative Knowing

The two modes of knowing as described by Bruner and Polkinghorne have been widely accepted in the literature of education and are virtually ubiquitous in contexts in which narrative is presented, defended, or pressed into service as a research or pedagogical tool (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 2001; Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004; Kramp, 2004). So pervasive is their influence in the movement to embrace narrative theory and practice in education that their own narratives have seemingly generated a mytho-poetic aura; with few exceptions, researchers have accepted their explanations uncritically. Yet, it seems clear that what has come to be a canonical account of narrative knowing represents, in the end, one particular theoretical view of how a self comes to know about itself, others, and its environment (Nespor & Barylske, 1991). Moreover, serious questions have been raised concerning certain of the features of the narrativist thesis: its limitation by European literary forms, Anglo-American race, and class considerations (Nespor & Barylske, 1991); epistemological eccentricity (Phillips, 1994; Phillips, 1997); ethical contradiction (Strawson, 2004); and ideological naïvete (Goodson,

1997; McEwan, 1997; Willinsky, 1989). And yet, upon this view, in the field of educational research, an entire “empire of the personal” (Nespor & Barylske, 1991, p. 820) has been constructed using narrative as a foil to pierce the “illiberal hegemony” of positivism (Phillips, 1994, p. 20).

It is also evident that the authors to which Bruner and Polkinghorne appeal for support in their construal of narrative knowing (MacIntyre, 1984; Carr 1986; Ricoeur 1984) are themselves not in agreement concerning the most basic of relationships—namely the relation between narrative and life (Carr, 1986b; Steele, 2003; Verhesschen, 2003). A difference of opinion on this account would seem to have consequences for thinking about how the self achieves self-knowledge and agency, operates intersubjectively, constructs identity, and is understood to experience its own subjectivity—all of the matters embraced by the methodological descriptors of this project. It seems reasonable, therefore, to examine more closely certain questions that are raised by a view of how a self achieves understanding through the use of narrative structure.

First, how adequately does the Bruner/Polkinghorne explanation of narrative cognition assist in considering the perennial question of the relationship between life and narrative? Does it matter whether stories correspond to, or mirror, some reality outside the context of formal literary criteria? What are the relative merits of different forms of narrative for ethical deliberation? To frame the question in this manner is to ask how the understanding of narrative cognition shapes an alternative way of conceptualizing human nature and a notion of the self (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). An assessment of narrative knowing as a prime function in self-construction involves other questions as well: can the

distinction between the modes of knowing be based on the identification of sameness and difference, and what implications might this have for the appropriation of meaning? If narrative knowing focuses on the unique and avoids general categories, and if it is the principal means by which selves engage in their own construction, how can it provide knowledge that is applicable or transferable to new and different contexts? The following discussion will suggest that a strict paradigmatic-narrative knowing distinction risks limiting questions about the demands of narrative configuration for self-understanding and agency in ethical deliberation.

Narrative and Life

At first blush, there seems to be little to doubt generally about a distinction between paradigmatic and narrative knowing, despite alternative accounts of how these modes actually work in dealing with narrative in practice.²⁰ In the matter of the understanding of historical narratives or thinking *about* stories, for example, some scholars, including Wilhelm Dilthey (1961) and R.G. Collingwood (1962), subscribed to a school of paradigmatic understanding that appealed to Carl Hempel's (1965) nomological model of explanation and a positivist analysis of historical knowledge (Carr, 1986b). Hempel proposed that the meaning of historical events needs to be grasped through a rigorous causal explanation that appeals to a covering law of some sort (Ricoeur & Valdés, 1991).²¹ This view implied that a narrative account of events in the world was inadequate as a form of knowledge. Opposing views, including those of Mink

²⁰ An exception to this is Strawson (2004) whose argument against narrativity as a general epistemic characteristic of selves will be considered later.

²¹ See *The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans Georg Gadamer* in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Valdes, Ed., 1991, p. 225), in which Ricoeur discusses whether Hempel's nomological explanatory model can be applied to an understanding of history.

(1978) and White (1987), countered with the observation that past events are without form and meaningless until fitted to the template of a particular kind of narrative structure. A refinement of this view was articulated by Dray (1963), who drew upon the insights of Wittgenstein to suggest that historical explanation is *sui generis*—it focuses on the reasons for action rather than causality.

All of these approaches face the same dilemma, succinctly expressed in the assertion that there can be “no untold stories” (Carr, 1986b, p. 10). On one hand, narrative is understood to be capable of representing the past in all its complexity; on the other, its appearance is understood as a structural reflection of the mind that produced it. From one vantage point, narrative leaps into the spotlight holding a mirror to the reality of life; from another, its art is such that we cannot tell the dancer from the dance.

Randall (1995, p. 91) suggests that one way of considering the debate is to ask about the relative primacy of story over reality. Which comes first? If reality is understood as events, does story inhere in them or in the one who experiences them? Such a perspective focuses on the nature of experience itself. Does narrative extract from experience already-existing stories—pre-existent sequences of events which may be described and interpreted in different ways, but which possess an inherent primordial form? Or is it rather the case that adventures, and the events said to constitute them, are first and foremost lived experiences, subsequently pressed into a storied form which reflects all of the constructive influences that culture-bound flesh is heir to?²²

Although this question might be dismissed as a purely “academic” (Randall, 1995, p. 92), for some critics of narrative research in education, it has a distinct

²² Randall (1995) cites Iris Murdoch and Jean Paul Sartre as defenders of this position.

immediacy. Phillips (1994; 1997), for example, thinks that when stories are told in “narrative analysis” in education, there is enough at stake that criteria such as ‘verisimilitude’ as the appearance of truth, and plausibility as “clarification of the uncertainty implied in the research question of why the happening occurred” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 19) are insufficient. Phillips considers that the distinction between paradigmatic and narrative analysis is problematic, “there are many occasions on which the stories used in narrative research, no less than scientific explanations, need to be true or at least have a significant epistemological warrant” (1997, p. 106). In Phillips’ view, credibility as a criterion of assessment lacks epistemic relevance. So Bruner’s observation that a call for narratives to be warranted is “misplaced verification” (Bruner, 1986, p. 14) is, in Phillips’ view, simply wrong. Narrators, he counters, can be mistaken about states of affairs including their own motivations. Moreover, when a researcher offers a narrative account of findings, it is not adequate to declare that “because configurative analysis is the researcher’s construction, it is inappropriate to ask if it is the “real” or “true” story” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 20). To declare that narrative explanation “needs to satisfy the subjective needs of the reader” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 19) is, for Phillips, to invite horrific consequences, “The narratives told by racists to justify discrimination or even genocide certainly seem to satisfy the subjective needs of their audiences” (Phillips, 1997, p. 107). Narrative research that appeals to a special type of knowing that can only be assessed on the grounds of coherence, verisimilitude, or apparent believability treads on thin ice.

Phillips’ critique calls into question the alleged difference between narrative and paradigmatic modes of cognition. For Phillips, the value of narrative knowing as

explanation in a research context cannot be a completely private matter, independent of some correspondence to states of affairs existing independently of the knower. That some inviolable truth is not attainable does not justify abandonment of a rigorous attempt at the project and a consequent slide into subjectivism (Phillips, 1994). In this view, life as led is not inseparable from life as told; there are experiences first and then there are ways of speaking about them. Phillips is suggesting that, in assessing these ways of speaking, we will need to ponder several variables: narrators can be dead wrong about matters in their stories, particularly about reasons for behaviour or thinking—their own and those of others; narrators can fabricate accounts to satisfy social exigencies; and narrated accounts can reflect justification, rationalization, or ideology.

Phillips illustrates anecdotally the tenuousness of the relationship between narrator intention and the representational value of stories. He relates how, in a university class on hypnosis, students stand and issue loud dog-like barks. When asked to explain, they offer improbable narratives—a source of great amusement to their peers who had, moments before, witnessed the hypnotic suggestion process that preceded these antics. Of course, if research was being conducted in this situation and the research question had focused on the students' understanding of their own behaviour, it would not matter that their accounts were demonstrably incorrect. Nevertheless, Phillips notes, it would still remain crucial to offer an accurate account of beliefs, however mistaken, in the research narrative. More sobering, however, are his allusions to ethics, and teaching.

By way of contemplating the moral domain, Phillips offers the domestic example of a child who relates a story to explain a missing apple pie. If the narrative turns out to be a lie, he notes, we might wish to take the opportunity to 'teach a moral lesson.' While

there is no explanation of what form that might take, the point raises a question about the sufficiency of coherence, verisimilitude, and plausibility. For educators, there might be times when the correspondence between a story offered by a student, a peer, or an administrator, and an existing state of affairs (e.g., a racist incident or an intruder sighted) could affect the tone of a classroom, a residence, or an entire school.

Another example concerns a researcher studying the process in which a teacher has conducted a successful calculus lesson. The teacher's reasons for this or that action might be written up and published in the context of material used for training. Phillips notes that if the researcher wished to draw conclusions about the efficacy of the teacher's actions, it would be necessary to consider the interaction of elements cited in the narrative with "the world" (Phillips, 1994).

So, in Phillips view, the "truth" of a story, considered as a correspondence to matters in the world, becomes a matter of concern according to the context in which the story emerges. His point serves as a reminder that stories matter in different ways and that we are constantly assessing—in some cases unconsciously—what criteria a particular context invites us to bring to a story. For teachers, this can sometimes entail a struggle with conscience as the following personal anecdote illustrates.

A student consulted me in my capacity as a school counsellor concerning academic and personal difficulties. He confided his feeling that drug use was probably affecting his performance. His story included the detail that his parents regularly used various kinds of "recreational" drugs at home and allowed their two children to share in the experiences. My initial approach was to work with the student on ways to withdraw from activities that compromised his success and to organize his work and study time

more efficiently to meet academic objectives. Avoiding judgments about the parents, I sidestepped the matter of whether the story was actually “true.” At length, however, after several meetings with him and after some internal struggle, I sought permission from the student to broach the matter with his parents. He consented. To my surprise, there were no ferocious denials and no threats of lawsuits for defamation of character; instead the parents agreed to discuss matters. They contacted me shortly afterwards to ask for a referral to a family counsellor. When I left it, the story appeared to have taken a positive turn. Over the next few months, the boy’s grades improved and the parents called to express thanks for a referral that they described as instrumental in a salutary change for them.

This anecdote is not offered as a morality tale or a paradigmatic “Hollywood plot” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10) from the annals of the wise counsellor! Its purpose is rather to suggest that teachers may be confronted with situations in which the matter of assessing the narrative-life connection of stories becomes a process that involves an appreciation of the different layers of meaning that context provides. Shifts between focus on the configurational details of stories on one hand, and on their correspondence with factors outside the narrative account on the other, would seem to be often accomplished without conscious reflection. Yet, the need to shift hermeneutic gears can also rise into consciousness as a challenge—pragmatic, ethical, or both. In such conditions a theoretical component to “common sense” might also serve well.

So it is that Phillips’ quarrel with Bruner, Polkinghorne, and others in his rogues’ gallery of narrativists, has its roots in deeper questions about the meaning selves make of experience, how they come to know the world, what stories matter, and what it is about

stories that matters. Phillips is not an enemy of stories and clearly delights in using them himself as his anecdotes and his publication of *A Social Scientist's Bestiary* (1992) illustrate; his grumbling in the end would appear to emerge from a modernist epistemological paradigm in which what matters a great deal, and must be addressed in some manner, is the distance separating knower from known. Among his targets, he includes Connelly and Clandinin (1990), two of the pioneers in narrative research in Canada.²³ As background to their contribution to the field, however, a cursory look at the work of Galen Strawson (2004) reveals some taken-for-granted elements of narrative knowing implicit in narrative analysis.

In Phillips' analysis, too much depends on the link between narrative and an external reality to lean on a view of narrative that glosses over the frailty of human perception, the vicissitudes of intention, and a view of language as the locus of reality-constitution. Strawson (2004) is equally unhappy with the convictions of narrativists, though on other epistemic grounds. His concern is with the conception of the knowing and telling self at the heart of the narrativity thesis. He inveighs against an acceptance of the view of narrative knowing that Bruner and Polkinghorne propose, noting that its presuppositions carry the risk of considerable injustice.²⁴

Strawson notes that narrative knowing has two dimensions, psychological and ethical. He describes the psychological narrativity thesis as the descriptive notion that everyone makes sense of life experience through stories. The ethical or normative narrativity thesis declares that the narrative outlook is essential to a well-lived life. The

²³ Included are Barone (1992), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and van Manen (1990).

²⁴ Strawson only mentions Bruner, to whom he amicably refers as "Jerry" (p. 428), prior to a deft evisceration of his thesis.

descriptive or psychological thesis is, for Strawson, patently false: not everyone makes meaning of life using narrative; he himself does not, and believes that he can provide reflective evidence to prove it. He describes those who think naturally in story form as “diachronics,” they experience themselves as having long term continuity, “a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future” (2004, p. 430). Not all diachronics are narratively oriented, however; that is, the sense of temporal continuity is not inevitably accompanied by a sense of experiencing life as a story.

Strawson’s episodics, in contrast to diachronics, are people who do not have the sense of being something that was there in the past and will be there in the future (2004, p. 439); or at least, that sense is not present to the same degree, despite their awareness that as biological organisms they have long term continuity. Strawson goes to some lengths to shore up this distinction as an experiential phenomenon. He states that for episodics “the past can be present or alive in the present without being present or alive *as* the past” (2004, p. 432). As an episodic, *soi-disant*, he argues from his own experience that the sense of “I” as the same person is only present intellectually, not as a felt reality supported by a thread of contiguous memories.

The ethical or normative thesis is, in Strawson’s view, the principal malefactor since it declares that you ought to be able to construct a story of your life that is respectably coherent. This coherency is understood, thanks in part to MacIntyre’s notion of the narrative quest, as integral to achieving success in living a good life and becoming a whole, ethically responsible human being (Strawson, 2004). Failure to manage this

ongoing task is seen as a lack of normalcy at best and an indication of pathology at worst (Bruner, 2004a; Polkinghorne, 2004).

Against the backdrop of the work of Charles Taylor, Alisdair MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur, as well as Polkinghorne and Bruner, Strawson's essay appears as nothing short of iconoclastic. Despite the studied absence of technical language and the use of an informal interview transcript technique for discussion of critical points, the essay presents a challenge based on a phenomenological view of the conscious experience of making meaning. Its importance for the present context resides not only in his questioning of the epistemological paradigm, but in its implications. For, in Strawson's view, a theoretical monopoly carries certain threats including that of injustice.

Strawson notes that the dominant view among academics involves an uncritical embracing of both the descriptive and normative views. He warns that both are demonstrably false and asserts in no uncertain terms that the project of human self-understanding is thereby hindered, that our grasp of ethical possibilities is impoverished, and that people who do not fit the narrative model can fall victim in psychotherapeutic contexts to needless distress (2004).²⁵ Whereas Phillips criticizes narrative knowing for its potential weaknesses in addressing a posited reality beyond language, Strawson's critique works from within, focusing on consciousness and the putative error of making narrative into a mechanical component of the self—an engine that drives the process of interpreting experience of the world. The irony of accusing a team of distinguished

²⁵ Strawson's observation that the normative thesis is likely to be a source of suffering and frustration for some is sobering. I wonder if there are other experienced teachers who have witnessed even very capable students who have exceptional difficulty in creating a storied account of events, or in organizing an explanation in story form. However tenable Strawson's argument may be overall, it does seem that individuals demonstrate markedly different capacities for the creation of stories.

psychologists and philosophers (he includes Taylor, MacIntyre, and Ricoeur) of “psychologizing”—explaining the behaviour of others by reference to a propensity they find in themselves (p. 437) cannot be lost on Strawson. He suggests that this tendency, as it issues in the ethical narrativity thesis, is motivated by a preposterous sort of hubris, absent from most humans, but present in those occupied by religious beliefs that are “really all about the self” (2004, p. 437).

Given that both the psychological and normative narrativity theses are robustly evident in the work of Bruner and Polkinghorne and that their epistemological tentacles extend into research and pedagogical practice using narrative in education, Strawson’s challenging essay, carefully counter-narrativist in form as well as content, raises ethical as well as academic questions. As a now widely-used and powerful form of discourse, does the narrative model with its universalizing tendency court particular risks? For Behar-Horenstein (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995), Nespore and Barylske (1991) and Willinsky (1989), the answer, for various reasons, is affirmative, and they point to the work of Connelly and Clandinin as a case in point.

Narrative, Life, and the Lost Unity of the Self

The extensive work of Connelly and Clandinin (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1990, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, 1990, 1994; Connelly et al., 1997) focuses on the practical actions, knowledge, and thinking of teachers as these are enmeshed within the narrative unity of individual lives. Their approach to this task is avowedly eclectic, its impressive catholicism supported by an appeal to Czarniawska (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004) and Polkinghorne (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001, p. 17). Their principal interest is in knowledge as the totality of a person’s experience. Personal practical knowledge is “a

particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation” (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 666). So far as an understanding of the self and narrative is concerned, their explanation of the research project reflects Polkinghorne and Bruner’s version of narrative knowing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001; Connelly, & Clandinin, 1990): “Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001, p. 19).

In a research context, narrative inquiry involves a multi-level telling of stories; beyond the personal narrative, there is the collaboratively constructed narrative and, above that, the research story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Reading the experience of others in case studies offers the opportunity to live their experience vicariously (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), an assessment of benefit mirroring Polkinghorne’s own evocation of the affective power of story (Polkinghorne, 1995). So too the explanatory dimension, “Stories function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8). In its telling and retelling of stories the self reconstructs experience—a process in which negotiation in a collaborative context features as a regulatory influence in the production of new experience and fresh understandings.

Despite their use of the term “untold stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10), experience and narrative are considered coterminous. Untold stories are “narrative secrets”—accounts omitted in the consultative revision of plot lines. It is, however, possible for narrative to fail in its representational function. In addition to omission, falsehood, deception, and misrepresentation, as in “cover stories,” are possible. The

assessment of stories occurs through the application of familiar criteria: verisimilitude, plausibility, continuity, closure, aesthetic finality, apperency, the invitational quality of a manuscript (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The meaningfulness of narrative depends upon a researcher's willingness to take heed of intersubjectivity, be aware of and interact with critics. An "empirical narrativist" assists the reader by "self-consciously discussing the selections made, the possible alternative stories, and other limitations seen from the vantage point of "I, the critic"—one of the multiple "I's" or ways of knowing we all have (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10).

It is, perhaps, not surprising that this account of knowing and narrative has garnered critical attention. The most serious problem appears to be that of representation (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995); narrative is presented in discourse as a sort of secular sacrament—an outward sign of an invisible interior reality. That reality consists of "non-observable mental processes or experiential structures" (Nespor & Barylske, 1991, p. 819) inferred from narrative. Narrative thus serves a doubtful double function as the premise of an inference and the evidence that the inference is correct.

Hard on the heels of this critique is Willinsky's (1989) concern that what is being reconstructed in the process of teacher's stories is a "Romantic conception of the lost unity of the self" (Willinsky, 1989, p. 257). Here, too, is a worry about the way in which an understanding of narrative as signifying inner processes may be problematic. The emphasis on coherence and unity in the personal aspect of stories risks obscuring the "practical ideologies of power in educational systems" (p. 262) and their influence in discourse. In Willinsky's view, that risk can be linked to a naïve belief that theoretical

ideas emerge from data.²⁶ Selves regarded as “embodiments of lived stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001, p. 42), are, after all, construction processes open to manipulation. As Goodson (1997) observes, “Personal and practical teachers’ stories may, therefore, act not to further our understandings, but merely to celebrate the particular constructions of the “teacher” which have been wrought by political and social contestation” (p. 115). The question is whether, in the absence of a theoretical perspective, there can be a healthy skepticism about, or productive resistance to, the colonizing influences of ambient power structures in the form-finding act of building a story. It seems evident that the criteria for narrative advanced by Connelly and Clandinin are themselves products of a white, educated, and Anglo-American society—presented, nonetheless, as universally normative human cognitive structures (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Nesper & Barylske, 1991).

The criticisms directed at Connelly and Clandinin raise important questions about the ways in which a view of the self can affect how narrative is understood. How much do recounted stories, unattended by careful, if speculative, consideration of theoretical views contribute to the project of education? What does this activity contribute to self-understanding? According to some critics, each time a story is retold, it is more likely to wander from an accurate accounting of what originally occurred to imaginatively embellished and more polished renderings (Strawson, 2004).

The idea that in telling and retelling stories we can better understand ourselves and therefore “will understand the power of story in the lives of the students we teach”

²⁶ Connelly and Clandinin note that “Formalists begin inquiry in theory, whereas narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001, p. 41).

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, p. 150) has ethical implications. Consider the statement: “the purpose of educational research is, after all, aimed at improving student learning” (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 673). And the following: “we acknowledge the stories we tell are our agenda. Our intention is to understand more about ourselves within each of our situations on the professional knowledge landscape and to move away from seeing characters as right or wrong” (Whelan, Huber, Rose, Davies, & Clandinin, 2001, p. 151).

This last assertion appears in an article co-authored by Clandinin. The article describes how a particular teacher struggles with the consequences of a lie that one of her grade four students told his mother about the teacher’s behaviour. The article relates how retellings of the story in a supportive collegial context assist the victimized teacher to reframe her experience and move on relationally in her dealings with parents. The student and his learning are not mentioned again. While many observations might be made about such an account, it could be noted that Connelly and Clandinin’s approach to narrative knowledge presupposes a unified self that is, generally speaking, highly principled and committed to notions of goodness in action, possessed of ‘fellow-feeling,’ and the desire to gain greater self mastery so as to benefit others; moreover, it is a self that is apt, as in the last example, to assume a stance of heroic self-sacrifice. Another comment might be that in the presence of a studied aloofness regarding the discussion of theory, the authors of a narrative account can wander into preoccupation with quasi-therapeutic ends, a certain complacency regarding ethical relativism, and a love affair with their own narrative. If the point of research, and its representation, is, after all, about student learning, how should that value be respected both in theory and practice?

Narrative knowing in the work of Connelly and Clandinin, with its express dedication to the pragmatic, comes up painfully short in the face of calls for epistemic respectability, concern with greater awareness of discourse complexity, or charges of illegitimate generalization of a cognitional and ethical model. The dismissal of theoretical questions in favour of persistent claims of allegiance to the practical in education courts an obscurantism that has not passed unnoticed in the field. Pinar (1995) has observed that the shift from “what does it mean to be educated?” to “how does it occur?” involves the displacement of individual psychology (p. 60). Such a move appears to imply the abandonment of the project of phenomenological reflection, a dismissal of the importance of psychoanalytical insights, and, as will be contended below, the risk of casting the self in a role inadequately scripted for practical agency.

One of the strengths of the narrativist approach is its concern to understand an agent in terms of her relatedness to her knowledge of the world (Barbieri, 1998). This understanding is rendered problematic by an attempt to create a critical distance from the stories by which we make ethical sense of things and by which, equally, our deliberations are shaped. So, for example, the point of telling and retelling stories is, ostensibly, to gain greater insight through the altered perspective that a reinterpretation of experience brings. These retellings and reinterpretations are accomplished in a collaborative context in which the knowing self objectifies stories and the experiences they represent in order to explore different possibilities. It is here, however, that the trenchancy of Willinsky’s (1989) criticism comes home. For in the deluge of narratives of educational adventures and their fondly reported epiphanies, we can rightly ask what is happening in the assumed space between stories as objects of attention and the subjects who are engaged

in reflection upon them. To what extent have the complications of the subject-object distinction been taken into account? How is the reflecting subject supposed to think of her knowledge?

The demand for critical distance from a story is, after all “somewhat akin to insisting that we ascribe to fish a “respiratory distance” from water” (Barbieri, 1998, p. 378). In a bid to reach a more enlightened perspective, teachers, in objectifying their stories and focusing on the practical “how,” might well be drawn into the very mindset against which Willinsky warns: the unwitting fashioning of plausible, coherent narratives which ignore the effects of the sacred stories of the educational establishment. The same earnest innocence might also furnish a context validating Strawson’s admonition: students struggling, and failing—to the detriment of self-esteem—to meet a curricular demand for crafting narrative accounts considered to be essential in a process of growth, self discovery, and understanding. Indeed, if Strawson’s argument has any merit, educational researchers might be encouraged to look even more closely at the ways in which prior assumptions about narrative knowing reflect particular cultural biases and therefore affect our dealings with those who draw from a different pool of primal stories.

When narrative is linked to an apparent agnosticism concerning theoretical particularities, and implicated, nonetheless, in a canonical decree about how selves access “personal practical knowledge” of the world, it invites hard questions about the very practicality it proffers. However, the matter of the relationship between narrative and life still represents a crucial avenue of inquiry. Even if it could be demonstrated beyond any doubt that many people are “episodics,” narratives are still widely recognized as a principle way of making meaning of experience and of clarifying perceptions of ethical

matters. And, whether we consider narrative in fictional or non-fictional form, the question remains as to what secrets about life and the self it may disclose.

In the West we are enmeshed in deep and storied assumptions emerging from a synthesis of Greek and Judaic sensibilities from which the culture evolved (Barbieri, 1998). For the ‘no untold stories’ view, this may mean that all attempts to gain perspective on our stories by objectifying them situate us inevitably in yet other, more primal ones. Is there here an infinite regress? Or could there be a bedrock pre-narrative structure to human experience? This question illustrates how the relationship between the self, narrative, and the world implicates a troublesome nexus of epistemology and ontology (Howe, 1998). Some further consideration of perspectives on the matter may shed light on the potential and limitations of the model of narrative knowing proposed by Bruner and Polkinghorne.

Considering Agency and Narrative

One of the issues at stake in the consideration of the life-narrative relation is the matter of agency—the capacity of the self to exercise some level of autonomy in thought and action. We can be entrapped by stories that diminish initiative, dull imagination, or call forth visions of possibility that are damaging. Howe (1998) notes, for example, that stories can become self-fulfilling prophecy—effectively supplanting and eliminating agency: “after years of receiving and then regurgitating information presented by their teachers, school children will develop the habit of expecting (and demanding) that they

play this passive role in learning. That is, they will be conditioned to fit the positivist-behaviorist conception of human nature” (p. 16).²⁷

Following Schwandt (2000), the above situation, from an interpretivist point of view, might be addressed in this way: we construct our social realities in story form using the elements of culture that constitute knowledge; to avoid being controlled (either at the level of thought and subsequently of behaviour) by the existing social and cultural norms conveyed in these stories, one can attempt to achieve a better understanding of them and of their constituents through an analysis in which they become “objects.” This involves the adoption of a “theoretical attitude” which assumes that the interpreter is somehow separate from, and largely unaffected by, the object of interpretation. In qualitative research, this ideal is pursued by the managing and tracking of bias using such methods as keeping a reflexive journal and peer debriefing (Schwandt, 2000). Through exercising this kind of critical self-awareness, an individual might theoretically be enabled to reach a level of understanding which permits resistance to outright manipulation by ambient social and cultural norms (Howe, 1998). Agency, thus understood as a measure of autonomy from the ventriloquy of controlling narratives, becomes a function of the discovery and understanding of the elements that compromise freedom for oneself and for others; in this view, the emancipating power of new understanding is achieved through intellectual detachment, distance, and objectivity.

²⁷ Some of the more negative dimensions of this possibility have been mentioned above in connection with the growth of Naziism. A powerful contemporary example can be found in the narrative of a female survivor of the Rwandan Genocide: “Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust,” by Immaculee Ilibagiza (2006, Carlsbad, CA: Hay House Inc.). The role of teachers in the fomenting of ethnic hatred is clearly illustrated.

A hermeneutic approach such as that proposed by Gadamer (1975, 1976) repudiates such a notion of understanding while still affirming the possibility of agency. Understanding is a basic structure of experience of life (Schwandt, 2000). Experience is of something already understood—part of the irreducible primordial givenness of our situation in life. The collective influences that inform our understanding constitute tradition, not a thing that one could step back to observe with detachment, but a “living force that enters into all understanding” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 87). Hermeneutics is therefore not about a method for reaching understanding, but rather an examination of the conditions under which that understanding occurs. In the process of interpretation, an attempt to disengage from one’s own judgments, biases, and prejudices would be like trying to shed one’s skin. The challenge is not to objectify and separate oneself from the perceptual prepossessions bequeathed by tradition, but to accept and examine inherited and unreflectively held views, and to alter those that impair our efforts to understand others and ourselves (Schwandt, 2000). Understanding comes about through, and is produced by, a participative, conversational and dialogic process in which meaning is negotiated. Nevertheless, unlike a strong constructionism, philosophical hermeneutics holds that there is a truth to interpretation—not in the naïve realist sense—but as a “disclosure that transpires in interpretive practices” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 198).

In the Bruner-Polkinghorne view, for example, some elements of the hermeneutic reading seem to be involved: understanding, experience, language, and story are inextricably linked. Since understanding comes about through the instrumentality of language, and since temporality as the basic structure of experience reaches language in

narrative, we are always to be found enmeshed in story.²⁸ In this version of the “no untold stories” view, the cultivation of personal agency involves a critical appreciation of narrative as culturally informed, and a negotiated generation of new stories whose value lies in their improved coherence. It is worth noting that the notion of narrative coherence in the Bruner-Polkinghorne model, as will become increasingly evident, presupposes norms of rationality and morality which distinguish their work from that of postmodern thinkers. Indeed, such norms, as Howe (1998) observes, are regarded by postmoderns as inherently oppressive—inimical to an approach that relies upon the deconstructive application of alternate stories and their iconoclastic power to alter perception through disruption, contradictions and paradoxes.

Both the interpretivist and hermeneutic stances view the self as part of a constructed social reality: the self in its dwelling-in-language, self-interpreting, expressive character. The self is understood as a conceptual entity contingently formed through social interaction but having no essence or fixed nature. At this point, however, views begin to diverge; philosophical hermeneutics trusts in the potential of language to disclose meaning and truth (Schwandt, 2000), not as a correspondence between an object and some external means of representation, but in the context of actual interpretive practice. Language discloses the human world; it is “what allows us to have the world we have” (Taylor, cited in Schwandt, 2000, p. 198). This means, so far as the narrative-life connection is concerned, that some stories and their interpretations are more accurate than others—a stance that many constructionist views would reject.

²⁸ Ricoeur writes, “I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent” (1980, p. 169).

The upshot of this is that, for commentators like Willinsky, a somewhat choppy narrative account might better reflect an appreciation of real-world matters than an elegant work of cultured coherence. The reason is that both stories and their interpretations (more stories) can represent, with varying degrees of accuracy, matters having reality in a humanly constructed social world. This position is quite different from one which affirms the importance of telling and retelling stories to create a smorgasbord of perspectives from which a pleasing concatenation may be served up to satisfy an individual palate. In one view, certain realities exist independently of the deliberating subject; failure to appreciate them puts agency in jeopardy. In the other view, narrative establishes reality and defines agency; however collaborative its conception has been, narrative's value inheres in the subjectivity of a unique personal context.

The Problem of Representation as Continuity

A central and recurring difficulty in considering narrative is the matter of representation: what does narrative offer an individual in terms of knowledge of the world, and what purpose does such intelligence serve? Carr (1986a) approaches the issue through a consideration of continuity between "Narrative and the Real World." In his view, Mink, White, Kermode, and Ricoeur all understand narrative as discontinuous with life: there is no necessary connection between narrative and the world since narrative is a post-factum imposition of form on experience. Life experience is scrambled eggs, narrative, an omelet. Fictional and historical narratives may expand our understanding of ourselves and of what is possible, but whatever mimetic elements they present are understood to create reality, not to imitate it (Carr, 1986a).

Carr's concern with the problem of continuity or discontinuity between narrative and life has to do with the self as the subject of a life story which reflects "the unity of many experiences and actions" (Carr, 1986a, p. 128). His interest goes beyond the basic ethical accountability question of how a person can be held accountable in time—the same in change (is P_1 at t_1 the same as P_2 at t_2 ?). Carr is interested in the way in which narrative discloses a relational reality between a story-teller and his community. He sees the ethical-practical problem of self identity in the challenge to unify three roles: narrator of one's story, protagonist in it, and audience to it. In rising to this challenge the self is disclosed not as a lumpish thing that passively bears the impressions of events, but a dynamic, active, changing subject of a story that is constantly growing.

To defend this view, Carr makes an important move. He appeals to the first-person experiential aspect of narrative and *what it is like* to be involved as a person who acts in the world.²⁹ Evidence for the continuity between narrative and life, Carr suggests, may be found in the experience of action. Our experience of action involves an oscillation between two points of view on the events we living through and the things we are doing. We are aware of being rooted in the present and subject to the unforeseen; but we are equally aware of striving for "an anticipated future-retrospective point of view on the present" (Carr, 1986a, p. 125). When faced with the question, 'What are you doing?' a typical response is to narrate a story in which the meaning of what we are about is expressed from a quasi-retrospective position corresponding to the future perfect tense. The immediacy of this proleptic perspective becomes evident when we discover that

²⁹ The inclusion of this perspective—a salient aspect of the phenomenological approach—shifts the nature of the discussion, rendering it more personal; this is especially evident; for example, in the work of Madelaine Grumet (1976), William Pinar (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), and David Abram (1996), among others.

asking ourselves what we are about is a crucial part of directing and maintaining our activity. As the answer to this kind of question, narration itself becomes a constitutive aspect of action.

It is worth noting at this point that the significance of appealing to subjective experience and what something is like, resides in its opening up the discussion to non-discursive elements—“unbidden nonintellectual truths” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 272). Such a move actually adds further complication to the question of whether there could be a pre-narrative structure to life since it allows for consideration of the influence of the passions in their various forms. The exercise is no longer exclusively a play of language and logic. We can ask about the reciprocity between reason and emotion in the discernment of knowledge as created or discovered. Carr does not travel as far along this road as Nussbaum (1990), whose view of the self reflected in narrative will be considered below.

Although Carr (1986) had identified Ricoeur as an enemy of continuity between narrative and life, he would not have had available to him Ricoeur’s later work in which the narrative-life link appears closer through consideration of pre-narrative structure. Also, Ricoeur’s (1991) notion of the recovery of “the narrative identity which constitutes us” (p. 437) through the exercise of imagination in narration resonates with Carr’s proleptic view of narrative action. Indeed, Ricoeur concedes that the gulf between life and narrative is at least in part abolished through the development of narrative self-understanding in which the ego enchanted by itself is replaced by a self made whole by responsiveness to cultural symbols (1991). However, it is in Ricoeur’s analysis of pre-

narrative structure that one finds an aspect of the life-narrative link that touches the Bruner-Polkinghorne model of narrative knowing more directly.

Ricoeur and Pre-Narrative Structure

Discontinuity between self and ‘real world’ and its role in the discussion of representation has been the subject of close attention in the work of Ricoeur (1983; Ricoeur & Thompson, 1981). Bringing together the study of literary theory and the analytic philosophy of history, Ricoeur has sought to go beyond a structuralist reading that embraces the “no untold stories” view and denies any connection between a text and a world beyond (Carr, 1986b). Instead, in the context of his study of mimesis, Ricoeur (1983; Ricoeur & Valdés, 1991) has proposed a relation of considerable subtlety, a type of “pre-narrative structure” (Carr, 1986b, p. 14) that inheres in experience – what he terms tentatively as “*histoire potentielle ou inchoative*” (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 114).

To begin, Ricoeur points out that we possess an immediate recognition of the distinction between an event that constitutes a narrative action—that which serves the development of a plot—and a psycho-social behaviour or a simple physical movement (1991). We do so in virtue of a grasp of language that permits us to distinguish between elements assembled with a congruity that makes a story and those that do not. This recognition of “the semantics of action,” Ricoeur describes as narrative intelligence (p. 428) or “phronetic intelligence” (p. 432).³⁰ By this capacity we are enabled to identify the symbolic value of an action through an assembly of elements into a descriptive context by which the action becomes intelligible—the raising of an arm, for instance, as a

³⁰ *Phronesis* is the term used by Aristotle to describe practical or moral wisdom. (OED: Greek: φρονήσις: thought, sense, judgement, practical wisdom, prudence).

gesture of friendship or as a threat. This process, he suggests, is carried out without consciousness of its operation by those who tell and follow stories. However, the presence of phronetic intelligence as a “depth structure” and the basis of narrative intelligibility is most vividly illustrated by the two following examples.

Ricoeur describes two situations in which he believes pre-narrative structure is evident. They are relevant to the present inquiry in several respects: first, they question the structuralist position of a firm discontinuity between narrative text and world, and they do so in a manner that hints at the way in which the moral positioning of the self relative to its environment can be conditioned by narrative configuration; second, they call into question the definitional parameters of narrative knowing and narrative analysis as they appear in Bruner and Polkinghorne’s definition; and thirdly, they have implications for the way in which narrative is viewed as an source of information concerning the self.

The first of Ricoeur’s illustrations concerns a psychoanalytic situation in which a patient brings to the analyst scraps of lived experience including dreams, “primitive scenes,” mental snapshots, and moments of conflict (Ricoeur, 1983; Ricoeur & Valdés, 1991, p. 435).³¹ From this rag-bag assemblage of thoughts, images, and feelings, the analyst, in collaboration with the patient, attempts to craft a story possessed of such form and intelligibility that it will challenge the patient to refigure her identity in a form for which she can take responsibility. Indeed it is the quest for personal identity, the drive for the discovery of the uniqueness of the self which assures continuity between the inchoate

³¹ “...des bribes d’histoires vécues, des rêves, des scènes primitives, des épisodes conflictuels”(Ricoeur, 1983, p. 114).

or pre-narrative history and the one that stands as a platform for responsibility and ethical deliberation.³²

The second instance that Ricoeur cites in support of his view of a pre-narrative configurational sensibility occurs in the work of Wilhelm Schapp (1976).³³ In this illustration the reader is asked to imagine a judge attempting to sort out the knotted tangle of background stories in which a suspect has been implicated. Ricoeur points to the common experience of feeling “caught up” or “entangled” (*enchevêtré*) in stories that seem to “happen to us” before they are recounted; these are episodes which we find difficult to explain and that need to be sorted out (Ricoeur, 1983). It is a reference to a background understanding that human action deserves to be narrated, calls for narration, and that our stories emerge from the depths of life entanglements replete with already formed characters and plots. Thus, Ricoeur asserts, whether intended as fiction or not, the intelligibility of narrative depends on a prior configurative understanding of our involvement in story: “Narrating, following, and understanding stories, is nothing but the continuation of such untold stories” (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 435).

Thus, Ricoeur’s sees configurational narrative sensibility as the defining element in subjectivity and the development of a narrative identity (1991, p. 437). It represents an impulse within the self to seek out the narrative identity by which it is constituted—a identity that resists the imposition from without of cultural forms. So it is that we ceaselessly apply ourselves to the re-interpretation of narrative identity in the light of stories passed to us through culture.

³² “C’est la quête de cette identité personnelle qui assure la continuité entre l’histoire potentielle ou inchoative et l’histoire expresse dont nous assumons la responsabilité. (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 114)

³³ Wilhelm Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt* (1976, Wiesbaden: B. Heymann).

Ricoeur's presentation of narrative as a kind of primitive competence seems, in the first instance, to fall easily within the definition of narrative knowing as proposed by Bruner and Polkinghorne. It resembles the action of narrative analysis: a synthesis of heterogeneous elements—the bringing together of the flotsam and jetsam of experience into a coherent storied whole that carries descriptive as well as explanatory force. In a psychoanalytic context, analyst and patient rebuild a life-story through re-employment of raw fragmented data and so permit the healing that the recognition of new meaning, and its call for response, invite.

The situation is somewhat different in the second instance however. Here, Ricoeur's use of the term 'disentangling' and his explanation of it, indicate that what is to be disentangled is already in emplotted form; he speaks of unravelling a skein of plots (*démêlant l'écheveau d'intrigues*) or of being tangled in stories (*enchevêtré dans des histoires*). Here, a responsible self is challenged to sort through a bird's nest of background plots, differentiate their lines, separate and clarify them thematically, and bring them forward for adjudication. This unearthing and unravelling of enmeshed material might be considered as the untold stories from which the told versions are but selected continuations (Ricoeur, 1983). The process thus bears some of the procedural earmarks of *analysis of narrative*—a work ostensibly carried out using the discriminatory function of the paradigmatic mode of cognition. In the case of the judge, for example, it might be reasonable to assume that the record of entanglements would be scanned and episodes selected on the basis of sameness rather than difference: Is there evidence, for example, that X was an habitual thief or a liar? The impression that this kind of discernment might be operating in a review process running in the background of

narrative knowing, or parallel to it, would seem to be recommended, by another dimension of narrative cognition as sketched by Bruner.

Both Polkinghorne and Bruner refer to the way in which culture, through the medium of language, operates to furnish the individual with raw material for the crafting of a meaningful and socially acceptable narrative. For Bruner this is the function of the “toolkit of culture,” an amalgam of “concepts, ideas and theories that permit one to get to higher ground mentally” (Bruner, 1986, p. 73). These elements are like “prosthetic devices” (p. 15) which enable the narrativization of experience through language which carries and circumscribes a range of possibilities—a cultural stock of plots and characters—for the construction of stories. The configurations and discourse conventions of this stock limit the range of possible meanings that a self can formulate. In this sense the self becomes both text and interpretation (Bruner, 1986). This point bears some consideration.

Language creates and constitutes knowledge or “reality” (Bruner, 1986, p. 132). How one talks about and represents things, and how they are in one’s personal experience of reality come to be the same. Applied to the self, the theory suggests that if I develop a sense of myself as a joker, this culturally-shaped character form becomes a circumstantially situated and interpreted ‘text’ from which are drawn the representations of myself that are communicated. The embodiment of the role in my particular situation reflects both the conceptual and linguistic material of the culture in which I am immersed and my dependence on the stories that others tell about me for my own identity construction. In this way, the self becomes a product of telling (Bruner, 2004a), reflecting

the dependent, collegial character and multiple authorship of self construction. Text, interpretation, and teller are blended into a whole.

Bruner notes that, in this process, cultural knowledge, unchecked by reflection, exercises control from the outside: “It is only when a self develops a reflective sense that...is premised on his ability to penetrate knowledge for his own uses” that the self is enabled to become a member of a culture creating community (1986, p. 132). Bruner appears to affirm here that a critical evaluation of cultural forms and their role in personal formation enables one to negotiate some degree of emancipation from the various conceptual hegemonies of culture. The manner in which this comes about Bruner states clearly, “Reflection and distancing are crucial aspects of achieving a sense of the range of possible stances—a metacognitive step of huge import” (p. 133). Collaboration is the key to this development and a crucial aspect of education. Bruner is emphatic in his address to educators about the need for the “loan of consciousness” which occurs as a child traverses the “zone of proximal development” (p. 132).

The situation of Bruner’s knowing self is thus clear: it has, at its disposal, the resources of culture which operate in a formal fashion like prosthetic devices—extensions of limbs which enable the manipulation of aspects of the world. The difference here is that after using these devices that are separate from ourselves, they become part of us. The canonical images of selfhood imprint us, either unconsciously as they are incorporated unwittingly into our repertoire, or consciously when, equipped with the “formulae for reckoning” (Bruner, 1986, p. 131) we negotiate their prosthetic value. In either case, they become incarnated into the situated self; what started as something conceptually separate from an individual becomes an instrumental force in its own

embodied integration. The forms of butcher, the baker, candlestick maker, and teacher become realities.

What is most notable in Bruner's description of the metacognitive achievement of "reflective intervention" (1986, p. 132) is its judicious selectivity: it occurs only when a person exercises a kind of discriminatory thinking that can "penetrate knowledge" and "negotiate the result of his penetrations"(p. 132). Upon what are these negotiations based? It seems reasonable to suppose that they involve already-entangled, emplotted cultural material which is subjected to evaluation and the selection of that which will best serve the purposes of one's own story. The telling metaphor of the prosthesis—an objectification of concept acquisition—suggests a complex process in which reflection and distancing imply a rational engagement of synthesis and analysis, evaluation of similarities and differences, and the achievement of a coherence sparkling with plausibility and verisimilitude.

In this process, the higher mental ground is gained through the use of linguistic conventions that aim for a particular sort of believability: "Believability in a story is of a different order than the believability of even the speculative parts of a physical theory" (Bruner, 1986, p. 14). To support this distinction, Bruner appeals to Popper's (1985) notion of verisimilitude—a position not without critics. In the view of Phillips (1994), not only has Bruner misappropriated Popper in this context, but arguments about verisimilitude and plausibility are in any event epistemic red herrings. Popper's work dealt with verisimilitude as an approximation to truth, not as appearance of plausibility (Phillips, 1994). Narrative accounts can be dazzlingly plausible and grippingly coherent

but simply incorrect—a state of affairs exploited around the world daily by gifted con artists, clever politicians and, of course, educators.

Polkinghorne, in a somewhat similar fashion declares that “Narrative research, by retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human existence, operates in an area that is not limited by formal systems and their particular type of rigor...Research investigating the realm of meaning aims rather for verisimilitude or results that have the appearance of truth or reality” (1988, p. 176). This location of meaning in a social/linguistic system Polkinghorne describes as social constructionism (Polkinghorne, 2004).³⁴ The distinction between this view and that of constructivism resides in the recognition by the latter of multiple sources of meaning including personal experiences and physical processes.

For Polkinghorne, the key difference between the positions is the degree of autonomy accorded to the individual as an actor in the process of meaning production. In constructionism, the locus of meaning is culture and its mediation through language of a finite range of acceptable plots; in constructivism it is “the idea that the self is central to the construction of one’s meaning system” (2004, p. 57). He concedes that, while boundaries between the two positions are not always clear, especially as regards individual autonomy, the heart of the matter for a therapist is the possibility for personal transformation through revision of life stories (Polkinghorne, 2004). For this reason, the question of the relationship between narrative knowing and individual agency continues to be of central concern for Polkinghorne. If the self is constituted in the constant

³⁴ Bruner (1986), however, declares himself to be a constructivist: “...we cannot know an aboriginal reality...there is none” (p. 158); and he denies that a constructivist philosophy of mind “...disarms one either ontologically or ethically” (p. 158).

refiguration of stories that emerge exclusively through concepts and, more important still, values supplied by culture, the range of its creative agency is subject to clear limitations. Moreover, if experience itself is only in language—"verbalized events" as Bruner asserts (2004a, p. 7), —then there are no 'untold stories,' for what occurs is understood as a linguistic precipitate, a product of word filtering.

In Polkinghorne's view, the discussion has direct implications for the relationship between narrative and life, and particularly in his own field of psychology. He declares, for instance, that decisions taken about very abstract matters have implications for what therapists do in the practice of their profession. The strict postmodern view of an individual as passively constituted in social discourse places awkward constraints on the objectives of a therapeutic technique that stresses agency in its bid to deconstruct the stifling plots imposed by particular social systems. Polkinghorne therefore commends such researchers as Shotter (2000) who have sought to understand and explain experience as the result of a "more fundamental interaction between a person and the world," in which knowing as a response assumes the form of a pre-linguistic behaviour (Polkinghorne, 2000, p. 269).

Self Construction and the Two Modes Distinction

Polkinghorne's identification of the distinction between paradigmatic and narrative knowing is presented in terms of the capacity for identifying and selecting qualities of sameness over those of difference. Since both modes of perception or "types of rationality" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 35) can be engaged in dealing with narrative, the way in which the distinction has been supported raises the question of what might elicit and guide the engagement, conscious or unconscious, of either type or mode of cognition.

Moreover, if the distinction is tenable, what implications might follow for self-construction? And further, what practical considerations might follow for the use of narrative in a research or pedagogical context.

Bruner has observed that self-making is accomplished both from the inside and the outside (Bruner, 2004a). The inside involves memory, feelings, ideas, beliefs; the outside includes our perception of the social esteem accorded to us and expectations placed upon us. Self-construction, then, entails a simultaneous processing of information from the inside and outside dimensions of selfhood. The raw material of story—fragmented thoughts, feelings or images—is assembled within temporal parameters through selective emplotment. However, the act of selection is itself influenced or determined by a background of cultural norms, models, and standards with which one's own creation is compared. The degree of enlightened freedom with which one carries out the task depends on what level of "higher ground" has been reached through a reflective appropriation of the cultural toolkit.

An example of this might be seen in my memories, feelings, ideas, and beliefs about certain teachers in my primary school experience, as part of my private and personal experience of self; although private, they can be tested in an intersubjective context—and possibly corrected—in communication with my classmates with whom I still have contact. This experience, with its revisitation of context-specific discourse, might well yield an evaluative enrichment through a sharing of perceptions from others in the same situation; it might permit a deeper grasp of how I understood myself and my environment in the past. In addition, my understanding of recollections of past experience might be further enriched through a deliberate scrutiny of the features of those

reflections: to what extent have the spectral characters in my past begun to resolve into cultural stereotypes?

These considerations of the past would, however, represent only one component in the ongoing construction of my identity; the process would also involve present matters including perceptions of how others think about me and what I understand to be their current and future expectations where I am concerned. Thus, narrative cognition would be pressed to take into account not only potential deviations from cultural norms (difference), but also an appreciation of the degree of resemblance to accepted standards and models (similarity). The narrative construal of the self would appear to be accomplished through an ordering of diverse elements. Background feelings and beliefs (the inside) along with fragmentary pieces of information about intersubjective matters (the outside) would be jumbled together and sorted out, some items finding their way into a storied account of “who I am now.”

Further, if the notion of some form of pre-figurative or pre-narrative disposition is accepted, it would be necessary to acknowledge that narrative knowing also involves the consideration of already-storied data. From the disentangling of multiple emplotted experiences to the fashioning of a coherent narrative explanation, there appears to be a long road on which the milestones would be the identification of common thematic elements and their resolution into something resembling aphoristic form. For example: “I am the sort who loves to socialize in large groups”—might be considered an identity declaration resulting from multiple entanglements whose denouements, though probably varied in tone, were, on balance, uniformly felicitous.

It might still be asked whether the process of self-construction from ‘the inside’ and from ‘the outside’ requires the same or different forms of cognitional function. If the self reviews ‘outside’ data, it will be occupied with cultural information including knowledge of exemplars—heroines and villains—the canonical figures in the dress-up toolkit of culture. The meaning of these terms would have been itself received in story form. X, as a model, only makes sense in the context of her story. Similarly, the identity question “Am I more like X or Y?” only makes sense in terms of my story. The self would be engaged at once in a process of comparison of elements from its life story with those of the model. For example, “How do my early life and professional formation compare with hers? Was she good at language and math in the early grades, as I was?” The scan of respective stories with its search for common elements, similar themes, and reference to categories looks very much like “analysis of narrative” and the exercise of paradigmatic reasoning.

Of course, the process of comparison would also require a selection of ‘inside’ material—an assortment of fragments of perception, beliefs, and memories, summoned into a rough narrative form for the purpose of making a comparison with the emplotted data from the intersubjective world of the ‘outside.’ This fashioning of fragmentary and varied material into story form conforms to Polkinghorne’s narrative analysis, with its focus on difference and the operations of a self clinging to the knowledge that it is separate and distinct from others in virtue of its unique inside experiential life.

In the end, coming to a coherent personal narrative would seem to require material from both inside and outside in an exercise of variable epistemic functions: inductive and deductive paradigmatic cognition in the analysis of narratives for common

elements; and narrative cognition in the bringing together of heterogenous elements in the production of the emplotted synthesis of story.

In summary, the process of self construction appears to involve a synthetic sequence in which paradigmatic and narrative modes of reasoning function together in a complementary fashion that blurs the categories of sameness and difference. Construal of one's uniqueness can apparently be based on perceived similarity to attributes identified in another individual or members of a limited group. A man interviewed on public radio recently described how grateful he was for the members of his psychiatric support group: "We're different from others in society on account of our problems, so in the group we're the same and can be understood and accepted." Such complex identity statements appear to emerge from the depths of experience in which there is a commingling of processes that marshal data—both isolated facts, perceptions and stories—and a weaving of them into "imaginative variations of our ego" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 437); experimental patterns are then tried out on others, modified, and stockpiled in the attic of the performative self.

Narrative cognition, and its operation in narrative analysis, appears to involve complex forms of awareness of ourselves in relation to conceptually abstract cultural notions on one hand and more concrete material from here-and-now embodied social interactions on the other. As these are selectively blended in narration, the expression of difference and uniqueness requires both thinking about stories and thinking with stories. Narrative cognition as defined by Bruner and Polkinghorne fits awkwardly with the processes which they themselves present as integral to the construction of a self in narrative.

Narrative, Reality, and the Self

To this point, the focus has been on narrative and views of the epistemological dimensions of the self that have come under scrutiny in education. Polar views concerning the relationship of narrative and ‘real life’ or ‘reality’ generally occupy an important space in the discussion. These might be summarized, albeit in a greatly simplified form, as follows:

- a) Narrative constructs reality and is thus continuous with it; since narrative form serves to create reality, the representational value of written narrative can be assessed in terms of a rational coherence; narrative does not imitate or reflect an independently existing reality which can somehow be discovered.
- b) Narrative holds the potential to disclose, or represent a pre-existent reality independent of the narrator; narrative may be continuous with, or correspond to this reality in various ways depending on a complex variety of conditions for epistemic or interpretive integrity;
- c) Narrative and reality are irremediably discontinuous. Reality exists independently of narrative, but the capacity of narrative to represent or correspond to this reality cannot be assessed since narrative form defies experimental method.

A similar polarity can be seen in considerations of the capacity of the self to know:

- a) The self knows in two different modalities one of which is narrative—a mode that does not have access to pre-existent universalizable truth about reality, but negotiates specific situated truths from cultural data;

- b) Narrative is a basic structure of knowing or interpreting experience. The self makes use of narrative both to express and to discover general as well as specific knowledge; knowing occurs in a process of inductive and deductive complementarity.
- c) The self and the world exist as separate entities, but it is a mistake to suppose that all selves either think about or know the world in narrative terms.

The Bruner-Polkinghorne model has been presented as roughly conforming to the profiles described under “a” in each category. It would have to be allowed that this categorization is approximate; there are differences in their respective views and their own positions seem at times to be blurred. However, what stands out in their work, and what seems to be most evident of their influence on thinking about narrative and the self in education, has rather greater definition. It is an enthusiastic embrace of narrative that places the self in an uneasy marriage with a view of knowing that appears limited in an important respect.

Narrative knowing, and the educationally significant ‘thinking about thinking’ that it entails, leans heavily toward a creation of a self in which the integrating principle is rational intelligence. Agency boils down to more or less calculated decisions about the incorporation of inside and outside material into accounts judged to efficacious by their resonance with particular cultural norms. Where, in the presentation of narrative knowing, do we find a self that teeters in uncertainty, is overtaken by contradicting knowledge and the summons to engage in risk? What space is there for experience of that which empties the self of expectation and overwhelms by its sheer strangeness - that

which Huebner (1999), has termed “the lure of the transcendent.” (p. 363). Where are the signs of the deepest yearnings of the human spirit that unite us, beyond language and culture, in the contemplation of the mysteries of life and death? The answer, it appears, is nowhere. These are not references corresponding to possibilities at the furthest horizons of human experience; they are only word constructs—considered variously as logical category mistakes, or linguistic artifacts of an empire now fallen.

The implications for ethics of a view of narrative dominated by cultural and linguistic constraints and of a notion of self sealed so tightly within its folds are manifold. To whom may responsibility be imputed? What element of constancy in the continual re-authoring process would allow such imputation?

Graham’s observation that “Autobiography has everything to learn from psychoanalysis” (Graham, as cited in Pinar, 1999, p. 522) is suggestive. For, as Ricoeur (2005, p. 115) has pointed out, it is psychoanalytic process that reveals the resistances of repression in recall as significant. This “active forgetting...is henceforth inseparable from the theory of the unconscious for which it becomes a corollary” (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 115). As the self seeks understanding of its own selfhood in negotiations with cultural forms, it seems that entangled, untold stories buried in consciousness may be as important as those consciously fashioned. If, as Ricoeur (p. 129) seems to suggest, selfhood is sharply concentrated in the ethical moment in which it declares its commitment: ‘Yes, I promise, I am responsible, I will do it,’ then a reckoning with the unpredictable, and the unknown, is an inevitable aspect of its contours. A view of a self nibbling softly from the hand of reason is altogether too tame. In the welling up of meaning that attends the intersection of the world of narrative and the world of a self, there is another element to be considered.

Narrative Knowing and Cataleptic Knowledge

An alternative lens with which to view the potential of narrative has been provided by Nussbaum (1990), whose thinking about the narrative-life relation includes the idea of cataleptic knowledge in narrative. The adjective “cataleptic” derives from the Greek *katalambanein*—to apprehend, or firmly grasp (Nussbaum, 1990). The cataleptic impression is one that possesses such power that experience of it convinces one that “things could not be otherwise” (p. 265). So, for example, Nussbaum provides an illustration from the work of Proust in which the protagonist (Marcel) is jolted by the sudden overwhelming realization of the reality, in a moment of intense agony, that he loves another (Albertine). Nussbaum believes that this sense of certainty accompanied by acute suffering is more than simply a way of knowing; it constitutes knowing.

Nussbaum proceeds to contrast “the blinding moment of cataleptic knowledge” (1990, p. 277) with the intellectual or scientific project in which rational analysis predominates. How do we know reality? Do we discover it or create it? In the cataleptic moment, she suggests, it is both: we are moved from clock time to human time in the discovery of a reality that can be expressed because it is already present in pattern form.³⁵ In this view, the reader of a narrative stands to be caught up in a process of empathic and sympathetic involvement with the protagonist accompanied by “a concomitant “mining” of his or her own life experience for analogous loves”(p. 280).

At first blush this reading may appear to resemble Polkinghorne’s explanation of how similarities in the stories of others may move us to expand our narrative repertoires. However, Nussbaum’s questioning of the roles of emotion and reason go beyond this

³⁵ “it is the emerging of something that has been there all along and has been repressed” (1990).

paradigm. In leaping lightly back and forth from the experience of the protagonist in a narrative, to the response of the reader, Nussbaum draws attention to the manner in which a reflective grasp of our own sympathies can be channeled by philosophical analysis. A theory that sets up confrontation and clarifies oppositions allows narrative to be the proving ground on which reality is revealed as neither wholly constructed nor wholly discovered, where reason and emotion are engaged in a complex dance of interaction through which we are enabled to understand that knowledge is no single thing, but a complex way of being. The key to this is a certain abandonment of the self, a yielding, a falling, an opening up to possibility which occurs in the cataleptic realization.

In the light of Nussbaum's rapprochement of theoretical analysis and the emotional fullness of the first-person affective character of the experience of narrative, the rational solipsism of the Bruner-Polkinghorne model of cognition presents as poor fare. Cataleptic knowledge names not a solution to a logical problem, but a direction for a bevy of other questions about the human condition. As Nussbaum observes, this kind of knowledge comes with a certain mysterious and anguished quality: it is "hard, glittering, strange...with the precipitous finality of death" (1990, p. 277). It is born of a conversation between narrative and philosophy. On its own, theory can be specious knowledge; narrative likewise, when it is yoked only to rational analysis, risks a solipsism evident in the model of narrative knowing considered above. Nussbaum's contention is that philosophy clarifies the conditions under which the evocations of narrative open up the possibility of the cataleptic moment.

As an account of the way in which knowledge conveyed in emotional impressions can receive definition and clarity in personal reflection, Nussbaum's exposition of the

cataleptic in narrative invites further discussion about self-knowledge in education. It asks about influences that might inhibit the development of particular sympathies: the emphasis on control and autonomy in the education of males in Western culture, for example.³⁶ It presents a self for whom narrative's high voltage potential implicates reason and emotion in a way that transcends any particular discourse. It also contains an implicit warning to educators about forgetfulness of the development and scope of human potential. In suggesting that there are secret, hidden, repressed things waiting to emerge and be written, it enjoins educators not to bury narrative in the shallow grave of no untold stories. Yet, it is not earnestly innocent as it invites us to bring the flinty skepticism of the philosopher to the most intimately personal matters of the heart to create a space in which the cataleptic event might occur. If that space is the self in its coming into being, then the questions about narrative and human flourishing can be asked again and again with the telling of every story.

³⁶ Nussbaum in fact makes a passing reference to Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982, Cambridge, MA) in this connection.

Chapter IV

Negotiating Identity: Feminists Rethinking the Self

This chapter will identify and discuss some of the central aspects of feminist thinking about subjectivity and selfhood that have emerged to change and enrich the way in which ethical issues are discussed in education. Stimulated by Gilligan's (1982) work in psychology, Anglo-American feminist ethics have closely reviewed many of the key assumptions and preoccupations of contemporary moral philosophy (Walker, 1992, p. 24). Across a broad spectrum of feminist scholarship, the results of this investigation have converged on at least one powerful insight: dominant theories of ethics, whether deontological, consequentialist, or contractarian focus on a constellation of factors that fail to take into account the vital qualities of relationship—with oneself, with others, human and non-human, and with the environment. In these theories, the abstract is favoured over the concrete (Noddings, 1984, p. 36) and preoccupation with impartiality, rules, and principles obscures the centrality of the responsive qualities of intimacy and care inherent in relationships (Gilligan, 1982, p. 105). This realization has foregrounded the notion of moral deliberation as situated in particular settings, and as influenced by traditions and language that require questioning.

It must be acknowledged from the outset that the weave of multiple feminisms contains many strands of thinking, often with subtle distinctions and varying emphasis. While concern with relationship and with theory based on women's experience are common aspects of feminist thinking, particularly of an ethics of care, they must not be taken as unvarying features of a feminist orthodoxy (Jaggar, 2000). However, in the view

of some feminists it is precisely the thinking along these lines that has offered the most radical challenge to modern ethical theory (Jaggar, 2000). I will argue here that the provocative character of care ethics, whatever its formal philosophical deficiencies (Carr, 2005; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990), offers avenues of inquiry for an understanding of the self that are especially promising for working with the tortuous complexities of ethics in educational settings.

The turn to the concrete qualities of intersubjectivity and new ways of including emotion and embodiment, as well as reason, in thinking about ethics, has accompanied the feminist exploration of a fluid, multifaceted self that defies the definitional reach of patriarchy. In education, this singular development has summoned old problems to be questioned in new contexts in which practical action, language, politics, and a passionate concern for justice have combined to demand public hearing. The task here will be to explore how some of the old questions about responsible action have been differently inflected in a movement whose excavations of selfhood can now claim a certain global significance if not urgency. If it is the case, for example, that feminist thinking offers a relational self whose moral agency differs from the contractual subject of liberal theory (Smeyers, 1999, p. 244), we can ask how this might affect the roles of emotion and reason in ethical deliberation. We might also wonder whether an account of moral development in which male and female responses are distinguished along rational and affective lines is educationally, theoretically, or morally satisfactory (Carr, 2005). To these might be added a specifically feminist concern: whether an ethics of care based on women's experience contains the conceptual resources for distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate forms of caring (Jaggar, 2000).

Amidst the multiple, complex, and sometimes competing discourses of feminism, women's concern with the integrity of heart, body, and mind has altered the landscape on which the ethical teacher is invited to engage in the task of reflection. These domains and the important questions raised within them concerning the emotional, somatic, and cognitive dimensions of selfhood will shape a discussion prefaced by a background sketch of some principal features of feminist thinking.

Over the past 40 years, feminism as a global upheaval of thought and an activist movement has challenged, if not changed, world consciousness regarding the relationship between gender and justice (Chesler, 2006). Identity, personhood, the body, and agency are topics around which feminists have organized a powerful critique of notions of the self based on the experience of white, heterosexual, economically privileged men whose power has dominated Western society (Meyers, 2004). In a study of feminist literature appearing in three leading academic journals of higher education, Hart (2006) identified feminist work as that which challenged patriarchy—defined as gender oppression. While strands of feminist writing differ in identifying the precise source of oppression, they are united in two respects: the belief that women suffer from social injustice that is sex-based and the commitment to a reappraisal of the social position of women (Hart, 2006).¹

Responding to the domination of institutions by patriarchy, feminist work on the self has issued in signal contributions to scholarship on at least three fronts: a critique of

¹ Categorization of strands can be fiendishly difficult; with regard to one strand, St. Pierre (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) comments “the categories “feminist,” “poststructural,” “feminist poststructuralism,” or “poststructural feminism” are insufficient for describing the complex ways the authors work with, within and against these theories as well as their reasons (ethical and political) for doing so. (p. 3). A further example appears in the work of Nancy Goldberger, (1996, p. 7), co-author of the groundbreaking *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, 1986), who reports being classified variously along with Gilligan, Ruddick, Noddings, and Fox Keller, as “different voice,” “alpha bias,” or “relational” theorists.

established views of the self; a reconstruction/reclamation of women's selfhood; and a reconceptualization of the self which emphasizes women's experience (Meyers, 2004).

Women have responded in various ways in their attempts to "turn down the racket of patriarchy" (Meyers, 2004, p. 9). Part of this response to the subjugation, discrimination, and exploitation associated with the traditions of male control has involved a struggle with the relationship between the particular experience of women and their pursuit of theoretical knowledge (Greene, 1994).² In the field of education, feminism has been represented by multiple discourses: liberal, cultural, and poststructuralism feminisms (Grumet, 2000) have taken up the task of critique, reconstruction, and reconceptualization using narrative as a key resource.³ Stories of women's personal, professional, and sexual lives have raised consciousness of the ways in which women's experience has been subject to the impoverishment of mediation by men (Daly, 1990; Greene, 1998). Indeed, the enhanced sense of suppressed women's voices being "micemutter, silly whispers" (Hospital, 1995, p. 201) has provoked reaction ranging from cerebral indignation against an Aristotelian "flowerpot view" of women to a passionate "Thunderbolt of Rage...hurled against the patriarchs who have never ceased to massacre women and our sister the Earth" (Daly, 1990, p. xxi). In meeting the challenge of excavating the unconscious ways that teachers internalize assumptions about identity (Pinar, 1995, p. 372), feminists have opposed the universalizing strategies of patriarchy and its monological, objectifying approach to knowledge by viewing narrative

² In this regard, Greene (Greene, 1994, p. 451) specifically cites women involved in scientific work: Harding, 1991; and Keller, 1992.

³ Miller (Miller, 2005, p. 66) distinguishes Liberal or reformist feminism by its concentration on understanding the organizational strategies of patriarchy. Radical or cultural feminism, extending a Marxist analysis to include sexual oppression, focuses on gender and the manifestation of power in personal relations.

with a postmodern epistemology that emphasizes “voice” and a dialogical, rather than monological understanding of human subjectivity (Greene, 1994, p. 448).

Deeply ingrained in this enterprise are the themes of silence and power (Goldberger, 1996; Miller, 2005; Noddings, 1984). In the search for ‘the real’ in Western science and philosophy, an enterprise founded on the notion of a knower as separated from an objective world, feminists have identified a Faustian bargain: the thralldom of knowledge that yields predictive power and control in return for a suppression of the richly complex self of experience that resonates with women’s ways of knowing (Greene, 1994). In the West, feminists have seen this effacement of the self as a key element of the positivist legacy, and a salient aspect of the shaping of the culture of education through grand rationalist narratives in the work of such as Tyler (1949), and Schwab (1969; 1971). Target points for feminists in that culture include “an overlooking of gender and racial factors, a taking for granted of meritocratic orders and the dependability of equal opportunity” (Greene, 1994, p. 450).

The Role of Narrative in Feminist Thought

As a location for feminist attempts to understand and recreate the self by addressing the complexities of the influences that they seek to resist, narrative has been warmly embraced, viewed with considerable ambivalence, and roundly denounced. While an emphasis on lived experience and the concrete situated particularity of moral deliberation have turned easily to narrative as a resource, many feminist reactions are wary of the underlying potential of narrative for reproduction of masculine values, and as a vehicle for furthering and continuing oppression of women (Munro, 1998). Certain feminist scholars have declared, for example, that the standard view of plot—beginning,

middle, climactic end—reflects the tension-resolution “thrust toward fulfillment” of male psychosexuality and is thus formally suspect as a vehicle for inquiry (Bogdan, as cited in Randall, 1995 p. 143).

Feminist poststructuralism has perhaps been the harshest critic of the role of narrative in constructing the self. In this view, the self is a process and a site of disunity and conflict, rather than a unified, fixed entity, as in liberal humanism. This conflicted subjectivity shifts constantly between the perspectives of the discourses that allow it to be conceived. In these discourses, “language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others” (St. Pierre, as cited in Jackson, 2001 p. 392). Language is therefore infused with power since it “organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world” (Jackson, 2001, p. 396).

These dynamics become particularly evident in the discourse of teacher education, for example, where power flows invisibly through the motherhood and apple-pie assumption that experience is important, into the normative prescription that learning through experience will occur in a linear fashion. Hidden beneath the patina of the ‘experience-is-the-best-teacher’ story there may be a flurry of manipulative whisperings: the self is a unity to which experience lends expertise; experienced teachers possess expertise and are ipso facto superior models; novices should conform to the identities of their mentors. In the underlying notion of predictable sequential progress of a teacher unified in nature and identity, there can be seen the exclusion of the struggle for a novice teacher to “borrow, to negotiate, to claim ownership, and to take up that which seems already completed” (Britzman, as cited in Jackson, 2001, p. 387). The erasure of

ambiguity, nuance, and complexity by the modernist narrative of professionalism, with its incremental linear development, likewise effectively eclipses a questioning of the influences that shape the understanding of experience itself. The horizon of possibility is obscured; a teacher launching out on the adventure of discovery is effectively denied a vision of change as recursive and transformative (Doll, 1993).

In a similar vein, another feminist poststructuralist examination of narrative concludes that even narrative's use of metaphor involves a conflating, assimilating, and reproductive tendency that effects a unity between its descriptive term and that which it seeks to describe; this unity "denies diversity, difference and the other" and finally denies identity itself (Stone, 1999 p. 336). In speaking of one thing in terms of another, metaphor is understood to secure hierarchical norms, erase dissimilarity, and negate difference by collapsing two things into one. Even narrative as expressed in the context of bodily performance becomes a visual misrepresentation. The body can be seen as a stand-in for the whole self—a metonymic misrepresentation in which the performer is only glimpsed in a walk-on part that disappears and is lost in a representation of something unintended (Stone, 1999, p. 334). Such a reading echoes the influence of Chodorow's (1978) work on object relations theory that opposed the notion of innate gender differences presupposed in language that reified and denied the meaning production processes underlying gender as a construction.⁴

⁴ Chodorow's opposition to an essentialist view of gender is based on her study of the asymmetry of child rearing practices in which women's primary role, understood from a Freudian perspective, as fixing the oedipal crisis, results in a continuing asymmetry in gender relations (Pinar, 1995, p. 369). Chodorow's view emphasizes the relational aspects of the mother-child interaction rather than the dynamics of interaction between the feminine semiotic and masculine symbolic elements as in the work of Julia Kristeva (Meyers, 2004, p. 13).

In Chodorow's view, a fundamentally relational self undergoes a process of differentiation from the primary caretaker in which the experience of nurturance is internalized as self worth and the capacity to relate to others in a similarly solicitous fashion. For males, this may occasion a crisis, as differentiation is sought in a repudiation of the cultural norms of feminine interpersonal responsiveness found embodied in the mother. The attendant repudiation of identification with the mother can yield a "compulsively rational, stubbornly independent self...a warped form of the relational self" (Meyers, 2004, p. 13). Thus, distance, disconnection, and separateness figure prominently in male gender identity and male epistemology (Grumet & Stone, 2000, p. 195); connection for males is not taken for granted or considered to be obvious, but is something to be proved. This means that, whether in the case of theatrical performance, or the reading of a narrative text, the interpretive space which is opened up becomes a location of particular vulnerability to the blindness of gendered perception. This can be understood as a threat to the power of the emotional engagement offered by literature or the arts—an engagement which above all allows a sense of connectedness to others through a bedrock quality of human experience. The upshot of this poststructuralist view is that narrative's much-touted potential for offering visibility to unvoiced elements and casting the light of social justice in dark places is itself highly suspect, for that very visibility becomes itself a "trap," acutely vulnerable and in danger of domination by colonizing powers (Stone, 1999, p. 334).

Miller (2005) likewise notes that "teacher stories" presented in journals of education are often "unproblematized recounting" of what is taken to be the transparent, linear and authoritative "reality" of those teachers' "experiences" (Miller, 2005, p. 51).

Teachers featured as protagonists in these stories are fitted with convenient unitary identities that display all the evidentiary characteristics of a thoroughly modernist, rationalist, and linear view of personal development: organically whole, fully conscious, and without contradiction. They are, as Miller (2005) notes, “hardly sites of “permanent openness and resignifiability” (p. 51).

Despite the weight of these cautionary notes, it would seem that many feminist writers in education would agree with Witherell and Noddings’ description of stories as “tools of enchantment” that allow pictures of real people, real situations, and real problems to be explored in powerfully engaging ways (Stanton, 1996; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Walker (1992), for example, sees story as the “basic form of representation for moral problems” (Walker, 1997, p. 67) and the site for a “logic of interpersonal acknowledgement” in which the details of relationship are amplified in the deliberative process (Walker, 1992, p. 33). Narrative allows us to read actions and events backwards and forwards over time—giving them intelligibility and “weaving them into lives that are anything more than one damned thing after another” (Walker, 1997, p. 67).

In the consideration of morally problematic situations, it is narrative that provides a broad canvas on which one sketches the people, relations, values, and obligations that are involved and begin to sort out how they have arrived there. Walker contends as well that it is in the space of narrative that the ideal self to which one would be true is constructed and affirmed in histories of identity, relationship, and value—three types of narrative upon which the integrity of self construction depends. The kind of integrity to which she refers is personal and explicitly temporal—rooted in a history of relationships and an actual display of reliable accountability—rather than in an ethereal experience of a

mystical self. Its hermeneutic complexity, not to be underestimated, is reflected in her observation about the self, “A good deal that is true *of* it consists in what it finds it can be true *to*” (Walker, 1997, p. 74).

Walker’s comment expresses her belief in the importance of narrative as a basis for reflection on a multifaceted self that consciously and unconsciously negotiates its identity in an ongoing process of reviewing stories.⁵ Understanding who we are means revisiting our understanding of language and of experience; to maintain and develop identity we need to reconsider periodically what it means to speak of being kind or respectful, to be engaged in friendship or obligation, and this task we accomplish through storying. However, Walker’s account of the variegated types of narrative that contribute to the work of identity building are, despite their perspicacity, apt to meet with some feminist skepticism concerning their usefulness in understanding ethical deliberation. A brief review of these narratives of relationship, identity, and values will permit a closer look at alternative views of the relationship between self and narrative and set the stage for consideration of ethical approaches within feminism.

Narratives of relationship, for ethical deliberation, deal with the way in which obligation is conditioned by an acknowledgement of the past character, present state, and future possibilities of a particular relationship. Of course, these may be very short stories in cases of limited contact—a stranger in difficulty for example—where it is entirely obvious what needs to be done. However, the question of the meaning of the relationship

⁵ A personal aside: as a young Anglican priest in parish ministry, I found that the most difficult aspect of the job was dealing with people dying in hospital intensive care units. Most distressing were the life stories of guilt, regret, or self-justification—all narratives of relationship and often products of a final anguished review. No one ever talked in propositions; in my experience, story was always the vehicle for life review.

may play a significant role in its merging with other larger stories. I recall one of my students, a gifted young man preparing to enter a business program at university, during a work project among the poor in Nepal, deciding that, despite the almost certain dismay of his parents, he would abandon his plans for studies in commerce.⁶ Instead he resolved to apply for medicine. Today he is an obstetrician who has donated his time and ability to research and volunteer work in Africa. At the heart of this dramatic change of trajectory was a narrative of relationship whose construction integrated experiential elements with much reflection in a story concerning the meaning of personal contacts that lasted only a few months.

Of course, the story was not really so straightforward at all. Narratives of relationship seldom are. This student was faced with the difficult task of weighing conflicting values: his respect for his parents' wishes, and his acknowledgment of their generosity in funding his studies against his own sense of a meaningful career choice. The matter of assessing accommodation to the wishes of others and the sacrifice of one's own priorities frames a perennial sore point with feminist writers for whom social institutions and practices, such as "the marriage plot" (Munro, 1998, p. 122) represent sites for the prescriptive dynamics of masculine control as well as self-descriptions that serve the interests of someone's else's tale. Moreover, the thumbnail sketch I have presented naturally excludes not only crucial detail about the Nepal experience, but a multitude of related tales to which the transformation theme is related: the story of a sister handicapped by a medical condition; the history of outstanding achievement in

⁶ His parents were not very happy with the guidance counsellor who led him on the trip to Nepal and subsequently assisted with his application to medicine. My response was a short narrative of relationship, identity, and value: He chose.

science courses; and the religious background of the family. The story of relationship, in short, is at best a partial account and so, in Walker's view, moral constructions of situations must also include other factors such as consideration of identity, the second of her narrative types.

The narrative of moral identity emerges as a necessary adaptive response to the array of values and opportunities with which we are faced. Though we may envision the realization of different possible values in a variety of relational contexts, we are compelled to select from among them those to which we direct our energies. Some will be about priorities such as alleviating suffering; others about particular persons in our lives. Upon reflection we can detect, in our personal history of managing, ordering, and maintaining our narratives of relationship, certain patterns of valuation recognizable by their characteristic selectivity as our own: the tendency, for example, to favour this or that cause, person, or circumstance. Only when I consider my pattern of charitable giving, for instance, do I realize that I favour appeals that support educational projects over those aimed at extending opportunities to young people for sports activities. Summary reflection suggests that one type of appeal is not intrinsically superior to another—disadvantaged youth stand to benefit in many respects from sports involvement as much as from intellectual activity; body and mind are both important and, naturally, the relative efficacy of either depends heavily on contingent factors. The realization may come that a personal pattern of selectivity arises not from a rational process of disengaged evaluation of options, but from other factors in my personal history; it is who I am. This recognition imparts to thinking about ethical matters a refinement and definition that would be impossible without the historical context which allows it to emerge. Just as the narrative

of relationship answers the question, How did we get here together?—moral identity narratives correspond with the question, Who am I? (Walker, 1997, p. 69). Walker points out, however, that there is still another level of story that unites the narratives of moral identity and relationships. This is the narrative of moral values.

Walker explains that the narrative of moral values is a “history of our shared understandings of what kinds of things, relationships and commitments really are important and what their relative importance is” (Walker, 1997, p. 69). The narrative of moral values reviews the process of deciding whether a particular new situation is an instance of previously acknowledged value or principle; it is an account of the attempt to address the question, What does this mean? in a particular context: What does it mean to be a good friend, to be loyal, or to identify with Albert Schweitzer’s “reverence for life?” These are questions that form part of a history of concepts that may be continually reinterpreted and revised within a community of shared understanding. That community, as Walker points out, provides the context in which even the most private parts of life are made intelligible. In matters of morality, private justification is known either as hypocrisy or self-deception.

The three interconnected and complementary narratives of relationship, identity, and value work together to offer the possibility of imparting to an individual life a distinctive coherence; a person may be more confident in the selection of what requires attention in the lived particularity of his or her own life. The visibility or legibility of these narratives also offers to others some assurance regarding our moral reliability. In all this, Walker is emphatic that stories are partial, that there may be multiple narratives of any given type (multiple moral identities that vary with context, for example) and that

there is no formulaic approach to the orchestration of coherence in narratives. Coherence, continuity and consistency are, in any case, not ends in themselves, but means of moving toward an integrity that is “the actual display of reliable accountability and resilient dependability that we may have many occasions to measure in each other and ourselves” (Walker, 1997, p. 75).

Walker’s conceptual framework of complementary layers of narrative offers a feminist rules-of-engagement approach to understanding the self minus a deontic rigidity. In it the self is viewed as a layered, nested subjectivity in virtue of its engagement in overlapping histories coexisting in states of alternation as life is lived.⁷ First-person stories are privileged in this process; although far from incorrigible, they are points of contact which allow others to call into question our sincerity or integrity and to press for alternative views. These correctives permit the adjustment of our personal stories and facilitate their function as coarse maps—lacking the fine detail of the landscape of experience but possessing the degree of simplification necessary to trace a route forward.

Of the two salient feminist preoccupations evident in Walker’s work—relationality and visibility—it is the latter that especially raises questions for some feminists. To understand narrative as a means, not only to present, but to seek out, organize, and reflect on elements of experience involves the valorization of voice in a “politics of visibility” (Stone, 1999, p. 328). Appealing to Peggy Phelan’s work on the politics of performance and the identity theory of Jacques Lacan, Stone (1999) observes that “efforts at making the invisible visible through representations create situations in which what is “real” can be dominated”(p. 333). In the realm of the visible, whether

⁷ This insight Walker attributes to work by Lee Quinby (1991) and Maxine Hong Kingston’s (1989) *The Woman Warrior*.

language or art, cultural reproduction guarantees that woman as the Other remains unseen. The experience of seeing is always conditioned by language; what can be seen is bounded by what one can say. Experience is therefore from a particular and partial perspective—a condition acknowledged in the framework of a Deweyan pragmatist approach involving experience as the basis of ethics. The problem is that the kind of partial perspective that Dewey offered in his view of experience was a “partiality of privilege” that continued to obscure the sexism of an inevitably and unquestioned male point of view (Stone, 1999, p. 332).

The result of this crippling partiality is that the greater the visibility achieved, the greater the possibility for reinscription of domination. The use of narrative, therefore, conducted in a context in which it is understood as an analogue to experience, risks undermining any effort at re-empowerment. In education, the naïve use of narrative may be seen to vitiate its potential as an instrument in the campaign to redress the injustices of gender imbalance; instead of greater perceptual acuity, it risks an unwitting servitude to ideological and political forces beyond the subject’s ken. Britzman (1991) warns that narratives “must be read not as guarantees of essential truths, or recipes for action but as representations of particular discourses that implicate the voices of teachers and researcher in larger interest and investments” (p. 55).

Emerging from this view is a picture of ingenuous tales recounted by sincere teachers unwittingly mouthing “meta-texts of exclusionary power” (Stone, 1999, p. 333) in the language of borrowed discourses they innocently claim as their own (Britzman, 1991). The challenge, Britzman asserts, is to move beyond a celebratory view of subjectivity dominated by the “nostalgia of the personal or the rhapsody of the unique” to

an awareness that what we take to be our subjective selves is a confluence of antagonistic discourses (1991, p. 233).

Munro (1998) also declares her embrace of narrative to be an uneasy one (p. 12). She alludes to the risk of romanticizing the individual and reifying notions of a unitary subject as hero. Teacher stories, arising out of the phenomenological tradition, bear notions of an essentialized self capable of discerning the meaning of experience. The emphasis on the individual thus has serious ethical implications; it deflects and obscures the complexities of a social domain in which the nefarious influences of racism, sexism and other forms of oppression continue to operate.

The overall outcome of this critique would seem to be, in Stone's terms, a poststructuralist "ethics of warning" riddled with caveats (1999, p. 336). We are invited to look at narrative warily and with a distinctly jaundiced eye, and to move beyond an essentialized self abstracted from the social world to a fuller appreciation of multiple perspectives and idioms (Britzman, 1991, p. 239). But the critique runs deeper than that. Our wariness must extend to the level of experience itself, to the ways in which perceptions are shaped by the "masculinist and phallogocentric constructs of discourse" (Munro, 1998, p. 34). This sort of metonymic language enjoins us to be aware that even at the deepest levels of intuition and bodily sensation our best intentions may betray any trust we have unthinkingly invested in them.

In general it seems that this strand of feminist thought has little to say about emotions; indeed, its deep suspicions regarding language in general and narrative in particular tend to translate into a distinctly cerebral, icy and distant posture relative to the affective dimensions, and more prosaic aspects of experience that figure prominently in

the vocabulary of a care ethics approach. Nevertheless, it has been the position in this inquiry overall that the most practical matters of education are best served when a variety of theoretical perspectives are brought to bear, and this not in the worship of eclecticism for its own sake, but rather in virtue of the complexity of the elusive selves on whose behalf the enterprise is after all conducted. The richness and variety so evident in the scholarly work that identifies itself as feminist could well be seen as a building block in a view of the relationship between theory and practice that recognizes complementarity as a key element in maximizing the good of debate in ethics. This, at least, is the line of argument that I will pursue and with a view to a fuller description of complementarity in subsequent chapters.

However, it will be helpful to step back slightly to look at the larger picture of feminist thought before exploring those strands that explore questions about the self as more affectively engaged.

Feminist thought and the self: Some general features.

Some of these observations directed at narrative reflect major themes that circulate through complex forms of feminist critique and reconceptualizing that contribute to educational thought. Some of these themes might be set forth in oppositional form as follows:

- Abstract (principle) vs. concrete, situated, contextualized
- Generalizable, universal vs. specific, particular
- Normative, regulating vs. diverse, rhizomatic, fluid (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 15)
- Definition vs. alliance (Nicholson, 1990, p. 35)

- Cognitive, rationalist vs. affective / cognitive; emotion/reason in concert (Nussbaum, 1990)
- Perpetuation of gender system based on biological determination vs. construction of gender in the nexus of economic, cultural and political forces in society (Martusewicz, 1992)
- Essentialist vs. non essentialist (ontology) (Goldberger, 1996, p. 7)
- Unitary vs. non-unitary (views of human subjectivity) (Bloom, 1998, p. 3; Munro, 1998, p. 2)
- Individual (isolation from relationship) vs. collective (consideration of larger social forces) (Britzman, 1991)
- Focus on intention vs. action
- A fixed core or essential self vs. a subject always in process in a social context (Casey, 1995, p. 450); fragmented, decentralized (Munro, 1998, p. 35)
- Adherence to principles vs. particularistic, context specific decision making
- Mind / body separation vs. embodied response (Debold, Tolman, & Brown, 1996)
- Distance, objectivity vs. connection, community, attachment (Pinar, 1995, p. 385)

It must be acknowledged that such a dualistic presentation of general characteristics risks a marriage of the very binaries and blinkered reductionism that some feminisms resist; indeed some have proposed a “feminist poetics” that rejects the polarization often associated with a truth seeking dialectic and embraces instead a poetic use of paradox to open new avenues of thought (Stanton, 1996, p. 33). In the face of criticism that such a stance is anti-intellectual, a rejoinder broadly representative of

feminist thinking is that the use of paradox embraces complexity, provides room for passion, caring, and imagination, and, in an educational context, challenges students to exercise the creativity of “what if” thinking in seeking “patterns of discovery” (Stanton, 1996, p. 33).

Nevertheless, as a broad outline of a close family of approaches to education that seek creative disruption of an ethical status quo, the list presents something of the scope of feminist opposition to accepted norms. It is noteworthy as well that feminism’s critique aims not only at subversion and resistance through deconstructive description of “white, bourgeois, androcentric” norms (Harding, 1990, p. 101) but transformation and the enhancement of women’s agency (Miller, 2005, p. 185; Munro, 1998, p. 2). Moreover, the ubiquitous concern with matters of justice, in the sphere of education, has compelled reconsideration of questions concerning how an individual self is shaped by the construal of the roles of heart, body, and mind in facing ethical decisions. It will be argued here (with, I hope, no shades of grand narrative) that the powerful influence of feminist perspectives has much to do with the committed manner in which concerns about theoretical matters are resolutely brought back at every turn into the realm of the concrete, practical, mundane untidiness of everyday existence. Two points need to be made here concerning the relevancy of this line of inquiry to education.

First, as Walker (1992) has made clear, the dominant model of contemporary moral theory is one involving the application of codifiable formulas by any agent to a situation in order to produce a “justified and determinate action-guiding judgment” (Walker, 1992, p. 28). In challenging this, feminist thought has challenged not only

particular versions but the theoretical-judicial model of ethical decision making itself. It is here that the ramifications for teachers become evident:

The picture of preset generic principles autonomously and impersonally applied by oneself to oneself and other describes participants in a structured game of institution, or administrators and judges disposing of cases in accordance with policy or law. It does not fit well in contexts of personal relationships or responsive care-taking, situations that require sensitivity, flexibility, discretion, and improvisation to find precisely what responds to very particular cases. Such contexts also require awareness of histories of relationship and understandings specific to these histories, for these determine what responses between particular people mean. (Walker, 1992, p. 28, 29)

This reading suggests that theories whose horizons are fixed by abstraction and deductive logic are ill-fitted for service in interpersonal contexts, not simply because of their focus on rights or contracts, but because of their fundamental nature—of the kind of accounts they are. Substitute teacher for “participant,” “administrator,” or “judge” and one is confronted with the concrete context that shapes, for many teachers, a working environment that is the setting for ethical action: a segmented day in a small plaster box with successive groups of complex human organisms, each with differing emotional, intellectual, and physical characteristics and needs, each with a different social, cultural, racial, linguistic, or religious background. How does one deal fairly with all while accommodating the peculiarities of this or that one?

Second, if the feminist view calls into question the regnant model of decision making by foregrounding the considerations that come with particularity, then it also includes, within moral deliberation about responsibility, the question of what position we are taking responsibility for (Walker, 1992, p. 32). This means asking about my knowledge of my own position—a question which is very much about my knowledge and definition of myself. One way of approaching this question is to ask about the interactions of emotion and reason as these have been discussed in the context of ethics.

Heart Speaks: Care, Emotion, and Reason

Grumet (2000) notes that attention to the formation of the self in curriculum may be expressed in projects which purport to valorize individual experience through activities that enhance self-esteem. However, when exercised in a context innocent of the contingencies of language and culture, and laden with turgid generalizations, this ostensibly caring and affirming attention to student development “trips up on its own solicitude” (2000, p. 193).

The species of solicitude to which Grumet refers would seem to be exemplified in the teaching of virtue as promoted by Bennett’s (1993) *Book of Virtues*. Here, the author, in good Kantian fashion, rises to the urgent task of teaching “moral literacy” through stories chosen to illustrate a prescribed list of virtues. No attempt is made to situate these qualities in the cultural heritage of the Western tradition or to understand them as concepts whose vitality depends on debate and negotiation within the situated context of relationships that make up a particular community. The resultant offering is a rule-based moral code with all the intersubjective richness of Baden Powell’s *The Duties of a Scout*—a work to which Bennett in fact appeals (Bennett, 1993). This approach,

reminiscent of code transmission by stone tablet, is underwritten by an implicitly essentialist view of the self and a moral orientation that contrasts starkly, but usefully, with the feminist version of caring in the work of Gilligan (1993) and Noddings (1984). It will be suggested here that the development of an ethics of care represents the sector of feminist thought in which notions of the self are most apt to make a contribution to thinking about ethical challenges.

Caring and gender.

The background to contemporary feminist thinking about the various forms of care ethics involves a reaction to certain conclusions drawn from Kohlberg's (1981) presentation of a six-stage process of moral development for which he claimed universality (1981b, p. 303). Kohlberg interpreted his research with male college students as indicative of a process of moral growth that reflected two key points. The first, an ontological assertion, described a correlation between the development of a moral self and the degree of separation from others. That is, the more fully developed the self, the less that self would require connection with, or approval from, others—an assertion illustrated in the autonomous deliberation of the highest category of ethical reasoning demonstrated in his research. The second point entailed the epistemological assumption that the greater the abstraction, impartiality, and rationality of knowledge, the more maturely representative of reality it was. Using these criteria for moral growth, Kohlberg demonstrated that women were slower than men to develop through the various levels of moral development and, in fact, rarely reached level six (Noddings, 1984, p. 96; Tong,

2003, p. 4).⁸ The significance of this finding for a gendered view of the self in culture and in education can hardly be underestimated, particularly when viewed through a feminist lens.⁹

Meyers (2004) describes how such a gendered conception of the self contributes to the assumed superiority of maleness and the devaluation of the feminine. The “man with a plan” represents a cultural stereotype of male selfhood; unerringly rational, possessed of principled respect for others, unflinching in his fidelity to duty and shrewd long-range life plans, he is a paragon of goodness and wisdom. The lives of women are not typically seen to fit this model: emotionally rooted concern for family and friends risks favouritism and the compromise of principles; the unpredictable character of domestic exigencies necessitates unpredictable changes of plan and seat-of-the-pants improvisation. For the feminine self, traditional domesticity is a set-up for failure. Only a feeble mimicry of the masculine ideal is possible since women are cast in caregiving roles for which the goals are *de facto* violations of the normative model of selfhood (Meyers, 2004, p. 5). Worse still, a woman who internalizes the values and norms of the Kohlbergian fortress model of moral integrity is apt to desire, and work toward, the very norms which are the weave of patriarchy. With this she becomes an unwitting collaborator in the project of her own oppression, reinforcing the long-standing charge of women’s moral inferiority (Meyers, 2004, p. 8).

⁸ Noddings observes that women seem often to be “stuck” at stage three—the “Good Boy—Nice Girl” orientation (Kohlberg, 1981a), a fact which should be considered to reflect less on women’s development than on the legitimacy of Kohlberg’s paradigm (Noddings, 1984).

⁹ In education, Carr (1996, p. 369) notes that, in North America, the preeminent professional organization concerned with the promotion of research into moral education is the American Moral Education Association—founded and still controlled by Kohlbergians.

Gilligan (1982) argued that Kohlberg's approach was limited by a gender-bias that prevented identification of a crucial distinction between the orientation of males to autonomy and of females to relationality in the sphere of moral deliberation and action. Gilligan repudiated both the notion that the masculine is a universal norm, and the legitimacy of evaluating the moral development of women by reference to standards drawn from an exclusively male context. By studying girls and women, Gilligan proposed an 'ethics of care' supported by a different mode of moral cognition. Her gendered view of a moral self appears antithetic to that of Kohlberg. For Gilligan, the moral self is

- defined by its connection with others and its irreducible relational particularity (Kohlberg's emphasis was on an autonomous self and rational principles)
- engaged in moral action through the concerted application of emotion and cognition (in contrast with Kohlberg's formal rationality that generated moral action).¹⁰

From Gilligan's vantage point, the self and its moral knowledge are far too complex to be boxed neatly into Kohlberg's categories. In a care perspective, justice as the gauge of universalizable moral development is replaced by a distinctive set of reflective skills and framing concepts that emphasize context-specific affective factors. A sense of the distance between the two positions may be had by considering an observation of the liberal philosopher John Rawls, from whose work, along with that of Piaget, Kant, and Kohlberg, had drawn. In speaking of "our sense of justice," Rawls

¹⁰ Winston (1998, p. 17) offers seven points of difference between Kohlberg and Gilligan based on an analysis by Blum. The two points here represent a conflation. See also Lawrence Blum (1988, 1991) for an extended defense of Gilligan and the beginning of a pursuit of the implications of her work for moral theory.

alluded to principles and theoretical constructions that go much beyond the standards of everyday life—that “may eventually require fairly sophisticated mathematics as well” (Rawls, as cited in Walker, 1992). This framing of the ethics of justice as a quantitative achievement on the part of an elite cognoscenti reflects something of the distant and hierarchical character of Kohlberg’s developmental theory. Walker notes that feminist thought in general targets just such theoretical imperialism which seems to mirror, intentionally or not, hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of administrative control. Any question that contemporary feminist concern about the matter might be Quixotic, or any doubt that such an attitude of moral superiority endures in education might be assuaged with a glance at one of Gilligan’s critics:

It is no doubt desirable that teachers acquire sophisticated and abstract principles of moral reasoning in terms of which concrete principles that should guide their professional conduct seem reasonable. But a teacher who has a good grasp of abstract moral principles may nevertheless lack an adequate grasp of specific moral concepts, such as due process. Moreover, teachers who have not achieved the highest levels of moral reasoning (which will be most of them) nevertheless must inform their conduct by reasonable moral rules (Strike, 1990, p. 213).

Here can be discerned at once a patriarchal management view of teachers combined with a curious confusion of categories (concepts, principles, rules) that issues finally in a admonition that there should be focus on “developing sophistication in the application of those principles that inform the specific activities of professional conduct” (Strike, 1990, p. 213).

Despite the trenchancy of Gilligan's challenge to Kohlberg's deontological ethics and essentialist view of the self, her work drew fire from some feminists who saw yet another instance of the subterranean influence of "grandiose quasi-metanarratives" (Nicholson, 1990, p. 33). The feminist counter-model of "a different voice" was culpable on the same essentializing grounds as Kohlberg; specificity was lacking with respect to identification of class, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity; specific limitations were also missing in terms of who was speaking with a (singular) different voice in particular historical and social circumstances; and references to the analytical framework provided by Nancy Chodorow were explicitly cross-cultural.

Whatever its deficiencies from a feminist perspective, Gilligan's insights inspired a new trajectory of thought in education where Noddings (1984) took up the task of articulating care as a transforming influence and an invitation to "enter a dialogue of genuine dialectical nature in order to achieve an ultimate transcendence of the masculine and feminine in moral matters" (1994, p. 6). Although Noddings' work represents a somewhat soft-spoken contribution, "a feminine relational ethics" (Tong, 2003, p. 6), its importance for thinking about the self and ethics in education is considerable.¹¹ Jaggar (2000) describes care ethics as offering "the best known and, many believe, most radical challenge made by feminists to modern ethical theory" (Jaggar, 2000, p. 358). Despite peremptory dismissals from some quarters (Carr, 2005, p. 139; Strike, 1990, p. 188), the challenge endures in the contention that attention to the moral experience of women serves to advance ethically superior values and to stimulate a rethinking of moral

¹¹ The positioning of an ethics of care represents an ongoing challenge. Jaggar (Jaggar, 2000) considers it under feminist ethics; Sander-Staudt (2006) clearly identifies care as separate from feminism (p. 22). The concern here pertains to its contribution to thinking about the self that has engaged crucial features of feminist thought such as the role of gender.

subjectivity and rationality. This latter suggestion alludes to the way in which reason and emotion are thought to function in ethical deliberation—a crucial matter which is usefully foregrounded in the version of care ethics offered by Noddings.

Noddings: Sketching the phenomenology of caring.

Noddings' vision of the ethical self is one of situated particularity; caring pertains to the ethical ideal as linked to the "whole self and a larger self-image"—a concept that includes careful consideration of the partners in a caring relationship: the "one-caring" and the "cared-for" (Noddings, 1984, p. 124). Unlike Kant's ethical agent deliberating in solitude about moral dilemmas, Noddings' caring selves "must rub elbows with the recipients of their care" (Noddings, 1995, p. 188). Since the ethical self can only develop in the act of caring about, and being cared for (p. 14), the heart of the matter is affective response in a relationship of reciprocity. So it is that, in considering or explaining moral action, women's reasons often point to feelings, needs, impressions, and personal ideals rather than principles. Justification is not the issue: "I am not standing alone before some tribunal. What I seek is completion in the other—the sense of being cared for and, I hope, the renewed commitment of the cared-for to turn about and act as one-caring" (Noddings, 1984, p. 95). It is in the closeness of this relation that the sentiments associated with "I ought" and "I must" emerge. When conflict arises—when one's sense of obligation is suppressed or muted, or one faces disinclination to act in the presence of a sense of "I ought to" resolution is sought in setting aside analytic thought and returning to the concreteness of the immediate situation (p. 84). The transition from the sense of "I ought to act" to "I must act" occurs "when I recognize that my response will either enhance or diminish my ethical ideal" (Noddings, 1984, p. 83).

While feeling or sentiment deriving from a particular context is at the foundation of moral behaviour, it is not the sole dynamic (1984, p. 92). Noddings makes it clear that “there is a commitment to remain open to that feeling, to remember it, and to put one’s thinking in its service” (p. 92). The ethical self is thus a process—a relation between the self in action and the envisioned ideal self, an oscillation between two moments: “natural” caring as a spontaneous response to a situation and “ethical” caring that includes reflection and deliberate action. Noddings uses the notion of “engrossment”—a term resonating with the nurturing attitude of pregnancy—to describe the act of attentiveness involved in making interior space for the concerns of another. It is an emptying of oneself that permits empathetic entry into the other’s reality and opens the possibility of “motivational displacement”—the impulse to act on behalf of that other.

Since Noddings is concerned with caring as a phenomenon in specific, concrete, relational contexts, she is doubtful that caring as she understands it can be meaningfully applied in abstract situations where individuals are motivated to act on behalf of a group. Real caring is learned *in situ*, as a practice in actual situations (Noddings, 1984; Witherell & Noddings, 1991) and as habit, which explains why women, who constitute more than 75 percent of caregivers in the United States (Witherell & Noddings, 1991), tend to respond to questions about care in terms of feelings rather than principles. Disclaiming gender essentialism, Noddings is agnostic about whether women are naturally more inclined than men to engage in caring (1984, p. 8). However, she emphasizes that it is out of the tradition of women’s experience as primary caregivers that an ethic of care emerges.

The scope and influence of Noddings contribution to thinking about ethical practices in education, teacher agency, and curriculum design are considerable. Her work, described as “highly developed theoretically” yet possessing a “commonsense appeal” (Pinar, 1995, p. 695) is underwritten by passionate concern for the welfare of students and the role of education in fostering understanding and compassion in society (Noddings, 2004; 2006). A somewhat detailed consideration of her explanation of caring as interpersonal reasoning will bring us closer to how thinking about the nature of the self potentially influences the perception of meaning in ethical deliberation.

For Noddings, the self is “a sort of script” (Noddings, as cited in Bergman, 2004, p. 153)—a multi-authored process always under construction. However, the most critical aspect of the self is its capaciousness in the development of “interpersonal reasoning”—a connected way of knowing (Belenky, 1986) characterized by receptivity and responsiveness in relationship. Noddings goes to considerable lengths to explain the capacity for interpersonal reasoning as part of the attitude of caring—not surprising given that criticisms of her theory of caring are aimed at the uneasy relation between affective responses and disengaged principles (Carr, 2005; Smeyers, 1999; Tong, 2003). The central notion of engrossment—the opening to another—involves, she argues, not only emotion; it is preeminently a form of consciousness. Noddings acknowledges that her entire program hangs on the answer to the question: “How can you even know that you are actually receiving the other?” (Noddings, 1984, p. 32).

Describing the moment of receptivity with an appeal to Buber’s phrase “The other fills the firmament,” she observes that “We can switch from an assimilatory mode to a receptive-intuitive mode which, by a process we do not understand well, allows us to

receive the object, to put ourselves quietly into its presence” (Noddings, 1984, p. 34). Noddings declares this receptive consciousness to involve a feeling mode though not necessarily an emotional one (1984, p. 34). She notes that there is an absence of evaluation or assessment; the desire to manipulate or make use of—the instrumentalist mode—is in abeyance: “We are not attempting to transform the world, but we are allowing ourselves to be transformed” (p. 34). Her careful prose describes a consciousness stilled, alert, absorbed, poised expectantly, with all senses engaged.

Noddings uses several illustrations to bring home the all-important distinction between the feeling mode and raw emotion, described in Sartre’s phrase as “a degradation of consciousness” (p. 34). The prosaic illustration of a stuck window—an example of arresting metaphoric power—serves as a setting for a short narrative which Noddings uses to clarify the distinction.

Suppose that I am trying to open a window that is stuck. As I push, one side goes up and the other side goes down. I move very carefully trying to prevent this lopsided movement. No luck. I examine the parts of the window. I hypothesize. I may examine a window that is working properly in the hope of understanding its mechanism. I experiment. Then, suddenly, I deteriorate. I beat and curse the window. Consciousness has entered a mode in which it meets its objects with emotion. (Noddings, 1984, p. 34)

The emergence of an emotional outburst of frustration as a degraded form of nonreflective consciousness contrasts both with a dispassionate rational analysis, and the feeling mode as a quiet openness to receive. The former aims, through analysis, to

impose structure on the world and to manipulate it; the latter, by abandoning an instrumentalist perspective, steps out into a sphere of possibility, gently ceding to the invitation to see things differently.

This depiction of an “affective-receptive” attitude that forms part of the caring relation translates rather smoothly into an educational context in Noddings’ next example. She describes what often happens when students are confronted with seemingly intractable mathematical problems. Physical tenseness may be evident, perhaps frustration at the “edge of genuine degradation” (Noddings, 1984, p. 35); even the teacher’s suggestion that they should momentarily “stop thinking” is greeted with some irritation. Only when the student relaxes and “receives the problem” (p. 35) is sudden insight likely to occur. Noddings hastens to add that what is crucial in the process is the ability to move back and forth between the affective-receptive and the analytic-objective modes. Nowhere is this capacity to shift and allow dominance to the appropriate mode more crucial than in the sphere of interpersonal relationships.

Noddings’ examples of a self confronted with a stuck window or a mathematical problem are but preamble to a consideration of human relationships and the indelibly complex ethical character of the challenge with which one is faced in that context. In the very act of reflecting on what we have received from another person, we are apt to distance ourselves. The move to study, analyze, and interpret received data involves a separation from the relational immediacy of concrete experience; in the reductive tidying process of abstracting we lose contact with the one cared-for and ourselves as the one-caring. The net loss has to do with diminution of compassion and the aridity of abstract

principle imposed without that quality of empathic identification that Noddings terms “the humane result” (1991, p. 161).

Simone Weil (1951) has also written of the attentiveness that characterizes an attitude of care. Noddings cites her at length in order to consider the lingering problem of the relationship of the concrete and the abstract, the emotional and the rational. For Weil, genuine concern for another means being able to ask, “What are you going through?” To do this requires that, “The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at” (Weil, as cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 161). For Weil this quality of attention can be developed through intellectual pursuits—the study of geometry, for example—or the discipline of prayer. Noddings’ experience of intellectually gifted and highly developed academic thinkers suggests otherwise. Just as the practice of prayer demonstrably provides no guarantee of attentiveness or integrity in interpersonal matters, so with intellectual discipline; the game of superior reasoning in the academy often, and as a matter of record, becomes a blood sport, with participants caring less about rational integrity or understanding each others’ arguments than winning points for personal prestige. It is true, Noddings notes, that the personage of the “gracious respondent” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 163) is an acknowledged, if rare, figure on the stage of public debate; but here, she contends, we are on the frontier of research, for precious little study has been devoted to the technical aspects of dialogue that we understand intuitively to possess the feeling quality of interpersonal reasoning.

A crucial point in Noddings’ argument is that, while an attitude of solicitude, involving attention and specific effort aimed at cultivating the relation and a search for an

appropriate response, is necessary, it is not sufficient. All the important aspects of caring may be present but they do not guarantee an ethical outcome. Two people may exhibit genuine care for each other and yet make decisions with harmful consequences for others. The self, as a project in process involving multiple builders, can develop serious structural imbalances.

Care Under Scrutiny

It is perhaps not surprising that Noddings' work has drawn critical attention from a variety of quarters (Card, 1990; Carr, 2005; Slote, 2000). In identifying care as a relational dynamic, as affective, situated, concrete, and particularized, Noddings has slung a well-aimed stone at the forehead of Kohlbergian reasoning, challenging in the bargain some of the traditional values of the old boys' club in education.¹² Her suggestion, for example, that ways should be found for teachers and students to spend more time, and to share different kinds of experiences together, flies in the face of the usual emphasis placed on the values of autonomy, independence, and distance—effective withdrawals from relationship (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 167).¹³ The ethics of care as articulated by Noddings seem nevertheless to merit extended consideration.

Response to her feminine ethics of care has included attention from a variety of feminists including advocates of the closely related “maternal approach” to ethics (Tong, 2003, p. 7) whose shots over the bow reflect unhappiness with the limitations of

¹² I acknowledge, with apologies, that she might not delight in the allusion to a male hero.

¹³ A personal note: Five years after retirement from teaching in boarding school environment, I still receive calls from students—now young professionals, married and with families. I am convinced that this is attributable not to any personal charisma or excellence in moral modeling, but to the fact that life in that school context involved sharing many different kinds of experiences with students beyond the classroom. In my view, Noddings is correct about the development of relationships. The question is whether this would be generally valued in a system increasingly governed by *homo economicus*.

mothering as a model for an ethics of caring (Hoagland, 1990, p. 109); for some, the caring self has sold out to the cultural servitude of male oppression: a sacrificial self engaging in self-care as a covert form of other-directed care (Card, 2001; Tong, 2003). For others, care symbolizes not an empirical characteristic of women's attitudes or behavior, but a cultural expectation of certain attitude of caring, "a deeply mistaken valorization of the stereotypes of bottomless feminine nurturance and self-sacrifice that continue to haunt women while politically disempowering and personally exhausting them" (Walker, 1997, p. 65). Still others wonder whether women's moral experience can be a dependable basis for ethical theory (Jagger, 2000).

Whether one places Noddings' version of the ethics of care under the banner of feminine or maternal, the immediacy of its appeal for thinking about life in classrooms seems incontrovertible. In a time when public consciousness can scarcely escape daily reminders of the horrific carnage of war, and when reports of sexual exploitation and violence against women in North American society seem unrelenting, the subtitle of Noddings' (2006) latest book—*What Our Schools Should Teach*—invites consideration.¹⁴ For the hope that care ethics holds out is the possibility of exploring middle ground between a utilitarian or consequentialist view of ethics on one hand and a Kantian moral view on the other.

The crux of the matter is this: that in both a consequentialist and a Kantian approach, the maximizing of goods of whatever sort, and the respecting of persons whoever they are, must be observed with rigorous impartiality. So, for example, my

¹⁴ See also Martha Nussbaum's (2005) *Women's Bodies: Violence, Security, Capabilities* (Journal of Human Development, 6, p. 167) for a statistical as well as a personal account of exploitation and sexual abuse of women.

dedication to bringing about a happy, peaceful, or just outcome to a classroom conflict, as well as my determination to maintain the principle of a respectful stance toward all parties involved might entail the suppression or outright abandonment of certain personally meaningful commitments, projects, or relationships.

Consider a situation in which I wish to demonstrate to students that the assignment of grades is conducted with the utmost impartiality. Everything is done to reward achievement that corresponds to criteria that, in an ideal situation, are the result of negotiation between teacher and students. Yet, I want to honour the extraordinary efforts of an intellectually handicapped student to whom I have accorded many hours of extra help time.¹⁵ It is a situation in which to give a passing grade—and thus reward this student whom I like and admire for his courage and determination—would be to abrogate the impartiality of an approach that favoured outcome as much as one that featured principle. The key point in this is, that coming down on the side of principle or on the side of care, or finding a niche on the continuum between the two, involves the subtle implication of a view of the self. Walker (1997), for example, sees in the resistance to the Kantianian tones of Kohlberg's stage theory or the dreary relativism of the context-dependent act-utilitarianism of a so-called situation ethics (Fletcher, 1966), a straining against a "formulaic view of selves, and their others, lives and their commitments, and the role of morality in binding or shaping these"(Walker, 1997, p. 66).

The influence of a notion of the self for establishing subtle distinctions in moral theory has been recognized by Sander-Staudt (2006) in her examination of the troubled

¹⁵ This example is drawn from personal experience. In fact, I was opposed by the principal of the school—a woman, who believed strongly in upholding the principle of equal treatment for all—no exceptions. In the end, there was a negotiated settlement in which the student was given a sort of honorary pass and packed off to a technical school.

relationship between care, virtue, and feminist ethics. Reviewing the work of McLaren (2001) and Slote (1998), she notes that, in their accounts, both care and virtue ethics understand the self as relational and concerned with the moral particulars of contexts. However, to configure the self in a way that accords ontological priority to the need to give and receive care retains a “mode of individualism that some versions of CE (care ethics) will challenge” (Sander-Staudt, 2006, p. 26). The reason for this—and one of the major stumbling blocks in a reconciliation of care with virtue—is that a theory that emphasizes relationality may run roughshod over matters of justice in the distribution of the work of care. That is, it may gloss over issues of reciprocity or even support abuse or exploitation. This is one of two points of contention that dog the ethics of care in the literature; care is theoretically ill-equipped to deal with the potential for injustice in asymmetrical relationships, based as it is in affective response (Carr, 2005), and its emphasis on proximate connectedness balks at the problem of responsibility to the distant other.

Hoagland (1990) advances a critical view of Noddings’ version of care which questions whether an “ethics of agape”(p. 111)—an other-centred model in which the commitment to care is unconditional—can escape the elements of enslavement to masculinist power.¹⁶ Noddings’ “motivational displacement,” in which the concern of the cared-for becomes one’s own, becomes a consequence of enslavement. Hoagland wonders whether the stereotype of the *mammy* (Hooks, 1981) reflects the unidirectional ideal of mothering that can undermine any reciprocity in family relations and have

¹⁶ *Agape*, unconditional love, is contrasted with *eros*, the sexual, and *philia*, the love involved in friendship. For a full discussion of the distinction in classical literature see C. S. Lewis (1960) *The Four Loves*.

nefarious social consequences: “Recipients of unconditional loving—children and husbands—combine in exploiting mothers, helping to create ageist response to older women” (Hoagland, 1990, p. 112). To pursue the ideal that Noddings proposes, and the sense of agency it depicts, risks reproduction of the very oppression women seek to escape.

For Ruddick (2002), a maternal ethicist examining the quality of dependency relationships, the situation is not quite so dark; she notes, however, the possibility of a loss of self on the part of the dependency worker that “risks her capacity to see her charge clearly” (Ruddick, 2002, p. 220). However, she acknowledges that the question, “What are you going through?” which Noddings identified as a basic care concern, is indicative of the disciplined attention of a “transparent self” that is open to receive the other (Ruddick, 2002, p. 220).

As for the second main criticism, that care fails the distant stranger, Hoagland (1990) and Card (1990) agree that, as a myopic practice touching only those who are proximate, and in its studious avoidance of principles, care leaves faceless others to starve outside the gates of moral consideration. In a world in which we can know with relative ease how it is that our own actions have contributed to this tragedy, consideration of our obligation to distant others is essential. Tronto, as cited in Sander-Staudt (2006, p. 30) also expresses concern for care as a practice that turns a blind eye to injustices along the lines of gender, race, and class perpetrated principally on disenfranchised women in service.

In response to these criticisms, both Sander-Staudt and Slote acknowledge that an ethics of care must consider how we should treat both those with whom we are close and

those at a distance. To rescue care ethics from a potentially fatal isolation from principle, Slote proposes a marriage of care and virtue ethics in which the practice of care is understood to be the most primary of the virtues (Sander-Staudt, 2006).¹⁷ Virtue is here understood to include both action (as in care) and intention (as in Kantian deontology). In such a merger (the details of which have yet to be negotiated), care would scrutinize virtue with a view to the achievement of care's goals; virtue would assess care with a view to actualizing virtue and the goods of a flourishing life (Sander-Staudt, 2006). The suitability of such an arrangement seems the more appropriate given that there will always be a need to assess justice issues arising from power differentials within relationships even if those that occur along the lines of gender and sex are obviated over time.

As for the problem of the soft-hearted blindness of care to the possibilities of exploitation and abuse by those cared for, or its self-sacrificial proclivity for complicity in it, the recruitment of virtue would, it is suggested, be salutary. The focus of virtue ethics has traditionally been on the development of virtue in the individual; in care it rests squarely on a richly dialogical self, constituted, known and maintained in its fluid variability in relationship. The virtue component offers the possibility of a certain balance involving attention to virtue, not just as that which serves the relationship, but also as that which permits it—that is, attention to a self that requires care in order to go on. To this marriage, then, virtue brings the resource of added scrutiny, and is itself enriched by affective, emotional, and embodied dimensions of a self defined by its engagement with others—a collaboration of incisive reflection with blood, sweat, and tears. While the

¹⁷ Sander-Staudt includes the observation (p. 24) that Slote has adopted Virginia Held's (1995) view of care as the source of all other virtues.

ethical self would appear to be the richer for such a union, there are, as Sander-Staudt (2006) observes, many issues to be discussed before the signing of any prenuptial agreement. How can the theoretical autonomy of care ethics be maintained if it is subsumed as one of the virtues? Does assimilation involve an eclipse of the acutely provocative aspects of care? Such questions may, in the context of engagement to which care ethics seeks to draw our attention, appear absurdly distant.

As a case in point, Brison (1997) writes of the personal experience of rape and of how this experience profoundly altered her understanding of the complex relationship between self and body.

It is not sufficient for mastering the trauma to construct a narrative of it: One must (physically, publicly) say or write (or paint or film) the narrative, and others must see or hear it, in order for one's survival as an autonomous self to be complete.

Hence we see the extent to which the self is created and sustained by others and, thus, able to be destroyed by them. (Brison, 1997, p. 29)

Brison's moving account of rebuilding a shattered self highlights the role of the unpredictable in constructing the self—a dimension which defies an ethical system dominated by reason; she illustrates some of the delicate issues that arise as a trauma survivor who declares "I am no longer myself" attempts to reconnect with the previous self and with others. These domains of the emotions and the body, central in an ethics of care, are the spheres in which the average teacher must move each working day. To see them as spheres of opportunity is to appreciate how, for Brison, the use of narrative provided a link with others that allowed recovery and rebuilding of identity to occur. As

Grumet has said, “Because art forms express knowledge about feeling, they provide a bridge between public and private readings” (1988, p. 148). It is the bridge which allows a separate self to experience the palpability of its relatedness. The public enactment of narrative creates a “liminal space” (Grumet, 1988, p. 149) constructed of experience and imagination in which meanings are not fixed but come alive to be negotiated and to effect transformation. Grumet emphasizes the link with curriculum as another stage and a “middle space” for the envisioning of possible worlds.

Grumet’s perspective might be seen to indicate that Walker’s three narratives of self construction; relationship, identity, and moral values are really only the beginning of a process in which meanings are teased out of experience through representation. Stories of the self and trauma, as Brison has observed, illustrate that the emergence of meaning in a relational context bears great power for healing and wholeness. Narratives of the self—whether of relationship, identity or value—also appear to suggest that however multiple, fragmented, decentred, or non-unitary a self is understood to be, recognition of transformation, or even the possibility of personal change presupposes a temporally conditioned recognition of at least two kinds of unity: the link of consciousness of what has been of the self—the continuity of the same, and the link with others through whom our past, present and future become intelligible. “I’m not the man I was!” shouts Scrooge at the end of his dream—a line that depends for its power on his waking, and awakened, consciousness to hear it, and on our understanding that he has heard what we too, at some time and place, have also dreamt.

Plots and Pots: Reversals and Overturnings

Care ethics, so admirably adapted in its gritty particularity to the enforced intimacy of the classroom, offers a remarkable challenge to educators. It affords a corrective to the disengaged reason whose magnificent sterility has, to put it crudely, got us where we are now: a global environment in crisis and a demographic time bomb ticking; the products of human intelligence used principally for the benefit of the elite masters of the world; and millions of human beings deprived of the basic necessities of life. Feminist thinking about care has issued a challenge in bringing into the spotlight the close-up-and-in-your-face aspects of human experience without which the quality of ethical deliberation is, at least, highly suspect. It is difficult to forget who, not so long ago, wrote *Silent Spring*, who tended the dying in Calcutta, who refused to relinquish a seat on a bus in Alabama. It is now more than ever difficult to avoid wondering about gender factors among the passionate voices joined in the chorus of caretakers of the planet.

Care ethics, of course, offers more questions than solutions. It certainly does not afford, as Britzman opines, a dreary reminder that deep down we are all the same. In its emphasis on the personal it mocks oversimplification, for it advances the wonder of the differences and the uniqueness of humans in the context of the sameness of the poverty of their knowledge, of their vulnerability, and of the tenuousness of their lives. Care ethics offers the chance for virtue ethics to be sundered from any vestiges of “flowerpot” thinking in a discussion of the different ways in which gender figures in ethics, and of the manner in which its social construction has been exploited. For educators it may afford an opportunity for a new focus on personal relationships and the possibility for

reinterpretation, in the light of emotion and reason, of their extensions in social institutions. If narratives inviting reinterpretation, and a review of ethics and the self, begin in grade one, there will surely be a better chance for denouements to be imagined that are both just and kind.

Chapter V

Self and Spirituality

The Sharp Point of Departure

Although it journeys through discussions in the academic literature of spirituality and ethics in education, the starting point for this chapter emerges directly from personal experience. In the context of a presentation to a graduate seminar on discourses in education at a Canadian university, I found myself surprised by fiercely antagonistic attitudes toward a range of disciplines that might loosely be described as touching spirituality. These included theology, and some of its subdisciplines such as biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, philosophy and history of religion, and the field of religious and spiritual education. Having previously taught courses on major religious traditions in the social science department of a secular secondary school, I had not expected so powerful a rejection of a connection between education and discourses dealing with concepts and questions regarding what is sometimes described as matters of ultimate concern.

The basis of the presentation was an article by Huebner (1999) on *Religious Metaphors in the Language of Education* in which he examines how the metaphors already present in educational discourse can revitalize our understanding of what it means to educate and be educated. It was hardly the stuff of revival tent rhetoric. Neither was it a partisan theoretical treatment of spiritual development “struggling to take a last dip in the shallows of the ebbing tide of faith” (Haldane, 2003, p. 12). In retrospect I wondered if perhaps, among other things, I should have been more keenly aware that, “Love is a

sticky wicket in educational circles” (Huebner, 1999, p. 363) and that Huebner’s discussion of transcendence, with its references to A. N. Whitehead, Parker Palmer, and the Hebrew Scriptures, might provoke a critique that judged this line of inquiry to be either antithetic or irrelevant to the business of education.

The charge of irrelevancy, along with some fairly thinly veiled hostility to Huebner’s ideas about the link between knowledge, interpersonal relations, and transcendence, though somewhat painfully revelatory, turned out to be fruitful; it set me to pondering a series of questions concerning how Huebner’s deeply thoughtful, sensitive and questioning approach to spirituality could be so vigorously repudiated by otherwise thoughtful, sensitive, and questioning people.

The written evaluations of classmates seemed unambiguous in their expressions of discontent: objections were not concerned with the presenter or the form of the presentation, but the substance of the article upon which it was based—an observation that served only to underscore the apparent disjunction. Was an approach that offered what had seemed to me a rich avenue of inquiry for understanding the self in its relational and ethical aspects, hopelessly tethered to objectionable associations with religious traditions? On what grounds was Heubner’s discourse describing spirituality as a unique dimension of human experience rejected out of hand? What seemed to me to be one of the fundamental questions had, after all, never surfaced in the discussion: What is the stuff of what we term spirituality? Are there particular aspects of human experience that are not susceptible of description under the categories of scientific, psychological, or philosophical analysis? Is the spiritual always, in the end, reducible to ethics or aesthetics? If a dimension of what we call the self somehow casts a shadow beyond the

descriptive categories of other disciplines, what would this mean for its nurture in education?

In this chapter I will investigate some of these questions and tensions that emerge from them in a consideration of spirituality and notions of the self. I will argue that the recent renewed interest in the spiritual, and the lively discussions it has generated, serve a prism-like function in allowing the spectrum of views of the self to be cast in different hues – some of which are helpful in thinking about ethics and spiritual education.

Spirituality and Definition

The term spirituality is elusive by all accounts. Carr (2003, p. 214) notes that the language of spirituality generally is manifestly protean and, in his own examination of its conceptions within education, he disclaims any attempt to arrive at a precise definition. Huebner (1999) warns about the use of the words ‘spirit’ and ‘spiritual,’ and their entanglement with either the metaphysical baggage of traditional religion, the connotations of superstition, or uncritical positions (1999, p. 343). In cross-disciplinary research involving 76 articles and 19 books, Tanyi (2002) concludes that spirituality is “a multidimensional concept without an agreed upon definition” (p. 501). Van Brummelen et al. (2004) flatly declare that consensus on the term’s meaning does not exist. Wringe (2002a), in a consideration of the nature of spirituality and whether it can be legitimately considered in education, wonders outright whether the ambiguities and potentially contentious overtones of the terms as they are used in an educational context “are misleading to the point of causing some to make unjustified claims to exclusive

competence” and causing others to feel inhibited or disempowered (p. 168).¹

Nevertheless, in an a cautious essay which considers whether the development of the self involves issues not covered under other subject matter, Wringe concludes that it does, though not, he declares, on religious grounds, as he is himself a non-believer.

Wringe explains that his conclusion is based on the benefits of asking questions of ultimate concern regarding the meaning of significant life events. He notes that most of the kinds of questions which are frequently advanced as justification for including a spiritual dimension in curriculum could be answered satisfactorily by scientific research or moral reasoning (2002). However, the important issue is “the effect upon the individual of contemplating the awesome significance of these questions and the fact that he/she constantly dwells upon them even when they do not apparently have immediate relevance to his/her immediate day-to-day affairs” (p. 163). As will become clear in the following discussion, Wringe’s conclusion represents two initiatives within education that seek to include spirituality in curriculum. The first is an attempt to fit the topic of spirituality for use in the pluralistic, secular context of public education by finding a meaning for it that would either obviate or minimize the political and ideological issues inherent in the term’s historic association with religion. The second seeks to serve the first through a turn to subjectivity and a consideration of the relationship between experience and meaning.²

¹ A similar observation is made by Van Brummelen et al., 2004: “Most teachers are ill equipped to address spiritual questions and issues, feel uncomfortable doing so, and therefore reluctant to participate in the teaching of spirituality and religion” (Van Brummelen, Koole, & Franklin, 2004, p 247).

² R. S. Peters (1967) seems likewise to recommend this strategy in his remarks concerning the duties of a teacher: “in religious instruction or current affairs, his main endeavour should be the deepening and informing of a religious and political *consciousness* (italics mine) rather than the defense of particular dogmas or programs” (p. 125).

In collaboration with Alexander, McLaughlin (2003) identified five “interrelated strands that often characterize the spiritual domain” (p. 192). These readily correspond with four of the five descriptive categories used in this study: a search for meaning (identity); the cultivation of an interior attitude or “inner space” (experience or how the self experiences its own consciousness), the manifestation of spirituality in life (agency); and connection with community (dialogical dimension). The fifth strand consists of “distinctive responses to the natural and human world” (p. 192), a category that could be broadly understood to involve virtually all the others; however, I believe that there is good reason for thinking of it as associated with the descriptor I have termed the “core” notion of the self—that is, what the self is declared to be on a continuum ranging from “no self” through the self as a developmental process of multi-faceted “selves,” to the self conceived as an essential, fixed unified entity. In trying to assess how particular understandings of spirituality implicate various notions of the self, this category, perhaps more than the others, is likely to be helpful. For, bathed in the light of the various versions of spirituality, the self as a responder to the world is frequently seen in relation to matters of good and evil. The line of reasoning I will advance in support of this notion has two different, but related parts.

The first will suggest that recurrent references to the work of Nel Noddings in the diverse literature of spiritual and religious education are not adventitious.³ They come at time of theoretical restlessness and a casting about for educational perspectives capable of responding to the socio-political complexity of a zeitgeist contorted by rapid change.

³ See among others: Inna Semetsky, Howard Deitcher, and Jen Glasser, Moishe Re'em, in Hanan Alexander (2004) *Spirituality and Ethics in Education*; Iris Yob in D. Carr & J. Haldane, 2003, *Spirituality, Philosophy and Education* pp. 112-126; Neiman (2000); Scheindlin (2003).

Particular versions of the ethics of care, despite theoretical vulnerability, appear to resonate at some deep level of collective intuition with the notion that social stability, and perhaps even survival, may depend less on the prevailing influence of cooler heads than on the quiet work of warmer hearts and that in the crucible of educational practice. The second part of an argument that embraces a communion between spirituality and ethics involves the thesis that a notion of the self as a spiritual being in relationship with its world can be usefully approached through the ancient concept of the *Tao* (Lewis, 1947; Postman 1999) which I will discuss later in the chapter.

In the field of education the perceived connections between ethics and matters of the spirit has sparked debate not only concerning how to frame a satisfactory definition of spirituality, but how the concept should be grasped in relation to religion.

Spirituality and Religion

An increased interest in spirituality on the part of some educators has been linked to the sense that the educational system has failed to prepare students for the ethical challenges of living in a complex, rapidly changing global environment (Alexander, 2004, p. vii). The response to a perceived deficiency in providing the kind of education that would permit a critical ethical response to increasingly difficult personal and social issues has been enormously varied and has sought to include such approaches as character ethics (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1997; Lickona, 2004); care ethics (Noddings, 2004, 2006); and critical pedagogy (McLaren, 1989). In this context consideration has been given to the matter of how to view spirituality: as a sub-topic of the study of religion or particular religions; as universal phenomenon transcending any particular religious tradition and separable from it; or as a practice related to ethical

awareness that might be usefully accommodated in a cross-curricular focus in education (Alexander, 2004; Carr & Haldane, 2003; Huebner et al., 1999; Noddings, 2006; Slattery & Rapp, 2003; Van Brummelen et al., 2004).

I propose here to examine some of the issues that have emerged in the discussion of the relationship between spirituality and religion by bringing together elements of what both Carr (Carr, 2003b, p. 214) and Alexander (2004, p. ix)—each in a somewhat different way—have identified as distinct approaches to spirituality. The first considers that spirituality must be understood primarily through its historic link with religion; the second considers it as a phenomenon that can be explored independently of either traditional religious understanding or practice. Some background to these two concepts will be useful.

The first approach, in virtue of its linkage to religion, has been described by McLaughlin (2003, p. 185) as “tethered spirituality” or the “traditional” approach (Carr, 2005, p. 214). The term denotes a treatment of spirituality in which the criteria for its definition as well as the evaluation of its development are drawn from the religion, or tradition within the religion, with which it is associated (McLaughlin, 2003). In the context of this inquiry, however, I would prefer to use the term “embedded spirituality,” a phrase that attempts to capture something of the quite intimate way in which notions of the spiritual can be enwrapped by, and become dependent on, the various layers of meaning in a religious tradition. I am considering, for example, the manner in which members of a particular liturgical tradition can view their participation in its practices and their stewardship of its resources, its paraphernalia, and history as a deeply spiritual act, unintelligible outside the walls of their denominational affiliations. It would certainly be

possible to consider such spiritual practices as the Prayer of the Heart or Jesus prayer (French, 1954) independently of the Russian Orthodox tradition to which its origins can be traced; however, without any reference to ecclesiastical culture and history, it would seem absurd to think that either the fullness of its meaning or, perhaps even the perception of its efficacy, would be left somehow intact.⁴

A similar view might be taken of the suggestion that teachers could nurture a “sacramental cosmology” and the awareness that “each aspect of life manifests visible signs of invisible grace” (Van Brummelen et al., 2004, p. 244). An embedded view of spirituality would understand such an attempt to be problematic in the absence of explanations of the meaning of the term “grace” outside of a framework which included the history and tradition of religion. The embedded character of sacramental thinking in the web-like filaments which form the relationship between the spiritual and the culture of religion as an institutional phenomenon are many, subtle and interwoven. As shorthand for the multifarious character of this relationship, the term “tethered” seems metaphorically challenged.

So far as ethics is concerned, I will argue here that embedded spirituality commonly leans toward an approach dominated by an a priori rationalism, and a favouring of deontological views of ethical matters. This is to make use of a distinction between discussions of ethics which tend to focus on rights, and the justification of moral

⁴ The question of the efficacy of prayer is of course a difficult one as C. S. Lewis has demonstrated in his essay, *The Efficacy of Prayer* (Lewis & Hooper, 1975). My use of the term here is on a very simple psychological level related to the specific character of the prayer of the heart. Its intent is the practice of the presence of God. Efficacy then becomes a matter of a sense of that presence, however defined by the believer.

judgments on one hand, and those that understand morality in terms of relationship and affective elements on the other (Alexander, 2004, p. ix).⁵

The second approach to spirituality has been described variously as an “attitudinal or postmodern account” (Carr, 2003b, p. 215) or a “religiously untethered” perspective (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 185). Again, I have chosen to adopt an alternative in the term “distinct” spirituality. This seems more appropriate here since “postmodern” may connote too broad a range of meanings, “attitudinal” does not emphasize the separate character of the approach, and “untethered” would seem to impart a sense of definitive separation that would be antithetical to a postmodern perspective that emphasized the connectedness of all things.

A view of distinct spirituality, while acknowledging the possibility of connections with religion, considers that this phenomenon cannot be contained within the precincts of a social institution, and adopts a focus on the experiential or phenomenological dimensions of it (Carr, 2003b, p. 215). Alexander (2004) distinguishes this orientation by its understanding of morality in affective rather than behavioural or cognitive terms. He points to its use as characteristic of existentialist and some feminist ethical thought—particularly that of care ethics as developed by Noddings (1984). Distinct spirituality, in its cultivation of distance from religion, may nevertheless assume different forms; some are developed in much the same fashion as those expressly linked to a religious tradition, while others are so lacking in structure as to obscure criteria for assessing spiritual development within them (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 192).

⁵ Alexander’s (2004) distinction does not explicitly situate either ethical approach in terms of its relationship to institutional religion. It is set within a discussion of the connection between ethics, spirituality, and education and a reference to four different ethical orientations seen as differing in terms of their emphasis on rights, feelings, a good life, and justice (p. ix).

A closer examination of these two different approaches to spirituality—distinct and embedded—and the tensions between them, will afford the opportunity to consider how notions of the self have been shaped by the emphases of discourses that are increasingly asserting their influence in contemporary society.

Embedded Spirituality and the Self

The rule of reason.

One prominent feature of approaches which view spirituality as embedded in religion is an emphasis on reason in the acquisition of understanding. This emphasis is typically evident in the contention that children ought to be given some exposure to religion and its various spiritual practices so that they might be better able to make choices about matters to which “they are to become personally committed and which may form the nucleus of a personal ideal” (Peters, 1981, p. 81). However, a similar emphasis on rationality and an indissoluble link between spirituality and religion can also be observed among people who oppose teaching about spirituality on the grounds that they do not want their children exposed to information about other religious perspectives that might contradict the tenets of their own tradition (Van Brummelen et al., 2004, p. 248). A strong rational element also underpins the contention that the study of embedded spirituality and its implication in moral thinking is justified since, for many people, moral thinking is framed by their religious beliefs (Walker, 2004, p. 7).

Kay (1967), in examining models of sequential moral and intellectual development in the work of religious educators such as Ronald Goldman (1968), sums up the cognitivist position: “Religious thought is nothing more than ordinary thought exercised on religious ideas....Since this is true of religious thought presumably it is also

true of moral thought” (p. 228).⁶ Kay contrasts this with his own view which involves recognition of the importance of non-cognitive elements in moral development.

Views of spirituality as embedded in religion support the conviction that, since all talk of spirituality is ‘contaminated’ by religiously partisan ideology, it risks a divisive reinforcing of the socio-cultural pluralisms that trouble liberal democratic institutions and ought to be rigorously excluded from public education (Carr, 2003b, p. 215). An alternative view endorses its inclusion in curriculum in the spirit of the history of religions approach and recommends it as a social science whose aim is to lend breadth to the student’s understanding of social life and organization.

Van Brummelen et al. (2004) observe that spirituality will be approached very differently in the context of teaching about religion: “religion may be de-spiritualized if taught in a purely cognitive, rational way” (p. 243). For students to enter “participatory relationships with the deep powers of the universe” it may be necessary to engage in a sensitive “teaching *of* religion (not just teaching *about* religion)” (p. 243). This observation involves certain assumptions on the part of the authors which it will be useful to examine:

1. Spirituality is embedded in religion tradition and cannot be fully appreciated apart from it.
2. A purely rational analysis in which religion and spirituality are pried apart would fail to represent either fairly.

⁶ Goldman had adapted Piaget’s sequential intellectual development model to a scheme for religious education in which spirituality could be equated with cognition. See Goldman’s (1986) *Readiness for Religion* in which children are only to be exposed to religious stories when they have reached an appropriate level of cognitive development. Biblical narratives are not to be introduced until age eleven or twelve.

3. Teaching *about* religion is to be distinguished from teaching *of* religion. Only the latter will permit a deeper knowledge of spirituality since it is linked to, and makes possible, the student's participation in practices in which spiritual experience can occur.

Van Brummelen's analysis raises several key questions about spirituality: can spirituality only be understood from the inside—from the point of view of a participant who has adopted the spiritual practice of a particular religious tradition and by implication abandoned the disengaged mentality of a purely cognitive approach? And secondly, is the understanding and appreciation of spirituality through the experience of practice necessarily linked to a religious tradition? These questions imply that there is an important distinction between 'inside' and 'outside.'

The Inside and Outside of Spirituality

McLaughlin (2003) carefully lays out just such a distinction as he considers what form education about spirituality might assume in a pluralistic public school system. Education in spirituality from the 'inside' pays particular attention to the attempt to "form, and nourish a commitment to the particular beliefs, values, and practices of a specific spiritual tradition" (p. 193). By contrast, in the view from outside, there are no assumptions about the belief or involvement of students in any particular tradition: "The aim is rather to engage in exploration, discussion and critical assessment of the spiritual domain and issues of meaning, truth and value relating to it" (p. 193).

When considered in the light of the inside-outside distinction the Van Brummelen (2004) article poses a question of considerable importance for educators. The article

presents a view of spirituality as embedded in religion (2004, p. 241). The definition of spirituality adopted in the article emphasizes the relationship of the individual within community and tradition to “that which is—or is perceived to be—of ultimate concern, ultimate value and ultimate truth” (2004, p. 241). Despite the statement that “It is possible to be spiritual without being religious” (p. 238), the article’s concluding recommendations for a “curriculum framework” reflect the definitive importance of religion and religious community (p. 249). Five of the seven suggested components of the curriculum make reference to the study of “traditions” or “religious traditions,” reinforcing the overall sense that what the authors are promoting is a generous view of spirituality from outside in an embedded approach.

Against this background, the assertion that the teaching of religion, and not just about it, affords an advantage over a purely rational approach, comes as a surprise. The recommendation implies that, whether attention is focused on spirituality or on religion, an ‘inside’ view is superior to one from the ‘outside.’ Moreover, in the case of the teaching *of* religion, and the consequent initiation of relationships with the “powers of the universe” (Van Brummelen, 2004, p. 243), the rationality which had been the basis of the recommendation of an extensive study of varied traditions is now set in opposition to spirituality and described as the culprit in a possible de-spiritualizing evisceration of religion.

The opposition of cognition and spirit appears as an awkward stranger in a roomful of neighbourly reasons the authors advance for the teaching of religion and spirituality together. A broad view of diverse traditions offers, they suggest, the visionary possibility of developing attitudes of awareness, sensitivity, respect, and appreciation in

the encounter with beliefs and worldviews not one's own. But for the fleeting incongruity of cognition as an enemy of spirit, the authors' defense of a curriculum framework of impressive ecumenical breadth is seamless in its sensitivity and commitment to a fair presentation of religious worldviews.

However, despite the brevity of its appearance in the article, it is the lone suggestion of an offer of relationship with the deep powers of the universe that plays the conceptually titillating cameo. At face value there is no contest. It may be the case that some students, given the choice of studying the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, the Five Pillars of Islam, or Christian creedal wrangles at Nicaea on one hand, and engaging in the experience of guided spiritual meditation on the other, would choose the former. But in my experience, the derring-do of youth, to say nothing of the fiery passions with which religious history is replete, speak against it. It is, as Huebner (1999) might say, the lure of the transcendent that should not be underestimated.⁷

This observation about a general preference for participation, action, and experience over the usual features of a cognitively dominated classroom approach serves only to amplify the question of whether spirituality considered as embedded in religion could, or should, be presented from the inside. Would this mean that in order to achieve a just representation of the spirituality of a particular tradition, it would have to be taught by a practicing representative of that tradition? Or is it that spirituality is so implicated in the formal nurturance of the habitual outlook, attitudes, and values of a particular

⁷ Huebner notes: "The lure of the transcendent must be present for education to happen, but that lure is threatening" (1999, p. 363). The fascination of threat fits with my teaching experience: although I worked hard to make my "World Religions" classes interesting and interactive, on the meaningful engagement scale they could not compete with the guided meditation experience that was part of our class excursion to a local Hindu temple.

tradition that persons outside would be denied spiritual experience if only by time and circumstance? If it is granted that a provisional acceptance of specific belief, or conversely, a willing suspension of disbelief (standard perspective shift as in contemporary movie culture) would be insufficient to permit entry into an experience of the worldview of a particular tradition, then one is left with the repugnant conclusion that all but the most superficial appreciation of other spiritual traditions is, at bottom, an untenable ideal. Such a conclusion would rest on knowing what is different—and better—about a view from the inside.

Inside the Inside

Re'em (2004) provides a helpful discussion of spirituality in union with Judaism and in the specific denominational context of Jewish schools. However, as I will illustrate, its most arresting feature is what it leaves unsaid. According to Re'em, spirituality, as shaped by the relationship between a believer and a particular tradition, can be profoundly affected by the manner in which the authority of the tradition is mediated. Appealing to Abraham Heschel's concern with godless religion, Re'em (2004, p. 212) asserts that the teaching of spirituality and religion together is a matter of vitality for communities of faith. Religion and spirituality can become pried apart—to the impoverishment of both—as he believes has occurred in some Jewish schools. He sees the theoretical roots of this separation particularly in Noddings' distinction between spirituality as an “attitude” and religion as the exercising of that attitude within an institutional affiliation (Re'em, 2004). He identifies this as the continuation of a line of reasoning begun by John Dewey and Martin Buber.

Both Dewey and Buber made the spirituality–religion distinction (using the terms “religion and religiosity”) though their attitudes were quite different. Dewey considered the spiritual to be “experiences having the force of bringing about a better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life” (Dewey, as cited in Re’em, 2004, p. 214); he believed that such experiences could occur in contexts quite separate from those provided by religious traditions and, accordingly, sought to encourage spirituality as capacity independent of affiliative beliefs and practices. In contrast, Buber, in Re’em’s view, saw the spiritual as emerging from the *I–Thou* dialogical encounter as a force that could revitalize Judaism. Re’em sides with Buber in endorsing the deployment of a relational spirituality as a resource from within tradition, but disagrees about the way in which it should occur.

Re’em approaches inside spirituality from the point of view of discourse. He first identifies “authoritative discourse” (2004, p. 216) which mediates the static ideological elements of tradition in a didactic process dominated by the monological voice of the teacher. This is contrasted with “internally persuasive discourse” (p. 216), which involves the voice of the student in a retelling that Bakhtin has described as “double-voiced narration of another’s words” (Bakhtin, as cited in Re’em, 2004, p. 216). This type of discourse, immediately familiar to most teachers, is characterized by disruption, speaking out, and vocal disagreement. Re’em seizes upon Bakhtin’s description of the collision of the two conflicting discourse forms as the opening up of a space for the determination of “the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world” (p. 216). It is the presence of both authoritative and internally persuasive discourses that are necessary “for the spirit of the individual to unfold” (p. 216).

In this view the spiritual part of the self has an ear, so to speak, for the authority of tradition with its rules and fixed dogmas—the ancient tones through which the transmission of important elements of shared experience can occur. However, that potential for dialogical solidarity with the historic and contemporary community of faith remains dormant until its activation in the encounter with the troubling, the questioning, the ambiguity and paradox of the alternate discourse. The author affirms that in the meeting of the two discourses there is the possibility for the perception of “polyphonic truth” and the embrace of contradiction and spiritual pluralism (Re’em, 2004, pp. 219, 220). Central to the task of religious education in an environment stifled by the monological is exposure to diverse discourses “to release the child’s still small inner voice” (p. 218). To do this requires a pedagogy that employs multiple discourses, welcomes a cacophony of voices, and is discerning with regard to disruption.

In focusing on the way in which discourse mediates authority and on the possibility for opening up dialogical encounter, Re’em has gone some distance in sketching a spiritual self nourished on one side by a rational appropriation of the resources of tradition and animated on the other by the immediacy and spontaneity of an emancipated interpersonal encounter. The openness and many-paths-to-truth character of polyphony also reflects Carr’s (2003) observation that, far from being indoctrination, “initiation into a given spiritual perspective may offer a valuable basis for the appreciation of its rivals” (p. 223). C. S. Lewis, musing on the same matter, noted the paradox that those closest to the heart of their own tradition often exhibit the greatest capacity to appreciate other perspectives (Lewis, 1956).

Nevertheless, these points do little to answer the question of whether there is anything at play in the view of the inside of embedded spirituality which could not be assimilated to the vocabulary of aesthetics or ethics and whether the inside offers any advantage to the educator. The polyphonically equipped self, free to challenge authority and to find new meanings in the interaction with authority, is still a creature driven by reason. Epiphanies in the clash of discourses, as presented by Re'em, all celebrate an intellectual magnanimity—a greater openness to understand and manage paradox, contradiction, disruption, cacophony, and raucous talk back in class. This perspective captures quite wonderfully the lively spirit of classroom interaction in which every teacher has at one time or another exulted: the respectful joust, the keen thrust and parry, the pitched battles that end in the warmth of collegial laughter, or a spell of thoughtful silence as students are drawn into the word-play of an engaging topic.

In Re'em's sketch of inside spirituality, the breeze of this open forum sweeps easily down from a notion of polyphonic truth that resists wooden authoritarianism on one side and greets religious pluralism warmly on the other. However, in all this, no mention is made of guilt and forgiveness, justice and compassion, or the role of the emotions in general. It is not at all clear how difficult ethical ground might be negotiated using a fundamentally dualistic model in which the verities of tradition are only counterpoint to situated insights emerging from the play of discourses. At issue is a dialectic between the dry bones of authority's dictates and the moist breath of living experience. Bones and breath are both needed for the dance and it is precisely this dialectic which is conspicuously absent here.

Also absent from Re'em's consideration of discourse and authority is the deep evocative power of sacred language for adherents to a particular tradition. Smith (1991), commenting on Islam, notes that from the outside, the Koran is scarcely intelligible. One must consider, he explains, both the nature of the language—Arabic—and its speakers:

Crowds in Cairo, Damascus or Baghdad can be stirred to the highest emotional pitch by statements that, when translated, seem banal. The rhythm, melodic cadence, the rhyme produce a powerful hypnotic effect. Thus, the power of the koranic revelation lies not only in the literal meaning of its words, but also in the language in which this meaning incorporated, including its sound. (Smith, 1991, p. 234)

This reference to the confluence of language, experience, and emotion is directly related, Smith explains, to the implication of authority in the text. Whereas the theology of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, is rooted deeply in narratives, the doctrinal authority of the Koran is direct; biblical stories are presented in the Koran in an abbreviated form “stripped of their epic character and inserted as didactic examples of the infinitely various things that declare God's praise” (Smith, 1991, p. 234). On one level this is a straightforward observation about the mediation of spiritual authority in a more literal text. On another, it hints at an aspect of polyphony that extends beyond the tensions of interpretive variation to the resonance between the substance of an authoritative spiritual declaration and the power and meaning of its form. Smith (1991) notes, for example, that apparent incoherence in the sacred text can be construed as representing the incommensurable disjunction between

the Spirit, understood here as the “Uncreated Koran” (p. 235), and the semantic poverty of human language.

However, if this accommodation appears as a creative rational move, it also signals a key feature of the way in which spirituality operates to inform ethical consciousness. For, in this illustration from Islam, inferential judgments concerning a text are informed by emotion just as emotion itself is fed by a coagulation of form and substance conceived within a narrative framework of rational understanding. No one who has ever been part of a religious organization can fail to note how, just beneath the surface of discussions about the management of quite mundane matters of faith and practice, currents of emotion flow that can at any moment rise up from the depths to put strict reason to flight. Pascal’s celebrated comment from his *Pensées*, “Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point” (the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing) deftly captures the aporia.

If the reasons of the heart are indeed of a different order in that part of the self that we term spiritual, then we are on the threshold of something that has been identified as taboo for discussion in education as Maxwell and Reichenbach (2005) have noted. They point out that while there is some acknowledgment that emotional reactions are amenable to modification by teaching, the moratorium on discussion about it reflects the more prevalent underlying supposition that the attempt to do so is like trying to “educate a headache” (Maxwell & Reichenbach, 2005, p. 296). Yet, if it is the case that emotion and reason are conjoined in a manner of which educators ought to take note, a consideration of that union in a context in which it is highly visible may yield some insight. And despite my contention that discussions of embedded spirituality appear to be dominated

by a rational approach, there appears good reason to think that the whole story is not being told—that Re'em, as an example from inside, as well as Peters, and Wringer, on the outside—are leaving out the parts that are either alarmingly irrational or perhaps non-rational, for just the cultural reason that has been suggested by Maxwell and Reichenbach. It may be that the spontaneous, unpredictable, apparently irrational character of affective response is seen to be inimical to a reasoned approach to education and, furthermore, that its general association with religion lies behind the reaction of my classmates in the graduate seminar mentioned at the outset of the chapter. With this speculation I want to return to the puzzling matter of emotion and reason in spirituality, for this discourse will serve as a bridge to a discussion of ethics in discourse about spirituality as distinct from religion.

Central to traditional religion is the authority of its sacred scripture—an authority which invariably shapes an understanding of ethical responsibility, and typically in a rational and deontic fashion. However, Smith's reference to the inability of language in the context of the sacred to carry the full weight of spiritual significance implies that there is a realm of reality as well as of human experience that is not easily translated into language of any kind. With this notion we are in what is sometimes called a "liminal" space (Grumet, 1988, p. 149; Winston, 2002, p. 250)—on a threshold, or at the edge of something. It is that space that I wish to consider.

The notion that the resources of the human situation, including language, reflect an epistemic shortfall in knowing and representing the transcendent is advanced by C. S. Lewis (1949) in an essay titled *Transposition*. He observes that just as one piano key can represent a range of instruments in a symphonic score, or one physical

manifestation such as weeping can express multiple emotions, so the experience of transcendence is itself so contorted by representational limitation that it issues frequently in paradox. An example can be found in Kenneth Grahame's children's classic *The Wind in the Willows* in which the protagonists Rat and Mole come upon a place that is strangely familiar:

This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me, 'whispered the Rat, as if in a trance. 'Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!

Then, suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy—but it was an awe that smote and held him.

'Rat!' he found breath to whisper, shaking. 'Are you afraid?'

'Afraid?' murmured the Rat, his eyes shining in with unutterable love. 'Afraid!' Of Him? O, never, never! And yet—and yet—O Mole, I am afraid! (Grahame, 1994)

Three aspects of this excerpt figure in the structure of a spirituality considered from inside. First, the internal coherence of even this small excerpt depends upon Rat and Mole believing that they are indeed in the presence of the god Pan, just as the sense of the sacredness of text and thus, its spiritual authority, reside in a prior acceptance of its canonical status as revealed. Second, the experience of the transcendent or of numinous awe as described by Otto (1968), is characteristically comprised of elements that issue in

paradoxical language, or at least, are not easily susceptible of coherent description. Third, the acknowledgment of spiritual authority appears sometimes to be grounded in a sense of recognizing what, deep down, fits either with what one has known to be the case all along or with that rather vague and elusive state of consciousness we call intuition: “This is the place of my song-dream.”

The first point might be seen as confirmation that spirituality as experience is linked to an acknowledgement of the kind of authority that issues from the teaching, initiation, and acculturation into a religious tradition that is communicated through its various levels of rational discourse. The second and third points, however, might rather lend themselves to the observation that spiritual authority emerges not from external sources, but from personal experience of an interactive sort. It is the third point that I want to examine more closely since it echoes Crites’ (1971) distinction between sacred and mundane stories and invites a consideration of a spiritual self that develops apart from the authority of tradition.

Spirituality in Sacred Story

Crites (1971) describes sacred stories as fundamental narrative forms through which the sense of self and the world is created. “People do not sit down on a cool afternoon and think themselves up a sacred story. They awaken to a sacred story” (p. 296). These stories are the powerfully inchoate ones lying beneath the surface of those that are told, written, or re-enacted ritually. Sacred stories cannot be directly or fully expressed for they reside “in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants” (p. 295). They resonate in mundane stories—the myths, epics, scriptures, and even some “merry little tales that seem content to play on the surface” (p. 296). Sacred story is a deep

background resonance that creates a world of consciousness and, thereby, the self that is oriented to it.

Crites' sacred story would appear to be the place of Rat's song-dream, in which the recognition of the shape of the holy occurs in his awakening in experiencing consciousness. This quality of consciousness, already infused with cultural forms, is like an "enveloping musicality" (1971, p. 304) which for Rat becomes the simultaneous fascination and fear of the otherness to which he is drawn. The implication here is that we are dealing with something to which we do not have reasoned access: deep registers of language that strain under the weight of sacred sign, story that takes us to a place where there is the risk of hearing a primal voice that defies restraint, whispering here and thundering there, shaking and caressing the earth as it wills.⁸

Crites makes it clear that he does not share Ricoeur's notion that myths represent the assembly of primal symbolic material into stories (1971, p. 306). However, his references to the sacred as "the unutterable stories we know best of all" (p. 297) and as "linking a man's individual consciousness with ultimate powers and also with the inner lives of those with whom he shares a common soil" (p. 304) suggest that his insights offer possibility for deeper scrutiny. For this approach to the spiritual implicates a self predisposed to entertain stories that come from outside the strictures of tradition, and the bounds of canonicity, cultural or religious. I refer to the non-rational, perplexing, dark and frightening aspects of the place of the song-dream.

⁸ Smith (1991, p. 232) reports the story of the words of revelation coming to Mohammad with such weight that the camel he rode was forced to the earth with legs splayed. The Hebrew scriptures similarly describe the voice of the Divine in terms of immense and uncontrollable power that shakes the earth and breaks the trees: Psalm 29.

Winston (2002) recalls the kinship of wonder and fear and notes that a commonality of spiritual traditions is their treatment of suffering, sacrifice, and the nature of evil. He identifies the remarkable contemporary success of the *Harry Potter* stories as evidence that children are instinctively drawn to stories which address rather than avoid the dark dimension of the human condition. From an educator's standpoint, he declares, the reality of evil offers an opportunity for the uncomfortable parts of human experience, including dreams, to be explored in the safety of contexts in which the transformative potential of pedagogical skill—in the field of drama in Winston's case—offers redemptive insight.

Noddings (1984) has also drawn attention to the dark aspect of spirituality in her discussion of the story of Abraham and Isaac in the Hebrew scriptures.⁹ In this account the patriarch Abraham prepares to kill his own son in obedience to a command from Yahweh. The account is heavy with the darkness and terror of a realm in which the powerful sacrifice the weak, the innocent are butchered, and blood is smeared on doorposts as the grim culture of ancient apotropaism finds incarnation in narratives of the evil that falls on the just and the unjust alike.¹⁰

Noddings (1984) alludes to Kierkegaard, for whom the Abraham story becomes the site of an intense struggle to understand the ethical dimension of the Divine–human relationship. His conclusion that Abraham's action was somehow justified on relational grounds, incites Noddings' indignation; she retorts hotly that “no woman could have written either *Genesis* or *Fear and Trembling*” (p. 43) and fires a volley of invective that

⁹ Genesis 22:9

¹⁰ Apotropaism: The use of magic or ritual to avert evil influences or bad luck” (OED) Apotropaic practices, often involving blood, were attempts to ward off evil. Classic studies of ancient near east practices in this area include the work of Roland de Vaux (1964; 1965).

includes the observation that traditional masculine ethics often appeals to “something beyond,” to deity or to principal (p. 44). Yet her own spirited rejoinder to the perception of the male apotheosis of heartless rationality echoes strains of a biblically prophetic character in which fiery calls for social justice are linked directly to care for the poor and downtrodden. To apply Crites’s language of “enveloping musicality” (1971, p. 304) it might be said that Noddings’ response resounds with the tones of a consciousness in which affect and reason have met in the service of mercy and goodness. In her passionate plea for caring Noddings shares a sacred story of affectively charged reason and reasonable passion.

At this point in the discussion it might be noted that where spirituality is identified as allied with religion, both reason and emotion figure variously in an economy of meaning that appears to be linked quite directly with ethics. The self as a spiritual creature, solitary and social, sups at the table of symbol, and finds meaning in a consciousness informed by factors that inhere, albeit indirectly, in some form of narrative embodying ethical code or the Law. In this sphere of religious affiliation, suspicions about emotion and their educability or their ideological coloring are subordinated to the primacy of investment in the tenets of formal belief—the source of Noddings’ discontent and the reason for the offensive face of embedded spirituality for education in a pluralistic liberal democratic context. This lack of critical attention to the emotions in religion, and the skepticism concerning them outside, suggest that at least one important question should be addressed from this foray into the domain of spirituality embedded in tradition. The question concerns whether, in the absence of the regulative and normative elements of religious tradition, spirituality could be considered to contain ethical

elements. How do notions of the self, outside the influence of religious tradition, include elements that could be identified as spiritual and ethical?

The Self in Distinct Spirituality

Perhaps the most salient feature of spirituality as a phenomenon distinct from religion is its emphasis on elements of experience that are seen to be deserving of special attention in virtue of their effects on thought, feeling, and behaviour. In this view, experiences of wonder and awe, along with a passion to live meaningful and purposeful lives, are viewed as transcultural human phenomena manifested in early childhood (Alexander, 2004). Personal experience is thus understood as evidence of a facet of life that is qualitatively distinct in its orientation to self, society, the environment, and “matters of ultimate significance” (Alexander, 2004, p. viii). Although recognition is given to the possibility of mutual influence between spirituality and various aspects of formal religion, the spiritual domain is understood to transcend any exclusive claims on the part of particular religions, or political ideologies (p. x). Moreover, and of significance for education, the vitality of the spiritual is considered to be independent of organizational or institutional forms (Alexander, 2004; Carr, 2003b).

In moving away from an embedded view of spirituality in which visible forms of practice instantiate canonically circumscribed notions of the spiritual, it is individual experience and consciousness that become the principal focus. This move, offering the advantages of a certain freedom from the ideological constraints of institutional definition, also risks the loss of spirituality as a meaningful term amidst what Grosch (2000) has termed a “confused and soupy miasma of moral, spiritual and religious insights which make up the New Age Spirituality” (p. 232). I want therefore to consider more closely

how the notion of the experiencing consciousness becomes a site for the inclusion of the spiritual. Crites' description of consciousness as a bridge between sacred and mundane stories (1971), with its haunting metaphor of the enveloping musicality of sacred story, offers a way in.

Music, as Carr (2004a) has shown, is not simply another form of language with the communicative properties of text. Reviewing the subtleties of inherence theories and causal theories, Carr argues that what we develop in listening to music is greater appreciation for the way in which instrumental resources have been used to achieve a richer musical expression of emotion. Nevertheless, it seems quite evident that this kind of appreciation for emotion or its enhancement through exposure to music bears no necessary relationship to ethical development. Development of emotional sensitivity to others is similarly ethically neutral. The cruelest tyrants, as the Nazis showed, as well as the most manipulative psychopaths, as the contemporary fictional character of Hannibal Lector has illustrated, may exhibit highly developed emotional sensibility in both aesthetic and interpersonal contexts—an observation which might serve to bolster the argument that, outside of a religious or ethical framework, the cultivation of emotional sensibility may be morally irrelevant at best and antinomian at worst. Just such assumptions may lurk beneath the surface of rhetoric suggesting that school programs in the arts may be marginalized with impunity.

In light of these dour reminders it might be asked whether the description of consciousness as enveloped by the musicality of sacred story points to anything that would be helpful in approaching ethics or understanding its relation to education. I suggest that the metaphor is apt; emotions have a rightful place along with reason at the

curricular table, spirituality shares kinship with ethics, and that the way in which the self is understood is at the heart of it all.

The elements of this admittedly risky argument involve a consideration of work from the arts, philosophy, and from theology.¹¹

Liminal Space in the Arts

McGhee (2003), considering the task of moral and spiritual development in education cites the following passage from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (V.i).

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;...
Let no such man be trusted.

Amidst an artful exegesis of symbolism in the text, McGhee highlights Shakespeare's point that "music for a time doth change his nature" (V.i) by which, as the passage suggests, he clearly means the brutish parts that accord ill with ethical integrity. The process, he explains, involves a stilling of the conscious mind in which the clamour of the usual preoccupations is replaced by "an intense listening or concentration which provides a portal to a transformation or re-ordering, or re-direction, of the energies of the psyche whose intimations then become more manifest and more audible"(2003, p. 37).

McGhee then proceeds to compare this process with the Buddhist *samatha* meditation in

¹¹ The obvious question here is how, in a consideration of spirituality separate from religion, can you bring theological resources to bear when they are likely to reflect institutional postures or creedal formulations? The answer, I think, lies in the direction of holding on one hand, that consciousness is never independent of cultural thought forms or immune to the influences of tradition, and on the other, that theological interpretation is often acutely self-critically aware of its canonical halts—as Liberation theology would seem to indicate.

which the *kleshas*—the defiling passions—are calmed and alertness is increased in order to allow mental states such as loving kindness and generosity to emerge. This intense concentration and stilling of the mind aims to “bring a person to insight into ‘the way things really are,’ a phrase that he acknowledges to be in need of interpretation (p. 38). However, he declines to do so, focusing instead on the notion that the task of teachers is to open up the possibility of ethical transformation, and that music along with drama, art, and poetry offer liminal activities that serve this end. Music, then, like the other arts, assists in the nurture of a certain quality of consciousness that is somehow conducive to the emergence of the good—though that is defined principally by the observation, also found in Grumet’s description of liminal space (1988, p. 149), that it entails possible worlds. What is it that happens in such space and what are its possibilities?

Winston (2002), in exploring the spiritual aspects of dramatic space as liminal, “separated from ordinary space and time” (p. 250), identifies the actor’s capacity to engage in a sacrificial transformation of the self as one of the spiritual dimensions of dramatic art. In a brief, but tantalizing sketch of the difference between Stanislavkian and Eastern methods of preparing to represent a character, Winston captures the central problem of moral education: the rapprochement of thought and feeling in virtuous act (Maxwell & Reichenbach, 2005). Winston explains that it is in giving themselves up in the intense fusion of body and mind required to assume a role that actors bring about the transformation of the audience’s consciousness. In portraying a character, methods will differ, but the aim is the same: “The actor seeks the gesture or movement that will not only represent the emotion but also help her feel it” (Winston, 2002, p. 249). It is in the

cathexis of the actor's psychic energy and its transfer to an audience in the catharsis of drama that transformation occurs.

What Winston has highlighted here would seem analogous to the coincidence of feeling and thought that is considered to be central in an ethical response to a situation. The education of the emotions concerns the learning of appropriate affective responses—those that are in empathetic harmony with particular situations and that issue in acts that reflect the good of human flourishing. This virtue ethics approach depends upon the ability to leap lightly between laws, rules or principles, and a spontaneously judicious fusion of act, feeling, and thought in particular circumstances. For the actor, the ability to enter into a role so intimately that feelings appropriate to the dramatic moment accompany the interpretive embodiment of the character is a function of a certain kind of practice, method, and experience. This work—a profound act of self-giving—permits, Winston notes, “the joy and celebration of our common humanity” (2002, p. 251). And he hastens to list the benefits, which include the understanding of the spiritual beliefs, rituals, and symbols of human cultures which are inscribed in the stories of performance traditions. However, playing in the background of this, the barest of outlines of what happens as an actor prepares, is, I submit, the musicality of Crites' sacred story. It can be heard in the notion of the sacrificial dimension of drama.

This is not to suggest that sacrifice, as the emptying of the mind of all personal preoccupations to make way for the complex products of imagination that inform an interpretive embodiment of a character role, is somehow and inevitably, an invitation to the transcendent, or a walking through the wardrobe door to a spiritual world. As Bailin (1993) has cautioned, there is no inevitability about the salubrious outcome of drama as

an unguided activity. However, it is to observe that this art summons both actor and audience to an experience of the polymorphic character of a consciousness that recognizes the enchanted unpredictable moments of fusion when word and action rush into synchrony with meaning and emotion: moments when the sacrifice of the actor rivals that of the shaman in its power to touch and bring new life.¹²

The possibility of this felicitous outcome notwithstanding, it would be wrong to leave polymorphous consciousness in an apparent paroxysm of aesthetic fatuousness. As Carr (2005) has pointed out, it is certainly the case that the dramatic aspects of art are as often apt to disquiet and trouble consciousness by bringing to view and calling into question accepted societal values. So the culturally recurrent notion that children (“out of the mouths of babes”) and madmen (*Don Quixote*) at times see moral truth with greater clarity also finds its way into sacred story. We cannot, according to one version of this story, enter the spiritual realm unless we embrace the capacity to see through different eyes and, as it happens, they are the eyes of children.¹³

The central themes in both of the above examples are the requirements of self preparation involving a releasing or giving up of the preoccupations of the conscious mind, the engagement of intense concentration, and the openness to new possibility. In this understanding, the ethical and the spiritual are brought into view together through a background narrative in which the lilting theme of self-giving in a relational context is joined with an offer of emotional experience as a source of knowledge and judgment. In

¹² Winston (2002, p. 251) alludes to the work of Schechner in performance theory in which there is some comparison between ritual and theatre, shaman, and actor.

¹³ “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 18:3

the literature of philosophy, to which I now turn, the correspondence between the union of ethics, the spiritual, and the self assumes a somewhat different form.

Philosophical Care of the Self

Cottingham (2003), meditating on the relationship of scientific method and spirituality, points out that a foundational presupposition among the ancients was that the truth was never simply given to a subject without regard for the interior disposition of that individual. Drawing his inspiration from Foucault's reflections on the ancient concept of care of the self, he notes that the turn of attention inward—generally considered to be a feature of spirituality—had significant meaning in cognitive terms in the Greek philosophical tradition pre-dating Christianity. The reception of truth was ultimately dependent upon the development of a particular attitude in which one's receptivity was significantly altered—a view which favoured particular attention to the self and to the care of the soul as reflected in certain ascetic and religious practices. Cottingham (2003) cites the work of Pierre Hadot concerning the Socratic and Hellenistic traditions in philosophy:

All spiritual exercises are, fundamentally, a return to the self, in which the self is liberated from the state of alienation from which it has been plunged...The self liberated in this way is no longer merely our egoistic, passionate individuality: it is our moral person, open to universality and objectivity, a participating in universal nature or thought... (Hadot, as cited in Cottingham, 2003, p. 45)

In the religious development of this idea within Christian tradition, there emerged, for example, the specific concept of *metanoia*—a profound change of heart that would

allow the truth to be received and to alter the flow and direction of life. That transformation represented a second dimension of this view of reality; there would be, in the process, a reciprocal response from the other side involving some kind of fulfillment or transformation. “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8: 32).

The advent of Cartesian thinking and the scientific method obviated the need for such a subjective attitude and alteration of inner bearing. Truths, and practical solutions to life’s problems, were now available in return for the application of appropriate cognitive skills and objective procedures. Whereas in the past, the response to the mysterious forces beyond human control had to be sought in some form of inner adaptation, perhaps the calmness and tranquility of resignation, now the possibility of becoming, in Descartes words, “masters and possessors of nature” could be realized (Carr, 2003b, p. 42). The idea of spirituality as the cultivation of receptivity in a relational context of reciprocation was effectively dismissed.

The shift from attention to an inner attitude of expectation to a focus on method and objectivity meant not only a shrinkage of the domain of the mysterious, but an altered attitude toward the spiritual. Mystery, as the unknown, became provisional, awaiting the application of the method and the spiritual, and was now confined to a shrinking sphere in which truth does not admit of access by science. In the pursuit of wisdom to guide human life, ethicists from various rationalist traditions including virtue, character, and Marxist traditions, rest in the Cartesian confidence that the truth can be apprehended through the exercise of appropriate cognitive skills harnessed in method (Cottingham, 2003). In these contexts it is often the appeal to deductive logic and the crisp, tightly knit,

unassailably assembled propositional thesis that dominates the discourse and carries the day.¹⁴ Although the truth—in science as well as in ethics—may be viewed as a rather more complex phenomenon than Descartes perceived it, it is nevertheless thought to be accessible through the application of more or less objective procedures (Carr, 2003). It follows, in this worldview, that ethical discussions need to focus on what rationality dictates one should do and what rights ought to be legislated in reasonable and just societies.

Despite the overwhelming emphasis on the rational and the general abandonment of spirituality as the search for, or cultivation of, an interior posture or an attitude which would allow one to receive truth, the philosophical tradition of care of the self has, I suggest, lately returned in the modified, affectively weighted, and gender-inflected form of the ethics of care. This assertion treads clumsily over many distinctions that philosophers would almost certainly want to make, especially given the various versions of care ethics that have been developed. However, I beg temporary indulgence in order to link the two traditions through one central concept whose meaning, derived from theology, is best understood as spiritual.

Theology, Kenosis, and the Self

First, while it has been acknowledged that spirituality is not reducible to ethics or aesthetics (Haldane, 2003,) there is a significant link between feminist theological and ethical discourses (Papanikolaou, 2003). The development of feminist positions on care ethics has stimulated considerable thought about the problem of abuse and exploitation of women engaged in caring not only in domestic familial situations, but also in professional

¹⁴ This is not always the case, however, as there can be significant blending of elements as in attempts to blend virtue and care.

and occupational contexts (Card, 1990; Hoagland, 1990; Noddings, 2004; Nussbaum, 2005).

The problem centres on those particular capacities of the self which Noddings has described as “engrossment” and “motivational displacement” (1984, p. 16). These are both premised on the ability of an individual to focus her attention exclusively on the one being cared for, to empty herself of all other concern, and to permit the experience of receiving the other fully. Noddings appealed to Buber’s metaphor of allowing the other to “fill the firmament” (Buber, in Noddings, 1984, p. 32) to describe this action and to highlight her view that it is only in caring for the other that the ethical self emerges (p. 14). This experience of being able to open up to someone else and to be wholly absorbed in their need forms the basis of an assessment of obligation and responsibility in Noddings’ version of care ethics. For her critics, it also represents a significant crack in the foundation of her ethical thought. Hoagland (1990), as was noted in the previous chapter, invokes the term “agape” (self-sacrificing love) from Christian theology to support her contention that this understanding of care serves a masculinist exploitation of women.

Among feminist theologians, the problem is framed in terms of kenotic theory. *Kenosis*—from the Greek *kenoein*, to empty—is generally understood as an emptying of the self, based on its biblical reference to the self-renunciation of the divine nature in the incarnation.¹⁵ This referencing of the kenotic phenomenon within the tenets of faith makes for a different kind of discussion of the problem. Popanikoulaou (2003), for example, approaches the issue using an appeal to the Trinitarian theology of von

¹⁵ Phillipians 2:7

Balthasar to meet objections that the kenotic act involves effacement, self-abnegation, and loss of autonomy. Kenosis, he contends, can be seen not primarily as self-sacrifice, but as a state of being that liberates eros—the freely felt desire to be in relation with another.

I would like at this juncture to note three things based on the brief review above: first, that in the arts, in philosophy and in theology, this capacity of the self for kenosis—the deliberate emptying of preoccupation to permit internal space to be made—calls forth the resources of a polymorphic consciousness capable of simultaneously differentiated levels of awareness; second, that such consciousness and the awareness it enjoins are profoundly relational; and third, that it constitutes a precondition for the reception of that type of cognitively informed emotion that serves an ethical purpose. I am suggesting that a kenotic view of the self takes account of one important, even indispensable, condition which allows the enveloping musicality of Crites' sacred stories to be heard; that music may be understood as embodying what the Chinese have called the *Tao*, the Way (Lewis, 1947; Postman, 1999).¹⁶ It is what permits us to be deeply moved by the hope in a great text, the sound of a voice dear to us, and to know that our pity for Lear, our horror at the Holocaust, our delight in a student's success, our outrage at racism or sexism, all fit in their various ways with a larger good in which for a moment we have shared. It is what allows us to recognize that we have been subject, as Huebner expressed it, to “a leading out by the Otherness that is the source of our transcendence” (1999, p. 361), and that we have come to a place where a response is expected whether we make it or not. Spiritual and ethical education is about making that response.

¹⁶ “It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are” (Lewis, 1947, p. 28).

The kenotic perspective of the self as inherently relational and affectively structured offers no formula for application in spiritual education. Indeed, in one sense it only serves to support Carr's observation that the socio-cultural implication (if not actual provenance) of human emotions in apparently normative patterns of interpersonal association and engagement must give rise to quite serious practical educational difficulties for anyone concerned with promoting capacities for "emotional intelligence" (Carr, 2000, p. 29). This is another reminder that the feminist critics of care are right to be cautious about the theoretical potential of any ethics of self-sacrifice for bolstering existing social patterns of exploitation—not only for women but for all in positions of service. What is needed, Carr allows, is not a manual of instrumental strategies for the production of "effectively affectively functioning persons;" it is rather the nurture of the kind of reflective judgment "which is conducive to assisting young persons to realize their individual potential in some vision of the good which goes beyond any such efficacy" (p. 31). As understood in the artistic, philosophical, and theological contexts above, a kenotic approach to spirituality offers, I suggest, the possibility for nurture of this kind of reflective judgment.

Conclusion: The Advantages of Distinct Spirituality

As a phenomenon distinct from religion, spirituality can be considered as a vital element of human development, and a domain in which study may be conducted to seek that which unites humanity in solidarity (Alexander, 2004). A distinctive feature of approaches in non-sectarian settings is a focus on the experiential, attitudinal, or phenomenological aspects of spiritual life. This may entail the study of narratives of episodes of heightened awareness, exaltation, or perception in which the usual contingent

and mediating effects of language and culture are thought to be suppressed, marginalized, or transcended (Wringe, 2002).

Although the above description of distinct spirituality embraces considerable variation within its ken, it serves nonetheless as a rough template for a sort of all-purpose model which, as Carr (2003) has noted, would appear to confer at least three particular advantages in an educational setting.

1. In offering a non-religiously based notion of spirituality it avoids the narrow parochialism, territoriality, and partisanship of denominational perspectives as well as the political ideology, sexist, and even racist elements that may cling stubbornly to a vocabulary of specific affiliation;
2. A distinct spirituality is at liberty to repudiate dualistic metaphysical doctrines that cordon off spirit from matter and are complicit in disconnected attitudes toward animals and the natural world;
3. It makes “reasonable sense of cross-curricular spiritual education” (Carr, 2003, p. 216).

Given the practical character of Carr’s presentation of the advantages of a distinct model of spirituality, I am emboldened to offer three more, based on my own experience as a Chaplain in an independent school with an international constituency. The benefits of an approach which maximizes the potential for interrelational camaraderie through its focus on common experience seem obvious, particularly in religiously and culturally

pluralistic settings.¹⁷ In addition, there is the matter of resonance between elements of a distinct spirituality and popular culture. By this, I mean the fact that representations of spirituality are conveyed on a daily basis in emails and by way of the media. Often enough they assume the form of wise counsel, urging recipients to address existential desiderata by seeing the glass as half full, seizing the day, or taking time off to engage in another round of golf or a second cup of coffee with a friend. Popular counsel of this sort is now current on the Internet and often accompanied by appealing visual imagery and mood music. To consider the emotivist and individualistic character of this discourse as spiritual is simply to acknowledge that its aim is different: its avuncular recommendations engage a level of meaning beyond the purely instrumental. One is urged to do something not as a means, but as an end in itself.

Although many such offerings can be readily deconstructed into self-serving platitudes or consumer marketing ploys, they do form part of the consciousness of contemporary young people, many of whom have no exposure to alternative definitional contexts by which to assess the meaning of spirituality. However, in the rich interstices between the shallow urgings of the pseudo-spiritual and the resources of a more substantial view of spirituality, there is space for an agent provocateur with an interest in stimulating reflection, an intelligible point of departure whose trajectory can be subtly altered to regions unexplored.

The final advantage that I would add, a variation perhaps of Carr's second point, is also based on experience. A distinct spirituality may well be more effective in

¹⁷ At non-denominational chapel services, Muslims routinely read the Hebrew Scriptures, Jews, the Christian Scriptures, and on occasion, both, along with their Hindu and Buddhist friends, enacted skits to illustrate some universal theme such as loyalty or kindness that they considered important.

approaching that most common, often intractable and mysterious of human experiences: pain. If spirituality represents an engagement concerned with addressing the human condition, then only that form of it capable of making some sense of the experience of pain would be worth our attention. Behind violence in schools it is reasonable to suppose that there is intolerable psychic and spiritual anguish and in the wake of its tragic acting out a great deal more. Faced with the interpersonal demands of classroom practice, a teacher's appeal to forms of spirituality that are identifiable as "from above"—descended through the mediation of the credal and doctrinal formulations of institutional policy—will almost certainly carry affiliative impedimenta that compromise their effectiveness in any pluralistic setting. A lighter touch might be better achieved through contemplating spirituality as a distinct and important part of personal ethical and social development.

The preoccupation with narrative that has dominated the last two chapters has appeared in this one in an even more crucial role. For the definition of spirituality is itself a product of culture and of that aspect of culture whose symbolic character most clearly emerges in narrative forms. It is in the literature, art, music, drama, and dance of the sacred that one must look for evidence that would justify any claim for inclusion of these elements in an already overcharged curriculum. We need to continue asking whether, in the various understandings of spirituality reflected in narrative forms, there is knowledge about the self and its potential that cannot be found elsewhere and that holds promise for the development of a consciousness ever in search of new vision.

It has been suggested that a secular cosmic framework within which to consider the predicaments of the human condition—the ultimate questions of suffering and death—could be offered without any reference to traditional symbolic systems

(McLaughlin, 2003). Conversely, Peters (1981) draws attention to the centrality in Western culture of the stories of the Christian Scriptures, and reminds us of Plato's conviction regarding the efficacy of vivid narrative for teaching moral truths to children. In pondering the difficult questions which such remarks are apt to raise, we might also recall Peters' dry comment that "Little is needed to kindle the desire for money, fame or sexual indulgence....It is much harder to develop sympathy and imagination" (p. 41). To pursue those qualities is to favour a liberal education whose moral aims include a breadth of understanding that opposes dogmatism and authoritarianism and in whose service spirituality may serve with distinction.

Chapter VI

The Self as Ethical Act in Education

The educator does not try to influence, but with the optimism and faith in knowledge as a vehicle to new response-abilities and new conversational possibilities. In essence, he says to the student “Look, with this knowledge I can promise you that you can find new wonders in the world; you can find new people who can interest you; and in so finding you can discover what you are and what you can become...” (Huebner, 1999, p. 113)

This concluding chapter has two objectives: first, to revisit principal viewpoints along the path in a journey of contention that notions of the self in the discourses of education carry significance for thinking about ethics and for ethical thinking; and second, to review in light of the foregoing discussions, how ethically inflected notions of the self might contribute to our understanding of the role of subjectivity in educational experience. Since a principal focus throughout this quest for an understanding of the self and its insinuation in ethical theory has been experience, the chapter is shaped by four narrative references drawn from my own experience in education.

The Sound of Two Hands Clasp

The particular interest in personal experience and phenomenological perspective that forms the background of this study, and with which its genesis is associated, bears an aura of contention. The principal objection to it finds an unerringly eloquent exponent in Carr (2004; 2005) who laments this particular defect as it is shared by the postmodern

approach to spirituality and aesthetics as well as the care approach to ethics. It is an emphasis on the individual, and on personal experience that translates philosophically into a focus on attitude. In spirituality, it yields the “Charybdis of vague, evasive and perhaps ultimately vacuous talk of awe and wonder” (2003b, p. 217); in aesthetics it is “extreme particularist views about art and emotion according to which emotional responses must vary with every shift of intentional content” and which tend to reduce emotions to acts of judgment (2004, p. 232); and in ethics, it appears as philosophically untenable attempts to reconcile “blind feeling” with “sighted reason” (2000, p. 28). Worse, Carr opines, even if a satisfactory account of the emotions could be advanced, such an account could not offer us guidance as to which emotion would be appropriate to a given set of circumstances. So it is that he finds a preoccupation with personal affect and affectively informed response to be a serious deficiency in the ethics of care. Some kind of outside reference to principle will be required in order to construct a coherent account of this ethical approach (2005, p. 139). Carr does concede however, with regard to feeling and aesthetic judgments, that what might be required to furnish a better understanding and explanation of the nature of affect, is a sorting out of the various elements of psychological economy with which such terms as compassion, love, pride and envy are associated (2000, p. 29). This is a fleeting concession of possibility in an otherwise unwavering demand for greater theoretical consistency and less attention to a subjective and potentially relativistic interest in the personal.

The general character of this objection, the artful diplomacy of its concessions notwithstanding, is recognizable in Fenstermacher’s (1994) criticisms of van Manen’s narratively based “pedagogical thoughtfulness and tactful intuition” (van Manen, 1994,

p. 161) reviewed in the first chapter. In that exchange, as in Nussbaum's discussion of the "ancient quarrel" (1990, p. 10) of the philosophers about art and truth, and Phillips' (1997) criticisms of narrative inquiry in chapter III, the concern is with the relationship between reason, emotion, and truth. It also looms large in an attack on Taylor's apparent failure to appreciate the affective dimension of a poststructuralist understanding (2004). It is the chief player in an account of the two dogmas that have dominated educational research for the past century (Alexander, 2003c): a disjunction between the cognitive and the affective; and the radical independence of truth, beauty and goodness. In all these discussions it is the steely rigor of disengaged reason pitted against the whimsical proclivities of an engaged emotion.

Despite considerable sympathy with Carr's calls for philosophical rigor and some sharing of his reservations about the undercurrents of psychogenetic gender bias in the care approach, I am drawn to Noddings' version of care ethics, not least on account of its determination to hold fast to a self that is both strongly relational and resolutely committed to a reflective narrative account of dialogical experience. It represents the prizing of a notion of the self that holds a certain kind of experience as a first datum in the fiercely difficult ethical work of discerning 'what in the world to do now'—though it is more than that, as Margaret Walker notes.

In an examination of top-down theoretical-judicial models of morality Walker (1992) gives credit to the view that the point of ethical deliberation is not just to determine what to do, but to be capable of determining what position you are taking responsibility for. And while she agrees with the progressive view that, implicated in this determination is an understanding of ourselves, as a feminist she wants to add that such

definition in exclusively rational terms is seriously deficient. When we are called upon to make moral decisions, it is as persons already equipped with repertoires of sensibilities, emotional responses, and priorities shaped by previous interaction. Our understanding of these is necessarily constrained by our place in the personal, political and social history in which these have been defined; they are, in any event, not susceptible of exhaustive definition. They are starting points for a hazardous process of negotiation with ourselves and with others in which what our responsibilities, commitments and relationships mean comes to definition. “In this way we determine, together and alone, not only what to do but what and how and with whom to be, and how to think about it in ways that can be shared” (Walker, 1992, p. 32).

This account touches upon two dimensions of the journey of contention in my thesis: that theory matters since the capacity to deliberate about and discuss ethical issues with reference to theory forms part of what it is to be responsible; and that implicated in this responsibility is an understanding of the self. The first point regarding theory prompted a critique of Campbell’s (2003) view that holding fast to particular values such as kindness or compassion did not necessitate any theoretical reference. Despite deep admiration for her emphasis on commitment to values in *The Ethical Teacher*, I understood Campbell’s reference to the relativity of theory to mean that the teaching self, in modeling goodness, had no clear obligation to think about ethics in ways that brought an understanding of theoretical tensions to negotiations in a relational context. My interest, then, and the holy grail of the present quest—at least at the outset—became the relationship between particular notions of the self and their implications for ethical views.

It seemed that the beginning point for any theoretical investigation was, inescapably, the matter of experience and specifically, the experience of subjectivity and otherness. I wish, therefore, in broad strokes, to explain how I understand this to be important for ethics in an educational context. My point of departure is, accordingly, a brief reference to personal experience.

Every teacher I have ever known has demonstrated how a notion of the self, and an understanding of what it means to be a self, shapes the practice of teaching. Is this only a different way of expressing the reasonable idea that every educated person has, in the conceptual inventory of their worldview, an anthropological, ontological, or psychological sense of selfhood that is traceable to some academic or religious tradition? What I propose may certainly include this notion, but looks beyond it. For each of the teachers who graced my path had a particular way of communicating how they understood what it is to be a self.

In grade one it was Miss Haugh who used the metaphor of “the thinking cap” to alert her students that an experience requiring full attention was about to unfold. “Put on your thinking cap” was a summons to shift things on the inside, to push away the thoughts of recess or cookies, and come right to the moment. Following the command, there would be a very slight, but noticeable lull in the proceedings, a time of transition—the professional, pedagogical “wait” time. I believe that she knew nothing of the research that recommends such technical strategy, nor do I think that this was the control technique of the experienced instructor. Her command to put on our thinking caps was, I suspect, a sharing of what the experience of learning was like for her personally, a metaphoric, symbolic shorthand for a way of preparing to be changed. And, I will hazard

the observation that, perhaps because she was a woman and closer to the intercourse of thoughts and feelings in bodies, she knew to insist that this collecting of ourselves under our caps should be accompanied by the clasping of every pair of hands together in the centre of every desk.

It seems quite certain to me, in retrospect, that Miss Haugh, teaching grade one in small-town Ontario in 1953, had read neither Husserl nor Merleau Ponty, and would not have been acquainted with their ideas about embodied subjectivity. Their argument that the ability to recognize the selfhood of another person in a way that would allow interactive relationship was made possible by the structure of one's own subjectivity might not have occurred to her as such (Zahavi, 2005). She might initially have been somewhat taken aback at the observation that, when the right and left hands are clasped, one has, simultaneously, the sense of touching and being touched; that the interior experience of the exteriority of one's own body anticipates the experience another may have of oneself; and that, upon reflection, with the thinking cap firmly in place, the process can be seen to harbour the first stirrings of what we call empathy. That, at least, is what Husserl believed (Zahavi, 2005).

Nevertheless, for Miss Haugh, as for others in my journey through school, the first-person quality of experience and its meaning, implicitly shaped a pedagogy of caring. There was the professor who, at the outset of every class, told a short story about his experience in the war, or in life outside the school, as if to say that our learning would be better if we saw it in the larger context of human affairs. In grade eight, our teacher, a much-loved gentle giant, told us that some days he found himself inexplicably irritated and that on such days, to be fair, he would wear a large yellow tie with black stripes to

warn us off any trifling. Another, a professor of French literature, would ask as we struggled with *Les Fleurs du Mal*, how we had gone about reading each poem, and what the experience was like. He would then describe how poetry required one to be saturated in words, and he explained ways of allowing them to penetrate to a place in the spirit not accessible to the rational mind. It is, he seemed to say, how selves are. Still another, before engaging in a writing exercise, would lead the class in a meditation ending with only breath and silence to still and clear the conscious mind in preparation for the effort of giving birth to thoughts in word.

I want to draw from these references two related observations close to the heart of the present work. The first is that, while it could be argued in each of the examples above that what these teachers offered were purely practical strategies, my impression is that something more personal was in play: a subtext that might have read: “Here is something from my present understanding of the experiencing self that I am; I offer it to you in hope that you too will find it good in your dealings with the world.” In each case, something about the teacher’s approach spoke of an inner saliency: what they did or said appeared, simultaneously, as an outward sign of an invisible and very personal process of sorting out and making meaning of life experiences, and as an act of solidarity. They were, so to speak, offering a hand with the challenge to be led out into a life in which information alone would not help with the more difficult questions.

The second point which explicates the first, and which addresses the question “why this project on the self and ethics in education?” involves the use of a philosophical distinction between the property of an object as experienced, and the experience of the property.

The worldly property of a perceived object, whether physical or mental, is defined by its intersubjective accessibility. In principle, we can all detect that an object has certain characteristics by which it is identifiable, upon which we have agreed and which can be communicated. However, when it comes to the first-person experience of an object—what it is like to perceive a sea lion or a pencil—this level ground drops away and is replaced by an epistemic asymmetry. We do not have the same access to what the perception of the object and its properties is like in the first-person experience of others. One cannot experience that perception in its first-person givenness just as one cannot experience someone else’s pain in the way that person experiences it, even when one has been made aware that the other is suffering.

Philosophically, the strong form of this distinction treads slippery paradigmatic ground—underlying it are issues regarding language, problems of representation, and the ontological difficulty of conceiving of a subject as separate from experience, summed up in Rorty’s comment about our habit of using language inherited from the Greeks: “Their description of our relation to the rest of the universe—descriptions which incorporate the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction—are no longer good enough for us. We can do better” (1999, p. 51).¹ However, the distinction appears here, not as a tenet of cosmic truth, but lightly held for the express purpose of drawing attention to the role of consciousness in the conceptual economy of meaning making in which notions of the self seem inevitably to be implicated. For consciousness, and the ability to distinguish mental states from each

¹ Zahavi notes that while “worldly” properties and the “experiential properties” of first-person givenness can be conceptually distinguished, they can not be separated (2005, p. 124). Zahavi’s observation concerning the distinction represents, it seems to me, something of the subtlety of a phenomenological probing of consciousness: less definitive than Rorty’s (1999) dismissal of essentialism, but more inviting.

other by their differing qualities, is the home of Ricoeur's narratively inflected concept of ipseity or selfhood. (2005, p. 101). In this view, the consciousness we have of ourselves in our narratives of identity becomes a prime scene for investigation. A few comments on the trajectory of the work as it sought to recognize the importance of consciousness and its interrelatedness with experience and ethics are, I think, in order.

My declared intent to consider relations between notions of the self, and the way ethical knowledge comes about, circulated around a view of experience that shaped the presentation.² MacIntyre's notion of incommensurability was introduced to preface a discussion of essentialist and anti-essentialist perspectives as expressed in Taylor's language of personal resonance and Semetsky's poststructural critique. My hope was to investigate, and bring to sharper definition, what conflicting ontological paradigms had to say about the self as considered through representations of, and thinking about, experience. Since the approaches of Taylor and Semetsky regarded language differently, I wondered whether descriptive terminology such as dialogical dimension, identity, or agency could occupy any meaningful middle ground in a presentation that demonstrated appreciation for both paradigms. Behind this attempt to bid diverse perspectives to "speak to each other politely," as one critic observed, was a curiosity about the relationship between shared visions of responsible personhood and opposed theoretical notions of selfhood.

The shared visions of responsibility appeared to be rooted somehow in experience. Deleuze's notion of stuttering, Sartre's transversality, and Taylor's horizons

² This was the question expressed in Chapter I as "How is what you are as a teacher, affected by how you think you know?" (p. 28)—a question based on the link between our ways of knowing and our human relationships (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 182).

of significance and languages of personal resonance, all seemed capable of interpretation as metaphors for an experience in which the shifting, evanescent quality of first person consciousness defies representation, or accuses the author of either a pathetic shortfall or outright traducement. This phenomenon is sometimes reported by artists, musicians, or writers who may at times desire to destroy their work since it seems to them to fall so far short of the experience they were moved to represent. I referred to this sense of otherness as the transcendent referent. It was an attempt to point back to the bedrock of personal experience and to ask whether, here, in conscious experience, there might be some common element that could shape ethical response in a way unfettered by paradigm constraints. But I will return to my description of teachers to pursue that question.

Yellow Ties: Consciousness, Self, and Intersubjectivity

In my personal narrative examples above, teachers can be seen as having consciously chosen to cross the borders between two realms: from the province of the intersubjectively accessible they offered discourse concerning negotiated and agreed upon worldly properties. From the territory of the first-personal they offered an amalgam of the perception of worldly properties and what those perceptions were like for them. It is important to make clear that I am not referring to the feckless gush of personal rhetoric that some teachers see as their prerogative behind closed classroom doors. I want to point, rather, to glimpses of the workshops of the mind and heart in which thoughtful people construct worldviews of great sensitivity and passion. Such glimpses may involve the meaning of books read, voices heeded, and the values and priorities that have shaped lives; this disclosure of meaning may also include the tools they have found useful: the concepts, languages, and cultural assumptions that were brought into play. In the case of

Mr. Valentine, my yellow-tie teacher, it was a personal disclosure about affect (I care about you), limitation (I'm flawed), and social solidarity (we'll strive for justice together and accommodations will include interpretation of symbol). In short, their disclosures entailed a communicative form whose amplitude describes the concerted thought and feeling of personal experience with which any account of "what it is like" is infused.

Even to think a thought occasions a perceptual experience that has a peculiar quality, and is "like something." And, while there may not be infinite variability, it does seem that the experiential shades and colorings with which thinking is infused are astonishingly varied. So, for example, Abram (1996) in describing Merleau-Ponty's preconceptual experience, explains the fusion of perceptions as synaesthesia, a process in which an intertwining of the senses issues in the oxymoronic language of "cool," "warm," or "loud" colours, or "soft" music. The same fusion can also be seen to extend to the perception of mental processes.

When we speak of ideas that stink, attitudes that are wooden, notions that are tasteless, or stories that are musical, our metaphoric register exposes a ratiocination that is not innocent of the sensual. This curious feature would seem also to be associated with our ability to distinguish one mental state from another. The sense of what it is like to read different authors includes the identification of common properties that will find at least some general acknowledgement, as is illustrated in Postman's (1995) comment that no matter how hard one tries, *Mein Kampf* cannot be understood as a paean of praise to the Jews. But beneath that, the perception of what it is like to meet someone through their writing remains personal and different from what it is like to work out a quadratic equation. Among the reasons for this is the matter of saliency.

When David Abram comments that “When we begin to consciously frequent the wordless dimension of our sensory participations, certain phenomena that have habitually commanded our focus begin to lose their distinctive fascination and to slip toward the background” (1996, p. 63), he is referring to saliency. Husserl’s well-known assertion regarding intentionality—that all consciousness is consciousness of something, sets the stage for an astonishing selectivity within consciousness. Why, of the thousand and one perceptions of which one is capable in any moment, is the field narrowed so dramatically, and in a manner not always easily explicable? How and on what basis does consciousness select its objects? Abram’s comment reminds us that some of the mechanisms that lead to our choosing some things over others for conscious attention can be appreciably linked to certain decisions, while others are quite opaque.

To question what it is about the first person givenness of perceptions, imaginings, and recollections that allows them to become objects of consciousness in which their infinite relations are apparent, is to court a certain astonishment. As Abraham Heschel remarked, such consciousness involves “radical amazement” as we wonder at how a minimum of perception becomes a maximum of enigma (Scheindlin, 2003, p. 185). Such questioning is also, in a way, a rebuke to a fatuous neurophysiological reductionism that declares this or that mental process to be ultimately explicable in materialist terms. As Wittgenstein observed, meaning, understanding or love could not be physical processes since no such processes could have the consequences of meaning (Carr, 2004a).

However, the most important dimension of pondering saliency as the selectivity of consciousness is that, at one level, it collapses the distinction between inside and outside. For to investigate the conditions under which things appear to me so as to allow

an experience of them describable in terms of “what it is like” is actually to aim at uncovering intersubjectively intelligible structures. This means that the full focus of my attention is really not on the purely individual bits of data—the scraps and stories of memory and imagining—that are brought to saliency in my consciousness. It is instead a matter of asking what it is about the manner of their appearing in my consciousness that discloses the world. We are brought face to face with the call of consciousness to go beyond the postulates of common sense and to confront the problem of how the world is constituted (Zahavi, 2005).

So, in adopting such an attitude in the classroom for instance, a teacher would pay attention to the givenness in consciousness of such public objects of the environment as people, social relations, and states of affairs within the school community and beyond. However, the principal focus would be on the subjective factors that allow these things to be presented in consciousness in certain ways. This is the phenomenological attitude which finds the expression of phenomena as possible experience for others also in the intelligibility of intersubjective language (van Manen, 1990, p. 58). Such investigation and questioning becomes, therefore, an act of solidarity, for its efforts to find meaning, or for the conditions under which meaning emerges, necessarily occur beneath a dialogical horizon of significance. This is the context in which the limitless variability and richness of Taylor’s languages of personal resonance are poised to make their contribution to experience.

In this light, the form of phenomenological reflection developed by Pinar (1976) more than a quarter of a century ago, which he named *currere*, can be seen as an example of a methodological invitation to solidarity within the educational community. Traversing

the steps of remembering the past, imagining the future and coming to a synthesis of elements in the present, there is a preoccupation with the meaning of experience and the way that meaning emerges. The question which Pinar himself has asked of the process is whether its temporal form renders it an inherently ethical activity.³ If we were to apply Ricoeur's categories, the answer might well be affirmative, since the enrichment of narrative identity that is the fruit of such a process of reflection, offers the possibility of an assertion Ricoeur considers crucial (2005, p. 128). It is the definition of our sense of self that comes in answering the question: Who will do it? I will...I commit to it. With the illocutionary force of this assertion of covenant, one has entered the dialogical theatre, set to do or to give something. But, Ricoeur asks, what is the source of this force of commitment? It consists, he suggests in "a will to self constancy, to remaining true to form, which seals the story of a life confronted with changes in circumstances and changes of heart. It is an identity that is preserved in spite of...in spite of everything...(2005, p. 130).

The teachers featured in my narrative litany above, were, of course, not all acquainted with phenomenology, *currere*, or philosophers of consciousness such as Ricoeur. And there may, in any event, be no clear connection between a deep understanding of conscious life and a deep commitment to live a moral one. However, I would note that all exhibited a capacity for the appreciative embrace of differing points of view; and that the merit of Schwab's polyfocality and Nussbaum's high theoretical generality would, I suspect, have struck a resonant chord with them.

³ Personal correspondence, Feb. 2007.

Self and Story: Saturated by Words

The teacher who began each class with a narrative of experience had been a B52 Bomber pilot and had faced the possibility at each take-off that he and his aircraft loaded with bombs would hit a bump or fail to clear the field and explode; or that he would survive to be shot down over Germany. I think that he was an essentialist. Rorty's (1999) statement that there are "relations all the way down, all the way up, and all the way out in every direction: you never reach something which is not just one more nexus of relations" (1999, p. 54) might not have made sense to him. It was a long way down, a long way up, and a fiery way out in every direction; a total loss of relations was a hard no-nexus reality, close and deserving of an awe that might slip the surly bonds of words.

Nevertheless, he did understand that there are quite different ways to read, interpret, and understand and he was well acquainted with the distinction between exegesis and eisegesis in confronting a text.⁴ His personal stories seemed always to assume that we were in the process of assembling our own narrative accounts and there were things of which we ought to take note. One of those was self-deception. Some of his stories dealt with this head on and in others it was a subtext. The wholeness and integrity of the life his stories represented depended upon the gradual acquisition of what Bruner and Polkinghorne termed narrative competency. Narrative as a synthesis of the heteronomy of lived experience, filtered through the membranes of cultural form and coagulated by interpenetrating insights would have made much sense to him as it has to those for whom it revolutionized qualitative research. But in the end, the coherency of

⁴ Exegesis: explanation, exposition or interpretation of a text with particular attention to the intent of its author and its possible meanings in an original context. Eisegesis: the interpretation of a text by reading into it one's own ideas (OED)

one's story had more to do with the shattering of illusion and the resonance of plot with those moments when one of the hard glittering certainties of Nussbaum's cataleptic knowledge (1990) had broken through the veil of misrepresentations that folly or will ceaselessly replicate in culture. One of those moments was about his wife who had died, and the realization that his culturally coherent story of effort to fashion worldly success so he could spend more time with her had missed the mark, for suddenly she was gone.

Comment on this aspect of the power of story must include the monumental work of Bruner and Polkinghorne in bringing the importance of narrative to the centre stage of educational practice; the extended space devoted to them in this project is underpinned by recognition of signal service. However, their narrative hermeneutic appears to come at the price of the limitation of possibility for ethical reflection.⁵ I think that when my pilot professor thought about his wife, he reckoned with the way in which the story of their relationship appeared in his consciousness, and that the manner of its appearing determined how he would represent that story to his students. For, implicated in his narrative of experience, was the recognition that this story was part of a much larger one—a story of commitment, in which people, even in tragedy, are moved to offer to others, at considerable cost to themselves, something about what experience is like, something that might help.

So too, with the professor of French who taught the appreciation of poetry through saturation in words. His offering was not of a method for securing better grades or enhancing his student evaluations. It spoke, rather, of a conviction that when attention

⁵ For a view of the way in which Bruner's narrative theory exercises an influence on his interpretation of a particular life history see *The Narrative Creation of Self* (2004). Comparison of his approach with that of Paul John Eakin (1999, p. 49), who examines the same story, illustrates a theory of strict cultural determinism in action.

is paid to the quality of consciousness in learning, there comes the same awareness of the fields of force that John Ciardi (1964) refers to in “How Does a Poem Mean?” They are the awareness of the natural world, of finitude and the inevitability of death, of oneself, and finally of the dimension of personal commitment or duty or social obligation, or just the realization that one “cannot indulge a mood forever” (Ciardi, in Charlesworth & Lee, 1964, p. 327).

Of course, nothing in Bruner and Polkinghorne’s anti-essentialist approach to narrative denies awareness of social responsibility and indeed clarification of the role stories may play in fashioning a responsible social identity serves it well. And yet, there is a difference, and I submit, one worth further investigation, in what it is like to think of ethical responsibility as a particular, culturally determined way of using language on one hand, and on the other to see it as an emergent property of relational negotiation which may, or may not, participate in some larger vision of goodness. I think that the latter view can be seen in operation in Arthur’s (2005) suggestion that it is worth struggling together to come up with some shared values—rather than rule-based accommodations—in a school community. Whatever may be the judgment here, and of course there are myriad issues to be addressed, the fact remains that the teaching or use of narrative in the framework of only one paradigm is not the best we can do.

Feminist discussions which so richly employ, and reflect upon, the different dimensions of narrative illustrate the last point. If one single overarching feature offers itself for distinction in feminist thinking it would, for me, be the summons to review the situated complexity of selves as embodied creatures in light of the possibilities for evil and for good. Amidst the crisp rationalism of declarations concerning the existence or

non-existence of distinctions between intrinsic or extrinsic, inside or outside, real or apparent, feminism arises in narrative form to confront, rebuke, cajole, and expose the ethical immediacy of sharing the planet with others.

What an egregious pity it would be if students were not introduced to feminist writing and allowed to consider how, in its various forms, it links the consciousness of a woman in a mud hut in Kenya with another in a university office in Canada: that it can be seen as a great movement world-wide, an awakening that embraces the causes of justice and care for people, for sentient life, and for the earth.

The difference in the feminist approach, it can be argued, is one of subtle hermeneutic flexibility. The use of narrative for reflection on identity, or for ethical purposes, conforms to the patterns identified by Bruner and by Ricoeur: moral negotiation as a continuous process of working out a coherence between lives and values; a mapping of new situations onto old understandings; an imagining of possible futures; a weighing of the significance of relationships and the commitments which they occasion. What represents, perhaps, a departure from the pattern is that the process of adapting existing values and honouring standing commitments is carried out with a flexibility more attuned to the perceptive demands of relationship. It is a “logic of interpersonal acknowledgement” (Walker, 1992, p. 33) and that, as the poet has said of the road taken, “has made all the difference.”⁶

In the domain of practical pedagogy the above observations could be seen to support certain bedrock caveats in the use of narrative. Conle’s conception of “frozen stories”, their stifling effect on human relations and their potential compromise of

⁶ Robert Frost: *The Road Not Taken*.

individual rights, serves as a reminder that insouciance in matters hermeneutic may lend itself to an interpretive stance that favours a self insensitive to matters of justice that involve gender, ethnicity and social class.

Similarly, Strawson's reservations about the normative weight of the prescriptive narrativity thesis would seem to suggest that the way in which narrative is presented as an exercise in classrooms can have serious consequences for students. The well-meaning teacher who unwittingly views narrative through the monocular lens of a particular theoretical model, offering it along with packaged criteria as an essential step in constructing a socially acceptable identity may imperil the very development of a mature sense of self targeted by the exercise. Worse perhaps, is that a rigid insistence on a rhetorical or theoretical model carries with it – at least in the matter of telling one's own story – an implicit circumscription of ethical agency. To enforce a particular model risks denial of the complex ways in which repressed and forgotten material from the unconscious emerges in that continual refiguration of stories that resists a passive moulding of self through the imposition of cultural forms.

More positively expressed, a teacher equipped with a variety of theoretical perspectives concerning the appropriation of meaning, and the willingness to bring them into play, could embrace narrative as one sphere of possibility for the discovery and making (as Nussbaum has noted) of meaningful personal commitments. Carr's notion of proleptically inflected questions as part of narrative knowing and ethical action represents such an opportunity.

Carr had suggested that asking oneself certain kinds of questions about what one is actually doing in a situation makes consciousness of narrative part of ethical action.

Posing future-perfect tense questions such as, ‘When I look back on this process what will I have wanted to see accomplished?’ allows for the merging of past, present and future through a conscious quest for meaning in temporal perspective. This broader context for decision making opens up the possibility for recognition of diverse points of view, the usefulness of paradox and the value of perspectival complementarity as a way of maximizing the good in ethical debate. Asking keenly perceptive questions is a learned skill as any cross-examination debater knows. Narrative presents teacher and students – properly equipped – with opportunities to develop the acuity, the range and the depth of the questions they allow themselves to ask. This process of development may serve very well in the development of a self, finely tuned to language and culture and equipped to undergo educational experience that welcomes and benefits from provocation, doubt, wonder and immersion in the dynamic tension and sometimes uncomfortable uncertainty that contradiction occasions. The sense in which all of this serves ethicality, however, warrants further discussion.

Breath and Silence

It could have been reasonably expected that the end product of this project might involve a modest map of sorts—a satellite image of remotely sensed data presented in terms of the definitional difference they present on a continuum of spectral reflectance. So for example, in viewing notions of the self from altitude, Kinsella lists three (2005), Neisser, five (1993), and Strawson (1997), no less than 17 different conceptions. However, my interests, and the nature of the source material I chose to examine, led in a rather different direction, one which did not suggest a numerical adumbration of species accompanied by a diagrammatic correlation of each with major ethical systems. This is

not to suggest that such a presentation would not be possible. Indeed, a fine-grained description of such relations might be elegantly ordered; and the demonstration of certainty that particular combinations of ontological and epistemological views are clearly adaptable to deontological approaches and others to some version of pragmatism, might be welcome in some quarters. However, what became evident at length, perhaps through the feminist lens, was that the notion of the self embraced, and the ethical theory recruited to serve were secondary to the manner in which both were brought to bear. The “logic of interpersonal acknowledgment” as indicated above does not represent another court of appeal, but rather an emphasis to be applied in the negotiated development of ethical understanding. A metaphor for illustrating the primacy of this application might be found in the consciousness of the actor.

An actor arrives on the stage charged with the task of representing a character that, except in the case of improvisation, has been described and subsequently interpreted by a director. The practice in which the actor has been engaged for weeks in rehearsal reflects a vast range of information, from the director’s instruction to do this or that with body or voice, and the actor’s own envisioning of the role, to the way in which his understanding and movement has been shaped by other actors on stage. In the first moments of performance the actor’s consciousness takes in, as well, the reactions of the audience. Now, the polymorphousness of consciousness permits an exquisitely delicate interplay in which there is a coalescence of the manifold details of gesture, voice, and interpretive understanding of the character, with the demands of being in dynamic relationship with others onstage and in the audience. For an experienced actor, this sketch of the character of consciousness in action would likely appear very crude. For there are

doubtless so many more dimensions of awareness that come to the task. There is, for example, the matter of breathing for the channeling of effort, and of the use of silence for effect. But here, nonetheless, in the recognition of the polymorphic character of consciousness can be seen the single capacity of the self without which any meaningful understanding of responsive and responsible human action could not occur.

The polymorphousness is not itself indicative of the ethical. As Lonergan has pointed out, what the mind finds in the “welter of conflicting philosophic definitions and from the Babel of endless philosophic arguments” is antithetical solutions at the root of which are its own complexity (1957, p. 386). However, when this polymorphic consciousness comes together in narrative, the process would seem to be tilted decisively in an ethical direction. For giving a storied account of who one is, however decentred, multiple, or fractured—still entails an inescapable reference to one’s commitments. However fierce the demands of stage acting on the polymorphic potential of consciousness, they scarcely exceed those of being an ordinary person facing the mundane challenges of everyday existence. In this regard, my teacher’s offering of breathing and silence reflected, it seemed, part of her own inner life: an intentional kenotic pattern of emptying and openness in which creative practice and genuine care are enriched by being brought together in embodied action. This species of kenosis points, I think, to the way in which a consideration of notions of the self and ethics are linked to educational experience. For, considered in this context, it is about mindfulness and the care of the self. It is an approach that considers the role of subjectivity and suggests what I would term pedagogical inflection.

To inflect is to bend, turn, or curve inward. Pedagogical inflection might be considered to describe the presentation of a subject, or the direction of learning, in a way that includes a slight bending inward—an artful acknowledgement that meanings and their imbrications in language reflect the experience of personal embeddedness within traditions and the communities of discourse by which they are comprised. Such pedagogical inflection might well endorse the value of perspectival nimbleness—the ability to leap lightly from one point of view, realization, or level of consciousness to another and to hold them in tension. This is how I understood the concept of transversality, and Nussbaum’s cataleptic knowledge which involved a back and forth movement between the vantage point of a character in a novel and the parallels with one’s own life.

Pedagogical inflection might also enjoin the capacity to be mindful, still and attentive both to activity without and within. If care of the self is considered to include the bringing together of these concepts of nimbleness and mindfulness, then surely the task of pedagogical inflection will serve an ethical purpose. For the phenomenological attitude—the gradual development of the capacity to be attentive to the conditions under which deeply meaningful understandings come to light and thus, to hear the underlying music of Crites’ sacred stories—would seem to be bound up with knowledge as a way of being.

So it is that teachers who turn to thinking caps and clasping of hands, symbols about their necks, narratives and poetry, breath and silence, have bequeathed to their students something whose value has more to do with an awakening to story than a passing on of information, though the two are inseparable friends. Much remains to be

learned about that very relationship and how the astonishing variety of selves is formed in its crucible. That is, however, another project.

This study ends with a return to the beginning and the strong recommendation of the candidacy of a notion of the self for attention in education. It is Graham's notion of a "the shadow of a self that can never finally be taken hold of or subdued" (1991, p. 31), a self whose features must be sought and reconfigured in every new age; it is the self awakened thirty years ago in the educational community by Pinar's call to run *currere's* course in the examination of consciousness. This is the self convulsed by a quest for meaning (Taylor, 1989), considered as minimal (Lasch, 1984), or declared as being no one (Metzinger, 2003). It is nevertheless strongly present in the calls for care (Noddings, 1984), and in the feminist voices demanding justice and the acknowledgment of the multifarious character of consciousness. In education such calls represent both opportunity and responsibility.

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