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## ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF VIGILANCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RE-ARTICULATION OF THE TEACHER

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Recent legislation restricting the topics teachers may discuss with students raises the issue of what role the teacher should play in society. We argue that this legislative scrutiny of teachers is symptomatic of an aversion to defining what a teacher *is*. We argue that, though a reluctance to provide an explicit definition of “teacher” may be warranted for reasons of democracy, academic freedom, and diversity, it also leaves open the possibility of political appropriations of the teacher, some of which may be the antithesis of democracy, academic freedom, and diversity. The role of the teacher thus remains subject to perpetual interrogation and change. A well-theorized and stable definition of the teacher, then, would preclude appropriations of the teacher for political purposes such as cultural assimilation,<sup>1</sup> religious indoctrination,<sup>2</sup> or economic gain.<sup>3</sup> Such a definition would need to be sufficiently broad to be applicable to all teachers in all places, while remaining narrow enough to ward off undemocratic impositions. In other words, the definition must be ontological, structural. We employ the work of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida to evaluate the meaning of “teacher.” We first give an example of a legally binding document that provides *only* negative definitions of the teacher. We then provide an overview of Derrida’s theory of iterability and Heidegger’s philosophy of language, while utilizing and critiquing an alternative conception of the Derridean teacher offered by Charles Bingham. We argue that the teacher, properly construed, ought to engage in an explicit, intersubjective inquiry into the ontological foundations of existence.

### CODES OF ETHICS

The Georgia Code of Ethics for Educators (GCEE) will serve as an example of a legally binding document that refrains from making any positive determinations of “teacher.” The purpose of the code is to define “the professional behavior of educators in Georgia” and serve “as a guide to ethical conduct.”<sup>4</sup> Though the GCEE *does* provide a list of definitions which apply to

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Llewellyn, *Comanche boys at the Albuquerque Indian School*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1882, The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, P08585, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/code-talkers/collection-gallery/>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts*, Harvard University Press, 1929.

<sup>3</sup> Deron Boyles, ed. *The Corporate Assault on Youth: Commercialism, Exploitation, and the End of Innocence* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> “The Code of Conduct for Educators,” Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 1, <https://www.gapsc.com/rules/current/ethics/505-6-.01.pdf>.

the teacher, all of them define what teaching is only negatively. The explanation of the term “educator,” for example, is circular and empty: “‘Educator’ is a teacher, school or school system administrator, or other education personnel who holds a certificate issued by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission...”<sup>5</sup> An educator, in other words, “as defined by the Code,” is “a person holding a certificate from the authors of the Code.” The other terms defined by the GCEE behave less like definitions and more like warnings:

- (a) “Breach of contract occurs when an educator fails to honor a signed contract for employment with a school/school system by resigning in a manner that does not meet the guidelines established by the GaPSC.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, “Child endangerment occurs when an educator disregards a substantial and/or unjustifiable risk of bodily harm to the student.”<sup>7</sup> The terms “inappropriate” and “physical abuse” are defined in an analogously negative manner.

Though the GCEE was first adopted in 1994,<sup>8</sup> other professional codes of ethics preempted it by more than a century. While there may not have been a legally binding Code of Ethics, educational licensure was required as early as the nineteenth century, when being a teacher meant adhering to strict lifestyle expectations. Practical concerns over the availability of teachers in rural schoolhouses led to the institution of a rule against women getting married while teaching.<sup>9</sup> Marriage, the logic goes, is “normally followed by pregnancy,” and “the teacher would most likely be unable to finish the term if she were to become pregnant.”<sup>10</sup> Other rules targeted the teacher’s “honor,” which meant that female teachers caught smoking or courting men were considered bad role models for children.<sup>11</sup> Male teachers, however, were allowed to “go out” one or two nights a week. Violations of these rules led to immediate termination.<sup>12</sup> The American Medical Association’s (AMA) 1847 code, on the other hand, was described as “deontological.”<sup>13</sup> “Medical men,” it states, are duty-bound to risk their safety for the community. In return, the community is to afford respect and deference

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<sup>5</sup> “The Code of Conduct for Educators,” Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

<sup>6</sup> “The Code of Conduct for Educators,” Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

<sup>7</sup> “The Code of Conduct for Educators,” Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

<sup>8</sup> Hope La’Monica Fordham, “An Examination of Standard Violations from 2002 to 2004 of the Georgia Code of Ethics,” (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2005), 10, [https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/fordham\\_hope\\_1\\_200508\\_edd.pdf](https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/fordham_hope_1_200508_edd.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Valerie Strauss, “Rules for Teachers in 1872,” *The Washington Post*, June 2, 2011, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/rules-for-teachers-in-1872-no-marriage-for-women-or-barber-shops-for-men/2011/06/01/AGTSSpGH\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/rules-for-teachers-in-1872-no-marriage-for-women-or-barber-shops-for-men/2011/06/01/AGTSSpGH_blog.html).

<sup>10</sup> Strauss, “Rules.”

<sup>11</sup> Strauss, “Rules.”

<sup>12</sup> Strauss, “Rules.”

<sup>13</sup> “Code of Medical Ethics,” American Medical Association, 1847, [https://www.ama-assn.org/sites/ama-assn.org/files/corp/media-browser/public/ethics/1847code\\_0.pdf](https://www.ama-assn.org/sites/ama-assn.org/files/corp/media-browser/public/ethics/1847code_0.pdf).

to their doctors.<sup>14</sup> The AMA's code of ethics is based on a reciprocal interplay of rights and duties, both of which are necessary for the code to function properly.

It is important to note that the AMA's code pertains to what practitioners should *do*: it dictates and prescribes. In this way, the AMA inscribes a clear pattern of behavior for those who become doctors. The early ethical expectations of teachers, however, proscribed specific actions as a preventative measure. In the eighteenth century, for example, the "minimum standards" for educating children were created out of a concern that children might grow up to be a "part of a nonworking pauper class."<sup>15</sup> In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, schools used curricular tools such as McGuffey Readers to instill patriotic values in their students.<sup>16</sup> The earliest U.S. education standards, in other words, were justified on the basis of a concern that some state of affairs *not* come to fruition, the implication being that the job of a teacher was preventative risk-management.

The standards-based reform that took hold in the 1980's reinforced the sense of "risk management" associated with earlier paradigms.<sup>17</sup> The *Nation at Risk* report begins with the phrase "our nation is at risk," clarifying that the danger stems from a "rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and as a people."<sup>18</sup> This reform movement reinscribed the notion of mediating some threat against students *qua* the future of the nation. The threat also manifests as an aversion to defining what "teacher" means, or what "teachers" do. This aversion is apparent even in the early stages of standards-based reform, as in, for example, the attempt to "improve instruction" by providing performance incentives, rather than delineating what instruction should look like.<sup>19</sup> Whereas the AMA's code of conduct describes the actions that doctors *should perform*, codes of conduct in education set standards while avoiding the codification of what teachers *are*.<sup>20</sup>

Because the GCEE is more analogous to an instruction manual on how to avoid risk, rather than a positive delineation of teacherly comportment, the

<sup>14</sup> American Medical Association, "Code of Medical Ethics."

<sup>15</sup> Michael S. Katz, "A History of Compulsory Education Laws," *Phi Delta Kappa* (1976): 12, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED119389.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Albjerg Graham, *Schooling America: How the Public Schools Meet the Nation's Changing Needs* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Lorrie Shepard, Jane Hannaway, and Eva Baker, "Standards, Assessments, and Accountability," *National Academy of Education*, 2009, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED531138.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," The National Commission on Excellence in Education, April 1983, [https://edreform.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/A\\_Nation\\_At\\_Risk\\_1983.pdf](https://edreform.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/A_Nation_At_Risk_1983.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Shepard, Hannaway, & Baker, "Standards," 2.

<sup>20</sup> The more recent focus on "best practices" and "what works" might be an exception to this, although these practices are, as of yet, not required by any binding code. Furthermore, our purpose in highlighting the AMA's code of ethics is not to endorse a "positive" version of a code, but merely to point out that positive versions do exist.

“teacher” *simpliciter* is left undefined. This amorphous teacher interacts with the world in the exact negative image of the standards laid out in the Code. These worldly interactions are, apparently, fraught, requiring strict regulations to prevent risk from actualizing. This preventative orientation casts teachers as potentially harmful actors, and the historical absence of ethical parameters of the teacher allows the profession to be appropriated for myriad ulterior purposes.

#### ERASURE

The failure to provide any positive determinations of “teacher,” however, may be unavoidable. Charles Bingham argues that “the teacher is called upon to erase him or herself in order to become a mouthpiece for whatever content is under consideration,” such that “texts, concepts, ideas...speak for themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Conceptualizing teachers as those who give knowledge to others implies an economy in which information is transmitted from the teacher to the student. This “information” must be construed as immediately clear. People, however, are not immediately clear. Instead, the information taught is always “deferred” and “differed,” according to Derrida’s concept of *différance*. Bingham explains that teachers defer content by “representing content in a reified way.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, teachers differ content because, as Bingham writes, “what one says has a context. One speaks from a certain orientation.”<sup>23</sup>

It would therefore appear that the existence of teachers would be precluded. If teachers are to be translucent vehicles through which ideal entities *qua* content pass, how can those who acknowledge the problematics of this economy still claim the right to be called a “teacher”? Bingham’s solution is a redoubling of teacherly vigilance. He argues that teachers should account for the impossibility of erasing themselves, while acknowledging the non-existence of immediate information that can simply be transmitted. Bingham suggests that teachers need a “heightened awareness” against terminological complacency. We argue that, though Bingham’s identification of the problematic of teaching is cogent, his appeal to vigilance as an antidote to *différance* is precluded by *différance* itself.

#### DERRIDA THE EDUCATOR

Derrida argued in *Of Grammatology* that the history of “Western metaphysics, as the limitation of the sense of being within the field of presence,”<sup>24</sup> inevitably led to the claim that speech, purportedly the purest form of intuitable self-presence, is, for that reason, the natural, metaphysical *home* of truth. Derrida explains that, because the “voice is *heard*...closest to the self,”<sup>25</sup> it has been privileged as the medium through which truth *must* be conveyed.

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Bingham, “Derrida on Teaching: The Economy of Erasure,” *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 27 (2008): 15-31, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Bingham, “Derrida on Teaching,” 20.

<sup>23</sup> Bingham, “20.

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 21.

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Writing was therefore historically deemed a derivative phenomenon, removed from truth and therefore unimportant for philosophical analysis. This overvaluation of speech, however, depended on a metaphysics that is not evidenced in phenomenological experience.<sup>26</sup> The notion that writing is a derivative corruption of speech implies that language is essentially pure;<sup>27</sup> that spoken concepts are *first* intuitively available to a seamlessly perceiving consciousness, only afterw(o)rds to be degraded into writing. Such immediate sonorous intuition is problematic due to the implication of a dualism that sets the soul against the body and inside against outside. Rather than attempt to provide a final critique or resolution to these perennial philosophical problems, however, Derrida observes that overlooked is the *condition of their possibility*.

For Derrida, what makes the problems associated with the matter-form binary thinkable at all is that concepts are precisely *not immediately intuitable*, and that signs are instituted, rather than natural. As Saussure pointed out, signifiers are inherently “unmotivated,” arbitrarily assigned to signifieds without any inherent connection between them.<sup>28</sup> The particular sound “tree” is an arbitrary convention, given meaning only in relation to other signifiers. That signs are arbitrary, however, negates any claims of a “natural subordination” between *categories* of signifiers.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Derrida explains, “if ‘writing’ signifies inscription and especially the durable institution of a sign...writing in general covers the entire field of linguistic signs.”<sup>30</sup> The essential characteristics of writing would therefore be generalizable to language *in toto*.

Writing must, for example, “remain legible despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee...even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written.”<sup>31</sup> Said differently, writing always already implies the possibility of the absence of both the author and the reader. This absence also means that “one can always lift a written syntagma from the interlocking chain in which it is caught or given without making it lose every possibility of functioning.”<sup>32</sup> One can employ a sentence written by anyone for any purpose whatsoever, regardless of the context in which it was written or intended. *Every* signifier, because it is only itself by *not* being its signified, is already constituted by a distance from its referent which renders the sign always already “internally” and “externally” differentiated. Furthermore, the signified need not be “present” to the signifier in order for the signifier to function; when the sign “tree” is typed, there need not be any trees present to the typist’s vision, yet the sign is still *iterable*. Writing is, then, instead

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *A Derrida Reader*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), 80-112.

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Derrida, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Derrida, *Signature Event Context*, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, 93.

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of being a degradation of language, its most essential characteristic. One implication of the generalization of writing is that the plurality internal to language renders problematic all claims to neutral intelligibility. Teachers, then, cannot unproblematically be “mouthpieces,” seamlessly transmitting “content” to students.

Furthermore, the iterability characteristic of language, Derrida argues, is also generalizable to experience more broadly. As we have noted, metaphysics, from Plato to Saussure, has imagined being to be characterized by presence. This “metaphysics of presence” resulted not only in naive versions of idealism and empiricism, but also in the instigation of an epistemological arrogance that Derrida sees as problematic. The notion that signifieds are *both* “thinkable and possible,”<sup>33</sup> *independent* from signifiers *and* referred to unproblematically by signifiers, is, Derrida argues, “dependent upon the onto-theo-teleology” that he aims to critique.<sup>34</sup> To complicate the simple picture of reality as presence, Derrida draws attention to the separation, the difference, that must exist *before* reality-as-presence is articulable. Just as words in a language are only differentiated in comparison to *other* words, objects of our experience are only objects by virtue of their separation from other objects. Just as, in language, it is “an impossibility that a sign...be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence,”<sup>35</sup> it is also an impossibility that presence be recognized, *as such*, without first being differentiated. Derrida calls this originary difference the “trace,” a dissimulating that “has always already begun.”<sup>36</sup> The implication is that, if the trace, rather than concepts or words, is productive of meaning, then the iterability of writing is not only characteristic of language, but also of experience in general.<sup>37</sup>

The “trace” is therefore not a mere inconvenience to be mitigated, but an ontological fact. Because writing *qua* *différance* is generalizable to the entirety of existence, the possibility of perfectly immediately communicable words, or of an idyllic efficiency achieved through vigilant “best practices,” is precluded. Every communication is *already* a corruption, which, in turn, renders intrusion both normal *and* *therefore* nonexistent: a normalized intrusion is no longer intrusive, it simply *is*. Accordingly, education reform proposals that rely on vigilance are doomed to failure. There are no perfect words or techniques that will ensure that students acquire and retain content. We argue that a more phenomenologically accurate definition of teaching will render questions of transmission and clarity obsolete, and act as a bulwark against the appropriation of teaching for undemocratic ends. Formulating this definition, however, requires more than Derrida’s negative observation that experience is constituted by an originary difference.

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<sup>33</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> Derrida, 79.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, 75.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, 51.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Signature Event Context*, 107.

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## THINKING AND SPEAKING WITH HEIDEGGER

Though Derrida argues that Heidegger adheres to the “metaphysics of presence,” we argue that Heidegger preempted Derrida in several of his texts about language. Heidegger, for example, calls attention to the null “middle” that must exist between world and thing, such that the two can be “intimate.”<sup>38</sup> These two “regions,” world and thing, “do not subsist alongside one another,” but, rather, “they penetrate each other.”<sup>39</sup> The world, which Heidegger defines as the “referential whole” that remains always already meaningful, is taken for granted until a jolt of anxiety renders it conspicuous.<sup>40</sup> One of Heidegger’s examples is the drinking jug, which, if removed from its function *as* a jug, only exists as a geometrical shape of kiln-fired clay.<sup>41</sup> The physical, geometrical properties of the clay, however, are not *constitutive* of the jug. “When we fill the jug with wine,” Heidegger asks, “do we pour the wine into the sides and into the bottom of the jug?”<sup>42</sup> Since the sides and the bottom of a jug are solid clay borders, the suggestion is, upon reflection, absurd. Instead, only the emptiness of the jug, which inherently refers to the “open region” in which the jug abides, can properly receive the wine. Furthermore, the jug, considered *as* a jug, cannot be separated from its “belonging-together in the event of drinking,” in “conviviality...farewell...memory...and festival.”<sup>43</sup>

Things and the world, therefore, mutually “carry out” one another.<sup>44</sup> Things “gather” a totalized referential whole into the “nearness” of meaningful experience.<sup>45</sup> There is, further, an uncanniness about this difference between world and thing, exemplified in the moments when we realize that, though things have meaning for us *now*, it could be otherwise.<sup>46</sup> Like ancient ruins that are now fodder for the tourism industry, rather than living, meaningful things-in-the-world, the relation between world and thing is open to revision. This precarious relationship is of the same nature as the relationship that maintains, for Derrida, between signifier and signified. Signifiers are arbitrary conventions, whose universal iterability guarantees the instability of their meaning, just as things can

<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1971), 199.

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 199.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 63, 74. See also Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 86-87.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 84-87. For more about the “as structure,” see Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 84.

<sup>43</sup> Heidegger, 87-88.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 178.

<sup>45</sup> “Near” is not meant here in the sense of “proximity.” Heidegger, 175.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 203.

have different meanings in different time periods and locations. Pol Vanderveelde explains that this linguistic precariousness, rather than constituting a deficiency of language, is rather the means by which we “recover the potentiality in the world.”<sup>47</sup> Instability and iterability are, in other words, fecund.

The challenge, in the context of questions about the word “teacher,” is to clarify how teachers are to *be*. Martin Heidegger’s reflections in *What is Called Thinking?* provide a potential clue. He begins with a defense of realism, comparing the “scientific” orientation towards a tree with the “phenomenological” orientation. The scientific orientation “records brain currents,”<sup>48</sup> analyzes the physical and chemical properties of trees, and determines the length of light waves that produce the colors green and brown, while the phenomenological relation asks: “does the tree stand ‘in our consciousness,’ or does it stand on the meadow? Does the meadow lie in the soul, as an experience, or is it spread out there on earth? Is the earth in our head? Or do we stand on earth?”<sup>49</sup> Like the naive analysis of the jug, the theoretical gaze removes the tree from everything that makes it a tree. It instead becomes hypostatized, alienated from the relational region in which the tree “trees.” *Before* allowing things to be disassembled by theory, instrumentalization, or science, we must first let them be *as* they are in the world.<sup>50</sup>

#### HEIDEGGER’S PRESENCE AND DERRIDA’S DENIAL: THE NOT-TEACHER

So far, we have discussed teachers in their role as users of signs. The problem, however, is that *all* humans use signs, which means that *all* interactions are differed and deferred. What, then, differentiates the teacher from humans more broadly? What is it that is unique to being a teacher? We have seen that the GCEE’s answer is purely negative. We have also argued that this definitional negativity leaves teaching open to the threat of undemocratic political appropriation. A unique, *positive* aspect of the teacher, then, needs to be articulated. Articulating this uniqueness in terms of a vigilance towards word usage, however, is precluded, due to the structural iterability of language and experience that problematizes immanent meaning altogether. If we are to define teaching and teachers, then, while taking into consideration the Derridean and Heideggerian insights above, the relevant aspects of teacherly behavior must be shifted away from what teachers say and do to what teachers *are*.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Pol Vanderveelde, “Language as the House of Being? How to Bring Intelligibility to Heidegger While Keeping the Excitement,” *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 4 (2014): 253-262, 260.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1968), 42.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 43. For information on Heidegger’s realism, see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 199.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 208.

<sup>51</sup> John Wilson and Nicholas Wilson, “The Subject-Matter of Educational Research,” *British Educational Research Journal* 24, no. 3 (June 1998): 355-363. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1501918>.



Focusing on what teachers are means describing the ontological structure of what teachers must be if they are to participate in the instantiation of the phenomenon of learning. We argue, considering both Heidegger's insight that things in the world are first and foremost their relations (e.g., the jug—conviviality), and Derrida's insight that words and experiences are always already self-differentiated, that teachers ought to be "pointers:" teachers should be those who point students away from the teacher (and from the teacher's words) towards the ontological, relational features of the world. Students and teachers would investigate these aspects of experience as they instantiate themselves in the various curricular subjects. How might math and science, for example, be approached in a way similar to Heidegger's analysis of the jug—by foregrounding, that is, their relational and ontological aspects? How might political and historical topics be treated differently if teachers were focused not on transmitting information about Thomas Jefferson or the Civil Rights Movement, but on investigating how these are structured, constructed, and instantiated in experience? Teachers and students would investigate how our experiences of these topics are ontologically constituted, and what this constitution might mean for our interactions with the world, with things, and with each other. "Thomas Jefferson" would not refer to a historical, lifeless figure, but to an active and effective phenomenon of experience. *How* exactly the effect referred to as "Thomas Jefferson" is active in experience would be the subject of investigation: where do we experience this effect? What are its relations? How is it experienced in different places and times?

This construal of the teacher solves two problems. Firstly, the danger that, because of the nature of language and experience, teachers inevitably fail to convey immediately clear information. By redirecting their attention to things and the world, investigating them in themselves *and* as they are constituted by the ontological difference that makes them what they are, teachers and students both learn about structural iterability and circumvent the need for vigilance of the sort explained above. Educational inquiry will explicitly question why such vigilance is appealing to begin with. Secondly, this delineation of the teacher avoids the myriad political, undemocratic appropriations of the teacher characteristic of the history of education in the United States and elsewhere. If teachers are conceptualized as "those who give information to students," then the content of this information is *ipso facto* a topic of political debate. If it is acknowledged that "giving information" is both a problematic and undesirable task for teachers, however, then the possibility of "filling" this information with politically charged contents is precluded. It would be replaced by an ontological investigation into the foundations of experience, perception, language, communication, and knowledge.

One final qualification is necessary: we are not arguing for the naïve possibility of a teaching that escapes *all* aspects of the political. We acknowledge, for example, that teachers are ineradicably human, and that

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humans are ineradicably political.<sup>52</sup> By advocating that students and teachers explicitly investigate the difference between thing and world, we are advocating for an examination into how the political is constructed, and how it operates in experience in cognitive and noncognitive ways. As previously stated, ontological investigations are investigations into the *relations* between things and between things and the world. Put differently, the relations that constitute our experience, as well as experience itself, are brought into the scope of educational inquiry. The political will inevitably be included, albeit in an ontological, structural sense. The difference is that, instead of *providing* knowledge, information, or curricular contents, teachers will direct students toward the phenomenological experience of things as they exist in relation to the world, which means a concomitant investigation of the precarious (and political) nature of this relation. In other words, the teacher is not an instrument of information, but an ally in knowing and being with the student. Attempts at teacherly vigilance and awareness will be, consequently, a non-sequitur.

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<sup>52</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998).

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