Chapter 4
The Servant

INTRODUCTION

We have seen how, in the model of enlightenment, the teacher is caught in a dilemma of domination. On the one hand, if he teaches his students that the shadows are the truth, he is keeping them in the dark, preserving their ignorance and their heteronomy. If, on the other hand, he forces them out of the Cave, with the resulting pain and confusion, he is imposing freedom and enlightenment upon them. Either way, his intervention contradicts the idea that the person must think and learn for himself.

However, there is another possibility. There is a way in which the teacher can be aware of this dilemma, yet still be a servant to the free development of the students. Such teachers locate themselves as in service to a sense of social, political and historical contingency. In short this means that instead of merely teaching within the Cave, teachers may now teach about the Cave. To understand this better, we need first to try to comprehend the meaning of this notion of contingency and its sociological and political significance for education and for the teacher.

At its most basic, the experience of contingency is the experience of the dependence of individuals upon the society in which they live. Sociologically it is the experience of being shaped and formed in and by the norms, values and customs of their society. Individuals are socialised into its language, its fashions and its ideas. When these factors are totally assimilated by individuals they appear merely as things that are taken for granted and as constituting common sense. In general terms, what we are and what we think, even our most critical thoughts, are all contingent upon the social conditions and definitions that make them possible. Nothing about us can be said to be uniquely our own for there is nothing that is not determined by our social environment. Philosophically, therefore, contingency raises questions about our sense of identity. Perhaps there is no individual essence, no independent ‘I’, that can be claimed as one’s own or as one’s unique individuality. Perhaps everything that we believe ourselves to be is only at best a social construction?

Contingency is also highly significant for education. In terms of the Cave we might say that it marks an educational development over the perspective of the master that we have explored above. The master never questioned whether the model of enlightenment that underpinned his practice was itself just another shadow masquerading as truth. Two serious and fundamental implications flow from this awareness of the totality of contingency. First, that everything is a shadow, even that knowledge that thinks that it can see through the illusions of the Cave (or society) and
overcome them. What is a teacher to teach if even the critique of the shadows is only another shadow? Second, some people in the Cave benefit from people believing these illusions. If the mass of people are kept in the dark about the true nature of their situation it doubtless follows that this will be to the advantage of those who maintain this ignorance. Put these two together and you have a very dismal picture of a society ruled by illusions that serve the interests of a few over the many, but that cannot be overcome. Indeed, as we will see later, perhaps the more teachers believe they can overcome such illusions, the greater is their own illusion! Thus, not only is the model of enlightenment seen as unavoidably political; so, also, is the work of the teacher.

Not surprisingly this perspective on contingency presents a new and even more complex dilemma for the teacher who wants to teach about the Cave, or about the society in which she lives and works. On the one hand, the student who is to be made aware of the illusory nature of the shadows becomes aware also that his teacher is part of the structure that perpetuates those illusions. Teaching about unequal power relations could be seen here to reproduce those very same relations. The prisoner, in being enlightened about the Cave, thus remains a prisoner to his teacher. A new purpose for education therefore suggests itself to the radical teacher: that is, to emancipate the prisoner from this reproduction by enabling him to see its political function, and therein to empower him to change the power relations in the Cave. But for this teacher, if she is not to be part of this reproduction, she must find a different relationship with her students than that practised within the enlightenment model. She must find a way of teaching that educates but does not dominate. We will now explore some of the ways in which critical teachers have sought to be servants of the emancipation of their students without simply becoming their masters. This new teacher understands that her teaching is compromised by its own contingency, and she understands therefore that her own identity and the content of this teaching are problematic. They both depend upon the very thing that they are designed to teach against. Somehow this teacher has to teach the truth of political contingency at the same time as revealing the role that she plays in its reproduction.

We saw earlier, in Chapter 3, how the teacher as master fails to adopt this self-critical perspective. In recent years in social theory and philosophy, however, there have developed new, more self-critical perspectives on this experience of contingency. In turn, these critical experiences have produced more critical perspectives on education and on the teacher. As we will now see, it is no longer universally accepted that the job of the teacher is to teach facts about the world as if they were true, or as if they were not themselves politically, historically and socially contingent. It falls to the critical teacher precisely to reveal to the students how and why the view of the world that they have grown up to believe in may only be one particular version of what is true. There may be other ways to understand the world, which they have not yet been taught. There may even be reasons why they have been taught to believe certain things as true and immutable. Indeed, even the idea of truth itself may be seen as
compromised by its contingency upon certain social and political preconditions. Perhaps the idea of transcendental moral and religious truths that could justify teachers as masters was itself only a Cave illusion, a social construction?

The new teacher, aware of this critique of the master, now becomes servant to the power and the implications of the experience of contingency as a social and political education in itself. To begin with he must expose his own mastery as a political fact and thereby as another shadow. This teacher becomes servant not only to raising the critical awareness of the student regarding their contingency upon the social world, but to his own sacrifice as master in doing so. This teacher, as servant to the students’ experience of contingency, can never again justify his practice according to moral and religious visions that dominate the students and prevent them from thinking for themselves. As will become clear, elements of this new perspective on the teacher sit uneasily with and even reject the whole model of education as enlightenment and the role of mastery that it gives to the teacher.

There is a whole range of theoretical perspectives on the teacher in which education aims for the awareness not only of contingency \textit{per se} but also of the contingency of the teacher in particular. We will explore two such broad-based perspectives. The first is from critical theorists in education who argue for the teacher as enabling the emancipation of the student from false ideas that are transmitted through the formal system of schooling. Here the teacher serves the critical and emancipatory thinking of the students, wherein they can come to understand and then change the world for themselves. The second group of perspectives is relatively new. They see the teacher in what can loosely be called ‘post-enlightenment’ or ‘postmodern’ terms. Here it is not the job of the teacher to serve any one idea of student development, but rather to listen to and encourage the many different views of the world that any classroom contains. These ‘deconstructing’ teachers will be servants of difference and pluralism, not masters of any one version of how education should be done or what must be learned and taught as if true. We will now look at each of these in turn.

**CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

\textit{Karl Marx (1818–1883)}

The thinking of Karl Marx may seem to be out of fashion today and certainly does not feature on many courses in higher education that train teachers. Nevertheless there are perspectives on the teacher that are to some extent grounded in the insights of Marx and of Marxist theory regarding contingency within and upon specific political relations.

At the time Marx was writing, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Europe was in the throes of the industrial revolution. The agricultural workers were migrating to the big towns and cities in search of jobs in the mills and the factories. For Marx this signified a new variation on the eternal relationship between rich and poor. In former times, labourers who
worked on the land could at least sustain themselves, even if only to a meagre extent. Now, however, this new migrant labour force had no means of sustaining itself other than through paid employment. The workers had become wage slaves, which in turn gave enormous power to the owners of capital. The latter, the bourgeoisie, held all the cards. The former, the proletariat, simply had to play the hand that fate dealt them. In observing this new kind of slavery Marx made several insightful observations. He noted that the right by law for everyone to own property looked like a form of equality, for all were equal under the law of ownership. In practice, however, since the poor had nothing, their rights under the law meant nothing. Worse still, the legal protection of property institutionalised the privilege of the haves over the have-nots.

Marx also noted that the bourgeoisie ensured that not only civil society but also the state operated in such a way as to defend their own interests. The main weapon used by the state was ‘ideology’. Bourgeois ideology ensured that the values and ideas that constituted common sense and taken-for-granted reality were those that reproduced the conditions that favoured the bourgeoisie. One of the most famous examples was religion. If the proletariat could learn to accept the idea that rewards should not be expected in this life, but rather in the next, then they would be more accepting of harsh working conditions and less likely to demand improvements. Similarly, the Protestant Work Ethic saw laziness as liaison with the devil, and workers were therefore encouraged to see hard work and long hours as a possible route to salvation.

For Marx, then, ideology was a key weapon in ensuring the dominance of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. Whilst hunger and the need to survive won the battle with their material needs, ideology won the battle for their hearts and minds and the worker understood not only that he must sell himself for work to the factory owner but that it was morally right that he do so.

Since Marx’s death, theorists have expanded upon these ideas, in particular regarding the role that teachers play in transmitting ideology to each succeeding generation of workers. This is a very important and controversial aspect of the job of the teacher, for anyone who already teaches or plans to become one. To what extent are teachers just lackeys of the state, educating students in ways that the state demands? Are teachers free to make their own decisions about the most appropriate education for their students, or are they merely passive conduits of the dictates of others? Many have argued that, whether consciously or unconsciously, teachers are always working on the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. We will now look at one example that makes this case in a stark and dramatic way.

**Louis Althusser (1918–1990)**

The French Marxist, Louis Althusser, published an influential essay in 1970 called ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’. In it he outlined a theory of the way in which schools and teachers operated as instruments
of the state. In contrast to the repressive state apparatuses, which used violence against those citizens who threatened the interests of the establishment, the ideological state apparatuses employed more subtle and hidden methods to achieve the same end. Althusser argued that, because of their role within the state, teachers had no practice except that determined ‘by and in an ideology’ (Althusser, 1984, p. 44). For one thing, this ideological function sees teachers employed to differentiate between those students whose future lies in production and those whose future lies in the management of production. All students are taught a number of useful techniques ‘which are directly useful in the different jobs in production’ (p. 6). But in addition it falls to teachers to reproduce in students the value system of capitalism and bourgeois morality. Thus, he says, students learn

the ‘rules’ of good behaviour, i.e., the attitude that should be observed by every agent of the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination (ibid.).

The real subtlety of this reproduction of ideology is that schools look on the surface to be politically neutral institutions. Althusser describes their ideological function as like a concert with a single score, ‘although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent’ (p. 29).

However, there is even worse news for teachers than that they reproduce bourgeois ideology. The cruellest irony of all is that the better the teacher is at motivating ‘difficult’ students to try harder with their school work, the more successfully he assimilates those students into the system that oppresses them. The more conscientious a teacher is, the more effective is his ideological function. In a passage that presents a bleak picture of the ideological role of the teacher, Althusser states,

I ask the pardon of those teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find in the history and learning they ‘teach’ against the ideology, the system and the practices in which they are trapped. They are a kind of hero. But they are rare and how many (the majority) do not even begin to suspect the ‘work’ the system (which is bigger than they are and crushes them) forces them to do, or worse, put all their heart and ingenuity into performing it with the most advanced awareness (the famous new methods!). So little do they suspect it that their own devotion contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School, which makes the School today as ‘natural,’ indispensable-useful and even beneficial for our contemporaries as the Church was . . . for our ancestors (p. 31).

The most dramatic thing that Althusser has to say, then, is that no matter how hard teachers try not to, they cannot help but represent the interests of the owners against the workers. Worse still, even the most inventive and caring teachers, who try to make schooling and learning more enjoyable
for those to whom it might seem most remote, are still only reproducing
the system that ultimately oppresses those students. This presents a very
dismal picture of teaching, as unavoidably a political activity serving the
needs of those in power. What more important job could there be for the
bourgeoisie than that of the teacher who slowly indoctrinates students to
accept the work ethic, to follow orders, to respect authority and to commit
themselves to a life of wage labour? For Althusser, the teacher is always
the agent of capitalism and works on its behalf.

Not surprisingly, many theorists and teachers, whilst sharing some of
this kind of Althusserian analysis, do not accept the idea that the teacher is
a helpless sap within the system of class relations. There are many
perspectives upon the role of the teacher that try to show how the teacher
can oppose this system of indoctrination and actually use education for
emancipation rather than continued oppression. I shall now consider some
examples of such thinking regarding the role of the teacher. Within what is
generally called ‘critical pedagogy’, the job of the teacher is not only to
help students overcome ideological distortions of their reality, but also to
help them to create new realities.

Praxis

We saw above that critical teachers required a different relationship to
their students than that merely of master. Praxis is the idea we must now
explore if we are to understand this new type of relationship.1 Recognising
the importance of contingency, Marx argued that human thinking does not
create its own social world; rather, the social world creates, shapes and
gives content to human thinking. On the surface this looks as if it might
support the view of teacher as master, for all that is required of education
is that the teacher enable the world to fill the mind of the student—even
perhaps as we saw earlier, by ‘putting it in there’ himself against the
recalcitrant will of the student. However, this does not convey the subtlety
of Marx’s thinking. He also argues that our activity and the social world
are separated or alienated from each other. In other words, there is a
gap between us and the world we work on. There are two aspects to this.
The first is that the worker is separated from what he produces. Unalienated work would have no such separation. The worker would
express himself through his work, creating a unity between human acti-
vity and the material world. This type of work would be praxis and would
see the world being transformed through the conscious activity of the
human subject.

The second aspect is perhaps even more significant. It is not only
physical work that alienates us from the external world; it is mental work
as well. We can think about the world, but we cannot immediately turn our
thinking into practice. A term that describes both aspects of alienation is
objectification. With regard to work as production this means that our
activity—which ought to be praxis, or a unity between our conscious and
willed activity and reality—becomes divided. Work becomes split into my
activity and an object out there that is not mine, even though it contains

my work. My work has taken the form of an object; it has become objectified and I have lost a part of myself to it. (I shall return to this shortly.) With regard to the relationship between work and thinking, if we could unite our thinking with our actions, or with our work in the world, this would be praxis. For example, I might theorise about a world without private property, without rich and poor, without alienation and oppression, a world in which what I am, what I think and what I do are unified and indistinguishable from each other. But if I try to enact my noble universal and ethical thoughts in the real world as if there is this unity, then I will be likely to encounter problems. Thoughts about what I ought to be do not easily translate into my actions, because I cannot choose the conditions in which I act. What happens is that it looks as if I am saying one thing but doing another. I repeat the very separation between theory and practice that I wanted to overcome.

Nevertheless, if work/thinking and the world could somehow be united as theory and practice, this would be praxis. As such, praxis becomes the key idea whereby the radical teacher can struggle to change the world. If the radical teacher can somehow find ways of working and thinking that do not alienate and divide her from her students, and also if she can bring about the unification of her students’ thoughts and actions, then the alienation of both will be overcome. Now we can understand what Marx means when he says that it is the social world that creates our consciousness. When the social world is characterised by alienation, then our work and our thinking are already separated into worker and object. But when the social world is characterised by praxis, our own work and our thinking are united with the world. It is still up to us to realise praxis, but for Marx, when we do, the world will be as our home. Moreover, being ‘determined’ by the world we live in will also be our own self-determination as human beings.

These are difficult ideas, not least because objectification is so powerful that it makes the reconciliation of theory and practice appear impossible. Nevertheless, before looking at how the idea of praxis has become an agenda for radical models of the teacher, there is a more simple way in which we can relate these ideas of alienation and objectification to the classroom. Teachers know that it is often difficult to motivate students to work. But ‘work’ in this example has the same characteristics and issues described above. When the teacher asks—tells—the student to do a piece of work, the student experiences alienation in carrying out the activity. Work in this example is learning. For those who struggle to realise praxis, learning ought to be an harmonious relationship between thinking and the world, and is or should be the most important way by which a student develops and grows, at one with the world. Students should learn about the world, work on it and in it, and they and their world should change as they do so. But when the work is forced upon them by another, it cannot be this self-determination, or praxis. Indeed, often students experience school work (learning) to be totally alienated from them. What they are asked to do, when and why, are all out of their control. What they make or write is not their own, indeed most often it is used to judge them. Thus, their work...
is produced in an objectified form and is returned to them in an objectified form as marks or sometimes even as punishment. Even if the work is praised, the students still understand that their work, their learning, is not praxis—valuable and worthwhile as an end in itself—but rather is a means to an end, perhaps for praise or to avoid the embarrassment of failure or punishment. As for the workers, so for the students, their work is not done for its own sake but merely as a means to other ends. In this way the students are alienated from their learning.

Critical pedagogues seek to address this alienation of the student directly. By doing so they propose a radical model of teacher practice that is servant to and not master of the students’ emancipation. The radical teacher, in serving the idea of the student’s praxis, is also politically committed to opposing and overcoming the causes of the alienation. You cannot work for praxis and expect to leave the student or the world as they are. If you work for praxis, you must also be working against those who profit directly from the objectification of physical and mental work.

**Paulo Freire (1921–1997)**

Perhaps the most significant contribution to a radical model of critical pedagogy is still that of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. His most influential work was and remains *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), written in 1968. His radical perspective on the teacher emerges clearly in Chapter 2 of this book. It is worth spending just a little time looking at his argument. Freire sees the alienation of the student from her learning and her lack of praxis in the world as grounded in the way the teacher–student relationship reproduces a master–servant relationship. It is, he says, one where the teacher is active and the student passive, one where the teacher teaches about the world as if it is a fixed object, immutable and eternal, and the student simply has to collect this information. The teacher aims ‘to “fill” the students’ (Freire, 1972, p. 45) with contents that are ‘detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them . . . emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity’ (ibid.). He refers to such a teacher–student relationship as the ‘banking method’ of education. Here, ‘education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor’ (ibid.). It turns the students into ‘receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are’ (ibid.).

It is not hard to see how this description resembles very closely the idea of ideology mentioned above. The teacher becomes the agent who transmits to the students an ideological picture of ‘how the world is’, which the students then have to prove they have learned. Not only this: there is no praxis here, for learning is always separated from the reality of the students’ own experiences and the curriculum never grants legitimacy to any knowledge that it has not sanctioned. This is not a creative enquiry or independent learning; rather it is merely the ‘receiving, filing and
storing’ (p. 46) of deposits of knowledge that are placed in the containers called students.

Freire sees this as an issue concerning praxis and alienation, and seeks to change the way we understand the nature of work, and working relationships, in schools. The banking system of teaching suppresses any creativity or transformation that the student might wish to engage in. In this way it suppresses, Freire claims, their fundamental humanity, which can be fully expressed only as praxis, where work is unified with the world rather than objectified by it. This means, of course, that education directly serves the interests of those who profit from alienated work. Such people have no interest in seeing students become critically aware of their alienation, or of a notion of praxis, for that might see students rejecting the world as it currently is and working for radical social change.

This is precisely what Freire proposes. Instead of teachers fostering the credulity of their students, they should be working to arouse their incredulity, to raise their suspicions about what is happening to them. In other words, it is the teacher’s job not to suppress but to encourage critical questioning. But here arises a fundamental question for this model of the teacher. How do you do this? Do you ‘teach’ critical questioning as if it were another deposit? Freire is very clear on this point: ‘One does not liberate men by alienating them. Authentic liberation—the process of humanisation—is not another “deposit” to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it’ (p. 52). He coins the term ‘problem-posing’ for a form of educational practice or praxis that will facilitate forms of learning other than that of the banking method. Whereas the deposits of the latter act as answers to questions that the students themselves do not ask, problem-posing begins by seeing the world as still open to the negotiation of meanings. It begins with questions, not answers, and does not therefore prejudge the world on behalf of the student.

This has two related but very important implications for the radical and emancipatory model of the teacher. First, it challenges the mode of communication that is to be established between teacher and student, or, in essence, it challenges the whole structure of teaching. Problem-posing, says Freire, ‘rejects communiqués and embodies communication’ (ibid.). It establishes, therefore, a dialogical relationship rather than a relation of master to servant. Both are participants in a conversation about the world that can influence and affect that world according to their own perceptions and experiences; yet equally both are part of a dialogue over which neither exerts complete control.

This leads to the second implication. Problem-posing education fundamentally challenges and transforms the whole basis of the teacher–student relationship. In a difficult passage Freire tries to explain this. Dialogical education can overcome the established hierarchy of the teacher’s domination over the student. If the teacher is as open to learning from this dialogue as the students, which she must be if she is to be working in the true spirit of problem-posing, then says Freire, ‘through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a
new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers’ (p. 53). The roles are no longer separated from each other or in opposition; now they are joined. Learning is no longer alienated from the learner and each becomes learner to himself, as well as teacher to others. In this different, dialogical practice, the actual teaching relationship itself has been changed. The world is questioned and criticised, and this critique produces a different world, one where the teacher and the student are no longer on opposite sides. Thus, in this radical model of education, problem-posing and dialogical education are seen to be praxis and potentially able to emancipate and liberate all who practise them.

Before looking at how critical pedagogy has developed since Freire, it is worth us addressing one question that might arise now in the mind of the teacher or the potential teacher. Is not Freire’s suggestion actually undermining the authority of the teacher? In the real world how possible would it be to enter any classroom seeking dialogue, particularly if students for whatever reasons are already alienated and hostile? Would they not simply see this approach as soft and as a chance to take advantage of a teacher who has suspended her authority? Freire remarked on this in a talk he gave in London in 1993. He commented that his critical pedagogy is not saying that the teacher should lose her/his authority . . . the authority of the teacher does not diminish the freedom of the student. One has to grow up through the contradiction of one with the other. In other words, there is no freedom without authority, there is no authority without freedom . . . What I am saying is that both teacher and students must be subjects of the process of education (Freire, 1995, p. 21).

Critical pedagogy has developed considerably since the publication of The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In particular the critique of the domination of the teacher in the banking model has been extended to cover any ideological domination of a minority group or suppressed voice in the cultural arena at large. The praxis of Freire, which destabilises the traditional identities of teacher and student is thereby extended into cultural fields other than education.

For example, Henry Giroux has employed the term ‘cultural workers’ (Giroux, 1992, p. 79) to encompass all those who work in the reproduction of ideological and social practices. This extension of critical pedagogy, says Giroux, ‘ties education to the broader struggle for public life in which dialogue, vision, and compassion remain critically attentive to the liberating and dominating relations that organise various aspects of everyday life’ (p. 137). As such, critical pedagogy moves from the classroom to social relations as a whole, and works now for social justice in all areas. Peter McLaren notes, ‘it is Freire’s particular strength that he has developed a critical vernacular that can help to translate both the other’s experience and his own experience of the other in such a way that ideological representations may be challenged’ (McLaren, 1997, p. 61). To paraphrase McLaren, critical pedagogy is relevant for all liberation struggles, the poor, women, people of colour, gays, lesbians and
indigenous peoples (p. 64). For those who struggle for social justice, caught within but opposed to a master narrative, critical pedagogy ‘speaks to the voiceless and the peripheralized, the marginalized and the excluded’ (p. 13). It offers a ‘space of hope’ (ibid.) in which critical educators can now ‘wage nothing less than war in the interest of the sacredness of human life, collective dignity for the wretched of the earth, and the right to live in peace and harmony’ (ibid.). Here the model of the radical teacher becomes the practice of all whose work involves them with society’s under-privileged and who, in destabilising the identity of the master, are prepared to become servants themselves to a notion of dialogical praxis, working towards ‘a praxis of redemption’ but in a space that ‘can’t be taken for granted’ beforehand (ibid.).

Normalising education

Critical theorists have given special attention to the ways in which the workers’ labour creates objects that have more value in the market place than the labour that made them. Objectification, explored above, refers to the way that the value of human labour is transferred into the value of commodities. The work of the human species becomes objectified, or exists in the world only in the form of objects. Marx calls this commodity fetishism, meaning that the value of human work appears to lie not in the activity of the workers, but in the objects that they make.

But critical theorists have taken this observation one step further. Now, they say, the worker himself is objectified. He has no value as a human being, only as an object in the market place, where his most powerful form of objectification is as a consumer. This human being is viewed as a potential source of profit, and is targeted by the media, by advertisers and by the pleasure industry—collectively, the culture industry—not to question that this objectified version of itself is indeed its true self and, rather, to spend our lives in the pursuit of personal pleasure through the entertainment industries.

One critical pedagogue, Ilan Gur-Ze’ev, has argued recently that critical pedagogy must come to see itself as offering a ‘counter-education’ to this objectification of the ‘I’ within the culture industry. When education serves this objectification he calls it ‘normalising education’, meaning that it works to make us accept ourselves as the ‘I’ that the entertainment and marketing industries see us to be. This, says Gur-Ze’ev, is a ‘de-humanisation’ (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003a, p. 1), and one that is so powerful in determining our understanding of who and what we are that it prohibits us ‘from detecting, questioning and challenging the violences of the apparatuses which construct them and determine [our] horizon’ (ibid.).

The task of the critical teacher, faced with the objectification of themselves and their students, is to try to counter this normalising education with a critical education that sees through these ideologies. Of paramount importance says Gur-Ze’ev is that teachers seek to educate for an ‘I’ that, through critical questioning, becomes an other to itself so that it might also then recognise the otherness of other people. What the
teacher must try to combat is the normalising education that assimilates everyone into the market place of ‘pleasure, cynicism [and] pragmatism’ (p. 7). As such, this counter-education, through its teachers, inevitably collides with the ruling powers. . . . It manifests a refusal to accept the present facts as the last and ultimate yardstick to evaluate reality, and it is committed to the effort of its own questioning and its own transcendence. It questions the self-evident and traces for the absent, for the forgotten, for the unrecoverable silenced voices and for the unfulfilled potentials (ibid.).

The real challenge here is that the educator must avoid pandering to the instant gratification of the objectified self and refuse any easy or certain solutions to the power of normalising education. For Gur-Ze’ev there can be no positive utopias, for, on the one hand, they turn the teacher into the master and, on the other hand, they come to serve, again, the process by which the ‘I’ is objectified, known and satisfied. This means that the teacher must teach in order to keep open the hope and possibility of what Gur-Ze’ev calls a ‘negative utopia’, one that is present in its absence. To do this the teacher will oppose an education that, Gur-Ze’ev writes, creates ‘the subject as an object for manipulation’ (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003b, p. 92) and work to produce ‘the I as a centre for reflectivity’ (ibid.). Ultimately his model of critical and emancipatory education asks two related things of the counter-educator. First, she will recognise that all human beings, her students included, are ‘more than what the system has invested in [them]’ (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003a, p. 9), and that as human subjects they have ‘the potential of resisting the normalisation processes [and] becoming different than expected’ (ibid.). Second, if the teacher is to know herself in the same way, then she must recognise her ‘homelessness,’ that is, that she also does not belong to the world that has sought to make itself normal for her. In keeping alive her own possibility, she can then teach from this homelessness for the homelessness of others. This, says Gur-Ze’ev, cannot overcome meaninglessness but it can offer a new readiness and vitalised responsibility for negating the given facts and pleasures. It is relevant in the counter-educator’s refusal to abandon her own spiritual homelessness with and for the Other. This is the form of love that is still possible for counter-education. Yes, love, yes: offering the Other your hand in a Godless world is still an open possibility (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003b, p. 92).

Summary

Critical pedagogy, then, in many different guises, rests on the awareness that what counts as education in any given society is contingent upon and reproductive of the political relations that determine it. Teachers are inevitably caught up in this, and, at worst, act as agents for this reproduction. But awareness of this contingency, which we might call
political awareness or political consciousness, is the beginning of the possibility of transforming these relations. Critical teachers teach for this awareness. They teach for students to understand how the system of formal education is designed only to release certain kinds of knowledge and to benefit only certain classes or cultures. They teach for students to recognise their own determination in a world that tries to make its education appear neutral and natural. They teach in order to raise awareness in the students that there are powers working behind the scenes that have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

Above all, critical teachers work to create the possibility that students might emancipate themselves from their condition as prisoners within the Cave. Such critical teachers recognise that their knowledge of social and political contingency does not make them masters of their students. On the contrary, it is this knowledge that calls such teachers to serve the emancipatory needs of the students.

POST-ENLIGHTENMENT PEDAGOGY

Introduction

There has recently emerged a different kind of criticism of the enlightenment model of education. Plato’s Cave, described earlier, makes a number of presuppositions about education that impact considerably upon the role of the teacher. Above all it seems to lend itself to an hierarchical model of the wise and enlightened teacher who has the answers and his apprentice who will be taken along this same path to the same enlightenment. One recent French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, has remarked that according to this ‘infantile prejudice, the master sets a problem, our task is to solve it, and the result is accredited true or false by a powerful authority. It is also a social prejudice with the visible interest of maintaining us in an infantile state’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 158). In Plato’s model there is even an explicit reference to this hierarchy. He says that the prisoner may need to be dragged out of the Cave, against his will. Here the teacher is charged with forcing the student to become enlightened and is presupposed as having an authority over the student, an authority that the teacher can enforce for the good of the student. Most people can recall a teacher saying at some point ‘I’m doing this for your own good . . . You’ll thank me later’. We saw above how this model of the teacher as master, and as the one whose greater wisdom and enlightenment is also their authority, could be manifested sometimes in a benevolent, and sometimes a not so benevolent, bullying and domination. Some have argued that even critical theorists assume the position of master because they still know how the student is to be enlightened and emancipated. Thus, not only the idea of the teacher as master but the whole notion of education as enlightenment and its related concept of emancipation have come under criticism. It is this I shall now explore as well as some of the different kinds of perspectives upon the role of the teacher that these criticisms have produced.
Teaching—the project

There is one main criticism of enlightenment education that has emerged from post-enlightenment philosophies that is relevant to and has far-reaching implications for the teacher. It concerns the way enlightenment models are used to justify what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, and by whom. Jean-François Lyotard is a theorist much associated with this critique. In his view, a model of enlightenment lies behind the way certain grand narratives legitimise some kinds of knowledge and actions in the world and repress or distort others. Grand narratives of this kind are ‘total’ explanations of the world that identify problem and solution at one and the same time. So, for example, Plato’s model of enlightenment was part of the project designed to bring an end to the corruption of Athenian democracy. More recently in European history, the Enlightenment project (or the project of modernity), through its development of science, technology and the arts, sought to ‘liberate the whole of humanity from ignorance, poverty, backwardness, [and] despotism’ (Lyotard, 1992, p. 97). It was hoped that it would not only produce ‘happy men, but, thanks to education in particular . . . [would] produce enlightened citizens, masters of their own destiny’ (ibid.). The legitimacy of this project lies not in the past but ‘in a future to be brought about’ (p. 61). This, says Lyotard, ‘gives modernity its characteristic mode: the project, that is, the will directed towards a goal’ (ibid.).

From Lyotard’s perspective, then, education becomes the tool of the dreamer and the social reformer who has a vision of what ought to be and teaches in order to bring this about. The knowledge and actions that serve the dream are labelled legitimate; those that oppose it become illegitimate. The teacher who is legitimate therefore is the one who works for the project. We have seen this already represented above. Punishment by teachers was legitimate because it served the project of salvation; child-centredness was legitimate because it served the project of nature; critical pedagogy was legitimate because it served the project of emancipation. Whilst you would not call all of these ‘modern’, they nevertheless share a common structure: that the ends justify the means. Whereas much of European history has been a conflict about which ends and which means, post-enlightenment thinking is now questioning the very positing of ends. Perhaps we have reached the end of the idea of enlightenment and its form as a project. Perhaps we have come to the end of projects per se? If so, this has enormous implications for teachers, and we will look at these in a moment.

Lyotard’s worries about the notion of ‘the project’ are threefold. First, he says that any project of enlightenment for a preconceived end relies upon a transcendental presupposition in order to justify itself. This means that all projects have to presuppose some kinds of truths that lie above and beyond the normal realm of knowledge and that cannot be known or tested in any of the usual ways. The real test of the transcendental presuppositions will be the realisation of the project, for this alone will prove the assumptions behind the project to have been correct. Examples of
transcendental presuppositions might be projects that have to presume the existence of God, or the natural goodness of humanity, or even visions of human potential that lie beyond those that are currently possible. In the absence of proof, projects may have to rely on dogmatic assertions about why they are right and others are wrong.

Second, Lyotard says that the modern project for the betterment of mankind, which is based on the enlightenment model that freedom is rational and achieved by each person autonomously thinking for themselves, has dramatically and brutally failed. He says, ‘for at least two centuries modernity taught us to desire the extension of political freedoms, science, the arts and technology. It taught us to legitimate this desire because, it said, this progress would emancipate humanity from despotism, ignorance, barbarism and poverty’ (p. 110). But, he states, ‘this promise has not been kept. It was broken not because it was forgotten but because development itself makes it impossible to keep’ (p. 111). What does Lyotard mean by this? He means that the very thing that is supposed to solve the problems is in fact contributing to them.

The new illiteracy, the impoverishment of people in the South and the Third World, unemployment, the tyranny of opinion and the prejudices then echoed in the media, the law that performance is the measure of the good—all this is not due to a lack of development but to development itself. This is why we would no longer dream of calling it progress (ibid.).

But there is an even more appalling example—Lyotard’s third point—of the way in which the nature of enlightenment as a project has been (ab)used. This refers to the Holocaust of World War II, which is sometimes referred to in terms of Auschwitz. How, asks Lyotard, in the name of the ‘fulfilment of all humanity’ (p. 36) could one race be systematically exterminated? It is not just that those with power can define humanity in their own interests, it is also that the very idea of humanity as a project to be achieved enables them to do so. No wonder then that Lyotard defines the post-enlightenment (or postmodern) attitude against the enlightenment project as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv).5 Furthermore, Lyotard does offer some thoughts on how this incredulity can shape the work of the teacher (he is talking about philosophy teachers, but we can extrapolate from this). The problem as he sees it is this. Teachers who justify themselves according to the project, or within the enlightenment model of education, become part of the problem and not the solution. The real issue for such teachers is that they think they know in advance what they must teach, and what they are teaching for. In so doing, they perhaps risk closing down the possibility of education to that which is legitimated by the project. They suppress other projects and, worst of all, they assume that education requires projects. For post-enlightenment critics, this will, more often than not, result in a tyranny.

Against the prejudged certainties of the enlightened and the enlightening, Lyotard sees the post-enlightenment teacher refusing ‘the consolation...
of correct forms’ (Lyotard, 1992, p. 24) and learning to work ‘without rules’ (ibid.). We have, he says, paid a high price for the nostalgic dream of a universally transparent and communicable experience, and now is the time to wage ‘war on totality’ (p. 25) and to accept that not everything can be presented as rational knowledge. For the teacher, this requires a recognition that he is caught up in the dilemma of totality. The teacher as master represents closure and finality. His authority is the view that ‘this is what must be learned because it is what has been learned before. It is what I know, and what you the student must come to know’. Lyotard’s critique of the master is that ‘you cannot open up a question without leaving yourself open to it’ (p. 116). Accepting this means accepting that the teacher must renew ‘ties with the season of childhood, the season of the mind’s possibilities’ (ibid.), rather than have his mind ‘made up’ (ibid.) before he arrives in the classroom. This is quite a challenge for a teacher—not to over-prepare but rather to keep open the space for unforeseen possibilities and not to prejudge what the learning must be. We will return to this in a moment.

Another similar critique of the idea of education structured by the enlightenment project comes from Zygmunt Bauman. He argues that the modern project of emancipation and freedom through enlightenment only in fact ‘emerged out of the discovery that human order is vulnerable, contingent and devoid of reliable foundations’ (Bauman, 1992, p. xi). A total explanation of society was needed therefore in order to try to establish reliable foundations for such a society. Enlightenment thinking believed reason promised just such foundations, but the cost, as with any claim to totality, was that anything that did not fit the explanation, anything that was different, had to be controlled and suppressed. Thus, the educational project was twofold: to establish order and to recognise the moral righteousness of doing so. This became the justification for, and the authority of, the teacher as master. At its most horrendous, again, the project to control that which threatened the project became the Holocaust.

Bauman argues that rather than see the Holocaust as an aberration of the project for the goal of a unified humanity, we should understand that ‘modernity contributed to the Holocaust’ (Bauman, 1989, p. 88). It did so in two crucial ways. First, it provided the model for the project of Nazism, in that both modernity and Nazism believed that their ends justified the means. For both, ‘the end itself is a grand vision of a better, and radically different, society’ (p. 91, emphasis removed). Like the enlightenment project in general, then, ‘modern genocide is an element of social engineering, meant to bring about a social order conforming to the design of the perfect society’ (ibid.). Of course, we might want to say that the extermination of European Jewry (and others) and trying to educate for a better world have nothing in common. But Bauman is challenging us to consider that the same notion of education for progress underpins both. It then becomes not a difference in the vision of humanity that is at stake (although of course it is), as much as a shared model of means and ends by which each vision is to be achieved.
The second way in which Bauman sees modern reason as implicated in the Holocaust is that it provides a detached way of calculating the most efficient and effective ways of achieving the project. Throughout history there has been mass murder. But what gives the Holocaust its distinctively modern and rational character is the efficiency with which it was able to be carried out. Rational planning meant that the means could be divorced from the moral questioning of the ends, and how to kill and dispose of six million Jews becomes merely an exercise in problem-solving. ‘Like everything else done in the modern—rational, planned, scientifically informed, expert, efficiently managed, co-ordinated—way, the Holocaust left behind and put to shame all its alleged pre-modern equivalents, exposing them as primitive, wasteful and ineffective by comparison’ (p. 89). Chillingly, Bauman notes that the Jews, in a racially pure Aryan world picture, were the ‘other’ that could not successfully be integrated or assimilated or controlled. ‘Like weeds, their nature could not be changed. They could not be improved or re-educated. They had to be eliminated’ (p. 93). Again we might want to distance ourselves as teachers from the implications either that we divorce means from ends in our teaching, or that we have criteria by which some kinds of students are eliminated from the project. Yet we also know that both are to some extent true. Teachers often teach about how to solve problems in the absence of a discussion about the ends. And, of course, there are many criteria by which students can be excluded from education at all levels. Again Bauman is challenging us to see that in the nature of teaching within the enlightenment model, no matter how laudable our aims may be, we may be using methods to achieve them that become part of the problem rather than the solution.

To bring this discussion to a close, I am reminded of a text that I read when I was beginning my PGCE. At the beginning of a book on personal and social education, Richard Pring reproduces a letter that a Principal of an American high school sends to his teachers on the first day of school. It reads:

**Dear Teacher**

*I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:*

*Gas chambers built by learned engineers.*

*Children poisoned by educated physicians.*

*Infants killed by trained nurses.*

*Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.*

*So, I am suspicious of education.*

*My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.*

*Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human* (Pring, 1984, introduction).
It is clear then that post-enlightenment thinking about the role and identity of the teacher has raised the stakes considerably. Now, the radical teacher, indeed any teacher with a vision for how education might contribute to creating a better world, could be said to be using the same model of education and teaching that allows for the tyranny of the enlightened over the apprentice. On this point Robin Usher and Richard Edwards state that, the end of education conceived as a ‘project’, of education as the vehicle for realising the modernist project, is one of the main characteristics of education in the postmodern. Coming to an end as a project implies that education can no longer be understood or understand itself as an enterprise standing above history and particular cultural contexts. It can no longer be dedicated—in its various forms—to the achievement of universally applicable goals—truth, emancipation, democracy, enlightenment, empowerment—pre-defined by the grand narratives (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p. 210).

So, are there post-enlightenment or postmodern perspectives on the teacher that can help us here? In fact there are many, and we will mention only a few. At heart, however, they share the view of Lyotard that we should be as the child, open to possibilities and to differences rather than closing them down.

Post-enlightenment teaching

Elizabeth Ellsworth provides a good description for us of the post-enlightenment teacher. We should, she says, entertain the idea ‘that teaching is undecideable’ (1997, p. 50). She means that even though a teacher may enter a classroom having decided what she will try to achieve, there is a gap between ‘address and response’ (p. 51). There are, she says, ‘imperfect fits’ (p. 50) between what this teacher attempts and what she actually achieves. In agreement with Freud, she argues that teaching is therefore one of the ‘impossible professions’ (p. 52) as no one can be sure, in advance, of the results they will gain. As such teaching is by definition undecideable.

It could be observed that this undecideability might have been one of the reasons for the brutality of the master seen earlier. His harshness was a response to the increasing frustration, perhaps fear, that the teaching was not working, a failure that then became the justification for ever more severe methods being employed in order to achieve success. It could also be said that the critical pedagogue whose project was emancipation now has to recognise that education as a project will never be successful because education cannot be controlled. In addition of course, its undecideability challenges all models of education that are led by outcomes and measurable objectives.

Even though Ellsworth sees teaching as undecideable, she does not believe that we should not teach. It is often the case that where someone argues in favour of an orientation towards undecidability, on the grounds
that some things cannot be rigidly planned for in advance, the response is either ‘There will be chaos’, or ‘Since we can’t do anything, we might as well not bother’. For Ellsworth, however, it is precisely here, in the space created by ‘the undecideability of pedagogy and the indeterminacy of its address’ (p. 55) that the real yet unanticipated possibilities of education exist. Faced with undecideability she says

I don’t see any threat of paralysis or nihilism . . . there’s no need to panic or despair. When I find myself despairing as a teacher it’s not the paradoxes of my profession that have brought me down. Usually, what leaves me feeling hopeless is the way that the culture of teaching manages to ignore, deny or bull its way past its own ironies and impossibilities’ (p. 139).

On the contrary, she says, in the undecideability lies the ‘fecundity of teaching’ (ibid.). Moreover, being asked to respond to these impossibilities ‘empowers and condemns me’ (p. 137) to keep teaching, but this time involved in disputes about ‘which meanings will be valued and why’ (ibid.). This post-enlightenment critique of the teacher understands that such a teacher is ‘empowered to participate, but never as the One with the “right” Story’ (ibid.), with consequences that she ‘can never fully know, understand or control’ (p. 138).

Such a post-enlightenment view of the teacher sounds exciting and full of risk and possibility. Of course, to those who, as Bauman has noted, crave order and predictability, ‘the postmodern seems to condemn everything, propose nothing’ (1992, p. ix). That is why the postmodern challenge seems to be ‘a shaking of the foundations’ (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p. 25) of everything that teaching seems to stand for. Usher and Edwards note that

education does not fit easily into the postmodern moment because educational theory and practice is founded in the modernist tradition. Education is very much the dutiful child of the Enlightenment and, as such, tends to uncritically accept a set of assumptions deriving from Enlightenment thought (p. 24).

Seeking a definitive post-enlightenment or postmodern philosophy of the teacher would obviously be self-contradictory. ‘There is no uniform, unified postmodern discourse of education’ (p. 25). That, precisely, is how and why it can remain open to unforeseen educational possibilities and is able to resist dogmas that prejudge totality or operate for closure.

Stuart Parker has offered a manifesto for education in postmodernity, arguing that the postmodern teacher will be an ironic teacher. His vision of a postmodern teacher sees a world that is framed and constructed but in ways that are not always transparent to common sense. The teacher’s role is to deconstruct this world so that students may see through its appearance to the mechanisms that have put it together. This postmodern educationalist he calls ‘the teacher-deconstructor’ (Parker, 1997, p. 143).
She will understand the world to be a text that has been written within the boundaries of certain genres and certain styles, boundaries that by definition legitimate some structures, some readings, and outlaw or marginalise others. Post-modern education thus becomes learning about the way ‘in which a text achieves its effect . . . highlighting the marginal, the concealed, the suppressed themes and assumptions’ (ibid.). Again the challenging nature of the postmodern viewpoint becomes apparent. Teachers and students will deliberately misread the text ‘with the intention of causing trouble’ (ibid.). The lesson is likely to be that there is no one true reading of any situation, for each text is contingent, and each reading of the text is contingent. There is no foundation that one can discover and rely upon which will enlighten us as to the correct reading. All teaching, says Parker, all education, should reveal how everything in the world ‘has no ultimate compelling justification’ (p. 144).

How can a teacher truthfully teach that there is no one truth? Parker’s ironic teacher must find a way of living a foundationless life, it seems, but doing so in a committed way. He writes:

teachers and students will be encouraged to become ironic in reconciling the foundationless status of their beliefs and commitments—and the commitments of others—with the desire to create, develop and defend them. Possession of this ironic attitude—this unstable, dynamic oscillation of the rhetorical forces of deconstruction and position, or reactivity and creativity—is the signature of the postmodern voice and a central characteristic of emancipation in post modernity (p. 142).

A slightly different approach to a similar theme is taken by Ronald Barnett regarding the post-enlightenment teacher in higher education. He argues that modernity ‘likes things to be orderly, measured (literally), fully calculable, uniform and rule-governed . . . But postmodernity won’t be put back into that bottle: the genie has now escaped. Multiple standards, multiple purposes, multiple knowledges and multiple consumers’ (Barnett, 2000, pp. 20–21). This ‘multiplication of frameworks’ within which teachers in higher education now work Barnett calls ‘supercomplexity’ (p. 6).

What is it, he asks, ‘to be educated under [these] conditions of radical uncertainty’ (p. 153) that characterise the supercomplexity of this postmodern world? His response is that teachers do not serve their students if they do not expose them to the unsettling character of the supercomplex world. To learn to live in such a rapidly changing world students need to learn to let go of the myths of certainty and predictability. To become resilient to change they must, in their education, be exposed to change and then helped ‘to live at ease with this unsettling’ (p. 155). A new kind of pedagogy is required for this higher education, and a new kind of tutor. Barnett argues that the formal lecture is only a ‘refuge for the faint hearted’ (p. 159) and any unsettling it might evoke is ‘barely skin deep’ (ibid.). In the lecture ‘the students remain as voyeurs’ (ibid.) watching a performance but never required actually to engage with it. He notes:
precisely under the perplexing conditions of supercomplexity, lecturers will fall back on teaching approaches that appear to offer, in their pedagogical relationships, a degree of security and predictability. Indeed, the students themselves, faced with the corresponding challenge of a pedagogy for supercomplexity, are likely to resort to more orderly and predictable pedagogical situations. They will opt for dependency. In short, a conspiracy for safety develops between lecturers and students precisely when such curricular approaches should be jettisoned as the pedagogy of another age (p. 163).

In contrast, the pedagogy of the new age demands that the teacher ‘step aside to some extent’ (p. 160) or even that ‘we have to give up the notion of teaching as such’ (p. 159). If students are to be unsettled, the teacher cannot act as a dependable stabilising force. She cannot appear with first aid every time a student is injured by the ‘radical uncertainty’ (p. 164) of the times. This means that those forms of education and teacher–student relationships that have been engineered to promote the model of certainty and stability must be got rid of. The student can only experience supercomplexity for herself if the teacher does not ameliorate its effects. Only then will the student learn not just resilience but enjoyment in these bewildering times. The post-enlightenment teacher frees students from having to learn ways in which experiences, or indeed the history of the world, can be tied together within a common meaning. That idea of a grand narrative that can offer a coherence to all that appears disparate and heteronomous is over. Now, for Usher and Edwards, experience becomes an end in itself and is no longer servant to ‘a hierarchy of foundational and transcendental reason and values’ (1994, p. 11). Now, moving from one experience to another without the tyranny of having to understand them all together and ‘properly’, as high culture might demand, is a pleasure, even a desire.

Let me cite now two remarks to conclude on the postmodern attitude that underpins many different versions of post-enlightenment philosophies of the teacher. From Usher and Edwards the following:

postmodernity, then, describes a world where people have to make their way without fixed referents and traditional anchoring points. It is a world of rapid change, of bewildering instability, where knowledge is constantly changing and meaning ‘floats’ without traditional teleological fixing in foundational knowledge and the belief in inevitable human progress. But the significant thing is that in postmodernity uncertainty, the lack of a centre and the floating of meaning are understood as phenomena to be celebrated rather than regretted (p. 10).

To which the following, from Bauman, can be added:

we are bound to live with contingency . . . for the foreseeable future. If we want this future to be also a long one. . . . what is needed is . . . a practical recognition of the relevance and validity of the other’s difference, expressed in a willing engagement in the dialogue (1992, p. xxi).
Summary

Clearly there are similarities and differences between recent emancipatory and post-enlightenment models of the teacher, but I do not propose to discuss these at this point. I want instead to end this chapter by asking a question of all of the models of the teacher explored here. The question is this. Regardless of whether teachers believe in serving nature, praxis or pluralism and difference, are they not all faced with the same problem—viz. that they know in advance what is to constitute an education for their students? In being servant to a particular idea of the teacher, and to a particular idea of the kind of educational developments they wish to work for, are they not also, again, becoming master over the student? Is it even possible for a teacher unambiguously to serve students when the teacher–student relationship is always mediated by an idea or a prejudged view about what education is for? Even the undecideability of post-enlightenment teaching has this very openness as its prejudged decision of the project that it seeks to achieve. Indeed, even irony can be a most powerful form of domination.

In Chapter 3 above we saw that Rousseau acknowledged this problem when he admitted that the art of teaching ‘consists in controlling events’ (Rousseau, 1993, p. 251) in such a way that the pupil does not realise he is being controlled: ‘let him think he is master while you [the teacher] are really master’ (p. 100). In a different way, McLaren also acknowledges the dangers that exist for a repetition of the domination of the master–servant relationship even in a praxis-based critical pedagogy. The latter, he says, can become ‘dangerously domesticated’ (McLaren, 1997, p. 55) because teachers can adopt it as a means to career advancement. Such teachers ‘wish to enjoy the appearance of being radical without facing the hard decisions that could risk one’s job security or possibility for tenure’ (ibid.). Usher and Edwards also observe that the emancipatory teacher may easily turn into another master. Educators, they say, ‘find it hard to accept that their emancipatory intentions, their desire to enlighten, may be implicated with the will to power and may, therefore, have oppressive consequences’ (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p. 27). Postmodern teachers, they argue, ‘need always to question any discursive practice, no matter how benevolent, for the configurations of emancipation/oppression within it’ (ibid.). Their own response to the ‘master’s voice’ of their own book is to assert at the end that in being forced to use language they accept that their mastery is already compromised and that their text therefore ‘can be deconstructed’ (p. 228). We also saw earlier, in Chapter 1, how Burbules summed up this dilemma, and it is worth repeating here. He notes:

authority is inherent in any teaching-learning relation; it cannot be abrogated or denied even when one wishes to minimise its significance. But authority carries certain costs: It can foster dependency; it implies certain privileges of position that interfere with egalitarian social commitments; it becomes too easily taken for granted in the minds of both student and teacher. Encouraging students to question authority, even inviting challenges to one’s own authority as a teacher, can foster
valuable learning—but only a person in authority can do that . . . Institutional customs arrogate dimensions of privilege to teachers that conflict with our attempt to manage authority gracefully . . . At a still deeper level, we who have chosen teaching as a career must acknowledge in ourselves the desires that motivate us. However modest we might endeavour to be, the influence that comes with authority and the pride of seeing our plans and intentions (sometimes) come to fruition are seductive pulls back into the temptation to exercise our authority—though only for the ‘best’ of purposes, of course (Burbules, 1997, p. 67).

Let us try and sum up what seems to be happening here. In this chapter we have looked at two specific notions of the teacher, each serving an idea of the potential of education, and describing a vision of pedagogy that would effectively realise that service. But in each case, with praxis and difference, the experience of the practising teacher may be much more complicated and problematic even than is anticipated within some of these perspectives. Teachers’ good intentions may, in fact, produce the opposite to what they intend. Education for emancipation cannot escape also being education as tutelage; and education for difference cannot escape also being education as the same. At the very beginning of this book we recalled the concern of Max Weber that he was ‘moved, above all, by the fact that on its earthly course an idea always and everywhere operates in opposition to its original meaning and thereby destroys itself’ (Bottomore and Nisbet, 1978, p. 362). Perhaps the unintended consequence, here, of teaching that is designed to serve the cause of emancipation or difference is that teaching unavoidably places the teacher in the master’s position. Every teacher teaches in the name of something, and in doing so assumes the role of master, even if they do not intend this—even if they refuse the title of ‘teacher’ and prefer, for example, something like ‘facilitator’.

This experience of the contradiction that lies at the heart of the teacher–student relationship can be taken seriously and at face value. It is, of course, very easy for the experience to be explained away as ‘obvious’—as it might be said, ‘of course you have to take decisions on their behalf; you have to teach them something’—and as having no real import beyond this truism. However, educational theory and philosophy that pass over this experience serve teachers poorly. This experience of the contradiction of freedom and authority is absolutely fundamental to the teacher–student relationship and to the dilemmas that the theory–practice divide reproduces. Indeed, on a much grander scale, it is the problem of the domination in modernity of instrumental reason, for it is the contradiction that envelopes social critique. There is no way that alternative visions can avoid becoming abstract and objectified as universal models, with the consequence that they become separate from and thereby dominate the very people whose truth they are supposed to represent. The philosophy of the teacher, as it is being presented in this study, takes this contradiction—the experience by both teacher and student of the abstraction of the teacher from the student—to be the substance of its work. We will see now how
thinking about this contradiction and opposition as philosophical substance and subjectivity offers teachers the chance to reassess their understanding of what they do and how they do it, and retrieves meaning within the difficult relation of their successes and their failures. In short, it reveals otherwise hidden philosophical depths within the ambivalence of the relation of teacher and student.

Before leaving this topic, however, it is appropriate to look briefly at a teacher who, over two thousand years ago, took the idea of being servant to others’ education even more seriously—Socrates. He is relevant for us at the end of this chapter for many reasons, but one stands out in particular: Socrates not only experienced the dilemma of being master over those he wished to think for themselves; he also, uniquely, turned this experience of the dilemma into an educational method, and became therein a ‘negative’ teacher.

**SOCRATES (C. 469–399BC)**

Socrates realised that when he questioned people about what they said they knew, it was not long before inconsistencies appeared in their defence of that knowledge. If they were honest, they would eventually have to admit that the certainty of their knowledge was pretty flimsy and that doubt had, in fact, replaced their certainty. What they learned from Socrates was that they did not know what they thought they knew. This is the same kind of education that Plato envisaged for the prisoners in the Cave—namely, that they would come to question and to doubt the illusory truths that the Cave reproduced. Where Socrates differs from Plato is that whilst Plato was prepared to argue for enlightenment and for enlightened teachers, Socrates refused to countenance such certainties. Crucially, what Socrates knew—the only thing he knew—was that as a teacher he did not know anything either. This was therefore the only thing he could honestly teach people. Famously, his response to this self-professed ignorance was that instead of trying to teach students some particular content, he chose instead to teach only for the negation, the doubting and the questioning of their existing knowledge. Since, as we have seen, the problem of the teacher as master over the student has always involved some prejudgement about what is to constitute their education, the solution that Socrates offers to this dilemma is to teach them nothing at all.

Here, then, is a very intriguing approach to the difficulties the teacher faces in trying to be servant to the education of his students. Socrates served the Delphic Oracle, which told him that there was no one wiser than him. Since the God could not lie, but equally since Socrates could not understand how this could be true, he devoted his life to trying to learn the truth of the Oracle. The only experience he knew to be true was that he never really knew anything for certain, and the more he interrogated those around him, the more he realised this was also true for them. Thus, as a teacher, he could never assume the identity of the master of knowledge, but only that of a servant of its continual questioning, or its negation. This
he spent his life doing. At his trial he says that if he is spared the death penalty on condition that he gives up this truth of his life, he will not accept this. Here he states very clearly what he believes being a servant of truth means for the teacher. He declares that, for as long as he lives, he will continue to serve the truth of the Oracle that he is wise solely in knowing of his ignorance. At stake, here, for Socrates is the integrity of the teacher. If he teaches something he does not know, then he is being untrue to himself and that will cost him his soul. Raising this issue before the jury, he asks them, ‘are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?’ (Plato, 1969, p. 61).

How, then, does Socrates actually practise this ‘negative’ philosophy of the teacher? How does he serve the truth of knowing nothing without becoming, as ever, the master or the teacher who knows what to teach on behalf of his students? Socrates responds to this in several ways. First, he distances himself from the idea of being a teacher at all. At his trial he notes there are respected teachers who charge for their services, but since he has never taken money under these circumstances, he is not a teacher of this kind—‘I have never set up as any man’s teacher’ (p. 65). Indeed, when Socrates does try to define a philosophy of the teacher that applies to him, it is as a very particular kind of teacher—a midwife. His skills, he says, are the same as those of a midwife, except that he supervises the labour of minds, not bodies. Also, just as midwives often have no children of their own, so Socrates says he himself is barren of wisdom, and that it is this lack of wisdom that makes him question the knowledge of others in order, then, to test their ideas to see whether they turn out ‘to be viable or still born’ (Plato, 1987, p. 41).

Over two thousand years later Socrates’ midwifery is still the subject of debate. From one point of view, it might be said that here is a teacher who sets himself to be the servant and not the master of his students. At no time does he have anything positive to teach anyone. All he does is to serve the Oracle, by which he has been given the task of understanding the truth of his lack of wisdom, and in serving this truth he is indirectly able to ‘teach’ others that his truth may also be their truth. He cannot tell them this, for that would be to know something. He can only work with them until they begin to see this truth through their own doubts and questions. If his negative education is successful, they will not have been taught anything except through and by themselves. But from another point of view, it might be said that he is a hypocrite. After all, he knows that he does not know anything, and this is still to know something. Or, he might even be seen as a destroyer, undermining beliefs but having none of his own.

Either Socrates is a near-saint who, at great personal cost, remained true to himself and to the service of education, refusing to make his life easier by compromising his integrity and pretending to know things that he did not know. Or he is a rogue, whose verbal acuity is sharp enough to reveal inconsistencies in everyone else’s knowledge but who never risks any of his own. Indeed, perhaps his claim to know nothing is hardly credible, and

is at best ironic, intended not to be completely believed. This would make him a practitioner of deceit. Such judgements about Socrates depend largely upon the extent to which one feels that he genuinely avoided abstraction (and therefore domination over the student), or rather masked it behind the dissemblance of not being a teacher.

Socrates ends this chapter by placing before us an intriguing challenge. If you set out to serve an educational ideal that has at its core the avoidance of inculcation and works instead for the free development of the student’s own questioning and doubting mind, does this necessarily still place you in the position of master? Is the path out of the Cave inescapably one that has always already been travelled before by the teacher? Or, alternatively, and perhaps with Socrates: if a teacher recognises that her role is essentially negative, knowing nothing in herself and drawing from her students their negation of their own knowledge can she succeed in being a servant to, rather than a master of, her students’ education? Is it negative teaching, rather than emancipatory or post-enlightenment teaching, which is really the foil of being the master? Does negative education finally achieve the overcoming of mastery and abstraction that has eluded our theorists thus far? If so, this offers us the perplexing idea that the teacher who successfully works for the free and critical thinking of the student has an inescapably contradictory identity. She must teach nothing in order to teach for the freedom of her students to think for themselves, and she must assume no other authority than that of the questioner. Carl Rogers has, so it seems, implicitly recognised the logic of just such a view: ‘When I try to teach . . . I am appalled by the results . . . because sometimes the teaching appears to succeed. When this happens I find that the results are damaging. It seems to cause the individual to distrust his own experience and to stifle significant learning’ (Rogers, 1969, p. 153).

Even if one accepts that Socrates achieved a negative pedagogy and was not teacher as master but teacher as servant, however, it is not easy to see how such a negative pedagogy could be employed by modern teachers. On the whole, they are not free to teach nothing, nor only to ask questions; more often, they have content that they must teach. Whilst Socrates can be seen to take seriously the question of authority that lies within the teacher–student relationship, it may be that we must also take the dilemma seriously but understand it in other ways. Bluntly, the modern teacher is set the challenge of finding ways to deal with their abstraction, their mastery, that enable them to serve the development of critical and thinking students whilst still being able to teach them something. Here, the contradiction of the teacher–student relationship takes its philosophical form. How can the teacher be both master and servant? The answer, within the philosophy of the teacher, lies in philosophical thinking about the significance and import of the experience of contradiction and dilemma: that is, by taking seriously the idea that there is something more, something deeper, to be learned from the difficulties of theory and practice.

It is towards this thinking that we now move in Chapter 5 but will be taken up in more detail in Part III below. In the following chapter we will
look at three examples of perspectives on the teacher that find a spiritual significance in these dilemmas and oppositions, and in the unintended consequences that are repeated between teacher and student. This will open up the way to deeper analyses of the teacher–student relation, deeper in the sense that thinking around the spiritual significance of teaching is implicated with notions of vocation, service and even self-sacrifice. These may or may not be religious in character. We will see in the next chapter how this spiritual pedagogy fares both with and without a sense of the transcendent.

NOTES

1. This is one version of praxis, viz. revolutionary praxis. Another type of praxis would be the one that Aristotle writes about in Book 6 of the Nicomachean Ethics.
2. For example, this objectification sees the ‘I’ turned into an object that consumes pleasure, amusement and entertainment. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote a celebrated essay on what they called ‘the culture industry’. They argued that the amusement on offer from the culture industry was only ‘the prolongation of [mechanized] work’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 137). The manufacture of amusement was sought after by the workers as an escape from the tedium of work, but in fact it only served to commend ‘the depressing everyday world’ (p. 139) to which they must return. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that even laughter itself has become an ideological weapon in the objectification of the individual. They state that within the culture industry fun and laughter have become ‘the echo of power as something inescapable’ (p. 140). Fun, they say, ‘is a medicinal bath. The pleasure industry never fails to prescribe it. It makes laughter the instrument of the fraud practised on happiness’ (ibid.). It perpetuates laughter as ‘a disease which has attacked happiness and is drawing it into its worthless totality’ (p. 141). They conclude that ‘a laughing audience is a parody of humanity (ibid.). See also Chapter 2 above.
3. This is in line with Adorno and Horkheimer who argue that no ‘independent thinking must be expected from the [cinema] audience’ (1979, p. 137).
4. I shall return to look in more detail at Deleuze in Part III below.
5. It is not just ‘post-enlightenment’ thinkers who draw attention to the relationship between education and the Holocaust. Theodor Adorno, one of the main figures in critical theory, opened a radio broadcast in 1966 by noting that ‘the premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again . . . Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to this single ideal: never again Auschwitz. It was the barbarism all education strives against’ (Adorno, 2003, p. 19).
6. As with other theorists and perspectives in Part II I am presenting the ideas of Bauman uncritically. The overall aim of Part II is critically to comprehend the whole that is presented when these different interpretations of education appear in relation to each other within our experience.