Chapter 5
The Spiritual Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Our journey to this point, through Chapters 3 and 4, has been a difficult one. Our guides along the way have, in a number of different respects, all tried to help us deal with the fundamental issue of authority and freedom in education. So far, we have worked with the idea that the teacher can try either to be master of the students or servant to the students. We have not yet explored the idea that the teacher can experience herself in some way not just as either master or servant, but in the context of a different kind of relationship altogether, one where the relation of master and servant has spiritual significance. The teacher who is committed to her students’ freedom, as was shown in the preceding chapters, experiences for herself the *aporia* of theory and practice. An *aporia* is a dilemma that seems to offer no path to its resolution. Here, then, the *aporia* of theory and practice is that teachers seem unable to put the theory of freedom successfully into practice and the result is that what the teacher *says* or *intends* is not what she actually *does*. The teacher who teaches for the freedom of the students’ own learning finds herself having to use her authority over the students to do so. She has to be master of them in order to serve their educational needs. She has to know in advance how and what it is that the students must find out for themselves. Thus her goal of students’ autonomy, whether it be through critical or post-enlightenment pedagogies, is compromised by a contradiction that she seems unable to shake off.

In consequence, the two approaches examined in Chapter 4 can provoke the thinking teacher towards a philosophy of the teacher but they can only take her so far along that road. They contribute to the philosophical education of the teacher because they acknowledge dependence and contingency as the fate of the teacher. But in teaching *about* contingency—indeed, in teaching *for* contingency—neither critical pedagogy nor post-enlightenment pedagogy has learned how to teach *as* contingency. Neither has succeeded in recognising how the contradictions that are inescapably part of the experience of contingency are themselves another and different kind of educational experience.

This is not to say that critical pedagogy or post-enlightenment pedagogies are not important. Their contribution to debunking some of the illusions of modern thinking and modern educational theory and practice in particular are vital. It is within these two broad perspectives that many of the teacher’s contradictory (and negative) experiences are generated. The problem is that for the thinking teacher who needs to deepen her understanding of these difficult (negative) experiences neither perspective offers any help, because both fail to give due recognition and
substance to the experience of contradiction in the teacher’s work. They fail to give substance to the truth in education that the master in education always comes first. (‘Fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom’, Hegel, 1977, pp. 117–118, and Proverbs, 1. 7.) Indeed, the post-enlightenment teacher who, through irony, asserts his lack of identity or of authority fails to be aware of the truth of irony. Irony requires that the teacher be both exactly what he appears to be and not what he appears to be. The teacher who misses the former gives up all rights to being a teacher. Worse, he becomes a dissembler, feigning not to be a teacher whilst using the fact that he is one in order to do so.

There could be a number of responses here to these difficulties. The teacher could, for example, give up teaching altogether in the certain but despairing knowledge that, despite her best efforts, the system, the institution, the instrumental method with its testing and tables of results, always wins through. Equally, she could become resigned to the conditions that oppose her at every turn and take the view that ‘if you can’t beat them, you might as well join them’. In fact, both of these responses are forms of resignation. The former resigns from teaching, the latter resigns to teaching. But there is within philosophy a different way of understanding this dilemma for the teacher. It is not an alternative to these difficulties; it is rather a different way of learning from them. It is a perspective that recognises the difficulties as offering something to learn from—about practice, about theory, and about the teacher. In this chapter we are going to examine three theorists who have, again in different ways, found the nature of these difficulties within theory and practice to have spiritual significance, particularly for the teacher who suffers them. In a sense, these three thinkers can be seen to take seriously the commendation from Adorno and Horkheimer that even when conditions make such thinking extremely difficult, and even when it appears that such thinking can change nothing, nevertheless, they say, our thinking ‘must examine itself’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. xv). This is what we shall undertake now by exploring the ways in which Martin Buber, Simone Weil and Martin Heidegger have each discerned spiritual import in the asymmetry of the teacher–student relationship. For Buber, Weil and Heidegger, in different ways, the aporetic experience of theory and practice is an experience of the relation between teacher and student where individuality or identity is in some sense lost to and re-formed in their encounter. This re-formation can be called spiritual for it seems to transcend each individual person and to have a significance beyond each of them, a ‘beyond’ that can be said, at least to begin with, to be an experience of unity over separation. For Buber and Weil spirit is essentially religious; for Heidegger, as we shall see, it is more nationalistic and political.

MARTIN BUBER (1878–1965)

The first spiritual philosophy of the teacher that we shall explore comes from a recent Jewish thinker, Martin Buber. He has written a great deal
about how religious insights can inform the understanding of everyday human relationships, but also within his work there are many references to education. In addition, the philosophy for which he is most famous, the *I-Thou* relation, can, as Buber himself shows, be applied in particular ways within education and in particular to the teacher–student relationship. It will be seen that with Buber, as with our other selected philosophers, what is offered here is not just an understanding of the teacher as pursuing either a project of enlightenment or its critique, not just a philosophy of the teacher as either master or servant, but a spiritual philosophy where both meet in a genuine encounter. Buber’s philosophy of the teacher helps us to understand something of the spiritual significance of the identity and work of the teacher.

In one sense, Buber sees education as a struggle against forms of estrangement in a world where humanity, as we have already seen, becomes alienated from itself. For Buber, true human relations are to be found in ‘dialogue’ or in what he calls the *I-Thou* relation. In opposition to the *I-Thou* relation, however, he finds in the world another relation, the *I-It* relation. In the modern world this latter relation becomes dominant over the *I-Thou* relation. The *I-It* relation has a resemblance in some ways to the notion of objectification that was considered in Chapter 3: for Marx, objectification succeeded in treating people as things and converted the objects of their labour into commodities. In consequence, the value of the work—in effect, the essence of the human species—becomes invested in commodities. What is lost in and to objectification is genuine human relations between people, and between people and the natural world.

This is similar to Buber’s critique of the *I-It* relation (although he does not have an economic theory of objectification). Buber says of the *I-It* relation that it enables an ‘accumulation of information’ (Buber, 1987, p. 5) between people whose relations to each other are thus characterised as between objects. Such people are, therefore, merely ‘surrounded by a multitude of “contents”’ (p. 12). In the *I-It* relation a man ‘rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses . . . [H]e has nothing but objects’ (pp. 12–13). Buber argues that this reduction of the living process to things or to facts is the overriding characteristic of modern life: ‘This is the exalted melancholy of our fate, that every Thou in the world must become an It . . . As soon as the relation has been worked out, the Thou becomes an object among objects . . . fixed in its size . . . Life . . . can again be described, taken to pieces, and classified . . .’ (pp. 16–17). Any communication between *I-It* (i.e. between the I and the object, or the information, or the person treated as the object) ‘is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding’ (Buber, 1947, p. 37), which, he says, is ‘the inalienable sterling quality of “modern existence”’ (ibid.). Against the *I-It* relation Buber sees the genuine human relation of *I-Thou*, where you and I experience ourselves in and as our relation to each other such that it is impossible for either of us to become fixed, classified or objectified. The relation of *I-Thou* is ‘mutual’ (1987, p. 15). ‘My Thou affects me, as I affect it’ (ibid.). Thus, he claims, ‘all real living is a meeting’ (p. 11).
In addition, the *I-Thou* relation is spiritual because ‘spirit is not in the *I*, but between *I* and *Thou* . . . Man lives in the spirit if he is able to respond to his *Thou*. He is able to if he enters into relation with his whole being’ (p. 30). In the *I-Thou* there is no object, only relation, and in this relation is to be found our spiritual life.

In view of this, Buber argues, the *I-Thou* relation exists as a dialogue in which there is ‘a genuine change from communication to communion’ (Buber, 1947, p. 21). This dialogue does not consist in what is said for the ‘what’ is only its objective form. The *I-Thou* occurs ‘when in a receptive hour of my personal life a man meets me about whom there is something, which I cannot grasp in any detail at all, that “says something” to me’ (ibid.). That is, he ‘speaks something that enters my own life’ (ibid.). Thus, in the *I-Thou* relation someone addresses us through ‘inner’ (p. 27) speech.

An example might help here. Buber describes a meeting in 1914 of men from different European countries who had come together over the outbreak of the war. Even from the start, and because of the seriousness of the situation, ‘the conversations were marked by that unreserve, whose substance and fruitfulness I have scarcely ever experienced so strongly’ (p. 21). As the discussion moved to the subject of who should represent the countries, Buber recalls that ‘a man of passionate concentration and judicial power of love, raised the consideration that too many Jews had been nominated, so that several countries would be represented in unseemly proportion by their Jews’ (p. 22). Buber, inwardly sympathetic to the speaker’s viewpoint, outwardly protested the injustice of the former clergyman’s argument saying that the Jews had access to the Jewish being of Jesus in a way denied to the Gentile. ‘He stood up, I too stood, we looked into the heart of one another’s eyes. “It is gone,” he said, and before everyone we gave one another the kiss of brotherhood’ (ibid.). Buber interprets this by noting that ‘the discussion of the situation between Jews and Christians had been transformed into a bond between the Christian and the Jew. In this transformation dialogue was fulfilled. Opinions were gone, in a bodily way the factual took place’ (ibid.).

Buber gives two other examples:

in the deadly crush of an air-raid shelter the glances of two strangers suddenly meet for a second in astonishing and unrelated mutuality; when the All Clear sounds it is forgotten; and yet it did happen, in a realm which existed only for that moment. In the darkened opera-house there can be established between two of the audience, who do not know one another, and who are listening in the same purity and with the same intensity to the music of Mozart, a relation which is scarcely perceptible and yet is one of elemental dialogue, and which has long vanished when the lights blaze up again (pp. 245–246).

Indeed, the participants in such a genuine dialogue do not need to say anything at all to each other for in the truly *I-Thou* relation, ‘no matter whether spoken or silent . . . each of the participants really has in mind the
other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them’ (p. 37). Buber also distinguishes two other kinds of dialogue: technical dialogue, ‘which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding’ (ibid.), and monologue, in which ‘disguised as dialogue . . . two or more men . . . speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways’ (ibid.).

This is of course only a very brief summary of Buber’s notions of I-Thou and I-It. Nevertheless, what we now need to do is to try and draw out the implications of the I-Thou relation for education in general and for the spiritual significance of the teacher–student relation.

There are two points we can pursue here. First, that the I-Thou relation is an educational relation, and second that the I-Thou relation, seen as pedagogy, has a special form in the classroom between the teacher and the student. In both cases the I-Thou relation works against the objectification of its participants and for their genuine human relation to each other.

First, then, how is I-Thou innately an educational relation? It is so because in the I-Thou relation I have to relearn who I am, who you are, and to recognise or ‘become aware’ (p. 27) that each of us, now, is not merely a solitary individual but is, instead, a mutual relation. The learning here, we might say, is that in becoming aware of myself as a person only in relation to another person, I am also becoming aware of the fiction of the world of facts and of objectification. In addition this is an education for the teacher about his identity, for if he is a teacher only in relation to the students then his certainty, his autonomy and his mastery are therein negated. The I-Thou relation, therefore, is implicitly a critique of, or a re-education in regard to, our taken for granted assumptions about ourselves and others. Buber implies that there is such an educative import to the I-Thou relation when he says that, when we are truly in relation, we ‘enter a realm where the law of the point of view no longer holds’ (p. 23) and we must learn about ourselves and others all over again.

But at the same time Buber warns that our lives are becoming increasingly unreceptive to these educational moments where the factual content of the world of I-It is lost to the mutual dialogue of I-Thou. ‘Each of us,’ he says, ‘is encased in an armour which we soon, out of familiarity, no longer notice. There are only moments which penetrate and stir the soul . . . [F]or most of the time we have turned off our receivers’ (p. 28). Thinking of the work of some of the critical theorists explored above, we might say here that for most of the time we prefer the security of answers, facts, certainties, objects, property and even of entertainment to the unsettling but educative relation of I-Thou.

Second, then, what are the implications of this for teachers? What does the mutuality of I-Thou mean in developing a spiritual pedagogy? Buber finds I-Thou in the classroom, but not in its pure ‘mutual’ form. Equally, he does not find the spiritual made educational in either of the two pedagogical traditions that we looked at earlier in the book: the enlightened pedagogy of the master or the more critical pedagogy of the servant. Nor does Buber find the mutual I-Thou relation in a synthesis of
these. In another essay, ‘On National Education’, he offers a summary of the two perspectives that have dominated educational theory and that we have already characterised above as those of the master and the servant. There are, he says,

two basic approaches to education and the task of the educator. According to the first, ‘to educate’ means to draw out of the child that which is in him; not to bring the child anything from the outside, but merely to overcome the disturbing influences, to set aside the obstacles which hinder his free development—to allow the child to ‘become himself’.

According to the second approach, education means shaping the child into a form which the educator must first visualize, so that it may serve as a directive for his work. He does not rely on the child’s natural endowment but sets up an opposing pattern which determines how such endowment is to be handled (1997, p. 149).

The latter, rather more old-fashioned approach, which we have met as the approach of the master and which is based on the unquestioned authority of the teacher, he compares to that of the sculptor. ‘Like Michelangelo,’ says Buber, ‘he [the master] sometimes sees the shape hidden in the crude marble . . . which he wishes to realise in the material [the student] at his disposal’ (ibid.).

The new, more progressive approach, characterised by the teacher who seeks ways of serving the free and sometimes natural development of the student, he likens to gardening and to that of the gardener. This teacher ‘fertilises and waters the soil, prunes and props the young plant, and removes the rank weeds from around it . . . [Then] he trusts to the natural growth of that which is inherent in the seed’ (ibid.). He concludes that the gardener’s education ‘indicates the care given to a soul in the making, in order that the natural process of growth may reach its culmination’ (ibid.), whilst the sculptor’s education ‘means influencing a soul to develop in accordance with what the educator who exerts the influence considers to be right’ (ibid.).

Buber is unhappy with both of these, for neither represents the relation of I-Thou. The gardener’s approach is more humble: he believes in the fundamental goodness of man, but it is also ‘more passive’ (p. 150). The sculptor’s approach ‘shows greater initiative, but carries with it graver responsibilities’ (ibid.). Buber concludes that the sculptor has too much confidence in his relation with the student. He, the master, knows too much. The gardener, on the other hand, has too little confidence in his relation with the student. He does too little.

Daniel Murphy, in his book Martin Buber’s Philosophy of Education, comments that, being dissatisfied with both the traditional and the progressive approaches to education and learning, Buber ‘did not attempt therefore to resolve the conflicting viewpoints of classical and progressive educators’ (Murphy, 1988, p. 96). On the contrary, ‘he writes of truths that are disclosed through the knowing, loving, believing and other
relationships of everyday life, i.e. truths that are disclosed through relational rather than objectivist criteria’ (p. 95).

In terms of pedagogy within the classroom and specifically in regard to the teacher–student relationship, Murphy argues that for Buber neither can be grounded in any kind of truth that is based on ‘objective validity’ (ibid.). On the contrary, Murphy claims, Buber sees genuine education to be ‘grounded in the integrity and truth of the relation in which the teacher is reciprocally engaged with his pupils and by the various forms of relational truth towards which he can guide them by his word and example’ (ibid.). As will shortly be apparent, the nature of this relation in the classroom is not as clearly or symmetrically reciprocal for Buber as Murphy might be suggesting.

Buber further explained his thoughts on education in a paper given in 1925.2 This essay begins with a dualism or an opposition reminiscent of the gardener and the sculptor. This time the dualism is between the historical reality that the new born must conform to and the uniqueness of each child. A one-sided approach to this dualism is taken by the gardener who merely ‘releases’ the unique force of each child, and by the sculptor who nurtures by copying history into the child. Freedom, says Buber, is as misunderstood in modern educational theory as authority was in old educational theory. In the spirit of I-Thou, Buber has a different understanding of the teacher–student relation. The teacher can bring dialogue, or I-Thou, into the classroom if he practises ‘inclusion’, which means that he can live and work ‘from the standpoint of the other’ (Buber, 1947, p. 125). This is not empathy, for empathy still treats the other as an object to be understood. Inclusion means being aware that ‘experiencing the other side’ (p. 123) is also experiencing one’s own being. Buber says of a teacher who practises inclusion that

he enters the school-room for the first time, he sees them crouching at the desks, indiscriminately flung together, the misshapen and the well-proportioned, animal faces, empty faces, and noble faces in indiscriminate confusion, like the presence of the created universe; the glance of the educator accepts and receives them all (pp. 121–122).

This I-Thou relation of inclusion and pure dialogue becomes an I-It relation if the teacher seeks to dominate his pupils or to interfere in their lives. Interference misunderstands I-Thou. Interference treats the life of the pupil as an object, and results in the pupil treating the teacher also as an object, as something to be obeyed or to rebel against. Using the drawing class as his example, Buber distinguishes the ‘compulsory’ school of thought from the ‘free’ school of thought. The former begins with the rules; the latter eschews those rules. Buber, however, finds the third term of their relationship to each other in the ‘hidden influence’ (p. 117) that the teacher expertly practises. We saw above in Part I that ‘the third term’ can be taken as referring to the thinking or the experience of a dualism, a dualism, in this case, between the rules of drawing and the absence of such rules. Buber himself talks of the idea of ‘the between’ where

and Thou meet, and calls it ‘a narrow ridge’ on which ‘a genuine third alternative is indicated’ between individualism and collectivism (p. 246).

The difference here between interference and influence is the difference between the teacher as master or servant and the spiritual teacher. In the drawing class if the students are told the rules to which they must conform, then the drawing will have little risk of personal engagement for the student. Alternatively, if the student is left ‘free’ to draw the object, undoubtedly each drawing will be different, but each effort will also be untutored by any ‘scale of values’ (p. 115) or by any judgements or standards by which the work can be taken forward. It is here, says Buber, when the risk of freedom has been taken by the teacher and the student that ‘the delicate, almost imperceptible and yet important influence begins—that of criticism and instruction’ (ibid.). In the influence that the teacher practises, he is master in the sense that he must select those aspects of the world that are to be brought to the child as a condition of the possibility of drawing. But equally the influence that he brings to bear on the work is contingent upon each element of ‘the created universe’ that constitutes his classroom. In selecting the world the teacher does not usurp the world. He is only its ‘hidden influence’ (p. 117). In the compulsory school of drawing, then, ‘the preliminary declaration of what alone was right made for resignation or rebellion’ (p. 115). But when the teacher is able, through her own example, to bring the ‘scale of values’ to the student by which his own work may be put into relation with criticism and instruction, then, ‘after he has ventured far out on the way to his achievement, his heart is drawn to reverence for the form, and educated’ (ibid.).

The only way this relation can be practised is in the spiritual understanding of the teacher between authority and freedom. Such an experience, Buber writes, finds the teacher with an ‘almost imperceptible, most delicate approach’ (ibid.) to educating, one that can be as little as ‘the raising of a finger, perhaps, or a questioning glance’ (ibid.). Here Buber understands the contradictory experience of the teacher who must teach in order not to dominate. This is the experience of the teacher as master and servant, and it is the spiritual identity of the relation between the teacher and the student practised as influence. Buber states:

if the educator of our day has to act consciously he must nevertheless do it ‘as though he did not’. That raising of the finger, that questioning glance, are his genuine doing. Through him the selection of the effective world reaches the pupil. He fails the recipient when he presents this selection to him with a gesture of interference . . . Interference divides the soul in his care into an obedient part and a rebellious part. But a hidden influence proceeding from his integrity has an integrating force (p. 117).

Such a teacher, therefore, appears to the student as only another of the influences of the world. As such, Buber is able to define education through the relationship of teacher, student and world: ‘what we term education,
conscious and willed, means a selection by man of the effective world; it means to give decisive effective power to a selection of the world which is concentrated and manifested in the educator’ (p. 116, emphasis in original). The teacher does select the parts of the world to present to the student, but this selection is embodied in the teacher as his own life, his own example. The result is that he influences the child as the world does, but also, like the world, does not interfere. Buber concludes, ‘the forces of the world which the child needs for the building up of his substance must be chosen by the educator and drawn into himself . . . The educator educates himself to be their vehicle’ (p. 129). It is here, in the spiritual relationship of the teacher who is, in a sense, both master and servant to the education of the student, that Buber believes he can find the spiritual renewal that he seeks.³ And contra one of the modern tendencies that have caused the need for such a renewal, he sets himself firmly against those who hold that only egoistic or charismatic personalities can make successful teachers. On the contrary, Buber has high praise for the quiet work that is the hidden influence of the teacher. He says, in an age which is losing form the highly praised ‘personalities’, who know how to serve its fictitious forms and in their name dominate the age, count in the truth of what is happening no more than those who lament the genuine forms of the past and are diligent to restore them. The ones who count are those persons who—though they may be of little renown—respond to and are responsible for the continuation of the living spirit, each in the active stillness of his sphere of work (p. 130).

But whilst teachers might seek Buber’s spiritual philosophy of the teacher in the reproduction of the I-Thou relation in the classroom, Buber himself notes that influence in the person of the teacher is necessarily characterised by a one-sided relationship between teacher and student. In reflecting upon the dualism of freedom and compulsion he notes that freedom is not the opposite of compulsion. In the spirit of the mutuality of the I-Thou relation, the opposite of compulsion is ‘communion’ (p. 117). Freedom in fact is the possibility of communion, and communion itself is the free desire ‘to commune and to covenant’ (p. 118) with others, the I-Thou relation. Thus,

freedom in education is the possibility of communion; it cannot be dispensed with and it cannot be made use of in itself; without it nothing succeeds, but neither does anything succeed by means of it: it is the run before the jump, the tuning of the violin, the confirmation of that primal and mighty potentiality which it cannot even begin to actualize (ibid.).

In the primal potential for communion lies what Buber calls responsibility. Not just the responsibility of the teacher to influence without dominating, but the responsibility of all human beings to respond to the address of the other. The I-Thou relation in education manifests this responsibility as inclusion, and is practised as dialogue. But Buber acknowledges that a special responsibility falls to the teacher, one that both confirms yet also in
one way exceeds Socrates’ thoughts about the necessary negativity of the teacher’s role. Because the teacher must select elements of the world on behalf of the student the relation of *I-Thou can never be mutual* between them. It would be very easy to say that the spiritual philosophy of the teacher requires that the teacher and the student be master and servant to each other. But this is not the philosophy of the teacher that Buber expounds. On the contrary, Buber holds the failure and the impossibility of the mutuality of *I-Thou* in education, and its implications for the teacher as both master and servant, to be the key experience and education of the teacher.4

Buber notes that inclusion between persons is when one ‘lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other’ (p. 125). In this way we are able to ‘acknowledge’ (p. 127) the living truth between us. However he very clearly notes that this mutuality, this pure inclusion, cannot be practised in education. Even though the ‘true relation of the educator to the pupil is based on inclusion’ (p. 126) and, as we saw above, the teacher must include all of the class that faces him, nevertheless ‘the relation of education is based on a concrete but one-sided experience of inclusion’ (p. 127).5 Specifically,

however intense the mutuality of giving and taking with which he [the teacher] is bound to his pupil, inclusion cannot be mutual in this case. He experiences the pupil’s being educated, but the pupil cannot experience the educating of the educator. The educator stands at both ends of the common situation, the pupil only at one end. In the moment when the pupil is able to throw himself across and experience from over there, the educative relationship would be burst asunder, or change into friendship (p. 128).

We saw above that for Buber spirit existed in between the relation of *I* and *Thou*. Where, then, in this one-sided version of inclusion in education is spirit to be found? It is to be found in the experience of the teacher as both *I* and *Thou*. Since the student cannot be *Thou* as the teacher, it falls to the teacher alone to have the experience of mutuality. Obviously this experience is contradictory. The teacher cannot experience mutuality on his own. Yet it is precisely this relationship that constitutes the vulnerability, the risk, the negation and the truth of his identity now as master and servant. This does not mean that it becomes an experience unrelated to the other. On the contrary it is the relation to the other experienced as the teacher’s own education about himself from the point of view of the student. The teacher’s experience repeats the *I-Thou* relation, but here he experiences himself as both of the participants—that is, as educator of the other and as educated about (the lack of) mutuality as it appears from the point of view of the other.

The man whose calling it is to influence the being of persons that can be determined, must experience this action of his (however much it may have assumed the form of non-action) ever anew from the other side. Without the action of his spirit being in any way weakened he must at the
same time be over there, on the surface of that other spirit which is being acted upon . . . Only when he catches himself ‘from over there,’ and feels how it affects one, how it affects this other human being, does he recognise the real limit, baptise his self-will in Reality and make it true will, and renew his paradoxical legitimacy (ibid.).

In short, the responsibility for selecting the world to present to the student, and the inclusion of the teacher himself as the paradoxical vehicle of its presentation, Buber calls ‘self-education’ (p. 129).

We can see now that this self-education includes the two elements that have guided our study of teacher to this point. The teacher is master in that he selects those elements of the world that are to be taught. He is also servant to the students’ own learning by risking his authority in the selection of the world that he makes and in seeing himself do so through the eyes of the students. The teacher is never more vulnerable to negation and to doubt than when he accepts the one-sided but dual-natured responsibility of educating as influence. To stand opposed to this vulnerability would be to adopt the stance of interference. This teacher would select the world but would not also be able to see himself from the other side. As such he would be unable to learn from himself about the necessity and the inevitability of his one-sided relationship to the students. In turn, this would render his integrity, his hidden influence and his being the third term between compulsion and communion, nugatory or worthless. Worse still, such a teacher would create the relation to the students of ‘resignation or rebellion’ (p. 115) for, in failing to be student to himself, he would confuse his authority with ‘a quest for control and a fear of lack of control’, a phrase found above in the Introduction to Part II (see Rose, 1999, p. 45).

Against this, the teacher who risks himself as selection and also negates himself from the other side, is the relation of self-education because he stands on both sides. Because he risks teaching an other, he is also student to himself. As such, and recalling Rose again, this teacher ‘does not permit you to transfer your authority to him, and, so, paradoxically, [the students] trust him more, because the trust is uncoerced and freely bestowed’ (ibid.). Mutuality in the teacher–student relationship, as we saw above, Buber calls friendship. The lack of mutuality, however, is what provides for the negation of the teacher. Only in this negation is the teacher working in and as the spirit of the educational relationship between the I and Thou who are teacher and student.

Buber is clear that the responsibility and inclusion that constitute this self-education are threatened if and when the educator fails to make his selection from ‘the pupil’s own reality’ (Buber, 1947, p. 127). He is able to conclude that ‘the influence of the teacher upon the pupil, of the right teacher upon the right pupil, is not merely compared to, but even set on a par with, divine works which are linked with the human, maternal act of giving birth’ (Buber, 1997, p. 138). Buber adds a new and substantial dimension to our thinking about the role of the teacher. It is a philosophy that is grounded in the real and
difficult experiences of the teacher–student relation, but equally in the recognition of the unequal and asymmetrical power of their relationship. Being able to work with this negative difficulty as an educational and spiritual experience marks Buber’s philosophy of the teacher out from the critical and post-enlightenment theorists who, in one way or another in Chapter 4, refused it, or sought to overcome it. The implication of the unequal and difficult I-Thou relation in the classroom is that the teacher is not unmoved or indeed unchanged by his relation to the student. On the contrary it is his education about being the teacher from his own risking of its authority.

SIMONE WEIL (1909–1943)

Our second example of a spiritual teacher is the French thinker and writer Simone Weil. Here, as with Buber, it is possible to uncover thoughts on teaching that find meaning and significance in the ambiguities and ambivalences experienced in being a teacher, and in the teacher–student relationship. In particular, as with Buber, the ambiguity of being the teacher who expresses herself as being both master and servant has a spiritual significance present in the difficult relation between them. In Weil’s philosophy of the teacher a third term—attention—is present, as will be seen, in the contradictory relationship between authority and freedom. This middle term, as with Buber and influence, is the notion of doubt understood not as paralysing or merely ironic but as a formative experience for the teacher about how, in her practice, she has to be both master and servant.

We have seen above that one of the fundamental ways in which teaching is experienced as a contradiction is in the gap between theory and practice, or between thought and being. Weil’s life provides a remarkable example of someone who attempted, at all times, to unite thought and being, and to lead a life that was true to her thoughts and doubts. Her largely ascetic existence infuriates some and inspires others. In relation to our explorations of the philosophy of the teacher, she provides a challenging and difficult example of someone who lived her life in the anxiety and with the doubts of being both master and servant. Indeed, this example was not restricted to her time in the classroom but extended to her work as a political activist against dehumanising factory conditions in France, and later against the Nazi occupation of that country and in the context of the war effort in general. In order, then, to understand a little about the spiritual nature of Weil’s philosophy of the teacher, it is helpful to have some details about the way she lived her own life, both as a teacher and outside formal education.

Simone Weil was born in Paris on 3 February 1909 and died on 24 August 1943, aged 34. As a teenager she became interested in the working conditions of low-paid workers and attended meetings of the unemployed. She was educated at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, where in 1928 she met Simone de Beauvoir, and in 1929 she had her first publication, which attempted to define ‘work’. She was ill for most of her life, and suffered
from severe and virtually incapacitating headaches. In 1931 she achieved her degree and was described in her final report as ‘a brilliant student’ (Anderson, 1971, p. 26). Thereafter she became a teacher in various schools. Notably during this period she used her supplementary pay towards the purchase of books for workers’ study groups that she attended and taught. She lived on five francs a day, which was the same as unemployment benefit. She is said to have been careless in dress, often with cigarette burns in her clothes, and she spoke in a rather monotonous voice.

At the end of 1932 she determined to ask for time off from teaching. Publicly the reason she gave was that she wanted to write a philosophical treatise on the relationship between modern technology, industry and culture. In fact it was her intention to gain experience as an industrial worker, and this she did for nine months between 1934 and 1935, including a period working in the Renault factory. We shall see why in a moment. In 1936 she fought in the Spanish Civil War. Around this time she had three significant religious experiences and began, in her life and her writing, to use the word ‘God’. When the Germans entered Paris in 1940, she left, hoping to go to London to continue struggling against the Nazi occupation of France. She joined the resistance in Marseilles, but eventually went to New York in 1942. Finally, she reached London and worked for the French provisional government, but she was refused permission to return to France on grounds of ill-health. In April 1943 she was found unconscious, having tuberculosis, and she died on 24 August 1943. It turned out that she had restricted her diet to what was available to her compatriots in Occupied France.

It is significant that here again it is possible to make a link between, on the one hand, the spiritual and, on the other, the ambiguities of power and authority found in teaching. At times, in Weil’s books, it is not easy to see where teaching stops and preaching begins. She has an overwhelming concern for the poor. She believes in a God, but she is not prepared to become a member of the Church, and she sacrifices her own happiness and desires so that she can share the suffering of others. She states,

the suffering all over the world obsesses and overwhelms me to the point of annihilating my faculties and the only way I can revive them and release myself from the obsession is by getting for myself a large share of danger and hardship . . . It is not, I am certain, a question of character only, but of vocation (in Miles, 1986, p. 44).

She was a teacher for much of the last twelve years of her short life and we have records from some of those she taught describing what it was like to be her student. Weil is spoken of as ‘a uniquely gifted and sympathetic teacher’ (p. 6). Despite the fact that she appears to have taught her students in a tone that was ‘low and monotonous’ (Anderson, 1971, p. 26), nevertheless her dedication to education seems to have carried itself over to them. David Anderson notes that

she treated her pupils as equals, seeking to awaken in them a response to great ideas rather than to cram them for examinations. Her methods were

open to criticism by her superiors, who looked for solid academic results rather than diffuse Socratic inquiries, but Simone Weil seems to have been ahead of her time in her way of encouraging free and creative thinking (p. 27).

Not surprisingly, therefore, the exam results of her students were notoriously awful. Clearly, as a teacher, she taught her students what she thought was important, which most often did not coincide with the examination syllabuses. One of her students has said:

our class was a small one and had a family atmosphere about it . . . when the weather was good we had our lessons under the shade of a fine cedar tree, and sometimes they became a search for the solution to a problem in geometry, or a friendly conversation . . . The headmistress [used to come] to look for marks and positions which she [Weil] usually refused to give (Miles, 1986, p. 12).

Her career as a teacher was accompanied wherever she went by her controversial teaching and by angry complaints from school inspectors and parents about the examination failures of her students. Her teaching did not fulfil their expectations of an education designed for success in bourgeois French society.

We can gain an insight into some of Weil’s most important philosophical ideas from things she wrote about teaching and education. She wrote a piece, probably in 1942, called ‘Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a view to the Love of God’. Central to Weil in education was the importance of what she termed ‘attention’. She argued that studies in schools are not interesting for their particular content—what they are about—but only to the extent to which ‘they really call upon the power of attention’ (Weil, 1977, p. 53).

What does she mean by ‘attention’ and why is it so central to education for her? In one very important way her description of attention is close to Donald Schón’s idea of the suspension of disbelief, a phrase borrowed from T. S. Eliot (see Schón, 1987, p. 94). Following Socrates, Schón points out that a student cannot know at the beginning of their course of study whether or not they are doing the right things. The student cannot know at the beginning what they will know at the end, and the student does not know enough at the beginning for the teacher to be able to explain to them everything they need to know. It falls, therefore, to the student to ‘suspend their disbelief’ in what they are being told by the teacher until such time as they can understand it for themselves. Obviously this requires the student to proceed without certainty and requires trust and faith on their part. Weil’s idea of attention is similar to this. It sees the process of learning to be a suspension of actively seeking or, in particular, grasping at the truth. Instead the learner, whether she is the teacher or the student, must suspend her desire for an answer in favour of waiting patiently for the truth of the object to reveal itself. This waiting, like the suspension of disbelief, requires faith in education per se in order to sustain the waiting, or attending, that is required.
As such, there is a spiritual import to teaching and learning to be found in her idea of attention and one that has important implications for the teacher. She argues that

attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object . . . [A]bove all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything . . . [A]ll clumsiness of style and all faulty connection of ideas in compositions and essays, all such things are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to the truth (p. 58).

She concludes: ‘we do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them’ (ibid.).

There are several important and educative aspects that should be noted here regarding this notion of attention. First, speaking in religious terms, Weil says in *Gravity and Grace* that ‘attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love’ (Weil, 1987, p. 105).

Second, she remarks that faith and love also require what she calls the ‘decreation’ of the self, suggesting that we must try to negate or overcome the ‘I’ in order to understand better the other, or, indeed, the universal that is all humanity. In attention the ‘I’ is suspended. In *Gravity and Grace* she says that ‘in such work all that I call ‘I’ has to be passive. Attention alone—the attention which is so full that the ‘I’ disappears—is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call ‘I’ of the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived’ (p. 107). In her biographical details it becomes clear that Weil spends her life trying to pay attention to all that is not the ‘I’, and this, perhaps, is exactly why for Weil suffering and truth are so intimately connected. This suspension or sacrifice of the ‘I’ in prayer and in teaching is a faith in and a love for the spiritual education that it produces. As with Buber, where spirit was between self and other, so, now, for Weil, spirit is in the space left between the decreated ‘I’ and those she is concerned to work with, be they her students or her factory workmates. Weil believes that we learn best, and we learn most deeply, when we work for and wait for something other than the self. Learning or attention for Weil is then ‘a negative effort’ (1977, p. 57). Clearly this has resonances with Socrates, and its significance for the philosophy of the teacher will be explored shortly.

Third, in her piece on school studies, she hints that learning is by nature contradictory. Weil says that a contradiction must be accepted as a fact in itself and not necessarily overcome. If, when one has worked hard to resolve a contradiction, it proves impossible, then, she says, both of the incompatible thoughts must be accepted. ‘Contradiction itself, far from always being a criterion of error, is sometimes a sign of truth. Plato knew this’ (Weil, 1988, p. 173). Weil says that opposites characterise our entire being. ‘No human thinking can escape from contradiction’ (ibid.), and in the face of this, ‘faith is the indispensable condition’ (Weil, 1977, p. 54)
for a kind of deep learning about the human condition, of which the
capacity to attend others is, for Weil, the highest quality.

Fourth, putting attention, faith, the decreation of the ‘I’ and contra-
diction together, Weil can see the important contribution that teachers can
make in the spiritual development of their pupils. ‘Teaching should have
no aim but to prepare, by training the attention, for the possibility of such
is the fact that they may never see the result of this teaching. Their pupils
will leave them and move on, as they must. But ‘every time that a human
being succeeds in making an effort of attention with the sole idea of
increasing his grasp of truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it,
even if his effort produce no visible fruit’ (Weil, 1977, p. 55). In a thought
that will ring true for many teachers who recognise that the fruits of their
work may take a long while to blossom, Weil concludes that, ‘even if our
efforts of attention seem for years to be producing no result, one day a
light which is in exact proportion to them will flood the soul’ (ibid.).
Therefore, and this explains her controversial teaching methods and poor
student performance in examinations, ‘students must . . . work without any
wish to gain good marks, to pass examinations, to win school successes . . .
[all their work should] aim solely at increasing the power of attention’
(ibid.). Thus, she says, ‘our first duty towards school children and students
is to make known this method to them, not only in a general way but in the
particular form which bears on each exercise’ (p. 59). Her last sentence in
her notebook before she died reads: ‘the most important part of
education—to teach the meaning of “to know” (in the scientific sense)’
(Miles, 1986, p. 51).8

Fifth, and lastly, she believes that the education of attention is for truth
and good and against evil: ‘the true road exists. Plato and many others
have followed it. But it is open only to those who, recognising themselves
to be incapable of finding it, give up looking for it, and yet do not cease to
desire it to the exclusion of everything else’ (Weil, 1988, p. 157). Desire is
crucial to the work of attention for desire leads the intelligence. She
writes: ‘for there to be desire, there must be pleasure and joy in the work.
The intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy. The joy of learning is as
indispensable in study as breathing is in running. Where it is lacking there
are no real students . . .’ (Frost and Bell-Metereau, 1998, p. 54). When
desire aims at truth it sets aside all questions of what ‘I’ want in favour of
giving attention to truth. To do so, for Weil, is to give oneself to working
and learning in the world for the good. She believes that since illusion
blocks truth, illusion is, therefore, evil. Here, education as attention can be
enlisted against evil, setting itself the task of freeing itself from the
illusions that are rooted in human ignorance and misunderstanding.
Although we might call this process of education ‘enlightenment’, clearly
it is not the one-sided model of enlightenment seen in Chapter 3 above. It
differs from it not least because whilst the master of Chapter 3 teaches
truth, attention for Weil teaches openness to truth.

We can try now to relate this educational philosophy more closely
to the relation of the master and the servant that is structuring our approach

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to the philosophy of the teacher. It can be observed, first, that Weil herself explores the teaching relationship in the language of the master and the servant. The teacher who teaches for attention in the student is embarked upon a vocation that works for the soul of the student. In this work, the teacher is helping the student to attend to the true process of learning so that, when the time is appropriate, he, the student, may be fully open to the truth of the object that penetrates him. In a manner similar to that of Gur-Ze’ev, as we saw in Chapter 4, the teacher is helping the student to detach himself from the short-term entertainments that distract him from the work needed to sustain attention. In this way, the student also finds that attention is best sustained when the selfish desires of the ‘I’ are suspended. The goal, therefore, of Weil’s spiritual teaching is in the effort to negate the ‘I’ by waiting in faith and love for the ‘most precious gifts’ (Weil, 1977, p. 58). In the language of master and servant, Weil writes:

[Thus,] may each loving adolescent, as he works at his Latin prose, hope through this prose to come a little nearer to the instant when he will really be the slave—faithfully waiting while the master is absent, watching and listening—ready to open the door to him as soon as he knocks. The master will then make his slave sit down and himself serve him with meat (p. 59).

We have already seen above how teachers can experience their work within the contradictions of the need to be both master and servant. This is a contradiction that Weil too finds at the heart of the educational relationship. Only the waiting and the attention of the student, brought about by the teacher who risks her authority for the education of attention, ‘can move the master to treat his slave with such amazing tenderness’ (ibid.). The service of the teacher is in the decreation of the ‘I’ of the teacher who attends her students. Weil recognises that such service ‘is a condition of love’ (ibid.), but on its own, she says, it is not enough. In addition to love for her students, the teacher must attend the student in each ‘particular form’ (ibid.). Weil understands that the teacher can only attend her students by enabling them to attend to truth for themselves. The truth of the teacher’s work is not as master over student but as master dependent upon the truth of the work of the student. Her call to the teacher to be both master and servant is summed up in her description of the kind of teaching and learning that attention commands:

In every school exercise there is a special way of waiting upon truth, setting our hearts upon it, yet not allowing ourselves to go out in search of it. There is a way of giving our attention to the data of a problem in geometry without trying to find the solution, or to the words of a Latin or Greek text without trying to arrive at the meaning, a way of waiting, when we are writing, for the right word to come of itself at the end of our pen, while we merely reject all inadequate words (ibid.).

She concludes, ‘every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament’ (ibid.).
This concept of teaching and learning as attention and decreation of the ‘I’ may, in the climate of testing and league tables, seem slightly luxurious. Who has time to attend to the National Curriculum (in England and Wales for example) in such a way that their students can wait for the deeper truths of each exercise to penetrate them? Who can afford the patience required to achieve an empty and waiting mind ‘ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it?’ (p. 58). It is more the case that the mind of the student be filled so that this content can be reproduced in the testing régime. Nevertheless, for the teacher who despair of such a regimen, and the teacher who, despite the contradictions that it produces, still works for the freedom of her students to think for themselves, Weil’s thinking speaks directly to the pain and struggle of those efforts. Indeed, it speaks of the significance of those efforts and struggles even though they may always seem to fail.

To work for attention and decreation is, Weil claims, to teach for love; not only love of God, but also ‘love of our neighbour, which we know to be the same love’ (p. 60). The meaning of the struggle by the teacher to exceed the formal curriculum goes beyond ‘warmth of heart’ or ‘pity’ (ibid.). It has at its core the struggle to put others before ourselves. Weil is clear in pointing out an elective affinity between academic work and the spiritual struggle involved in our relations to others, particularly those less fortunate. Those who suffer in the world, she says, need above all else ‘people capable of giving them their attention’ (ibid.). This quality is not achieved overnight, and indeed will be accompanied by many failures. ‘The capacity to give one’s attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing’ (ibid.). But the truth of attention is in the struggle of the ‘I’ against its desire to know in advance or to settle the issue. Attention enables a relation to the academic project and to the sufferer that never seeks to evade or to overcome its difficulty. Only from within the struggle can the truth of the relation as struggle be recognised.

We saw, earlier, in the Introduction to Part II that Gillian Rose spoke of her consultant, Dr. Grove, as understanding the truth of his limitations within the difficult relation to his patients. But equally, he attended the truth of Rose’s illness; he did not mask his limitations by seeming to know the illness too well. Dr Grove’s pedagogy here is, in Weil’s terms, an implicitly spiritual and educational philosophy of the teacher, for it too is attending to difficulty and dilemma as they are actually experienced in work. To learn to be open to the difficulty of any particular form of academic work is to learn the same openness required to attend to the suffering to others. Weil writes:

so it comes about that, paradoxical as it may seem, a Latin prose or a geometry problem, even though they are done wrong, may be of great service one day, provided we devote the right kind of effort to them. Should the occasion arise, they can one day make us better able to give someone in affliction exactly the help required to save him, at the supreme moment of his need (p. 61).
Perhaps it is this asceticism, this struggle against selfishness that makes Weil’s spiritual philosophy of the teacher too difficult for teachers? But it is not the end-point of the struggle that is most important here. There are very few saints. What Weil is offering is a philosophy of the teacher that speaks to the failings, the limitations, and the vulnerabilities of the teacher who risks attending the other. As master she must take responsibility for teaching and for the content she provides. As servant she must find ways of teaching that content that open up the space for attention to truths that are unanticipated by the content. The teacher who serves the freedom of her students is in this case the teacher who herself practises attention and decreation. It is ‘only watching, waiting [and] attention’ (p. 60) that enable the teacher who is master also to be the teacher who is servant.

Weil’s philosophy of the teacher as master and servant can be summed up by noting that teaching and learning require the same suspension of certainty and knowledge in both teacher and student. The teacher must await the truth of the student as the student must await the truth of the lesson. The challenge for teachers, with or without a national curriculum, is, therefore, that in geometry and Latin (as in all subjects) they struggle to teach for the truths that lie not in the content itself but in the relationship that the student has to the content. And they do this through having the same relationship to their students. For those teachers who find themselves able to attend their students, by letting their students attend the truth of their objects, there is a spiritual import to their work. The giving of one’s attention to learning is of the same quality as the giving of one’s attention to suffering. Weil writes: ‘the love of our neighbour in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: “What are you going through?”’ (ibid.). This embodies the recognition that the sufferer is a human being like us, who requires to be looked at in the manner of attention. ‘The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this’ (p. 61). She concludes: ‘academic work is one of those fields which contain a pearl so precious that it is worth while to sell all our possessions, keeping nothing for ourselves, in order to be able to acquire it’ (ibid.).

From our brief exploration of the concept of ‘attention’ as a form of teaching and learning, we are perhaps in a better position now to understand why Weil led the kind of life she did. To suffer with others was a way of expressing her attention, her negation of the ‘I’ and her openness to truth. She lived a life that tried to express the not-I (perhaps we can say the I-Thou) of herself, or the human relation that she shared with others. In a sense, Weil is offering ‘attention’ as a way of coming to understand or to learn about the way humanity is suppressed and distorted in the world. Christopher Frost and Rebecca Bell-Metereau argue that, whether in the schools or in the factories, Weil was practising her educational philosophy. She was following her doctrine of the ‘popularization of knowledge, and she strived to achieve this goal both by educating herself about the lives of the people she wished to serve and by serving the people with whom she worked’ (Frost and Bell-Metereau, 1998, p. 14).
But what are we to make of such sacrifices on the part of Weil? Is this a life reflecting merely a somewhat pious ideal of service, or does it reveal something more spiritual within the demands and the struggles of the contradictory relation of servant and master? Is the truth in fact that Weil was from a reasonably wealthy family and chose to go into factories in the secure knowledge that her own life circumstances meant that she did not have to do this. Was this not somewhat patronising? Critics have recently wondered whether, ‘considered within the context of certain endeavours that she attempted, she can even be seen as downright ludicrous or pathetic, most particularly in her attempts to be a factory worker, an occupation for which she could not have been more ill suited’ (p. 22). T. S. Eliot, no less, in his introduction to Weil’s *The Need for Roots*, says that ‘one is struck, here and there, by a contrast between an almost superhuman humility and what appears to be an almost outrageous arrogance’ (Weil, 1995, p. vi). Weil’s response to Eliot’s insight about her being both master and servant at the same time might be found in the following:

nothing gives me more pain than the idea of separating myself from the immense and unfortunate multitude . . . I have the essential need, and I think I can say the vocation, to move among men of every class and complexion, mixing with them and sharing their life and outlook, so far that is to say as conscience allows, merging into the crowd and disappearing among them, so that they show themselves as they are, putting off all disguises with me. It is because I long to know them so as to love them just as they are. For if I do not love them as they are, it will not be they whom I love, and my love will be unreal. I do not speak of helping them, because as far as that goes I am unfortunately quite incapable of doing anything as yet (Weil, 1977, pp. 6–7).10

Perhaps we can say that, like Buber, she chose the philosophical and spiritual struggles of relation over the evils of separation and self-interest. In the language of master and servant, we might also say that she rejected being master of those she attended precisely by risking the pre-emptive understandings of their suffering that led her, as master, to the factory in the first place. In this way, she accepted that her own difficult experiences were necessarily those of master and servant: master because she could observe suffering, and servant because that mastery was then risked by attending the truth of that suffering. In seeing the dialectic of humility and arrogance in Weil, Eliot touches the truth of Weil’s educational philosophy. Only the arrogance of the master can lead her to want to understand those who suffer; and only the humility of the servant knows that precisely it is this arrogance that must be risked. If we see Weil only as master then she is the middle-class reformer come to enlighten and liberate the workers. This is the master of the enlightenment model. If we see Weil only as servant, then she appears as a pious ascetic who believes that she should become as those who suffer. But if we see Weil as understanding the necessity of being master and servant, then we recognise the spiritual significance of her acceptance of the contradictory
struggle that not only attends attention but is the very substance of
attention embodied in this philosophical teacher. We should not forget that
Weil did not merely observe the sufferings of others in some objective or
clinical fashion. She worked in the contradiction of teacher and student,
and of freedom and domination, both in the factories and in the classroom.

For a conclusion we can look again to the recent book by Frost and Bell-
Metereau. The authors note that in the question of how much in life to give
and to sacrifice, Weil insisted that the truth required painful experiences.
They note that Weil put herself at both physical and emotional risk,
recognising this stance as essential to any quest for genuine truth’ (Frost
and Bell-Metereau, 1998, p. 107). Of this risk, Weil says: ‘there is
nothing that I might not lose . . . [But this] state of extreme and total
humiliation . . . is also the condition for passing over into truth’ (ibid.).
Such is the spiritual philosophy of the teacher that is Simone Weil. The
authors end their book by asking:

why do so few people seek the high standards of perceptual acuity and
intellectual rigour that Weil herself sought? Perhaps her life offers the
best reply. The answer, it seems, is one of cost. Readers of Weil may
focus primarily on the outcome of her life because doing so reminds them
of the potential cost of such a life course. However, if one remembers
Simone Weil’s own criterion—that one must choose a life of attention
without regard for results—then her life is a model not of failure but of
near perfection (p. 110).

MARTIN HEIDEGGER (1889–1976)

Our third spiritual philosophy of the teacher, which is drawn from Martin
Heidegger, is significantly more controversial. Although Heidegger’s
writings that are relevant to the philosophy of the teacher are brief, they
contain some potentially educative insights about the philosophical nature
of the teacher–student relationship and the work that the teacher performs
in serving that relationship. There is, however, a dark side to Heidegger’s
work that we cannot ignore, and it serves as an important warning to us.

The teacher as explored in this chapter recognises the spiritual nature of
his work. Both Buber and Weil have argued that in the relation between
teacher and student there is a third partner, the work and the experience
of relating. This work for Weil was attention and for Buber influence, and
both recognised in this work the spiritual nature of the difficulties of
power and authority that necessarily accompanied teaching. Equally both,
in different ways, mediated their authority through their openness to
vulnerability.

The spiritual teacher who understands himself to be the contradictory
relation of master and servant knows that he must treat the contradictory
telos of authority and freedom with great care. Its negative authority is
delicate yet unforgiving. But what happens when that spiritual import of
teaching becomes deformed? What happens when the teacher avoids the
necessity of being both the authority of negation and the negation of (his)
authority? In such avoidance the teacher becomes master even of spirit itself. There is great danger here, for our difficult experiences still call for resolutions. When spirit is deemed to be that resolution, it becomes a political weapon wielded towards an end other than itself by a teacher who assumes for himself mastery of spirit. Here difficulty becomes the opposite of itself. It becomes spirit as certainty. This changes fundamentally the relation between teacher and student and is at least one interpretation of the fate of Heidegger’s philosophy of the teacher, as we shall now see.

To understand something of Heidegger’s relevance for the teacher it is first necessary to try to give a flavour of his more general philosophy. For Heidegger learning is always connected to thinking. Both in motion a process that in a sense calls us to an awareness of our own selves or of our own Being. (What is intended by this capitalisation will become clearer below.) Thinking and learning are at the same time the being of Being—or, we might say, where we are being our own Being. Similarly, to ask a question tells us more in some ways than answering the question. To ask a question is to be already part of the possibility of asking the question in the first place. The questioner is implicated in the question; or, the question is his being called to the awareness that he already is. Heidegger says, ‘we ourselves are, in the strict sense of the word, put in question by the question’ (in Krell, 1993, p. 385), and to be put in question is to know or recognise that we are Being.

But there is a complication. Thinking, learning and questioning provoke an awareness of our Being, but when we try to get closer to this awareness, to Being in itself, it withdraws from us. This is because if we ask of the origin of every question that provokes awareness, it can be known only as something lost in the asking. To ask the question ‘what is Being?’ is to ask the question that Being has made possible. The question is always the effect of Being. As such, we can say that Being withdraws from direct contact with us and is known by us only through these effects. It is in the question but cannot be known as the answer to the question. The name Heidegger gives to this possibility that is already Being is Dasein. In Being and Time he puts it like this:

Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it—all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves. Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own Being. The very asking of this question is an entity’s mode of Being; and as such it gets its essential character for what is inquired about—namely Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiry as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term ‘Dasein’ (Heidegger, 1992, pp. 26–27).

This is difficult stuff. Let me try to put it like this. What is at stake for Heidegger is that whatever I do, whatever I think, whatever I might ask, I have to accept that they are only possible because I am in some sense
already alive. My Being, or my being alive, is the necessary pre-condition of any activity, any thinking at all. If I miss this, I might take myself to be the master who is independent of such preconditions and that would be an illusion. His point, then, is that in asking questions I am drawn to the fact of my own Being, but in such a way that, while I can only repeat my implication or contingency within it, I can never know it objectively from a detached or privileged viewpoint.

It is we ourselves to whom the question ‘What is called thinking—what calls for thinking?’ is addressed directly. We ourselves are in the text and texture of the question. The question ‘What calls on us to think?’ has already drawn us into the issue in question. We ourselves are, in the strict sense of the word, put in question by the question. The question ‘What calls on us to think?’ strikes us directly, as a lightning bolt. Asked in this way, the question ‘What calls for thinking?’ does more than merely struggle with an object, in the manner of a scientific problem (in Krell, 1993, p. 385).

This perhaps becomes a little clearer when we assess its implications for Heidegger’s philosophy of the teacher. Clearly Heidegger’s argument about Being has some connection with one of the most important themes in our discussion of the philosophy of the teacher, namely the practice of asking questions. If the teacher is to be the questioner he needs to understand himself as Dasein, that is, as an effect of the possibility of Being. Furthermore, if the Dasein of the teacher is charged to call others to their Dasein, this teacher is setting himself up as the Being that must withdraw in the face of the students’ questions. I shall quote at length here a much-cited passage from Heidegger that tries to describe this philosophy of the teacher:

Teaching is even more difficult than learning. We know that; but we rarely think about it. And why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. Indeed, the proper teacher lets nothing else be learned than—learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we really learn nothing from him, if by ‘learning’ we now automatically understand merely the procurement of useful information. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he still has far more to learn than they—he has to learn to let them learn. The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than the apprentices. The teacher is far less sure of his material than those who learn are of theirs. If the relation between the teacher and the learners is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official. It still is an exalted matter then, to become a teacher—which is something else entirely than becoming a famous professor (pp. 379–380).

What a beautiful passage. On the surface it defines teaching as learning, teacher as learner, and suggests their conjunction to be difficult, and the
difficulty, precisely, to be the learning. It shows how the purpose of education and, therefore, of the teacher is not to fill students with knowledge, but to let them learn and, most importantly, to let them learn learning itself. It highlights the necessary humility of the teacher, for the success of his teaching will not seem to reflect on him at all. In this, the teacher must above all be teachable and this teachability alone must be his only authority (see Tubbs, 2003a, pp. 75–90). Moreover, Heidegger seems here to have described a philosophy of the teacher where the teacher is master because he must anticipate the Dasein of his students and call to it, but also servant to Dasein because the success of this calling requires his own withdrawal so that the students come to think their own Dasein for themselves. A sense of humility and vulnerability could be said to be integral to being teacher in Heidegger’s philosophy of the teacher. Thus, the teacher’s identity falls to the movement that is learning.

Integral to the notions of calling and withdrawal as authentic education and learning is the idea of the current or draught that is produced by the withdrawal of Being from the question, and the withdrawal of the teacher from the student. This current is the calling of that which withdraws. Thus, the calling by a teacher to his pupils—‘learn from me’—is not in this sense intended to be any kind of mastery or command over against the pupil. It is rather ‘an anticipatory reaching out for something that is reached by our call, through our calling’ (in Krell, 1993, p. 386). The call of the teacher is not just to his own Dasein, it is to the anticipation of the Dasein of others. What prevents his dominating them is that what the teacher calls, or points towards, is at the same time his withdrawal from it:

What withdraws may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him. Being struck by actuality is what we like to regard as constitutive of the actuality of the actual. However, in being struck by what is actual, man may be debarred precisely from what concerns and touches him—touches him in the surely mysterious way of escaping him by its withdrawal. The event of withdrawal could be what is most present throughout the present, and so infinitely exceed the actuality of everything actual (p. 374).

One of the reasons that Heidegger’s philosophy has proved so appealing is that it seems to ensure that the results of thinking about Being are not known in advance. As we saw in Chapter 4, post-enlightenment thinkers find the notion of the project that knows in advance the ends or truths it must achieve to be tyrannical, totalitarian and a suppression of difference. Heidegger would seem to offer a model of just such ‘undecideability’. He argues that when we point towards what falls away or withdraws, although we are called into the resulting current, this is a sigh ‘without interpretation’ (p. 375). This open-endedness of questioning and learning makes Heidegger’s philosophy of the teacher attractive to those who wish to combat the seemingly closed and totalising narrative of the enlightenment model that we explored above. It is this notion of learning and teaching as ‘without interpretation’ that seemingly ensures the respect for
and the tolerance of difference in the students’ education. Education cannot be deemed to have reached its end because ‘arrival’ is only a prejudice of the intellect. As the cabinetmaker learns from the wood what slumbers within it, so the teacher must learn of the student without interpretation and, therefore, without any closure of possibility (pp. 379–381).

Beyond formal education itself, Heidegger extols the importance of the whole of one’s life as the questioning and learning Dasein. Questioning, he says, is not to serve those who have grown tired and their complacent yearning for comfortable answers. We know: the courage to question, to experience the abysses of existence and to endure the abysses of existence, is in itself already a higher answer than any of the all-too-cheap answers offered by artificial systems of thought (in Wolin, 1993, p. 51).

In the same year, 1933, he added that this kind of philosophical questioning that goes to the heart of our own Being ‘will then no longer be simply the preliminary stage to the answer as knowledge . . . but questioning will itself become the highest form of knowledge. Questioning will then unfold its ownmost power for disclosing the essence of all things’ (p. 33), including, as we have seen, the essence of the teacher as the possibility of teaching for the students’ own Dasein. Thus, in his philosophy of the teacher, both teacher and student will be expected to practise ‘the most constant and most uncompromising and harshest self-examination’ (p. 29). To risk the danger and the excitement of questioning, both in ourselves as teachers and in the withdrawal of our students is, says Heidegger, actually to ‘will ourselves’ (p. 38).

In a way very similar to that of Plato, Heidegger sees how this philosophy of the teacher, and this kind of philosophical thinking, has the spiritual significance of serving the society or community in which one lives. Just as Plato argues for a republic divided into the wise, the courageous and the skilful, so Heidegger argues for a community or a people wherein, through questioning and self-examination, students will learn and practise three kinds of service, each in their way embodying the spirit of the whole society. They will learn to share the physical work of the community—labour service; they will learn to share in the protection of the community—military service; and they will learn to embrace the difficulties of understanding the history and destiny of the community—knowledge service. This latter, he says, is not to be ‘the dull, quick training for an “elegant” profession’ (p. 35). Rather it is to embrace the Being of the community by placing oneself within its ‘overpowering’ Being (p. 36). He intends that this threefold model of education as service will reform university study in particular so that it will no longer serve the professions but rather the reverse. The professions were to serve the spiritual mission of the questioning student. Of this spiritual mission, he claims: ‘all capacities of will and thought, all strengths of the heart, and all capabilities of the body must be developed through struggle, must be
intensified in struggle, and must remain preserved as struggle’ (p. 37, emphasis in original).

There are themes here that we can pick out as relevant to our own exploration of the spiritual nature of being the teacher. Clearly of paramount importance for Heidegger, as for Buber and Weil, is the idea that the teacher must be a questioner. He must question himself at the same time as he provokes questioning in others. Heidegger grounds education and the Being of the teacher not in an objectified vision per se but in the vision of struggle as spiritually educative and formative in itself. There are few philosophers we can draw on who have so clearly identified the difficulty of being a teacher to students as the very essence of the job itself.

There are other features that spring from this that in some ways complement what we have already seen in Buber and Weil. For example, by putting thinking at the heart of our Being, Heidegger offers no rest from the withdrawal of the teacher from the Dasein of the student, or from the decreation of the taken-for-granted self, or from the call to the living relation that is the work of the teacher. Questioning calls us to the vocation of Being because it makes us realise our dependence upon other more overpowering elements. As the I-Thou relation and ‘attention’ both lead the I into the kind of spiritual work where its certainty decreases as its work for the other increases, so, now, in the education for and of Dasein, what we are becomes less and less certain as the recognition of the precondition of Being grows ever more irresistible. In each case the spiritual is the meaning of the negative experiences about ourselves and our practice that we have as teachers. In each of the cases mentioned, the spiritual is present in the ways that our negotiation of the authority of the master teaches us to become students of its difficulties, dilemmas and contradictions. It is present in our commitment to work for others, but more so in the failures that accompany our attempts. Heidegger’s particular emphasis and special contribution to the philosophy of the teacher is, I think, that he shows how we can become servant of the struggle by risking our own authority, our own mastery, so that others may hear the call of the question that comes from themselves. As the master succeeds, so also the master fails to secure himself. As the students’ questioning grows, as they answer their own call, so the lessons get harder for the teacher, not easier. Dasein is not an answer; it is—on its most sympathetic reading—a question. As the Dasein of the student emerges, so the power and the calling of the question increases. In this philosophy of the teacher, the latter is master and servant, living and working in the question rather than resolving it.

But, if all of this is true, then how is it that this same Heidegger is ‘a member in good standing of the Nazi Party from 1933 to 1945’? (see Wolin, 1993, p. vii). How is it that there are, from around 1933, speeches in which he extols the virtues of Hitler as ‘the present and future German reality and its law?’ (p. 47). How is it that this teacher, who seems to recognise the necessity of the spirit of the teacher to contain his own withdrawal, also writes that ‘knowledge means: to be master of the situation into which we are placed?’ (p. 58).
One answer to these questions is that Heidegger not only extolled spirit as the Being of the question and the question of Being: he also believed that the spirit of the struggle was the truth of the German people (Volk) and the German state. In short, Heidegger grounds spirit, or struggle, in German National Socialism or Nazism. Where Buber and Weil find the import of the third partner between authority and freedom in the negation of will, Heidegger locates it in the mastery of the properly educated will of the German people and the state.

What is the tenor of Heidegger’s rhetoric around the time of 1933? When this will of the German people, this third partner between authority and freedom is enacted, therein is realised ‘the new reality’ (Farias, 1989, p. 143) of the German people. The education of this new reality, he says, is ‘that act of questioning that is born from the movement of the future that erupts into the present’ (ibid.). And again, ‘asking questions is always marching ahead, sounding the future’ (p. 147). As such, the movement requires ‘the new Teacher’ (p. 139) whose will embodies the truth of the German people. Heidegger saw this new teacher emerging from the politicised youth in Germany who constituted ‘the new student’ (p. 142). Such students were members ‘of the SA or of the SS’ (ibid.). From their energy and will would emerge ‘the new order’ (p. 146). They were the ones with the necessary courage to act for the realisation of the new reality. They were to be the leaders, the Führers, whose own will would lead to the binding unification of all wills into ‘the one great will of the state’ (Wolin, 1993, p. 59). It is the true comradeship found in the moment of vision, the Augenblick, that ‘educates the Führers’ (Farias, 1989, p. 145). Heidegger summarises his educational philosophy as ‘learn to know ever more deeply: from now on every single thing demands decision, and every action responsibility’ (Wolin, 1993, p. 47). He advocates this education as a ‘spiritual will to serve’ (Farias, 1989, p. 149), sacrificing the self for a genuine understanding of Being as this destiny, here and now, in the Volk and in the National Socialist revolution that will engender ‘the total transformation of our German existence (Dasein)’ (Wolin, 1993, p. 46).

In sum, the will of the leaders was legitimate because they worked for the destiny of the German people, a destiny known and recognised in advance and served by those whose spirit matched that future reality.

It is significant that the university was to play a key role for Heidegger in serving this spiritual vision of the national community of the future. When he was made Rector of the University of Freiburg, he made a now infamous address from his new position, ‘The Self-Assertion of the German University’. In it, he called on the teachers and students of the university to commit their will spiritually and intellectually to the true ‘essence of the German university’ (p. 29). He states: ‘this essence will attain clarity, rank, and power . . . when the leaders are, first and foremost and at all times, themselves led by the inexorability of that spiritual mission which impresses onto the fate of the German Volk (people) the stamp of their history’ (ibid.). This will require, as we just saw, ‘the most constant and most uncompromising and harshest self-examination’ (ibid.).

The self-examination will require strength, and the assertion of will. What the will must aim to realise is the ‘spiritual world’ (p. 33) of the German people, a power that, says Heidegger, ‘comes from preserving at the most profound level the forces that are rooted in the soil and blood of a Volk’ (pp. 33–34). He concludes, ‘a spiritual world alone will guarantee our Volk greatness’ (p. 34).

We could continue listing quotations that illustrate the links that Heidegger makes between the mission of the National Socialists in Germany before World War II and his vision of philosophy and education. But we need now to draw out two criticisms of Heidegger’s ideas as they relate to the philosophy of the teacher. The first is his carelessness with the spirit of the teacher–student relation, and the second is his carelessness with spirit per se.

A philosophy of the teacher that is contained in the contradictory relation of the teacher and the student requires the negation of the teacher for the truth of its theory and practice. The teacher who teaches for doubt, for questioning, and for the realisation of contingency is not only concerned with the negation of certainty in theory, or in principle. In his practice he knows that he must bring it about and that he, as teacher, cannot remain immune from this practice. The teacher can ‘attend’ the student or can ‘influence’ the student, but in neither case does the teacher remain only the teacher. On the contrary, the spiritual struggles that attention and influence contain mean that the teacher cannot remain the same after the work as before it. The work is his education, a work that requires the learning of both teacher and students.

In Heidegger’s description of the teacher–student relationship seen above, however, it is the teacher who calls the student to self-examination and questioning, or to his own Dasein, his own Being. We saw that Heidegger describes how Being withdraws from the question leaving only its trace as ‘possibility’. The same is now true of the teacher. The teacher withdraws in order for the truth of his teaching to be present as the trace of its possibility. But, the negation of the teacher here is no more than mere rhetoric. The teacher withdraws in the face of that which is already known or presupposed in advance. His withdrawal from the student replaces his negation by the student. This both denies the student her own work, and protects the mastery of the teacher from the negative implications of that work. When Heidegger says that the difficulty of teaching is ‘to let learn’ (Krell, 1993, p. 380) and that the truth of the teacher is the ‘spiritual will to serve’ (Farias, 1989, p. 149), this is rather the dissemblance of the teacher who is and remains master. It is in the risk of the relation to the other, not in the withdrawal from that relation, that the truly philosophical teacher represents the truth of this dilemma and opposition that constitute his work.

This leads to the second, perhaps even more significant criticism of Heidegger’s notion of a spiritual education. It becomes clear that whereas in the spiritual education of the teacher the outcome of learning is ambivalent, Heidegger’s spiritual education is known to be grounded in the destiny of its own future. Like Buber’s sculptor, this teacher knows too
much in advance about the end of education—in the sense of its certain outcome as the will of the German people—to risk the difficulty and struggle of education in his own work, difficulties and struggles that will not stand being owned by any individual or any ‘race’.

In Heidegger, then, at the nadir of his thought, the philosophy of withdrawal becomes the philosophy of mastery; the philosophy of letting learn becomes the dogma of the German will; the openness of education ‘without interpretation’ becomes the totalitarian certainty of nationalistic teaching; and the current or draught that calls to education becomes the power of ‘the storm’ (Wolin, 1993, p. 39) of Nazi ideology. Heidegger perceived what he called a general decline in the ‘moribund pseudocivilization’ of the West, whose spiritual strength was failing and starting ‘to come apart at the seams’ (p. 38; see also his ‘Letter on Humanism,’ in Krell, 1993, pp. 217–265). We should not be surprised then that a concrete ontology, a definite way of Being, was employed against the arbitrary freedoms of this pseudo-civilisation, or even that education itself degenerated into mastery as nationalistic fervour. But we need to be ever mindful that, in the face of the difficulties of spiritual education and the philosophical teacher, it is likely that seemingly plausible and attractive resolutions will be offered. Against this, the philosophical teacher continues to choose the harder path of being master and servant at the same time, and resisting pseudo-ends, such as nationalism, that can so easily and disastrously colonise it.

We have to understand Heidegger’s contribution to the philosophy of the teacher, therefore, as a warning about the uses and abuses that spiritual education can fall into. How easily the third partner that accompanies teacher and student in their difficult relation becomes a spiritual certainty, and one that retains its spiritual appeal whilst in fact setting itself against all who are ‘others’, or are outside of the chosen people. We have to see through the spiritual rhetoric of Heidegger’s educational philosophy and realise that it is nothing more than the mastery and domination of doubt, of questioning and of thinking posing as their essence or their truth. Against this ‘jargon of authenticity’ the negative education that is the work of doubting, questioning and learning has its own truth, a truth that is not mine or yours, neither the teacher’s nor the student’s simply to own or to possess.

NOTES
1. This is the spirit of Freire’s comment in Pedagogy of the Oppressed that in banking type education, ‘instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués’ (1972, p. 45).
2. This paper is translated as ‘Education’ in Buber’s Between Man and Man (1947). It was an address to the Third International Educational Conference, Heidelberg, August 1925.
3. Buber was concerned that within Judaism the teachings of the Law (theory) and the actual lived life of Jews (practice) had become separated. He sought a spiritual renewal through education that could reunite these elements with each other. See, for example, Buber 1967 and 1997.
4. Of course, we have to be cautious here for Buber is referring specifically to Jewish education and in particular the relationship between the Law and everyday modern Jewish existence. This is not
the place to discuss the relationship between Judaism and modernity. (I have done so to a certain extent in Tubbs, 2004, Chapter 6.) Suffice to say that those who find in Buber a new ethical relationship, a new unity that can easily be transferred from Judaism to modernity—and this includes educators who argue for the purely mutual form of the I-Thou relation between teacher and students in the classroom—may not themselves be practising inclusion.  

5. Buber makes the same point about the relationship of therapist to client in his conversation with Carl Rogers in 1957. Buber says of the therapist, ‘you have necessarily another attitude to the situation than he [the client] has. You are able to do something that he is not able. You are not equals and cannot be’ (Buber, 1998, p. 162).

6. This is taken from the essay ‘Teaching and Deed’, and is also reprinted in Buber, 2002, pp. 234–239.

7. I am aware that Buber would most likely not welcome calling responsibility and inclusion a ‘philosophy’ of the teacher. Philosophy was one of the elements he blamed for the separation of thinking and being, or theory and practice. The intellectualisation of Western philosophy, he says, has turned God into a (Kantian) idea and only a renewal of Jewish teaching will be able to overcome the ‘depressing loneliness’ (Buber, 1967, p. 158) of the intellectual climate of Europe. However, Buber also notes that the separation of thought and being ‘transforms the Jewish question into a human question’ (1967, p. 25). We might, therefore, risk calling his theory and practice of inclusion, in its one-sidedness in education, a philosophy of the teacher precisely because it does highlight the teacher’s experience of paradox and contradiction in relation to freedom and authority, and, crucially, he finds this experience to be educational and formative. Equally, we might call this experience of influence and negation a spiritual education for the teacher because it learns of itself from within the separation of thought and being. This opens up for us the spiritual significance of the teacher’s difficult identity. Lastly, we might call the spirit of the teacher in Buber—that raising of the finger or the questioning glance, the ‘hidden influence’—a third partner in the necessarily one-sided relation of teacher and student. It is the same one-sidedness or experience of opposition and contradiction that has given momentum in Chapters 3 and 4 to our search for a philosophy of the teacher that is grounded in these difficult experiences.

8. ‘Scientific’ in this context, broadly speaking, means philosophical.

9. The others in whom she found the crisis of humanity most acute were the poor and, in industrial twentieth-century France, the factory worker. In her writing about her experiences of factory life she notes the way that that such work suppressed man’s true humanity because it suppressed his ability and his will to pay attention, to learn, making him, in order just to survive, not want to be human. To suppress attention is to suppress man’s need to learn, to crush his power of attention and thus also his ability to care for himself and for others. Here are some of Weil’s observations about working in factories.

It is inhuman; work broken down into small processes, and paid by the piece; relations between different units of the firm and different work processes organised in a purely bureaucratic way. One’s attention has nothing worthy to engage it, but on the contrary is constrained to fix itself, second by second, upon the same trivial problem, with only such variants as speeding up your output from 6 minutes to 5 for 50 pieces, or something of that sort . . . (Miles, 1986, p. 20).

The situation itself automatically banishes rebellious feelings . . . (p. 21).

One dare not be insolent to the foremen and, moreover, they [the conditions] very often don’t even make one want to be. So one is left with no possible feeling about one’s own fate except sadness. And thus one is tempted to cease, purely and simply, from being conscious of anything except the sordid daily round of life. And physically too it is a great temptation to lapse into semi-somnolence outside working hours. I have the greatest respect for workmen who manage to educate themselves. It is true they are usually tough; but all the same it must require a lot of stamina (ibid).

In front of his machine, the worker has to annihilate his soul, his thought, his feelings, and everything, for eight hours a day . . . One submits in silence . . . One cannot be ‘conscious’ (p. 27).
And in the midst of it all a smile, a word of kindness, a moment of human contact, have
more value than the most devoted friendships among the privileged, both great and small. It
is only there that one knows what human brotherhood is. But there is little of it, very little.
Most often, relations between comrades reflect the harshness which dominates everything
there (ibid.).

10. Note that Rose is struck by Weil’s inability to disappear or to pass unnoticed (Rose, 1993,
p. 222).
11. Perhaps it is worth noting here that there is a better defence here against Heidegger’s being a
racist than against his being a spiritual master. It is in the nature of the Dasein that he describes
that it can never be assumed purely biologically or separated in some way from the conditions
that constitute it. The extent to which this is contradicted by the idea that authentic Dasein is to
be found in the soil and the blood of the Volk is obviously highly debateable. An incisive
exploration of this theme can be found in Cohen, 2003, Chapter 1.
12. I use the term ‘careless’ deliberately here as Heidegger believed that ‘care’ was an essential
14. The contributors to the recently published Heidegger, Education and Modernity (Peters, 2002)—in
which the first item, allegedly a transcript of the deposition of Heidegger before the Committee on
De-Nazification, proves to be a hoax—generally give priority in their studies to the ways in which
Heideggerian philosophy can be employed in education against instrumentalism in, for example,
science (Copper); normalising education (Gur-Ze’ev); performativity (Smeyers); the technological
dissolution of the historical essence of the University (Thomson); resistance to technology’s
totalising effect (Standish); calculative thinking (Fitzsimons); and the machinery of standardisation
(Bonnett). The result is that in the same volume, Paul Standish apart—who argues that the lack of
(mis)recognition of the other in Heidegger ‘undermines his ontological project [which] founders
toward a kind of nihilism’ (Peters, 2002, p. 166)—the dangers of spiritual totality unmediated in
and by real social relations, real subjectivity, are not explicitly recognised by the other contributors
to Heidegger, Education and Modernity. In sum, the suppression of property relations in Being and
Time is not recognised. I have argued elsewhere (Tubbs, 2004, Chapter 3) that Heidegger’s notion
of care in Part I of Being and Time, lacking actuality, has identity imposed upon it as time (and
destiny) in Part II. The silence on the relation of Being and Time to Heidegger’s Rectorship is a
silence which also suggests that philosophy can be abstracted from practice. In addition, it is a
silence that represents the political as if it was not a representation. It is the culture, the re-
formation of education and philosophy, and modern subjectivity, which is silenced here. It is,
finally, a silence that elides the retreat into the dualisms that Heidegger is being employed precisely
to destroy—say, the dualisms of creative/standardising, techne/poetry, closure/openness. It is in
this repetition of such dualisms that private property relations and philosophy mark their eternal
return. It provides, at least, another contingent beginning for the philosophy of education to
reassess the necessity of the philosophical resources that it has mistakenly and dangerously
discarded.
15. This is the title of a book by Adorno that carries criticisms of Heidegger. It is helpful to note,
here, that Adorno says of ‘Heidegger’s absorption into Hitler’s Führerstaat [that it] was not an
opportunist manoeuvre: it followed from a philosophic attitude of mind in which the Führer and
the dominant power of being were virtually identified’ (Adorno, 1992, p. 24).