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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

NEGOTIATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND PUBLIC
EDUCATION: CONCEPTUALIZING A PROPHETIC PRAGMATIC
TEACHER FROM TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

JEFFREY AYALA MILLIGAN

Norman, Oklahoma

1998

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EDUCATION: CONCEPTUALIZING THE PROPHETIC PRAGMATIC
TEACHER FROM TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This inquiry participates in continuing philosophical debates over the appropriate relationship between religion and public education (RRPE) and the conceptual consequences of any such relationship for teachers (Purpel, 1989; Noddings, 1992, 1993; Yob & Laird, 1994, 1995; Götz, 1997). Identifying problems inherent in RRPE, it proposes criteria for any attempt to renegotiate RRPE and thus reconceptualize *teacher*: i.e., affirmation of diversity, social authorization, moral-ethical idealism, non-'realist' ontology, love ethic, and meaningfulness. These criteria ground a critique of three paradigmatic conceptions of *teacher*--as prophet, as technician, as common sense pragmatist--here found inadequate for an historical moment when conflicts over RRPE threaten school's claimed role in democratizing society. This critique concludes, however, that Cornel West's (1989) prophetic pragmatism provides a useful philosophical framework for renegotiating RRPE and reconceptualizing *teacher*.

Using an embodied literary-philosophical approach to analyze three teacher portraits from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Laird, 1991; Bogdan, 1992; Alston, 1996), this study demonstrates that one portrait--Baby Suggs--represents a teacher whose practice is consistent with prophetic pragmatism and meets the criteria above. Here named the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* (PPT), the concept derived from that portrait denotes a person who grounds teaching in a sense of the *holy* as

an unschematized response to existential mysteries of human experience (Otto, 1958) and in ongoing creation of democratic community governed by a love ethic. PPT responds to current tensions of RRPE by presenting religious, secular, and scientific narratives on their own terms as contingent, imperfect, but meaningful instances of human desire to explain existence and thereby derive some moral and epistemological structures by which to order human lives. Deploying narrative, art, and poiēsis in service of a love ethic, PPT aims to motivate social criticism and inspire ameliorative vision in learners, yet does so from a position of pragmatic intellectual humility. Thus PPT is better able than teachers conceived as prophets, technicians, or common sense pragmatists to negotiate and renegotiate RRPE. For, unlike them, PPT decenters would-be totalizing narratives as necessary but limited attempts to comprehend what we do not know in order to fashion a meaningful present.

Chapter I

Negotiating the Relationship between Religion and Education:

The Prophetic Pragmatic Teacher

Public Education: "Pyrning and Pyrrning in the Widening Gyre"¹

Public education in the U.S. may well be falling apart, and the role of *teacher*, one of the traditional centers around which the educational process revolves, is subjected to increasingly powerful centrifugal social forces. Less than five decades after the Supreme Court finally expanded the Jeffersonian ideal of common, public education as a bedrock of democracy to all citizens, that still imperfectly realized ideal is threatened with cultural balkanization. Calls for school choice, vouchers, public support for private schools, gender and/or race specific public schools, and the phenomenal rise in home schooling appear to undermine the Deweyan ideal of the school as a place where all races, classes, and genders

¹William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 6th Edition, Vol. 2*, M.H. Abrams, et. al., eds., New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993, p. 1880. In drawing on Yeats' poem to characterize current tensions in U.S. education I do not intend to be overly apocalyptic or to imply that the concept of the teacher as *prophetic pragmatist*, which I will propose, is some "rough beast" . . . "slouching toward Bethlehem to be born." I do think, however that his metaphors of broken circles and spinning out of control are apt characterizations of current educational conflicts. And I do hope to recover, through this concept of *prophetic pragmatic teacher*, a possibility of social harmony, the loss of which fills Yeats' poem with such dread.

come together to inculcate and sustain a culture of democracy. And the widespread public dissatisfaction with public schools which underlies many of these movements is often directed at teachers. Though not without their supporters, teachers are variously described as unionized obstacles to vital educational reforms, liberal threats to traditional values, racist and sexist agents of cultural hegemony, or intellectual laggards inadequate to the task of ensuring American economic superiority. These disagreements and the charges they inspire against teachers represent competing visions of the just society and the educated person and the sorts of teachers needed to carry out those visions.

Perhaps the most powerful of these centrifugal forces is a result of our deep cultural ambivalence and strong social disagreement over the appropriate relationship between religion and public education. In fact, much of the impetus behind the movements for school choice, vouchers, and public support for private education stems from many citizens' concern that secular public education is actively and deliberately undermining their religious beliefs. Teachers are often accused of promoting "secular humanism" or, in many instances where they openly reflect the religious values of their communities, of promoting religion.² Caught between strict defenders of the notion of the separation of church and state and a

²For a good overview of the current conflict over these issues see Barbara B. Gaddy, T. William Hall, and Robert J. Marzano, *School Wars: Resolving Our Conflicts Over Religion and Values*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.

resurgent religious right, our traditional concepts of *teacher* are centers that cannot hold. The object of this inquiry is to de-center the conflicting positions over the appropriate place of religion in public education by constructing a concept *teacher* which will enable actual teachers to negotiate a balance amidst these centrifugal social forces.

So, one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of this moment in the cultural history of the United States and, more specifically, its public schools is the debate over the appropriate relationship between religion and education, a debate which cannot be accurately portrayed as a contest between wild-eyed religious fanatics and reasonable defenders of secular democracy, between a "worst. . . full of passionate intensity" and a "best. . . lacking all conviction."³ It is a conflict between competing visions of education and concepts of *teacher*. In response to such conflicts, the philosopher of education John Dewey (1938) once wrote that "all social movements involve conflicts which are reflected intellectually in controversies...It is the business of an intelligent theory of education to ascertain the causes for the conflicts that exist and then, instead of taking one side or the other, to indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the contending parties."⁴ And the African-

³Yeats, op. cit.

⁴John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1938, p. 5.

American philosopher of religion, Cornel West (1993), has issued a similar challenge to get beyond the competing discourses of Eurocentrism and multiculturalism--two ideological constructs which mask efforts by certain groups to gain access to the rewards of the status quo and which intersect in important ways the religious tensions in education--in order to create a cultural, political movement that can provide some consensus, some unity across the diversity of identities and positions which preserves the irreducibility of individual identity within participative communities.⁵

The fundamental question, of course, is how. How do educational theorists go about finding a "more inclusive plan of operations?" How might they get beyond the conflict of competing discourses and concepts that threatens public education and achieve some degree of consensus on the relationship between religion and education and a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating that relationship ? What might all this mean for public education? What might it mean for the way we conceive the role of the teacher in public education and society in general? These are the questions which will guide this inquiry.

Obviously, the challenges and risks of re-negotiating the relationship between religion and education and revising the concept *teacher* are daunting, so

⁵Cornel West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times: Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume 1*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993, pp. 3-32.

daunting in fact that the discretion represented in the current ideal of strict separation may be the better part of intellectual valor. This was, after all, the apparent conclusion of those involved in the expansion of common schools in the late 19th century when schools evolved in an increasingly secular direction.⁶ And, though Dewey did speculate upon the outlines of a "common" faith that would separate the "religious" aspect of human experience from supernatural "religion" and transfer it to his ideal of democracy guided by critical intelligence and thus resolve the antagonism between religion and science, he was under no illusion that his philosophy of religion was a settled belief capable of defining the presence of religion in public education.⁷ His common faith actually involved the gradual extinction of traditional supernatural religion, an eventuality he knew was unlikely in the foreseeable future. Thus, his advice of 1908 probably still held, as far as he was concerned, in 1934 and might still hold today:

Bearing the losses and inconveniences of our time as best we may, it is the part of men to labor persistently and patiently for the clarification and development of the positive creed of life implicit in democracy and science, and to work for the transformation of all practical instrumentalities of education till they are in harmony with these ideas. Till these ends are further along than we can honestly claim them to be at present, it is better that our schools should do nothing than that they should do the wrong things. It is better for them to confine themselves to their obviously urgent

⁶R. Freeman Butts, *The American Tradition in Religion and Education*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1950.

⁷John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934.

tasks than that they should, under the name of spiritual culture, form habits of mind which are at war with the habits of mind congruous with democracy and science. It is not laziness nor cynicism which calls for the *laissez-faire* policy; it is honesty, courage, sobriety, and faith.⁸

One might argue that contemporary American society is even further from Dewey's common faith today than it was when he wrote that optimistic philosophy of religion. Supernatural, other-worldly religious denominations have grown along with, and some scholars suggest, in direct response to more open, ecumenical denominations.⁹ And the challenge is further complicated by the growth in religious diversity.¹⁰ Thus the threat of religious dogmatism is no less than it was in Dewey's day while the growth of religious diversity heightens the divisive potential of encounters among faiths in the public schools. In addition, the values of many fundamentalist and evangelical groups are fundamentally and violently opposed to the still incomplete evolution of democratic ideals regarding the human rights of women, children, gays and lesbians and others.¹¹ Would re-negotiating the

⁸John Dewey, "Religion in Our Schools" in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Volume 13, ed. Jo Ann Boyston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977, p. 168.

⁹Rodger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

¹⁰Kenneth Wald, *Religion and Politics in the U.S.*, Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1992.

¹¹Leroy S. Rouner, ed., *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

relationship between religion and education compromise those rights?¹²

Clearly, one of the toughest problems in any renegotiation of the relationship between faith and school and redefinition of the concept *teacher* is accommodating the extreme, for instance the absolutism characteristic of fundamentalist and conservative evangelical groups, as well as some proponents of science, and their contradiction of certain views of human rights.¹³ Dewey and the contemporary theologian Leonard Swidler (1990) have argued that dialogue among religions and between the religious and secular-scientific worlds, an inevitable aspect of any renegotiation of the relationship between religion and education or redefinition of the concept *teacher*, will require the surrender of such absolutist claims as a fundamental prerequisite.¹⁴ Yet such a requirement clearly

¹²This and related challenges to the re-negotiation of the relationship between religion and education and thoughtfully articulated in Susan Laird, "Spiritual Education in Public Schools? *Religious Education* 90, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 118-132.

¹³In fact, absolutist truth claims are one of the defining characteristics of fundamentalism. See James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977 and *Beyond Fundamentalism*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984; and Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Power and the Glory: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992. For a discussion of this conflict see Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, "Gender and the Limits of Inclusion: Should Multiculturalism Include Fundamentalism?" *Religious Education*, in press.

¹⁴Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 33; Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, p. 66.

puts off serious reconsideration of this relationship to a distant and uncertain future, leaves unresolved the current tension between religion and public education, and perpetuates apparent ethical contradictions whereby cultural and epistemological arguments which are used to promote the rights of some groups constrain-if critics like Carter, Nord, and West are correct-the rights of others. It also ignores compelling arguments based on values of the multicultural movement and epistemic assumptions of post-analytic philosophy that would seem to require such a renegotiation of this relationship as well as a revision of traditional understandings of the concept *teacher*.¹⁵

Amid such social polarization, if public education is to realize the ideal of itself as a force for creation and sustenance of democratic culture, then it must renegotiate the existing relationship between religion and public education, for to maintain the status quo appears to threaten the fragmentation of public education as a democratic commons. It follows that any such renegotiated relationship between religion and public education would have important consequence for our understanding of the concept *teacher*, since teachers, along with their students, are the central agents of the educational process. One fundamental premise of this

¹⁵See Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, "Multiculturalism and the Religious Right: Is Dialogue Possible?" *Journal of Thought* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 45-54 and Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, "Religion, Public Education, and Dewey's Call for an 'Intelligent' Theory of Education," *Educational Foundations* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 69-84.

inquiry, therefore, is that dominant traditional and contemporary concepts of teachers are inadequate to this task: they do not offer a conceptual model that can meet the needs of a new relationship between religion and education that seeks to preserve public schools as a democratic commons, nor do they offer a conceptual framework for the role of teachers that enables them to negotiate the intricacies of that relationship. The object of this inquiry is to articulate a concept of *teacher* which can fulfill both tasks.

In this chapter I will formulate a set of evaluative criteria which such a concept of *teacher* that is able to fulfill these tasks must meet. In the following chapters I will then deploy those criteria to identify and critique the inadequacies of three paradigmatic concepts of teachers--teacher as *prophet*, teacher as *technician*, and teacher as *common sense pragmatist*--via a genealogical analysis of each concept and a critique of the ethical consequences of these concepts as they are characterized in three cases from Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Beloved* (1988). Finally, I will argue that Cornel West's revision of contemporary neo-pragmatism--*prophetic pragmatism*-- offers a philosophical framework for a concept *teacher* that is consistent with the task of renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education *and* will enable teachers to negotiate a new balance amidst the tension between religious culture and public

education.¹⁶ I will call this alternative concept of *teacher* the *prophetic pragmatist*.

In order to carry out the objective of this inquiry, it is necessary to understand the historical and contemporary context of debate over the relationship between religion and education since that context is an important source of criteria by which any new concept of teachers which aims to renegotiate that relationship will be evaluated. Therefore, in the following section of this chapter, I will attempt to sketch the history of this debate as means of identifying likely objections to this inquiry's goal and the criteria for a new concept of teachers which may follow from those objections.

Historical Context: The Search for a Center

Debate over the relationship between religion and education and the role of teachers is really not new. It has gone on in the United States at one level or another for a hundred and fifty years. Though the influence of religion on education in America was deep and pervasive through the 17th and 18th centuries, it began to wane by the mid-19th century as the growth of religious diversity in the United States made the previously common practice of actively promoting protestant Christian religious values increasingly impractical.¹⁷ New Catholic and

¹⁶Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 211-243.

¹⁷Edwin Scott Gaustad, "Church, State, and Education in Historical Perspective" and James E. Wood, Jr., "Religion and Education in American Church-State Relations" in James E. Wood, Jr., ed., *Religion, the State and*

Jewish immigrants protested the unexamined protestant ethos of the new common schools as an infringement of their religious liberties, reflecting and in some cases furthering the gradual reinterpretation of the First Amendment as calling for the strict separation of church and state. In addition, particularly toward the end of the century, schools increasingly assumed a role in preparing students for work in a newly industrial society.¹⁸ Thus as a result of both pragmatic interests and constitutional considerations raised by increasing religious diversity, the public schools of the United States were moving toward a largely secularized center by the end of the 19th century.¹⁹

While disagreement over the place of religion in public education raged in the U.S. the larger debate over religion and its proper role in social discourse continued to roil the waters of philosophical, scientific, and political thought. The revolutionary ideas of philosophers such as Descartes, Enlightenment philosophers like Locke and Rousseau, and scientists such as Newton led to a "subjectivist turn" in philosophy which "granted science a monopoly on truth in the marketplace of

Education, Waco: Baylor University Press, 1984, pp. 15-18, 26-30; Butts, pp. 114-15.

¹⁸H. Warren Button and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., *History of Education and Culture in America*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983, pp. 155-70.

¹⁹Gaustad, *ibid.*; Butts, pp. 112, 133.

ideas."²⁰ This rise in the importance and explanatory power of science increasingly forced philosophers and theologians to attempt to reconcile religious ideas and scientific reason as insights and breakthroughs in the sciences--first in astronomy and physics and then in geology and biology--rendered many religious beliefs suspect.²¹ Therefore, while the place of religion in education was eroding as a result of the practical difficulties of religiously diverse school populations and the legal difficulties of constitutional precepts, many of the most basic and long-held beliefs of the faithful were crumbling under the epistemic and ontological assaults of scientific inquiry. The rise of science in academic and intellectual circles was such by the early decades of the 20th century that John Dewey (1934) could look forward to the day that the religious attitude would be separated from supernatural religion and attached to the processes of science and democracy as the best hope

²⁰Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, pp. 28-29.

²¹John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973, pp. 43-44; S.E. Frost, Jr., *Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Western Education*, Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1966, pp. 420-422. On the efforts of philosophers to demonstrate the relevance or irrelevance of reason to religious faith or to explain how the two interact see, for example, Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, eds./trans., Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1934; John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, I.T. Ramsey, ed., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958; Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962; Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958; and Dewey J. Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

for the moral growth of society.²²

Though many post-Enlightenment philosophers and social critics--including Dewey--have predicted the demise of religious "superstition" and "dogma" in the face of advancing democracy, scientific knowledge and secularization, religion has refused to go away.²³ In fact, contemporary studies of religion in the United States demonstrate that the percentage of Americans professing religious beliefs is as high now as it has ever been and that, contrary to expectations, it is precisely the more "fundamental," other-worldly sects that have shown the most dramatic growth.²⁴ The U.S. today is, according to Harold Bloom (1992), "saturated" in religion.²⁵ Ironically, this new prominence of religious faith throughout the world, as well as here in the United States, has coincided with and is in part a response to the spread of "faith" in science, broadly construed, via contemporary secular education.²⁶ Religious conservatives--Christians, Jews, Muslims and others--have responded to this modern "faith" and its often rather contemptuous dismissal of traditional

²²John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, op. cit.

²³Marty and Appleby, pp. 11-13; Wald, pp. 74-79. See also Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

²⁴See, for example, Finke and Stark, op. cit., and Wald, pp. 74-79.

²⁵Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.

²⁶Kepel, pp. 117-19.

religious belief by organizing highly effective social and political movements designed to recapture the public square from "secular humanism."²⁷ This has included the establishment of religious schools and the education of children at home, two of the fastest growing sectors of U.S. education, in an effort to create a more religious social center.²⁸ However, the rise in the political profile of religion has not solely been a phenomenon of the religious right. More liberal and even revolutionary movements have also claimed religious justification for their efforts to transform modern social structures which do not conform to divinely ordained ethical principles. Liberation theology is just one example of such religious-political alliances²⁹

According to some scholars, the rise of conservative religious movements is a reaction to modernity and its effects on relatively homogenous socio-religious subcultures.³⁰ Modernity brings differentiation and choice, which tend to undermine the shared assumptions that constitute the cultural identity of a group.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 191-92; Marty and Appleby, pp. 37-42.

²⁸Cited in Helen Hardacre, "The Impact of Fundamentalisms on Women, the Family, and Interpersonal Relations," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms and Society*, Vol. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 129-39.

²⁹Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

³⁰See Barr, *Fundamentalism*, op. cit.; Lionel Caplan, *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 9; Marty and Appleby, pp. 10-18.

While its emphasis on science and rationality challenged the authority of Biblical teaching as early as the turn of the 18th century, it was not until the development of mass communication and universal public schooling that the full impact of these challenges was felt among the classes from which Christian fundamentalism in the United States eventually grew.³¹ Applied to social theory and politics, its philosophical assumptions led to modern concepts of democracy, individual liberties, education and teachers, sowing the seeds of the contemporary "rights" that have undermined, though by no means eradicated, traditional patriarchal authority and which so threaten many religious conservatives.

The multicultural movement in U.S. society and education, for instance, is one manifestation of this extension of the concept of individual liberties which has spawned highly secular formulations of the concept *teacher* and thus elicited a strong response from many religious conservatives, though many of the mainstream and liberal religious groups have embraced it. Multiculturalism inspires much of the current debate over the relationship between religion and public education. The multicultural movement's roots lie partly in the struggle of African-Americans for the democratic rights guaranteed to all individuals, exhibiting an early organized expression in the founding of the N.A.A.C.P., like the fundamentalist movement, early in this century.³² An important stream in

³¹Marty and Appleby, pp. 31-32. See also Finke and Stark.

multiculturalism's evolution has been African-American's struggle for civil rights and the application of the lessons of these struggles to Latin Americans, women, Native Americans, Asians, and gays and lesbians.³³ Though the very concept of individual civil rights is rooted in the contributions of post-Enlightenment "modernist" philosophies, and thus hardly a reaction against modernity, feminist scholars and other cultural critics have come to recognize the subjectivities within this philosophical tradition that privilege white men and to reassert the importance of group identities.³⁴ So just as religion in general has undoubtedly benefited from the notion of freedom of religion as well as the technology that has evolved out of modernist philosophies, multiculturalism too has benefited from modernist assumptions about individual liberties. However, just as multiculturalists and feminists have argued that these same liberties have been deployed behind conceptual masks of objectivity and universality to empower some social positions

³²James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education, History Of" in Marvin L. Alkin, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, Vol. 3, New York: Macmillan, 1992, pp. 870-74. Also L.H. Ekstrand, "Multicultural Education," C.C. Mukhopadhyay and Y.T. Moses, "Multicultural Education: Anthropological Perspectives," and S.E. Noffke, "Multicultural Education: Curriculum For" in Torsten Husen and T. Neville Postlethwaite, eds., *The International Encyclopedia of Education*, Vol. 7, 2nd edition, Tarrytown: Elsevier Science, Inc., 1994, pp. 3960-64.

³³Ibid.

³⁴See, for instance, Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

at the expense of others, conservative religious critics have argued that similar modernist concepts of rationality, education, and *teacher* have been deployed to marginalize and silence them as well. It may well be, therefore, that the rise of conservative religious movements and the rise of identity politics are quite different responses to the same disempowering modernist concepts of rationality, knowledge, and truth and the related concepts--education and *teacher*--which have disseminated them.

The prosecution of this debate through much of the history of the U.S. both by those who would have public education guided by religious purposes and those who would exclude religion entirely from the schools has repeatedly focused on several specific points of disagreement. Disagreements over whether education should be primarily focused on pragmatic occupational concerns, over the most appropriate response to religious and cultural diversity, over what constitutes knowledge and reality have all reflected conflicting concepts of *teacher* at the center of quite different visions of education. In what follows, I will articulate these points of disagreement as a series of objections, and responses to those objections, to the basic proposition of this inquiry--that we need a new concept of *teacher* to negotiate a new relationship between religion and public education. By proceeding in this manner, my inquiry will identify the problems any such reconception of *teacher* will face as well as the criteria, implicit in those problems, which will constitute a basis for evaluating the paradigmatic concepts of teachers

as *prophets*, *technicians*, and *pragmatists* as well as the success of a new concept of teacher as *prophetic pragmatist*.

Negotiating Balance: Objections, Responses, Problems

The Pragmatic Problem

Perhaps the oldest, simplest and most common objection to the call for a reconception of *teacher* that can facilitate a new relationship between religion and public education rests on a disagreement over the purpose of education. Since at least the second half of the nineteenth century, when education was increasingly seen as a tool for assimilating immigrants and training students for useful trades, the common sense pragmatist has argued that the purpose of education is to prepare the young for economic and political participation in the existing culture.³⁵ The young become useful, contributing members of society by acquiring the skills for a productive occupation and the information and attitudes necessary for full participation in democratic society. Education, in this view, should be about shaping students to fit the social roles of worker and citizen. Religion is seen as a private matter of personal belief which, though it may have relevance for the individual's understanding of his role as worker and citizen, can have no practical relevance as far as the teacher, as social agent, is concerned, because to do otherwise would involve the imposition of a particular set of religious beliefs. We

³⁵In using the term *common sense pragmatist* here I mean to distinguish between this common view of education and *philosophical pragmatism*.

might call the objection raised here by the common sense pragmatist the *pragmatic problem*.

The *pragmatic problem* grows out of a quasi-functionalist educational philosophy which assumes the possibility of a clean and clear religious-secular dichotomy.³⁶ Those who adhere to this position, however, ignore the fact that such a distinction is a relatively recent idea that, while it may be recognized as true by the non-religious, is probably not generally accepted by the religious, who argue that faith is relevant to all aspects of our lives. It is a position rooted in post-Enlightenment epistemic and ontological assumptions which have been thoroughly undermined by post-analytic philosophy and an understanding of religion as private belief rather than a system of social meaning-making with significance for all aspects of society. Thus the *pragmatic problem* is based on the belief that the world created by these post-Enlightenment philosophical assumptions is the way the world really is rather than a social construction. In making this assumption the common sense pragmatist commits what Dewey called "*the philosophic fallacy*" in asserting the objective, independent reality of the social status quo as a reality to which the individual must conform rather than as a contingent social construction

³⁶I use the term *quasi-functionalist* here because the philosophically functionalist aspect of this view of education is applied only to the secular side of the dichotomy. Traditional functionalism would, I think, acknowledge a role for education in fitting students for their socially defined religious roles as well as their economic and political roles.

which individuals may change.³⁷ It then proceeds to a narrow conception of *teacher* as a common sense pragmatist who trains or shapes the individual to fit the status quo rather than empowering the individual to participate in the construction of social reality. While the *pragmatic problem* seems on the surface a straightforward objection in favor of the down-to-earth practical concerns of getting along in the world, it in fact responds to and encompasses a cluster of objections based on very specific and questionable philosophical assumptions. Therefore, while the *pragmatic problem* does remind us of certain important practical expectations of teachers, it is not a compelling argument against a conception of *teacher* which would enable a renegotiated relationship between religion and public education.

The Diversity Problem

Another practical objection to the proposition of a concept *teacher* which renegotiates the relationship between religion and public education is the *diversity problem*. This objection rests on the recognition of the religious diversity represented in the United States, a recognition which contributed to the growing secularization of schools in the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁸ Given the practical limitations of time on school curricula, it is impossible to include all

³⁷Cited in Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1997, p. 108.

³⁸Gaustad, pp. 15-30; Butts, pp. 114-15.

topics that are worthy of study. So what shall we include? What shall we exclude? Are we required, in the interest of fairness and neutrality, to treat all religions equally? Is it possible to do so and still adequately address other subjects like science of mathematics? If not, which religions shall we address? Which will we not address? How will we decide? How will we respond to the inevitable objections from those who are excluded? The obvious answer to these questions which the *diversity problem* raises is that someone must choose. But how can the teacher do so without, in effect, endorsing some views over others and thus violating the constitutional separation of church and state? The only practical response to the *diversity problem*, and the response increasingly taken in the latter half of the nineteenth century, seems to be to exclude religion from public education and religious faith from the concept *teacher*. In this way, supposedly, we can avoid the controversy which attempts to include religion seem inevitably to occasion.

Ironically, however, the contemporary educational discourse responding to the *diversity problem* turns this argument on its head. Much of the literature on multiculturalism, for instance has focused on revealing the mechanisms by which social institutions have perpetuated cultural domination and the effects this has had on women and minorities.³⁹ In response to the insights gained from this

³⁹Christine Sleeter, ed., *Empowerment through Multicultural Education*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 11; Cameron McCarthy,

inquiry, multiculturalism in recent decades has evolved to include transformative, liberatory social agendas which recognize that empowerment of marginalized groups is a necessary co-requisite of meaningful, ameliorative social change. These agendas have some of their theoretical roots in a corpus of postmodernist and postcolonial literature which deconstructs the traditional conceptions of knowledge and power employed by dominant social groups to marginalize and oppress women and minorities.⁴⁰ This project has created non-absolutist concepts of power, knowledge, culture and identity which lie at the heart of multiculturalism and constitute a challenge, not only to Christian fundamentalism and other conservative religious movements, but to many of the basic modernist assumptions which have undermined and marginalized religion as well. The post-analytic philosophy which informs the multicultural movement in education argues that the modernist claims of objectivity and rationality which have been advocated as an alternative to religious subjectivity and irrationality are in fact masks which protect

"After the Canon: Knowledge and Ideological Representation in the Multicultural Discourse on Curricular Reform" in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, eds., *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 290-91.

⁴⁰See, for example, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*, New York: Vintage, 1990; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1979; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 1990; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

and promote the interests of subjective knowers.⁴¹ Thus the effort to avoid the competing interests of the *diversity problem* by turning education to more objective interests may actually mask yet another subjective interest.

Some of the more conservative religious critics of multiculturalism in public education have turned this postmodern insight into the inevitable subjectivity of different subject positions to their causes. They charge that teachers, in fact, do impose a single point of view on a diverse society by actively undermining the religious and ethical values of children in favor of an ideology or even a "religion" of secular humanism, an ideology which they believe promotes evolutionary theory and gay rights, criticism of "traditional" American values, ethical relativism, and a lack of respect for authority. These critics advocate a concept of *teacher* as a kind of spiritual prophet, closely scrutinize textbooks, curricula, and teaching methods for "anti-religious" biases, and advocate "putting God back in our schools" through organized school prayer as a solution to the perceived moral and educational biases of teachers and the public schools they serve.⁴²

However, not all critics of public education's treatment of religion occupy the far right of the political or religious spectrum. Many more moderate critics

⁴¹This is Code's argument in *What Can She Know?*, op. cit.

⁴²See Gaddy, Hall, and Marzano.

share the view that American civic and academic culture are hostile to religious culture. Stephen L. Carter (1993), for instance, a professor of law at Yale University, has recently written a widely-read critique of how religious faith is "trivialized" in the public arena by a legal and political system that assumes that religion is a private matter that should not intrude on public decisions.⁴³ This forces religious people to act as if their faith did not matter in their civic lives lest they be accused of forcing their religious views on others or subject themselves to the ridicule to which popular culture so often subjects religion and the religious. And public education, Carter argues, is no exception to this widespread anti-religious bias.⁴⁴

The philosopher Warren Nord (1995) offers another reasoned critique of the current relationship between religion and education and the concept of teachers that relationship endorses. He makes two basic claims. First, he asserts that public education is not neutral vis a vis the religious faith students bring with them to school. Second, he argues public education has an ethical and legal obligation to be fair to religious worldviews. But, partly in reaction to the controversy religious

⁴³For an example of such an argument see Richard Pratte, "Civic Conscience and Religious Conscience: A Fundamental but not Fundamentalist Distinction," *Philosophy of Education* 1987, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1987.

⁴⁴Stephen L. Carter, *Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*, New York: Doubleday, 1993.

issues arouse, public education in fact ignores religion and its place in history and people's lives in its texts and curricula. According to Nord, public education is governed by a modernist, secular worldview which undermines religious faith because its basic philosophical assumptions, conceptions of human nature, history, evidence, rational argumentation, etc. systematically reject, undermine, and contradict religious assumptions. To ignore religion and then teach a subject--history or biology, for instance--from within this worldview as if it were *Truth*, when in fact it is contested, constitutes indoctrination in Nord's view. And in his view schools should avoid indoctrination. Public education should be neutral on religiously contested matters until students are mature enough to distinguish between teachers' opinions and truth--high school or early college--then education and educators no longer have the obligation to be scrupulously neutral but do have the ethical obligation to be fair.⁴⁵

Finally, the African-American philosopher of religion, Cornel West (1989), has challenged the tendency of postmodern progressive intellectuals, including those in the multicultural movement, to ignore or downplay the relevance of religious faith, particularly to emancipatory cultural and political struggles. With the recent exception of liberation theology, they have tended to ignore the fact

⁴⁵Warren A. Nord, *Religion and American Education: Rethinking a National Dilemma*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, pp. 63-97, 161-91, 236-41, 378.

that "the culture of the wretched of the earth is deeply religious."⁴⁶

Since the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe, most of the progressive energies among the intelligentsia have shunned religious channels. And in these days of global religious revivals, progressive forces are reaping the whirlwind. Those of us who remain in these religious channels see clearly how myopic such an antireligious strategy is. The severing of ties to churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques by the left intelligentsia is tantamount to political suicide.⁴⁷

This shunning of religious channels, according to West, is not only myopic in the sense that it makes progressive intellectuals out of touch with the culture of the oppressed, it is also myopic in that it renders them blind to the role of religious faith in enabling the oppressed to cope with and resist their oppression. While West recognizes the regressive role religion has played as summarized in Marx's dictum about the "opiate of the masses," he maintains that faith has been an absolutely vital source of existential sustenance in the face of the natural tragedies endemic to human existence and a site of resistance to man-made tragedies such as racism, patriarchy, and economic oppression.⁴⁸

The increasing loss of faith in the masks of objectivity and rationality as refuges from the conflicting subjectivities of the *diversity problem* has opened up education to charges of partiality and oppression from many constituencies. As a

⁴⁶West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 233.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 234.

⁴⁸Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 139-141 and *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 15-20.

consequence of this criticism, for at least the past two or three decades, the concepts *diversity* and *inclusion* have been key terms in debates over educational reform.⁴⁹ Though there have been and continue to be considerable differences over what diversity ought to mean, how it should be fostered, and who and what ought to be included in education, there is a fairly widespread, though uneven, consensus that education in the past has not adequately reflected the social contributions of women and minorities. This sense of the past and present exclusion from schools, books, history, and power of women, African-Americans, American Indians, Latinos, Asian-Americans, gays and lesbians by a hegemonic, white, Euro-American male establishment lies at the heart of that vast and influential social movement we call multiculturalism. Multiculturalists have demanded and demand the inclusion of these marginalized cultures and their contributions in curricula and textbooks and their greater representation in enrollment and hiring. Though the multicultural movement has by no means eradicated racism, sexism, and homophobia in our schools and society, it has nonetheless enriched American culture and education through the inclusion of these long-silenced cultural groups.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Sleeter, pp. 1-23.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*; Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, eds., *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, New York: Routledge, 1993; Patricia Aufderheide, ed., *Beyond P.C.: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1992; Rick Simonson and Scott Walker, eds., *Multicultural Literacy*, St. Paul:

Typically, religion, particularly denominational Christianity, has often appeared in the national dialogue on multiculturalism as an opponent, arguing against inclusion, particularly of feminist and gay points-of-view, and the perceived multiculturalist undermining of so-called traditional family values.⁵¹ Perhaps because of this opposition, multiculturalists have often treated organized religion in the U.S., especially the religious right, primarily as the rear guard of white, patriarchal hegemony rather than as a set of rather distinct cultural groups in themselves who may have some claims to assert under the multiculturalist rubric of inclusion and cultural diversity.⁵²

Yet religious groups arguably do constitute cultures, and religion is frequently one, if not the most important constituent of a cultural identity.⁵³ And while religious cultures often split along ethnic and gender lines, they also often cross those lines. Indeed, there is ample evidence that religion continues to be a major constitutive element of people's cultural identity; it may even be growing in

Graywolf Press, 1988.

⁵¹Gaddy, Hall, and Marzano, pp. 33-54, 115-134; Marty and Appleby, pp. 76-77, 85.

⁵²See, for instance, Richard Pratte, *op. cit.*

⁵³For a definition of culture and the relevance of religion see Evelyn Kessler, *Anthropology: The Humanizing Process*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974, pp. 9-10.

importance.⁵⁴ As noted above, West (1989) and Nord (1995), from quite different points on the political spectrum, both argue that it is primarily a highly educated secular elite who ignore or devalue religion's contribution to the public sphere, an argument they advance, West contends, at the risk of political suicide. Many scholars, as well as ordinary members of faith communities, have put forth forcefully argued claims that religious cultures are discriminated against and directly undermined by social institutions, particularly education.⁵⁵ If education, like society in general, should give space and voice to minority points-of-view, then why, they ask, are religious points-of-view excluded?

Therefore, to argue from the *diversity problem* to justify the exclusion of religion from our concepts of *teachers* and public education, again depends upon the assumption that religious beliefs can and should be separated from the social and cultural identity of individuals, including teachers and students. Though some individuals can and do make such a distinction, the assumption that they must does violence to some religious students and teachers by imposing a particular worldview on a diverse world in the very act of attempting to avoid endorsing any

⁵⁴Finke and Stark, op. cit.; Wald, op. cit.. For discussion of the cultural specificity of groups like Moral Majority see Steve Bruce, "The Moral Majority: the Politics of Fundamentalism in a Secular Society" in Lionel Caplan, ed., *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 177-194.

⁵⁵Carter, op. cit.; Nord, op. cit.

single worldview. As with the *pragmatic problem*, the *diversity problem* does highlight important constraints on a reconception of *teacher* and the relationship between religion and public education by calling attention to the bewildering range of cultures and identities which an inclusive system of democratic education must accommodate, but it does not constitute a compelling argument against the proposition that such new concepts are necessary and possible. On the contrary, it seems to present one of the most compelling arguments that such new concepts are vitally necessary.

The Authorization Problem

Another underlying issue to which the *pragmatic problem* implicitly responds and which follows from the *diversity problem* is the issue of teacher authority. We may call this the *authorization problem*. According to this objection, the authority of the teacher derives from her role as an agent of the state empowered by a social consensus, expressed through the apparatus of the educational system, regarding the value of certain skills and subject-matter. Where social consensus about the meaning and value of a particular topic exists--literacy or numeracy, for example--the teacher is authorized to instruct students in that skill or body of knowledge. However, where there is consensus on the value but no such consensus regarding the meaning of a topic--ethics or morality, for instance--the teacher's authority to instruct students in that topic may become mired in disagreements over meaning. And where there is no such consensus

regarding the meaning or value of a topic—a particular religion, for example--the teacher should not instruct students in that topic because the lack of social consensus precludes social authorization of such instruction. For the teacher to do so would either mean state endorsement of a particular religious point of view, a violation of the Constitution, or an exercise of illegitimate authority on the part of the teacher. Furthermore, the justification of religious worldviews rests upon supernatural rather than social authority. Such worldviews are not accountable to society, the source of the teacher's authority. Therefore, the public school teacher has no authority on issues related to religion.

This argument from the source of a teacher's authority against a concept *teacher* which allows for a religious orientation and thus contributes to the renegotiation of the relationship between religion and education is flawed in several respects. It assumes that authority is given by society, and the teacher is the passive recipient. But it does not question how those who bestow authority on the teacher--teacher training colleges, state certification agencies, etc.--acquired that authority. Authority is not so much given as it is claimed on the basis of the expressed or implied values of society. Thus the teacher's authority derives from the perceived consistency of the teacher's actions with the values of the society she serves. While there may indeed be considerable social disagreement over the appropriate expression and practical meaning of these values, one can argue that there are broadly held social values which should inspire and authorize the

teacher's practice.⁵⁶ Thus the concept *teacher* may include a morally prophetic orientation even as it must, in response to the *diversity problem*, eschew the role of spiritual prophet advocated by some religious critics of public education.

However, the *diversity problem* also reminds us of the fact that these broadly held values are expressed in a variety of ethical "dialects," among the most prominent of which, according to Cornel West, are religious dialects.⁵⁷ To argue that such "dialects" lose their validity as an expression of broadly held ethical values, and thus a potential source of moral authority, because they are religious and therefore partial assumes the existence of an impartial, objective expression of such values and raises the specter of yet another objection to this inquiry's goal to construct a concept of teacher which does not exclude religious orientations: the *indoctrination problem*.⁵⁸

The Indoctrination Problem

Perhaps the strongest objection to this inquiry's proposition of a new

⁵⁶Nord makes just such an argument in *Religion and American Education*.

⁵⁷West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 234.

⁵⁸Note that I am here claiming space for religious expressions of broadly held ethical values as *one* expression of those values, not *the* expression of those values. I do not mean to suggest that any one religious expression of such values is superior to another religion's expression of them, nor am I suggesting that religious expressions of them are superior to non-religious expressions. I am merely claiming that religious language--myth--is one common means of expressing ethical ideals which warrants respect.

concept *teacher* for a renegotiated relationship between religion and public education is the fear of indoctrination. This concern over the *indoctrination problem* stems from both the history of religious involvement in education where teachers were conceived of as spiritual prophets and schools were used as instruments for inculcating the tenets of particular faiths. It also stems from the undeniable tendency of many, particularly fundamentalist, religious groups to express their moral values in absolutist and all-encompassing terms. Given these absolutist claims and a supposedly divine mission for many denominations to evangelize, many critics of a more open relationship between religion and education justifiably fear that such a relationship may simply open the door to indoctrination by those who may not have any commitment to open dialogue and negotiation. This is one of the concerns behind Dewey's (1934) and Swidler's (1990) assertion that such groups must surrender their absolutist claims before dialogue is possible.⁵⁹ Pending such a "surrender," it is best to avoid discussion of religion in public education, as well as the moral and ethical questions that might lead inexorably to such discussion, in order to avoid controversy and to preclude the *indoctrination problem* to which such discussions may provide an opening.

The problem with this response to the *indoctrination problem* is that it does not really solve the problem. At its best it preserves the discussion and

⁵⁹Dewey, *A Common Faith*, op. cit.; Swidler, *After the Absolute*, op. cit.

inculcation of ethical values in education via teachers but privileges non-religious language, thus running up against the *diversity problem* by ignoring the fact that ethical language *is* religious language for huge segments of our society and our school populations and thus excluding these segments of society from the ethical discourse in schools. Warren Nord (1995) claims this constitutes a form of indoctrination.⁶⁰ Thus the effort to avoid the *indoctrination problem* by banishing the concept of *teacher* as spiritual prophet and avoiding religion may well run right back into the *indoctrination problem*. At its worst, this response to the *indoctrination problem* posits ethical relativism as the only acceptable response to ethical absolutism: Since our ethical dialects differ, we have different ethical values. Therefore, each should leave the other to his or her own values. But the relativist response quickly runs into cases where ethical and religious questions are unavoidable and which demonstrate its inadequacy: religiously sanctioned child abuse, for instance, or female circumcision.⁶¹ Therefore, if secular indoctrination is as unacceptable as religious indoctrination and ethical relativism is equally problematic, we must find a path between the horns of this dilemma that enables teachers to address and promote ethical values while remaining open to the various

⁶⁰Nord, pp. 160-90.

⁶¹For a more detailed discussion of both of these challenges see Susan Laird, "Spiritual Education in Public Schools?" op. cit. and Milligan, "Gender and the Limits of Inclusion, op. cit..

expressions of those values and avoiding the *indoctrination problem*. We must find a way for teachers to be undogmatic moral prophets. In short, we need to do what this inquiry proposes to do.

The Epistemological Problem

Yet another powerful objection to a reconception of *teacher* and a renegotiated relationship between religion and education rests upon important assumptions about the nature of knowledge. We can call this objection the *epistemological problem*. It rests upon the belief, widely held since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, that scientific method is the most accurate, reliable, and verifiable source of true knowledge. As Dewey (1934) wrote, "there is but one sure road of access to truth--the road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record, and controlled reflection."⁶² Religion, on the other hand, is a body of myth and superstition. It is belief rather than knowledge. Therefore, since the purpose of the teacher and education is to convey knowledge, and since the introduction of competing unverifiable supernatural claims which can never be resolved can only yield perpetual disagreement, religion should be excluded from education except as a social and historical artifact. The *diversity problem* is solved by making the transmission of "knowledge," rather than culture or faith, the role of *teacher* and

⁶²Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 20.

the object of education.

It is the unshakable faith of this view that science can provide knowledge of the laws of nature which govern not only the natural world but the world of individual and social human behavior as well. As scientists come to understand these phenomena they learn to predict and control them as well. These mechanisms of prediction and control can then be utilized by teachers, who function as technicians using scientifically produced methods to shape students to socially defined ends. From this view we derive a concept of *teacher* as technician and education as technology.

In recent years the epistemological assumptions on which this objection is based have been thoroughly undermined. Developing alongside multiculturalism, and in important ways providing a philosophical foundation for it, has been a profound shift in thinking on epistemology. In his essay "The Politics of American Neo-Pragmatism" and again in more detail in his book, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, Cornel West (1985, 1989) tells a story of the origin and evolution of an anti-foundationalist epistemology in American pragmatic philosophy from Emerson through Dewey.⁶³ This epistemic anti-foundationalism, West contends, rests on two key insights of American pragmatism. The first recognizes the theory-

⁶³Cornel West, "The Politics of American Neo-Pragmatism" in John Rajchman and Cornel West, eds., *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 259-272; West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, op. cit.

laden character of our observations of the world and hence the futility of using the "real" world as the final court of appeal for truth claims: "We cannot isolate 'the world' from theories of the world, then compare these theories of the world with a theory-free world."⁶⁴ The second insight is what West calls the "historicist turn" of American pragmatism, the recognition that truth and knowledge claims are historically conditioned. The result of these insights is a philosophy that eschews the search for epistemological foundations, places ethics rather than epistemology at its core, and yields an epistemic pluralism which recognizes different ways of knowing rather than a single way of knowing whose claims are grounded by appeals to the unmediated experience of reality.⁶⁵ This plucks the teacher out of his clean and comfortable role as the educational technician who transmits objective knowledge and utilizes scientific methods and drops him right back into the *diversity* and *authorization problems* with all their messy and uncomfortable disagreements over ethical questions and the languages in which they are expressed.

This later view, which West attributes to post-war analytic philosophy, is dealt a "deathblow" by Richard Rorty's (1979) description of the "emergence, development, and decline of its primary props: the correspondence theory of truth,

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵West, *American Evasion*, op. cit.

the notion of privileged representations, and the idea of the self-reflective transcendental subject."⁶⁶ West's description of Rorty's "deathblow to modern North Atlantic philosophy" has much in common with the story Lorraine Code (1991) tells.⁶⁷ Code demonstrates how what she terms "traditional" epistemology conceals behind a mask of objectivity a subjective knower who is white, male, propertied, and thoroughly educated in the assumptions of post-Enlightenment epistemology. In privileging this admittedly powerful way of knowing the world as *the* way of knowing, she argues, we have perpetuated the privileged position of a particular class as well as the oppression--albeit in a more subtle form--of women and, by implication, others. Code's response to this discovery of subjectivity within modernist epistemology is to explore the way we know other people as an alternative epistemological paradigm that would displace what she calls "malestream" epistemology from its position as *the* way of knowing to a new position as *a* way of knowing, thus making room for other perspectives in an interdependent network which she describes as a kind of epistemic ecosystem.⁶⁸ Thus Code reveals knowledge claims as social constructions, which in turn reveals

⁶⁶West, "Politics of American Neo-Pragmatism," p. 263. West is referring here to Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

⁶⁷Code, op. cit.

⁶⁸Code, pp.269-284.

the *epistemological problem's* claim of clean and clear distinctions between knowledge and belief as a mask for responses to the *diversity* and *authorization problems* designed to privilege particular groups.

Philosophical moves like those described by Rorty (1979), West (1989), and Code (1991) toward epistemic anti-foundationalism or epistemic pluralism obviously undermine the knowledge and truth claims of many religions because they are foundational claims; the supernatural aspect of religion Dewey criticized was precisely their claim that the things they believe are "really real." However, these philosophical moves also challenge the truth claims and epistemic assumptions which have often been deployed to dismiss religious faith as an irrational, mythological relic of less enlightened times; namely, the argument that they were contradicted by science, whose claims about the "real" world were "true." If all truths, religious *and* scientific as well, are local products of historically, culturally, and politically conditioned discourses and objectivity is simply a fiction concealing the will to power of particular individuals or groups, then many of the traditional justifications for excluding religious questions from secular education are as discredited as religious faith itself. Therefore, if religious groups and sub-groups constitute distinct and in some cases marginalized cultures, and if, as post-analytic epistemological assumptions suggest, there are multiple, perhaps even equally valid ways of knowing rather than one correct way of knowing, then does not religion have some claim to space in public education as an

aspect of marginalized culture, an alternative epistemology, as one of the voices of the Other? Thus post-analytic philosophy drags both the concepts of *teacher* as spiritual prophet and as technician out of their comfortable refuge in foundational epistemologies and drops them right back into the contingent, ethically messy, non-foundational world of the *diversity* and *authorization problems*.

The Ontological Problem

The *epistemological problem* is closely related to another common objection to the proposition that our concepts of *teacher* and education should include religion. This objection is rooted in assumptions regarding the nature of reality and the process of education as framework for learning via direct experience with that reality. Again, science is held up as the surest means of access to truth about reality. The data we receive through our senses and the logical extrapolations from that data by means of scientific method define what we can know of reality. Since it is this reality with which we must deal in our day-to-day lives, education should be directed toward the fullest understanding and control of that reality, which is encountered in experience. Much of religion, however, is premised on supernatural claims which are, by definition, non-"real" or beyond "reality" as we know it at any one moment. However, since science is open to revision, it is open to the possible expansion of our concept of reality to include what was previously "supernatural," but the most it can say about such claims is that we can "know" nothing about them at this particular moment. When they

become known, they will become part of reality and are no longer supernatural. Therefore, since the role of the teacher in this view is to facilitate the student's understanding and control of his experience of reality, the supernatural claims of religions are not educationally relevant except as social and historical artifacts.

The *ontological problem*, however, does not present a compelling objection to the proposition of this inquiry that our concepts of *teacher* and education should be more open to religious points of view. Religious experience is, after all, a real experience even if many of its claims are not.⁶⁹ It has an immense influence on the day-to-day lives of billions of people. Therefore, one can argue that it has a legitimate place in education as a form of real human experience. This is the argument made for study *about* religion as opposed to the study *of* religion.

Though he was suspicious of traditional religion's impact on education, Dewey's (1916) philosophy of democratic education placed great emphasis on experience as the foundation and method of human learning and the diversity of experience as not only conducive to greater learning, but essential to democracy as well.

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in time and space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his

⁶⁹William James, of course, made just this argument in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: Collier Books, 1961.

own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action.⁷⁰

Would religious experiences or religious points-of-view in the "interest" we call education provide still more "numerous points of contact" and "greater stimuli" to which students and others must respond and thus, perhaps, enrich the educational experience of students? Does the current widespread practice of ignoring religion in public education and often seeking to limit religious expression--often violating constitutionally permissible forms of expression--mean fewer points of contact and fewer stimuli, thus impoverishing educational experience?⁷¹

The two points...by which to measure the worth of a form of social life are the extent to which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups. An undesirable society, in other words, is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience. A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic.⁷²

Clearly, Dewey's description of an "undesirable society" is applicable to

⁷⁰Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 87.

⁷¹Carter, op. cit.; Nord, op. cit.

⁷²John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, New York: The Free Press, 1916, p. 99.

many religious groups. It might be quite persuasively argued that fundamentalist groups that put often severe constraints on women and children do not constitute groups where interests are equally shared. Also, the common tendency of many religious groups to segregate themselves from other groups contradicts Dewey's call for "interaction of the different forms of associated life" in "fullness and freedom." Many religious groups are "undesirable societies" by Dewey's definition; perhaps most others include some undesirable tendencies and thus, to the extent they do, fall short of his democratic ideal. However, might not public education's segregation of itself from religion and religious experience implicate it as well in Dewey's definition of an undesirable society? Ought not public education, if it is to meet Dewey's democratic ideal, change any such undesirable aspects and thus "make provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and...secure flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life?"⁷³ This is a powerful argument for the inclusion of studying *about* religion in school curricula and knowledge of it in our concept *teacher*. But this is the easiest part of the argument. It does not necessarily follow that studying about religion as a social and historical artifact means that we must, as Nord (1995) asserts, take it seriously as a living contender for truth.⁷⁴

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Nord, *Religion and American Education*, pp. 213-16.

The argument against religiously inclusive concepts of *teacher* and education on the basis of the *ontological problem* is also undermined by the arguments of post-analytic philosophy which undermined the *epistemological problem*. If we cannot have an encounter with reality unmediated by theory, then we cannot separate "reality" from our theories about it. Our theories become stories we tell about reality in order to render our experience of it meaningful and to enable us to direct future experience. Clearly, some of the stories we tell are more useful in this regard than others: Darwinian evolution is a more useful story than the creation story in *Genesis* in making a broad range of our experiences meaningful and in directing the course of future experience. But the stories science tells us are not always completely adequate in making all experiences meaningful or enabling us to direct the course of future experience in all instances because science does not offer us answers to normative questions: What should we do? How shall we live?

One could argue that religion meets the first part of Dewey's definition of education--"that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience"--but that it falls short on the second part--"and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."⁷⁵ However, might one not also argue that public education today, with its often narrow focus on

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 76.

skills needed in the job market, fails the first part of Dewey's definition even as it succeeds in the second? Rendering human experience meaningful is, after all, one of the central roles of religion. West (1982) has pointed out, for instance, the importance of Afro-American protestant Christianity in contributing conceptions of human nature, history, the good society, and loving relationships which not only made life meaningful for many African-Americans, even in a context of overwhelming oppression, but which provided a basis for resistance of that oppression as well.⁷⁶ Thus, though religion has a long and inglorious history of oppression, it has also provided hope, sustenance, and resistance to oppression as well.⁷⁷

West's discussion of the positive contributions of religious faith highlights public education's limitations in meeting the first part of Dewey's definition of education--making experience meaningful. For we live, West (1993) contends, in a contemporary American civilization marked by two distinctive characteristics: the "sacred cow" of "economic growth by means of corporate priorities" and endemic racism, patriarchy, and homophobia.⁷⁸ The consequences of this include the commodification of American culture and the reification of the individual as an

⁷⁶Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, op. cit.; Cornel West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 132.

⁷⁷See, for instance, Brown, op. cit..

⁷⁸West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, pp. 60-61.

object whose relationships are governed by the paradigm of the market. Thus we live in a "market culture" or "culture of consumption."⁷⁹ When such a culture is combined with the natal alienation of African-Americans--"the loss of ties at birth of ascending and descending generations"--the product is "the highest levels of forms of self-destruction known in black history."⁸⁰ For the larger community, the combination of the "spiritual sterility" of the culture of consumption with economic decline since 1973 yields right-wing, potentially fascist politics.⁸¹ This corrosive and potentially explosive situation is exacerbated by the lack, West argues, of "viable institutions and structures in black America (and, one could argue, American society in general) that can effectively transmit values like hope, virtue, sacrifice, risk;" namely, "religious institutions and schools engaged in oppositional and transformative roles against class subordinations in American capitalist social relations."⁸²

Clearly, religion is by no means the only source for resistance and ameliorative social action in such a culture. Both West and the African-American novelist Toni Morrison have attributed similar powers of sustenance and resistance

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 148.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 149-50.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 194.

⁸²Ibid., p. 151; Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, p. 19.

to African-American music, particularly jazz, and to secular political and philosophical movements.⁸³ Other scholars have also noted this power of the aesthetic.⁸⁴ And philosophical and political movements such as Marxism, feminism, democracy and others have long been sources of critique and resistance of social oppression. But religion has been and is at least as important a source of ameliorative social action as any of these other movements; it is an art in which people live, an *inhabited* aesthetic.

It is, at best, an open question as to whether or not public education in the United States does now or has ever been effective in making the existential facts of human experience meaningful to students, let alone in articulating a response to tragedy--both natural and man-made--or hope and sustenance in their resistance of it. Perhaps public education's aversion to religion, for all its practical justifications noted above, is in fact an aversion to any "faith," any "unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices"

⁸³West, *Race Matters*, p. 105; Cornel West, *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America, Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume 2*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993, p. 25; Toni Morrison, quoted in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah, eds., *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, New York: Amistad, 1993, pp. 371, 394.

⁸⁴See, for instance, Jim Garrison, "The Crossroads of Poetry and Prophecy: A Response to Milligan," *Philosophy of Education 1997*, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1997. See also Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros*, op. cit.

except capitalism.⁸⁵ This would appear to be the case since public education seems to be as aversive toward feminism, Marxism, and cultural criticism as it is toward religion. If this is true, might not Dewey's definition of education and the democratic society, West's analysis of the "culture of consumption," and the ethical imperative inherent in the *diversity problem* require public education to take religion seriously as a live contender for truth by making room for a "religious" orientation in our concept of *teacher* and education that is not defined by but rather *includes* traditional religion as one valid way in which people make their existence meaningful and find hope and sustenance in the face of tragedy?⁸⁶

Criteria for a Religiously Inclusive Concept Teacher

In the last section of this inquiry I attempted to address some of the likely objections to the basic proposition of this inquiry, which is that the misunderstandings and disagreement over the relationship between religion and education calls for a new concept *teacher* which can both negotiate and *re-*negotiate that contentious relationship. Though the objections reviewed above--the *pragmatic problem*, the *diversity problem*, the *authorization problem*, the

⁸⁵Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 33.

⁸⁶Following Dewey, I am using the term *religious* as distinguished from *religion* to suggest that movements like Marxism, feminism and others have "inclusive ideal ends" which they think worthy of "controlling our desires and choices" and are, therefore, *religious* even though they are not *religions*. See Dewey, *A Common Faith*, pp. 1-28.

indoctrination problem, the *epistemological problem*, and the *ontological problem*--do not exhaust all possible objections to the basic proposition of this inquiry, they do represent some of the most important and common challenges to it. And while I have argued that these challenges do not constitute a compelling reason for abandoning the aim of this inquiry--a concept *teacher* which is more sensitive to and inclusive of religious points of view, they do identify important criteria by which the success of any such concept should be judged. The next step in this inquiry, therefore, will be an explicit accounting of the ethical criteria which follow from the objections reviewed in the previous section and which will frame the remainder of this inquiry. These criteria will include:

Affirmation of Diversity

Given the racial, ethnic, religious heterogeneity of public schools as well as important gender and sexual orientation differences, the concept *teacher* must avoid imposing any single, authorized, definitive structure to the relationship between religion and public education. It should affirm diversity as one way of avoiding the *indoctrination problem*. More importantly, it should enable actual teachers to understand and negotiate that diversity rather than construct some "unifying" conceptual superstructure designed to contain it. It should equip teachers with navigational skills, not a ready-made road map.

Social Authorization

The new concept *teacher* which this inquiry will construct cannot rest upon

foundational epistemic claims, whether such claims are grounded in the authority of "objective" science or the word of gods. For, as Rorty (1979), West (1989), and Code (1991) have argued, such claims are, to some degree, social constructions because they are always mediated by the subjectivity of the individual knower. Thus the *teacher* conceptualized here should recognize the revisability and contingency of knowledge claims. It should recognize the element of social construction in knowledge claims, not in the sense that knowledge is whatever one believes, but rather in the sense of knowledge as a theory about reality which can be judged by its consequences, by its usefulness in meeting socially defined ends.

In recognizing the socially constructed nature of knowledge claims, however, this conception of *teacher* should not settle for the constrained authority which derives from a least-common-denominator social consensus about the meaning and value of particular topics or techniques. The fact that there is a social consensus on the value of "reading, writing, and arithmetic" does not mean that the teacher's authority should be limited to instruction in those subjects. Rather, the concept must recognize the teacher's responsibility to ground teaching practice in the authority of socially recognizable ethical ideals rather than the limited roles defined by the political status quo or supernatural authority. Dewey (1934) has shown that such ideals are possible without appealing to philosophical idealism or divine edicts, and West (1989) reminds us that, once we eschew foundational epistemic claims, such ethical ideals become the primary means of adjudicating

truth claims.⁸⁷

Non-"realist" Ontology

Given the epistemic anti-foundationalism of the *social authorization* criterion, this concept *teacher* cannot rest upon or assert absolutist claims about the nature of reality because it has no relationship with reality unmediated by socially constructed theories about that reality. To assert such absolutist epistemic and ontological claims would render teachers susceptible to the *indoctrination problem*. However, to reject, ignore, or silence those who may assert such claims would violate the criterion of *affirming diversity* by imposing one socially constructed conception of reality on another.

Moral-Ethical Idealism⁸⁸

Empowered by authority claimed on the basis of socially recognizable ethical ideals, the new concept *teacher* must affirm the possibility of individual moral growth toward ideals which are, in keeping with the criteria of *social authorization* and *non-"realist" ontology*, posited by the individual and the society of which the individual is a part yet open critique and revision. The concept should enable and encourage moral growth while eschewing both strong ethical relativism

⁸⁷Dewey, *A Common Faith*, pp. 21-28; West, *American Evasion*, p. 213.

⁸⁸My use of the term "idealism" here is not meant to refer to philosophical idealism but rather the more general understanding of the term as holding to a flexible sense of justice and right and wrong that informs behavior and provides an orientation for moral growth.

and ethical absolutism.

Love Ethic

The concept must define a teaching ethic that affirms the transcendent worth and dignity of each individual as well as that individual's desire and ability to grow toward his or her own understanding of ethical ideals. The individual should not be construed as a means to some externally defined end but rather as an imperfectly realized ideal end in him/herself. The student is not an object to be shaped to fit "reality" but an autonomous subject fit to participate in the shaping of that reality.

Meaning-full

Consistent with the *affirmation of diversity* criterion and the *social authority* and *ontological* criteria, the new teacher concept should not only be open to but also conducive to the construction of existentially meaningful accounts of the widest range of human experiences. This openness to meaning-making should not be limited to explanations of the natural world but should include "mythic" narratives that provide some rationale for social ideals and propose meaningful answers to the great existential questions: Why do we exist? How shall we live? Why does tragedy occur and evil exist?

Conclusion

Thus far in this inquiry I have attempted to show that the current social conflict over the relationship between religious beliefs and public education

threatens the Deweyan ideal of the school as a laboratory of democratic culture. I have suggested that the calls for school choice, vouchers, and public support for private schools as well as the phenomenal growth in home schooling which this conflict fuels threatens a "balkanization" of education along racial, cultural, and religious lines which reconstructs "the barriers of class, race, and national territory" that democracy, as a "mode of associated living...of conjoint communicated experience," is supposed to break down.⁸⁹ I have proposed that, in order to mitigate that conflict and respond to Dewey's call for more inclusive plans of operation, we begin to renegotiate the relationship between religion and public education by re-thinking the concept *teacher* in a way that is more sensitive to religious points of view without surrendering the Deweyan ideal of democratic education. I have suggested that Cornel West's *prophetic pragmatism* offers the most useful philosophical framework for this new concept, which I have named the *prophetic pragmatist*.

As a preliminary step to the articulation of this concept of *teacher* as *prophetic pragmatist*, this chapter has addressed some of the most common and important objections to the proposition of a new relationship between religion and public education and used those objections to generate criteria by which a concept of *teacher* which attempts to contribute to such a relationship may be judged. It

⁸⁹Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 87.

has not been my intent to suggest that the problems articulated here identify all potential challenges confronting this inquiry's proposal to define a concept *teacher* which is more sensitive to and inclusive of religious orientations. Nor do I mean to assert that the criteria listed above exhaust all possible criteria that could be drawn from the challenges I have addressed. I am merely claiming that these challenges, and the criteria they suggest, offer a necessary and sufficient basis for demonstrating the inadequacy of traditional concepts of *teacher* for a renegotiated relationship between religion and education as well as some of the shortcomings of a number of more contemporary efforts at re-defining that relationship. In addition, I am claiming that these criteria will also be useful in determining whether the teacher as *prophetic pragmatist* is more useful than traditional concepts of teachers in negotiating a new relationship between religion and public education for a diverse society.

In the following chapter I will address the first and second of these three claims, that these criteria can be used to demonstrate the inadequacy of traditional concepts of *teacher* as well as the shortcomings of several recent and contemporary efforts to re-define the relationship between religion and education. The last of these three claims, that these criteria can be used to demonstrate the superiority of the concept of teacher as *prophetic pragmatist*, will then constitute the focus of the remainder of this inquiry.

Chapter II

Centers that Cannot Hold:

Paradigmatic Teachers and Contemporary Re-Visions

Introduction

Chapter 1 of this inquiry advanced two basic claims regarding the current historical moment in U.S. education. First, our deep disagreement over the proper relationship between religion and education threatens a "balkanization" of American education along racial, cultural, and/or religious lines which endangers the school as a laboratory of democratic culture. Secondly, in order to avoid this danger, we must, on the advice of John Dewey (1934), "indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the contending parties" by constructing concepts of *teacher* which can negotiate and *re-negotiate* the complexities of this relationship.¹ Chapter 1 then advanced the thesis that Cornel West's (1989) notion of *prophetic pragmatism* offers a useful philosophical framework for such a concept.² Finally, as a preliminary step to the testing of this thesis, I explored a number of common objections to the proposition

¹John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1938, p. 5.

²Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 211-243.

of a more inclusive relationship between religion and education and used those objections to formulate a set of necessary and sufficient--but not necessarily exhaustive--criteria by which this thesis might be judged.

Clearly, however, the call for a more "inclusive plan of operations"--a new concept *teacher*--assumes the validity of an underlying claim; namely, that traditional and existing concepts of *teacher* and visions of the relationship between religion and education are inadequate. Chapter 2 will examine the validity of this underlying claim. Whether explicitly articulated or not, various positions in the debate over the relationship between religion and education are founded upon basic assumptions about human nature, knowledge, the educated person, and the good society. These assumptions in turn give form and substance to explicitly educational concepts, among them *teacher*. In this chapter I will articulate and critique three broad concepts of *teacher* which have emerged from different positions in the debate over the relationship between religion and education. I will argue that these concepts of *teacher*--as *prophet*, as *technician*, and as *pragmatist*, as well as more recent attempts to revise this relationship, are inadequate to the contemporary challenge to negotiate a role for religious faith in education and a concept *teacher* which meets the criteria formulated in Chapter 1.

Contemporary Revisions

In recent years a number of scholars in the philosophy of education have begun to re-envision the relationship between religion and public education by

challenging the long-held assumption that religion has no place in the public school. Nel Noddings (1993), for instance, has argued that religion and religious questions should be a part of public school education because they have long been at the very center of human experience.³ She would make both an important part of the school curriculum. This would require, however, a profound shift in the way we conceive of the school curriculum since the questions religious beliefs address and raise are not confined to one discipline; they cut across disciplines and will thus require that teachers be trained to venture outside their disciplinary boxes, to recognize the relevance of existential and religious questions to their own disciplines and be able to follow their connections to other disciplines. Such a program of study, she maintains, can only be carried off if teachers adhere to strict pedagogical neutrality.⁴

Noddings' justification for such study in public education is that it liberates students from the constraints of a narrowly functionalist curriculum and exposes them to a wider variety of cultural, intellectual, and spiritual ideas, thus strengthening their ability to negotiate diversity and strengthen democracy.⁵ Thus the criterion identified in Chapter 1 as *affirmation of diversity* is apparently met in

³Nel Noddings, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1993.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 136-139.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

Noddings' revision of the relationship between religion and education. However, discussion of these issues should take place according to the "methods of intelligence."⁶ By this she apparently means what Dewey called critical intelligence, the idea that all truth claims should be subjected to "patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record, and controlled reflection."⁷ In making critical intelligence the non-negotiable basis for conversations in the school on religious issues, she necessarily excludes, as did Dewey, religious groups like conservative fundamentalists and evangelicals. She says to them:

You are free to practice your religion as you see fit, but when you enter the public arena, your commitments and recommendations must be and will be subjected to the methods of intelligence. The public school is committed to these methods, and your children will necessarily encounter them.⁸

Ironically, these are the very groups with whom dialogue and a concept *teacher* capable of *negotiating* rather than dictating the relationship between religion and education is most urgently needed. They are necessarily excluded by Noddings' and Dewey's insistence that critical intelligence is the only legitimate basis for dialogue.

⁶Ibid., p. 143.

⁷John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934, p. 32.

⁸Noddings, p. 143. Dewey argued that religious groups had to "surrender...the whole notion of special truths that are religious by their own nature, together with the idea of peculiar avenues of access to such truths." Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 33.

Thus Noddings' revision of the relationship between religion and education actually founders on the *diversity problem*. Nor does she articulate the concept *teacher* which her revision would require.

More recently, Warren Nord (1995) has sought a resolution of the conflict between religion and education by pointing out the ways in which public education excludes religion and arguing that public education should take "live" religious options seriously as contenders for the truth.⁹ Nord suggests that we should teach as fact those areas where we agree, but where we disagree, where religious and secular ways of knowing offer competing conceptions of history, nature, etc., we should teach the conflicts; we should present both sides carefully and neutrally to enable students to understand the disagreements. In this way the schools can be fair and avoid the *indoctrination problem*.¹⁰

Underlying Nord's arguments for fairness is a guiding metaphor: the school as a marketplace of ideas.¹¹ Nord's argument is, in a sense, economic: religion has been unfairly excluded from the marketplace; free and fair trade in ideas requires that it be allowed to compete. Part of Nord's critique of secular education's hostility toward religion and his argument for the inclusion of "live" religious ways

⁹Warren Nord, *Religion and American Education: Rethinking a National Dilemma*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 187-89, 258-59, 342, 379.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 246.

of knowing in public education are premised on notions of cultural diversity and knowledge which are consistent with three of the criteria for a new concept *teacher* identified in Chapter 1: *affirmation of diversity*, *social authorization*, and *anti-"realist" ontology*. However, these assumptions, as well as his marketplace metaphor, raise the specter of ethical relativism.

Nord responds to the danger of ethical relativism by rejecting both moral absolutism and strong relativism and endorsing a weak relativism that postulates a shared core of moral values which can guide ethical decisions in the school's marketplace of ideas.¹² Though Nord is perhaps correct in his notion of a common core of values--murder, gratuitous violence, rape, theft and other acts probably are generally condemned as immoral--he is less clear on how such "core" values become ethical behavior or enable students to make ethical decisions. For the problem is surely not the lack of a shared core of values but the lack of a consensus on what those values mean and how those meanings are put into practice in human experience. For surely ethics are given form and meaning in behavior, and behavior is in part culturally conditioned. It is unclear, therefore, how this abstract shared core of values avoids both strong relativism and moral absolutism in a context of cultural and epistemic diversity and meets the criterion of *moral-ethical idealism* identified in Chapter 1 as necessary for a concept

¹²Nord, pp. 340-343.

teacher that can negotiate and renegotiate the relationship between religion and public education. And like Noddings, Nord fails to conceptualize the *teacher* his revision of American education would clearly require.

Ignacio Götz (1997), however, has explicitly addressed the role of teachers in his call on teacher education to develop the spiritual life of teachers.¹³ He argues that spirituality entails self-transcendence, the pursuit of high ideals, a sense of the infinite possibilities of human potential, and qualities of openness and transparency which make individuals better teachers. Götz' description of the ideal qualities of a teacher's spiritual life suggest a concept *teacher* that would affirm the criteria of *moral-ethical idealism* and recognize the sanctity of the individual. However, he is less clear--in this admittedly brief essay--on how such "spiritual" teachers would respond to the *diversity problem* or whether the basic philosophical assumptions of the teachers he envisions would enable them to steer clear of the *indoctrination problem*.

Like Götz, Iris Yob (1995) explores the possibility that public education may have something to learn from religious education inquiring into the possibilities of a culture of education infused with spirituality.¹⁴ Yob calls her

¹³Ignacio L. Götz, "On Spirituality and Teaching," *Philosophy of Education* 1997, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1997.

¹⁴Iris M. Yob, "Spiritual Education: A Public School Dialogue with Religious Interpretations," *Religious Education*, 90, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 104-17.

revision of the relationship between religion and public education "spiritual education." Critical of the materialistic focus of so much of public education, Yob argues the necessity of a paradigm shift that would make the spiritual metaphors of "quest, enlightenment, truth" central to public education. In effect, she is calling for a revision of public education that would seem to require a concept *teacher* not unlike that proposed by Götz in his call for teacher education to develop the spiritual life of teachers. However, as Laird (1995) points out, Yob does not address how spiritual education will respond to what I have called the *diversity problem*. Nor does she articulate how spiritual education might meet the criterion of *moral-ethical idealism*, how it meets the challenge of condemning religiously sanctioned child abuse or patriarchal oppression without succumbing to moral absolutism and the *indoctrination problem*.¹⁵

And neither Götz nor Yob discusses the political response of a "spirituality of teaching" or "spiritual education" to injustice and man-made tragedy. Barry Kanpol's (1996) suggested revision of the relationship between religion and education, however, directly addresses this issue by calling for an alliance between critical pedagogy and liberation theology as a tool for social transformation.¹⁶

¹⁵Susan Laird, "Spiritual Education in Public Schools?" *Religious Education* 90, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 118-132.

¹⁶Barry Kanpol, "Critical Pedagogy and Liberation Theology: Borders for a Transformative Agenda," *Educational Theory* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 105-18.

Kanpol suggests such an alliance would envision education as a cultural critique supported and guided by spiritual idealism in the tradition of African-American protestant Christianity's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. He envisions critical pedagogy's concept of *teacher* as transformative intellectual through the lens of such traditional forms of spiritual idealism, suggesting we consider the possibility of *teacher* as *prophet*. Kanpol's vision, however, is a political *agenda*, not a framework for negotiating the relationship between religion and education. While it may meet the criteria which call for *moral-ethical idealism* and recognizing the *love ethic*, it runs afoul of the *diversity problem* and raises the specter of the *indoctrination problem* in its implication that religious or political difference is equal to ethical error.

These attempts to re-envision the relationship between religion and education testify to a growing recognition among philosophers of education that the social conflict over this relationship calls, as Dewey said, for a "new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice."¹⁷ While some of them imply a different concept *teacher* for the relationship they envision, they do not fully articulate that concept or how it deals with the problems discussed in Chapter 1. Others fail to address the concept at all. In both instances the new relationships between religion and education these philosophers envision fail to challenge the

¹⁷John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 5.

paradigmatic concepts of *teacher* which dominate and have dominated popular educational thought and practice and which are inadequate to the task of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education. The remainder of this chapter, therefore, will demonstrate the inadequacies of three of the most prominent of these paradigmatic concepts *teacher*--the *prophet*, the *technician*, and the *pragmatist*--by exploring the evolution, the underlying philosophical assumptions, and the consequences of those assumptions for a concept *teacher* faced with the challenge of negotiating the relationship between religion and education.

The Paradigm of the Teacher-Prophet

Evolution of the Teacher-Prophet

Historically, education and religion have made common cause. The ancient Hebrews, Greeks, Christians and many other groups typically saw the education of the young as an aid to religiously defined goals.¹⁸ In ancient Hebrew society, for instance, key aspects of the teacher's role evolved from the religious and social functions of the classical Hebrew prophets through the *hakimim* and *sopherim* to the responsibilities of the parent-tutor to educate the child in the tenets of the

¹⁸Edwin Scott Gaustad, "Church, State, and Education in Historical Perspective" in James E. Wood, Jr., ed., *Religion, the State and Education* Waco: Baylor University Press, 1984.

faith.¹⁹ In the Christian tradition, Jesus and his use of the art of parable as an instructional method has provided a model seen as worthy of emulation by teachers.²⁰ From the time of Constantine to the Enlightenment education and faith were intimately connected. The rise of scholasticism, the university, and the teaching orders particularly fixed the stamp of religion on the concept *teacher*.²¹ In both traditions the concept *teacher* was founded on the need to transmit both divine and authoritative received knowledge to younger generations.²² In short, the concept *teacher* was an integral component of prophecy.

This concept of *teacher* as an instrument of prophecy is readily apparent in the writing of some of the most prominent contributors to the history of western educational thought. Martin Luther, for instance, saw the teacher as second in importance only to the minister in the defense and propagation of the faith and charged the teacher with helping to bring about Christian community.²³ John Calvin too conceived of the teacher as a lay preacher to whom much of the success

¹⁹The *hakimim* were wise men possessing wisdom, justice and understanding and charged with transmitting knowledge and discretion to the young. The *sopherim*-called rabbis-were teachers and leaders. E.B. Castle, *The Teacher*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 7-11.

²⁰Robert Ulich, *History of Educational Thought*, New York: American Book Company, 1968, pp. 61-71.

²¹Gaustad, p. 13.

²²Ulich, p. 91.

²³Castle, pp. 101-102; Ulich, 122.

of Calvinism could be attributed.²⁴ Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Jesuit teaching order in part to defend and propagate the faith in the face of Protestantism, offered Jesus as a teaching model worthy of emulation and saw "the salvation and perfection of one's soul...and of one's neighbor" as the primary goal of teaching.²⁵ The educational thought of Erasmus, the religious reformer who sought to reconcile faith and reason, was directed at the spiritual reform of Christian life.²⁶ And Comenius, whose *Great Didactic* aimed to foster a great Christian human community, espoused a basic philosophy which was mystical and religious and placed God as the source of moral standards. In his view, teaching had three tasks: the development of erudition, morality, and piety.²⁷ Clearly, religious faith and prophetic agency are central to the concept *teacher* in the development of educational thought in the West at least up to the Enlightenment.

This historical affinity between religion and the concept *teacher* is not confined to Western societies, however. The role of teachers in many other cultures has evolved out of religion and continues to be influenced by religious goals. In Islamic societies Mohammed is revered as the last of the prophets who

²⁴Castle, p. 104.

²⁵Ibid., p. 106; Ulich, pp. 150-51.

²⁶Ulich, p. 138.

²⁷Ibid., 190-192.

imparted divine knowledge to the people, a fundamentally pedagogical task.²⁸ Al-Farabi, referred to as the "Second Teacher," is honored for his efforts to create harmony between reason and faith.²⁹ And the tenets of Islam are the primary topics of education for ordinary Muslims.³⁰ Teaching in Buddhist societies can also trace its history to the arrangement of scenes from the Buddha's life--*jataka*--on temples for the instruction of the illiterate and to the organization of schools taught by monks on temple grounds to impart the rudiments of reading, writing, and the faith to the young.³¹ And traditional education in China and Vietnam was centered on the thought of Confucius.³² Clearly, across cultures, and particularly in the evolution of Western educational thought from Plato through the Christian fathers and the Calvinists to Rousseau, the concept *teacher* names a role charged with the

²⁸ Abdul Hameed Siddiqui, *Prophethood in Islam*, Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 1968, p. 35.

²⁹ Mehdi Amin Razabi, ed., *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, Surrey: Cuazon Press, 1996, pp 59-62.

³⁰ See, for instance, Raden Adjeng Kartini, *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, Hildred Geertz, ed., New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1964 or J.S. Furnival, *Netherlands India: A Study of a Plural Economy*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1944.

³¹ See, for instance, David K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969 and Paul Strachan, *Imperial Pagan: Art and Architecture of Burma*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989.

³² See Alexander B. Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

prophetic task of transmitting divinely sanctioned moral values to the young and/or "uneducated."³³

The evolution of the concept *teacher* in the history of American educational thought and practice has also evinced a close relationship between religion and education. During the colonial period, the alliance of church and state was a general rule which had an inevitable impact on the concept *teacher*.³⁴ The first American schools were explicitly religious and required religious orthodoxy of their teachers.³⁵ In the 18th century state support of the schools of established religions was common.³⁶ In short, religion dominated education in the colonial period and was thus central to the concept *teacher*.³⁷

The 19th century saw the gradual evolution of an increasingly secular concept of *teacher* and education as the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state was increasingly applied across the nation.³⁸ Despite this

³³Castle, p. 109.

³⁴Gaustad, p. 15.

³⁵James E. Wood, "Religion and Education in American Church-State Relations" in Wood, *Religion, the State and Education*, p. 26 and R. Freeman Butts, *The American Tradition in Religion and Education*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1950, p. 114.

³⁶Butts, p. 115.

³⁷Gaustad, p. 18.

³⁸Butts, p. 112; Wood, pp. 28-30.

movement, however, Christianity continued to play an important role in the concept of *teacher* in such institutions as dame schools and even in the colleges.³⁹ The education of African-Americans after the Civil War, for instance, was inspired to a significant extent by religious motives and carried out by teachers with solid Christian credentials "called" to their work by their religious convictions in the manner of the prophets.⁴⁰

Gradually, however, the principle of the separation of church and state as applied to education spread with the common schools. Horace Mann, for instance, recognized that sectarian religious instruction in publicly supported schools was likely to provoke conflict in a religiously diverse society, so he argued against such instruction in the common schools.⁴¹ However, Mann also believed that the *Bible* contained a general body of widely accepted moral and religious truths which could be tapped, through Bible reading in school, as a form of moral education.⁴² In this way Mann hoped to get around the *diversity problem* by trading the traditional concept of *teacher* as religious prophet for a more general concept of

³⁹S.E. Frost, Jr., *Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Western Education*, Columbus, Charles E. Merrill Books, 1966, pp. 403, 410.

⁴⁰Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 164-167.

⁴¹Butts, pp. 116-17; Frost, p. 395.

⁴²Frost, pp. 396-399; Gaustad, p. 20.

teacher as moral prophet. Catholics and Jews, however, vigorously resisted scripture reading in the public schools, seeing it for what it was, an expression of an essentially Protestant version of Christianity.⁴³ Meanwhile, the expansion of science and trade, as well as the growth of religious diversity in the United States, exacerbated conflict over the implicit and explicit sanctioning of Protestant Christianity in the public schools and the concepts of *teacher* as religious or moral prophet which made it possible.⁴⁴

Mann's assumptions about the relationship between religion and moral education and the underlying concept of *teacher* as moral prophet were characteristic among many prominent educational thinkers of the 19th century. Ralph Waldo Emerson's thought, which has been described as a secularized version of Christianity, stressed the existence of a universal spirit transcending the physical world.⁴⁵ He viewed the role of the teacher as one who guides the student from individuality to an experience of community that is not only social but religious. And he saw the function of teaching as deepening man's sense of imbeddedness in the transcendent.⁴⁶ Catharine Beecher, one of the most prominent proponents of women's education in the 19th century, even more explicitly shared Mann's

⁴³Butts, p. 133.

⁴⁴Wood, p. 27.

⁴⁵Ulich, pp. 293, 314.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 293, 295, 305.

assumptions regarding religion and the role of teachers as moral prophets. She too advocated religious education and Bible reading in schools as the best forms of moral education.⁴⁷ And in the late 19th century, Anna Julia Cooper, a powerful voice for the rights and education of African-Americans, particularly women, continued to advocate protestant Christian values as the moral basis for education and bible reading as the best means for affecting moral education.⁴⁸ Clearly, though American education had evolved from the unabashed inculcation of sectarian religious beliefs under a concept of *teacher* as religious prophet toward an increasingly secular approach to education under a concept of *teacher* as moral prophet, a non-sectarian protestant Christianity still exercised a profound influence on the concept *teacher* at the close of the 19th century.

Though the principle of the separation of church and state is widely accepted in schools in the late 20th century, the meaning of that principle in

⁴⁷See Catharine Beecher, "Essay on the Education of Female Teachers" in Shirley Nelson Kersey, ed., *Classics in the Education of Girls and Women*, Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1981; Susan Laird, "Beecher, Catharine Esther" in J.J. Chambliss, ed., *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1996 and Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 103-138.

⁴⁸Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From The South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 302.

practice and the role of teachers as agents of moral prophecy are still debated.⁴⁹ As late as the 1950's many states either did not prohibit or actually encouraged Bible reading in schools and organized school prayer was widespread.⁵⁰ And many contemporary critics of the public schools, in their call for school prayer and Bible reading in schools as a response to the real or perceived moral decay of contemporary society, evince nostalgia for a public school system founded on protestant Christian moral values like that created by Horace Mann. Implicit in this nostalgia is a concept of *teacher* as an agent of moral prophecy, as a transmitter of divinely sanctioned knowledge and moral behavior from one generation to the next, which, if adhered to, guarantees the good society. Whether they recognize it or not, they are drawing on a long tradition of educational thought which has conceived *teacher* as prophet.

The Conceptual Consequences of the Teacher-Prophet

In order to understand the relevance of the prophetic model to the concept of *teacher* implicit in this long tradition of common cause between religion and education it is necessary to more fully understand the concepts *prophet* and *prophecy*. These terms are most often defined in reference to religious figures like

⁴⁹See, for instance, Barbara B. Gaddy, T. William Hall, and Robert J. Marzano, *School Wars: Resolving Our Conflicts Over Religion and Values*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

⁵⁰Butts, 191-92.

the Hebrew prophets--Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Amos among others, Christian prophets such as John the Baptist, and the prophet of Islam, Mohammed.⁵¹

However, prophetic religious figures and other religious specialists are also found in other cultures, such as the Native American prophets Wevoka and Handsome Lake.⁵² Such figures are often described as "the man to whom it is given to speak the words given him by God...What he says is true and can be totally relied upon."⁵³ Prophets tend to appear in times of great crisis when people feel vulnerable and without control of their social environment. Their messages generally offer an explanation of the crisis at hand and a call for a new order

⁵¹See, for instance, Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson, *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962; Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, New York: Harper & Row, 1960; Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983; Isma'il R. Al Faruqi, *Islam*, Niles: Argus Communications, 1984; B.D. Napier, "Prophet, prophetism" in George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962; Neal Reimer, *Karl Marx and Prophetic Politics*, New York: Praeger, 1987; M.H. Shepherd, "Prophet in the NT" in Buttrick; and Bruce Vawter, *The Conscience of Israel: Pre-exilic Prophets and Prophecy*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961.

⁵² Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995, p. 212. See also L. Spence, "Prophecy (American)" in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, pp. 381-82; and Thomas W. Overholt, *Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, pp. 27-40, 62-67.

⁵³James Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism: Biblical Foundations for Evangelical Christianity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984, p. 20.

designed to address it.⁵⁴

Prophecy has been seen as having three defining characteristics: 1) an individual who is conscious of having received a special call from his god, 2) revelatory experiences, and 3) the proclamation of the revealed message to the people.⁵⁵ It also involves interaction among a minimum of three separate actors: the supernatural, the prophet, and an audience.⁵⁶ This interaction, however, is not a one way transmission from the divine to the prophet to the people. Prophecy is not prediction. It is rather a communication loop which can be modified by feedback from the audience or prophet or subsequent revelations.⁵⁷ The basic pattern of prophetic speech presupposes the intervention of God in history and typically consists of a moral critique and judgement of a prevailing situation, a threat or prediction of the consequences of that situation, and a call for radical change in accordance with divinely sanctioned ideal principles.⁵⁸ The prophet's message must include enough of the old, traditional beliefs of the people to be meaningful and authoritative to the them, but it must also be sufficiently novel to provide an

⁵⁴Overholt, pp. 113-14.

⁵⁵Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962, pp. 216-19.

⁵⁶Overholt, p. 15.

⁵⁷Ibid.; Barr, pp. 21-32.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 21-32; Napier, p. 899.

explanation for and remedy to the crisis which the traditional beliefs have been unable to provide.

Some sort of supernatural or symbolic confirmation of the prophet's authority is an important characteristic of the paradigmatic *religious* prophets. Though this divine confirmation is perhaps the prophet's most obvious claim to authority, another important source is his audience's acknowledgement of his authority, their sense that the prophet conforms to the cultural expectations of the role and his ability to articulate what they have already begun to feel. Thus the prophet's authority comes from both revelation and his audience's recognition that he is performing a culturally recognized role.⁵⁹ Prophecy ends, interestingly enough, not when supernatural revelation is absent but rather when the prophet's audience no longer recognizes him as performing an accepted social role.⁶⁰

Though claims of divine revelation are often seen as the hallmark of the prophet, a number of scholars argue that claims of such revelation are not a necessary component of prophetic activity. According to this view, prophets can be any individual with a compelling vision of a changing social order or some one who "speaks forth for God in the spirit which animated Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah,

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 69-73, 87-89.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 155-59, 183.

and Jesus."⁶¹ Other religious figures who, while they make no claims to speak the literal words given them by God, nevertheless articulate social critiques and recipes for change premised on the will of God or a transcendent ideal are also described as prophets.⁶² These individuals can be appropriately described as *moral* prophets. To view them as such assumes a judgement that they are inspired by the same spirit that moved the classical prophets even if they do not claim direct revelation from God. In this sense, Martin Luther King, Jr. could be called a moral prophet.

The name of prophet may also be applicable to figures who, though they make no appeal to divinely sanctioned or spiritually transcendent ideals, nevertheless generally conform to the prophetic model. They may appear in times of crisis with cultural critiques premised on the inadequate and unacceptable realization of existing social ideals, with predictions of the dire consequences of society's failure to live up to those ideals, and with a specific plan of action for realizing them. Such *ideological* prophets may even include historical figures, such as Karl Marx, who explicitly reject religious paradigms.⁶³

All three types--the *religious*, the *moral*, and the *ideological*--share two

⁶¹Ibid., 167.

⁶²Shepherd, p. 919 and Karl Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus: The Paradigmatic Individuals*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1990.

⁶³Neil Reimer, *Karl Marx and Prophetic Politics*, New York: Praeger, 1987.

fundamental characteristics: prophetic speech and social authorization. The prophet and his prophesy can exist "only in a dynamic interaction with an audience," an audience that bears the responsibility of identifying the truth and authorizing the prophet in relation to his conformity to a culturally defined role.⁶⁴ Thus a claim of divine authority is not a necessary or sufficient condition for the existence of prophecy or the title prophet. Such claims are the hallmark of the crank or lunatic unless a meaningful aspect of their society authorizes them as prophets. Therefore, individuals and movements are prophetic in that they engage in a sustained moral critique of actually existing conditions, point out the consequences of those conditions, and offer existential or programmatic prescriptions based on ideal conceptions of truth or human society which are meaningful to that society. Thus, the concept of the prophetic may be defined as a mode of speech and action aimed at transforming social reality in accordance with recognizable social ideals.

In the literature on the prophetic and prophecy, the role of the prophet is frequently and explicitly defined as that of a teacher or clearly implied to the extent that "prophets were concerned with individual and social behavior, the perennial concerns of teachers."⁶⁵ Their goal, like many of the major figures in the history of

⁶⁴Ibid., 183.

⁶⁵Castle, p. 7, writes "If education is primarily concerned with what sorts of persons people become, we cannot exclude the Hebrew prophets from the

educational thought as well as ordinary teachers, was the creation of "righteous men and the just society."⁶⁶ This tradition of the religious prophet as *teacher* can be seen most explicitly in the Old Testament account of Ezra, who "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgements" and who "read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."⁶⁷ It is also apparent in Jeremiah, where a pedagogic intent is evident in the sense that "something is presented as a paradigm for the purpose of instructing students and inducing insights...in order to transform."⁶⁸ The religious prophet, then, is in important respects a paradigmatic teacher.

If prophets have functioned as *teacher* in and of their contemporary societies, it should be no surprise that educational theories closely allied with religious beliefs would see their teachers as performing the role of moral prophet. Indeed, in the Jewish cultural tradition the prophetic role appears to have evolved into teaching: "The prophetic teachings, in diluted form but still retaining their strong moral emphasis, were mediated through the *sopherim* (rabbi) and *hakimim* community of teachers."

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 9. Plato's *Republic* is, perhaps, the most famous example of these goals in educational thought.

⁶⁷*King James Bible*, Ezra 7:10.

⁶⁸Timothy Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*, Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1984, p. 171.

(wise man) to the Jewish father and much later to the schoolmaster and his pupils."⁶⁹ And in the early Christian church the gift of prophecy was evidently suppressed and absorbed into the missions of preachers and teachers.⁷⁰ Teachers in the long history of common cause between religion and education are prophetic not in the sense that they have received some divine revelation, but rather in the sense that their teaching is motivated and given direction by a body of ethical or theological absolutes that are perceived to have divine sanction. In short, they are moral rather than religious prophets. And those non-religious teachers who are motivated by some compelling vision of the just society-Paulo Freire, for instance-might also be considered morally prophetic.⁷¹ One of the most eloquent contemporary exponents of this ideal of the moral prophet as *teacher* is David Purpel.⁷²

Purpel draws explicitly on the tradition of the Hebrew prophets for his formulation of an approach to education which has as its primary point of

⁶⁹Castle, p. 13.

⁷⁰Mitchell, *ibid.*

⁷¹Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 1990.

⁷²See David E. Purpel, *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education: A Curriculum for Justice and Compassion in Education*, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1989.

departure "the reality of immense and unacceptable human suffering."⁷³ Purpel's response to both the inevitably tragic elements of human experience as well as the avoidable oppression and injustice inflicted on many in contemporary society is to seek "ways in which our schools can be energized with images and language that have force and meaning" and to examine "the possibility that theological language might have for this effort."⁷⁴ His work, then, can be seen "as an attempt to sacralize the educational process, to imbue it with a spirit of what is of ultimate significance and meaning."⁷⁵ For Purpel, the Hebrew prophets provide a powerful model for this integration of theological and critical language into education focused on amelioration of tragedy and social injustice. "The most powerful source for Western culture of this integration of religion and criticism is...the biblical prophets. I see in his [Abraham Heschel] interpretation of the prophets intriguing possibilities for an educational framework which combines a sense of the sacred and a sensitivity to cultural realities with a strong emphasis on the development of critical consciousness."⁷⁶

⁷³David E. Purpel, "Extending the Boundaries of Moral Education" in Wendy Kohli, ed., *Critical Conversations in Philosophy of Education*, New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 150, 156.

⁷⁴David E. Purpel, *Moral and Spiritual Crisis*, p. 77.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 78.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 80. Purpel is referring here to Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, New York: Harper & Row, 1955.

Though he does not make the distinctions between religious, moral, and ideological prophets made here, Purpel's concept of *teacher* is constructed around the figure of the moral prophet. "Educators themselves need to be "prophets" and speak in the prophetic voice that celebrates joy, love, justice, and abundance and cries out in anguish in the presence of oppression and misery."⁷⁷ The educator should work "within the prophetic tradition that seeks to remind us of our highest aspirations, of our failures to meet them, and of the consequence of our responses to these situations" in order to develop "skills and knowledge that enhance the possibility of justice, community, and joy."⁷⁸ Purpel's call to teachers to assume the role of moral prophet unifies both religious and secular manifestations of prophetic activity by correctly locating the moral prophet's authority in the power of socially recognizable ethical ideals rather than claims of supernatural revelation. This enables him to merge contemporary streams of liberation theology and critical pedagogy into a potentially powerful voice which not only names and challenges injustice but offers a transformed vision of the good society as well.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 110.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 104-5.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 85, 102-3. For a fuller account of liberation theology and critical pedagogy see Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993 and Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Hadley, Bergin & Garvey, 1988. For another discussion of their significance for education and the teacher as prophet see Kanpol, "Critical Pedagogy," op. cit..

This unification of the moral vision which occupies the place divine revelation held in the religious manifestation of prophetic activity is to be articulated, Purpel asserts, in a reconstituted "overarching mythos," the lack of which is one important aspect of our "cultural and educational crisis."⁸⁰ Purpel calls on colleagues to "celebrate certain religious and moral principles" and transcendent values which cut across ethnic lines and which "amount to elements of a broadly held common heritage."⁸¹ This overarching mythos yields educational goals based on values which "are in a sense 'non-negotiable,' even though we are simultaneously convinced of their 'truth' and nervous about their problems."⁸²

Purpel clearly recognizes the potential dangers of his concept of *teacher* as prophet. He reminds us that, even as we act on his advice to "celebrate certain religious and moral principles," we cannot endorse any one religion or denomination. He further states: "It is vitally important not to overstate the value of this particular tradition to the development of an educational framework. What we value is his [the prophet's] passion and commitment to justice."⁸³ He is aware of the problem of potential indoctrination and dogma but is simultaneously critical of the amorality, moral relativism, "vulgar pragmatism," or "sterile non-

⁸⁰Purpel, *Moral and Spiritual Crisis*, pp. 70, 106.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, pp. 67, 70.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁸³*Ibid.*, pp. 67, 80.

commitment" that is so often assumed to be the only alternative to moral absolutism and indoctrination.⁸⁴ "The challenge," he writes, "is formidable: 1) we must find ways to avoid paralytic and wishy-washy responses to the conflicting, strident, and self-righteous demands of narrow interest groups; 2) at the same time we need to be responsive to the legitimate concerns of our pluralistic, multicultural nation; 3) we need not have to choose between one and two but can strive to re-examine our traditions and seek language and images that give us common direction and purpose."⁸⁵

Inadequacies of the Teacher-Prophet

Purpel's articulation of the crisis in contemporary education is very similar to the challenge I suggested in Chapter 1 which faces any system of public education which attempts to do justice to the role of religion in history and the lives of students in our multi-religious, multicultural society while adequately responding to social injustice and tragedy. There is clearly much in the prophetic tradition which is attractive and even useful in formulating a response to these challenges: the passion, the compelling moral vision, the sense of outrage at moral failure, the tireless struggle toward not just improvement but social redemption constitute an inspiring vision for the concept *teacher*. As I have argued here, this

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 99, 119.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 93-94.

concept of *teacher* as prophet is perhaps the oldest and most common concept of the *teacher* in the history of educational thought. However, it does not imply, by itself, a concept *teacher* which can negotiate the relationship between religion and education while preserving the school as a laboratory of democratic culture. In spite of Purpel's efforts, it runs afoul of the *indoctrination* and *authorization* problems identified in Chapter 1 and thus fails several of the criteria defined by those problems.

The *indoctrination problem* remains because it is so deeply imbedded in the prophetic tradition. Integral to the prophetic tradition is the assumption either of divine revelation or a set of transcendent moral values which give voice and direction to prophetic activity. This is clear from the analysis of prophecy and the prophet offered in the previous section as well as the long history of correlating and mingling the concepts *teacher* and prophet. The prophet has an explicit moral framework to which he is absolutely committed. Purpel implicitly recognizes this fact in his call for an "overarching mythos" to guide education in the prophetic voice. While it may well be true that the various peoples who constitute our multicultural society have some common moral values, what this might mean in actual practice is far from clear and not without controversy. As the 19th century controversy over Bible reading as moral education attests: one man's common moral heritage is another's religious or political indoctrination. It is just this sort of conflict at the level of actual practice that the gradual secularization of the schools

in the late 19th and 20th centuries was designed to avoid. Purpel's suggestion of an overarching mythos is a form of weak relativism meant to forge a passage between the horns of moral absolutism--the *indoctrination problem*--and moral relativism--a failure of the *moral-ethical idealism* criterion. But the conceptual model he chooses for teaching--prophecy--leaves his project vulnerable in actual practice to the first horn of the dilemma, the horn that the prophetic model has historically *embraced* as a pedagogical tool for bringing society into conformity with particular ideal ends. And thus the *indoctrination problem*, to which the whole tradition of *teacher* as prophet is vulnerable, collides with the *diversity problem* in a multicultural society such as our own. Therefore, the prophetic model by itself is perhaps more likely to produce conflict than meaningful progress toward the just society.

However, by deploying the conceptual model of prophetic speech and the distinctions among categories of prophet--distinctions implicit in Purpel but never articulated or analyzed--we can clarify the exact source of the *indoctrination problem* in the notion of *teacher* as prophet. It is not the religious content of prophetic speech per se that produces the *indoctrination problem*. As we have seen in the previous section, explicitly religious content is a defining characteristic of only one kind of prophet, the religious prophet, and it is surely possible that one may hold religious beliefs without indoctrinating others in those beliefs. It is, rather, a misunderstanding of the source of prophetic authority that leads the

prophet into the *indoctrination problem*. For when the prophet, and his audience, assume his authority derives from God or absolute, transcendent ideals rather than the consistency of his message with the imperfectly realized but recognizable values of his society, he becomes an absolutist who runs afoul of the *epistemological* and *ontological problems*. The *indoctrination problem* is then inevitable.

If, on the other hand, the prophet and his audience recognize the social basis of his authority, then the prophet runs the risk of becoming a moral politician juggling the competing assertions of various ethical constituencies: he becomes an ethical relativist and thus loses the direction and moral passion of the prophet. The prophetic tradition by itself is simply an inadequate model for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and *re*-negotiating the relationship between religion and education because it is incapable of steering teachers between the Scylla of moral indoctrination and the Charybdis of ethical relativism. In a sense, it lacks a conceptual rudder capable of steering us to where we know we want to go.

Finally, there is another, more practical, problem confronting the concept of *teacher* as prophet which follows from the sources of prophetic authority. As mentioned above, that authority comes not from the prophet's claim of divine revelation, but rather from his audience's acceptance of that claim and their recognition of his action as conforming to a culturally defined role named

prophet.⁸⁶ Thus, for the teacher to assume the role of prophet as he has in the past and as Purpel suggests he should do now, the teacher's audience must authorize him in that role; they must at some level accept and affirm his articulation of guiding moral values--whether divine or not--and recognize his actions as fulfilling the prophetic role. Without this authorization, the prophet is a crank, a nut, a kook whose actions are likely to be perceived as indoctrination and who is unlikely to be tolerated for long in the classroom. In a society as diverse as ours any such broad authorization of teachers as prophets is unlikely.

There is much useful and inspiring in the prophetic tradition of the concept *teacher* and in Purpel's contemporary revision of the concept of *teacher* as prophet. The sense of moral purpose and outrage against injustice should inspire any concept of *teacher* in a society, like ours, marred by man-made evils. And the recognition, made explicit by applying the conceptual distinctions of religious, moral, and ideological prophecy to Purpel's thesis, that the *indoctrination problem* is not a necessary consequence of religious claims is useful to the construction of a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating the relationship between religion and public education. However, neither the tradition of *teacher* as prophet nor Purpel's revision of that tradition meets the criteria established in Chapter 1 for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating the relationship between religion and education

⁸⁶Overholt, pp. 69-73.

while preserving the school as a laboratory of democratic culture. We must look elsewhere for a more suitable concept *teacher* for a multicultural, multi-religious system of democratic education that includes religion, avoids indoctrination, and responds to existential tragedy and social injustice.

The Paradigm of the Teacher-Technician

The Banishment of the Teacher-Prophet

By the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th the concept of *teacher* as moral prophet came under increasing attack and was generally rejected by those advocating a more scientific approach to education. This rejection is, perhaps, most clearly stated in a famous speech by Max Weber, a seminal influence on the modern conception of the academic vocation, particularly at the university level.⁸⁷ "The prophet and the demagogue do not belong on the academic platform...To the prophet and demagogue, it is said: Go your ways out into the streets and speak openly to the world, that is, speak where criticism is possible...In the lecture room we stand opposite our audience, and it has to remain silent. It is irresponsible to exploit this situation."⁸⁸

⁸⁷Wolf Heydebrand, "Introduction" to Max Weber, *Sociological Writings*, New York: Continuum, 1994, p. vii. For an account of Weber's influence on the academic vocation see Mark R. Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. See also J.E.T. Eldridge, ed., *Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality*, London: Michael Joseph, 1971.

⁸⁸Weber, p. 293.

Unlike Overholt (1989), Weber saw the prophet as "an individual bearer of charisma who proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment" and is "never to be found where the proclamation of a religious truth of salvation through personal revelation is lacking. In our view, this qualification must be regarded as the decisive hallmark of prophecy."⁸⁹ While he saw some relationship between the prophet and the teacher of ethics, he maintained that philosophical ethicists, such as the great teachers Confucius or Plato, and religious figures like Luther and Calvin were not prophets because they either claimed no new revelation or lacked "that vital emotional preaching which is distinctive of prophecy."⁹⁰ The enterprise of the prophet," he argued, "is closer to that of the popular orator (demagogue) or political publicist than to that of the teacher."⁹¹ And the demagogue, Weber asserts, has no place in the classroom because students, who he assumes are there to listen, have no opportunity to challenge or disagree with the professor.

Weber's banishment of the *teacher-prophet* signaled the rise of a new concept *teacher* for a new period indelibly marked by the growth of science and the technologies it made possible. According to Weber, "the fate of our times is

⁸⁹Max Weber, "The Prophet," in S.N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 253, 261.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 259-60.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 261.

characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world," where, "in spite of theology, the tension between the valuespheres of *science* and the sphere of the *holy* is unbridgeable."⁹² Science today," he writes, "is a *vocation* organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe."⁹³ Since science does not and can not address ultimate questions, students are in error who come to the lecture to hear something more than "mere analyses and statements of fact." They seek a leader rather than a teacher, "but we are placed on the platform solely as teachers. Fellow students!" Weber admonishes, "You come to our lectures and demand from us the qualities of leadership, and you fail to realize in advance that of a hundred professors at least ninety-nine do not and must not claim to be football masters in the vital problems of life, or even to be leaders in matters of conduct."⁹⁴ Thus Weber dispenses with the ancient concept of *teacher* as moral prophet and replaces it with a newly ascendent ideal, an ideal which splits the traditional teacher's role into two: the researcher-scientist who

⁹²Ibid., pp. 301-02.

⁹³Ibid., p. 300.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 296-97.

discovers knowledge and develops new technologies, and the *teacher-technician* who applies that knowledge and technology to effect learning.

Though he acknowledges they often fall short of the ideal, Weber demands that teachers be objective in the treatment of subject matter. The teacher's task is to "serve the students with his knowledge and scientific experience and not to imprint upon them his personal political views."⁹⁵ In addition, the useful teacher teaches students to recognize facts that are inconvenient for their "party opinions" as well as their teacher's. While the teacher who takes a scientific approach to education cannot promote one or another fundamental position, he can deploy scientific thought to "contribute to the technology of controlling life by calculating external objects as well as man's activities, contribute methods of thinking," and foster intellectual clarity by identifying the most effective means and likely consequences of chosen ends as well as the practical stands and final conclusions which are logically consistent with one or another ultimate position. Insofar as the teacher exercises these responsibilities and no more, he is in the service of moral forces.⁹⁶

Though Weber is referring in this speech to the professor as scientist and never explicitly denies the title *teacher* to those who do engage "fundamental

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 293.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 298-99.

positions" in their teaching practice, his estimation of such teachers and his own ideal conception of teachers are clear. "We are destined to live in a godless and prophetless time...It is weakness not to be able to countenance the stern seriousness of our fateful times...To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently...simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him...One way or another he has to bring his 'intellectual sacrifice'-that is inevitable."⁹⁷ The ideal teacher, however, does not sacrifice his intellectual integrity to such weakness because "in the lecture rooms of the university no other virtue holds but plain intellectual integrity."⁹⁸ Weber's ideal teacher is objective, dispensing scientific knowledge and analysis and studiously avoiding any answer to the question Tolstoy claimed was most important to us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?"⁹⁹ He serves science, the most important factor in the process of intellectualization which has been going on for thousands of years, "a belief that there are no incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 300, 296, 303.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 303.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 290.

master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculation provide the service. This above all is what intellectualization means."¹⁰⁰

According to Schwehn (1993), these ideals have shaped the academic vocation in America at the university level since World War II. And to the extent that concepts of the ideal teacher at the university level influence those at the lower levels of public education--particularly through teacher training--they have shaped prevailing conceptions of teachers at elementary and secondary levels as well. These ideals, however, are not Weber's alone. For Weber is but one significant voice in the process of "intellectualization" he describes, a process that, among other things, has sought, with considerable success, to make education scientific, to bring to it the understanding and control of educational phenomena that science has increasingly exercised over natural phenomena. Thus the scientist becomes the model for the university professor who discovers facts and formulates "laws" of individual and social human behavior and tests techniques that hinder or facilitate learning. The teacher at the elementary and secondary levels, then, becomes ideally an educational *technician* who deploys these techniques to effect learning in her students.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁰¹My use of the pronoun *he/him* to refer to scientists and university professors and *she/her* to refer to schoolteachers deliberately reflects the language

Evolution of the Teacher-Technician

The evolution of the concept of *teacher* as a *technician*, an outgrowth of the idea that education is or ideally should be a science, can be traced back at least to the middle of the 19th century. In that time, roughly corresponding with the gradual secularization of public education in the U.S., figures like James and John Stuart Mill, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, G. Stanley Hall, Edward L. Thorndike, B.F. Skinner and others made important contributions to the study of science *in* the education of the time as well as the study of education *as* a science by turning the methods and results of science to educational problems. Their seminal influence shaped the development of education into the 20th century. Though the long-idealized concept of *teacher* as moral prophet did not and has not disappeared from American classrooms, their contributions gave rise to a new ideal of education as a technology built upon and governed by the laws of science and new concept *teacher* as the trained *technician* who operates the educational machine.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the first attempts to develop a completely scientific education.¹⁰² James Mill, for instance, deployed the sense empiricism of

and assumptions about gender exhibited in much of the literature on education as a science.

¹⁰²F.A. Cavenagh, ed., *James and John Stuart Mill on Education*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1931, p. xi.

Locke and the psychological theory of association in his plan of education for his son, John Stuart, whose own empiricist ideas of a universe of causal regularities had a profound impact on what would come to be seen as a scientific approach to research on teaching.¹⁰³ Thus the elder Mill's detached and objective application of educational techniques derived from scientific theories may well be one of the first instances of the concept of *teacher as technician*.¹⁰⁴ And Thomas Huxley, an outspoken critic of religious control of education and influential proponent of science instruction in English schools, claimed for science the power to improve not only practical life, but moral life as well, and envisioned the teacher's role as bringing students' minds into direct acquaintance with the *knowledge* of scientific facts.¹⁰⁵ Herbert Spencer, a friend of Mill and Huxley and "intellectual linchpin between Britain and America," also exerted an enormous influence on education

¹⁰³Ibid., p. xii-xxiv; John H. Chambers, *Empiricist Research on Teaching: A Philosophical and Practical Critique of its Scientific Pretensions*, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992, pp. 109-10. The psychology of association anticipated key aspects of behavioral psychology. James Mill claimed that it was essential to education to create associations that will result in right habits, habits "that will be stamped in by pleasure and pain," so that each individual could fit himself to become "the instrument of the greatest possible benefit to his fellow men."

¹⁰⁴J.S. Mill's nervous breakdown would later be attributed in part to his father's system of education, a less-than-auspicious debut of the notion of teacher-technician. See Cavenagh.

¹⁰⁵Frost, p. 423; Cyril Bibby, ed., *T.H. Huxley on Education*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1971, pp. 12-14, 26, 40-43, 99-105, 209.

through his book *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (1861), which became a widely popular text in normal schools and university teacher training departments.¹⁰⁶ In it he advocated a theory of education, heavily influenced by Darwinian evolution, in which the child was seen as a complex organism governed by the same stimuli of "cause and consequence" which governed the evolution and behavior of other animals. Science, he concluded, was the knowledge "of most worth" to mankind, and scientific culture should underlie all educational activities.¹⁰⁷

Thus, by the turn of the century, many of the key assumptions underlying the concept of *teacher* as technician had already assumed a prominent place in the cutting-edge educational theories of the time. The child was less likely to be seen as an imperfect but improvable image of a living God; he was, rather, a complex animal inhabiting a universe of discernable "causal regularities" and governed by the same forces of stimulus, response, and natural selection that shape the experience and behavior of other animals. Education was less a process of moral growth toward conformity to an ethical ideal embodied in the idea of a

¹⁰⁶Frost, p. 422; Andreas M. Kazamias, ed., *Herbert Spencer on Education*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1966, p. 22,31-35, 49, 56; Edward J. Power, *Educational Philosophy: A History from the Ancient World to Modern America*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 117.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 30; Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1914, p. 46.

transcendent God; it was increasingly seen as a technology of control whereby the isolation and manipulation of appropriate stimuli yield predictable responses in human behavior. The ideal teacher of "modern" educational theory was no longer the moral *prophet*; the ideal teacher was the rational, objective, efficient *technician* applying the knowledge and techniques of the researcher-scientist to education. In the 20th century these assumptions would receive further elaboration and more sophisticated application to education in the seminal research of G. Stanley Hall, Edward L. Thorndike, and B.F. Skinner.

G. Stanley Hall, for instance, was an instrumental figure in focusing the scrutiny of educational science on the child and redefining the concept *teacher* along the lines of the *laboratory technician*. So profoundly influenced by evolutionary and psychological theory that he defined education as "conscious evolution" and its goal as "fitness for life," Hall believed that physical evolution had been so firmly established as fact that it should be applied to mental evolution via psychology.¹⁰⁸ Hall's analysis of human behavior in the context of evolutionary theory led to the development of what he called "genetic" psychology, the notion that the human mind evolved in the same manner and in tandem with the evolution of the body, and his "Law of Recapitulation," a belief that the mental development

¹⁰⁸Frost, p. 426; G.E. Partridge, *Genetic Philosophy of Education: An Epitome of the Published Educational Writings of President G. Stanley Hall of Clark University*, New York: Sturgis and Walton Company, 1912, pp. 15-31, 91-98.

of each individual human being progressed through the same evolutionary stages as the "race."¹⁰⁹ Applied to religions, cultures, sexualities and gender, Hall's "law" could locate any individual or group on a spectrum which was defined by the pinnacle of intellectual, physical, and cultural evolution: white, western, male, Christian culture.¹¹⁰ Hall believed that this psychological theory could provide settled answers to educational questions and a solid scientific foundation for teaching: "This new educational science has already passed judgements upon many of the most important questions of both matter and method of teaching in all grades--verdicts, which, when still further confirmed by genetic evidence, will be final, and will give education what it has so long lacked, a truly scientific basis."¹¹¹

The role of the teacher in Hall's theory of education as natural and conscious evolution was to facilitate the natural biological "unfolding" of the child by deploying knowledge of the child's psychological evolution to consciously direct that evolution in desired directions.¹¹² For this task the teacher required training in psychology rather than philosophy, though it need not be overly analytic or systematic but rather practical, for "she"--the teacher--"tends to magnify rules.

¹⁰⁹Partridge, pp. 15, 21, 27, 31.

¹¹⁰G. Stanley Hall, *Educational Problems, Vol. II*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1911, pp. 69-72.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 99-103.

Give her a few simple and easily taught rules and a few dozen inspiring lessons on the history of education, and as many on the nature of childhood."¹¹³ In other words, the teacher need not fully understand, let alone participate in, the scientific underpinnings of her craft, she need only apply the knowledge science dispenses to her from "the fountainhead of the educational system. . . the university".¹¹⁴ Thus Hall's biological model of education suggests a concept of *teacher* as a *laboratory technician* manipulating natural processes in the laboratory of the school to achieve ends determined elsewhere.

In the first several decades of the 20th century schools in the U.S. came under increasing criticism by proponents of greater educational efficiency.¹¹⁵ Drawing on the work of Fredrick Taylor in the scientific management of industry and the pioneering work of Joseph M. Rice in quantitative educational research, reformers seized upon techniques of measurement and inferential statistics as well as the model of industrial organization to create a new and efficient system of schooling in which teachers assumed the role of trained *factory technicians*. Aided by the growth of educational psychology, this new movement promised a more

¹¹³Ibid., pp. 339-40.

¹¹⁴Partridge, p. 337.

¹¹⁵Chambers, p. 101.

rational and scientific approach to the technology of education.¹¹⁶ Edward L.

Thorndike was one of the seminal figures in this movement.¹¹⁷

Like Spencer and Hall before him, Thorndike's theory of education and implicit concept *teacher* were deeply influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution. He credited Darwin with bringing a naturalistic approach and the evolutionary view to psychology, a consequence of which was the conclusion that "the intellectual difference between a monkey and a child is not in nature but in degree...In mind, as in body, man is a part of nature."¹¹⁸ The psychological insights that grew out of Thorndike's research on animals refined the associationist psychology of Spencer and Hall's genetic psychology by identifying the mechanism by which mental development takes place--stimulus and response.¹¹⁹ Thorndike claimed that learning is a matter of forming connections between stimuli and responses, connections which can be "stamped in" if rewarded or "stamped out" if punished. Mind was nothing more than the sum total of such connections.¹²⁰ Based

¹¹⁶H. Warren Button and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., *History of Education and Culture in America*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983, pp. 219-21, 231-34, 241.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 41-42; Edward L. Thorndike, *Education: A First Book*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1923, p. 4.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 10; Power, p. 149.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 247; Geraldine Joncich, *Psychology and the Science of Education, Selected Writings of Edward L. Thorndike*, New York: Bureau of

on these conclusions he formulated two "laws of learning:" the "Law of Exercise" and the "Law of Effect," which would prove an important contribution to the development of learning theory in psychology and the basis for a more explicit technology of education.¹²¹

Thorndike was also at the forefront of the measurement movement in education, asserting that everything which exists, exists in some quantity and is, therefore, measurable.¹²² Even questions of quality and values could be restated, he believed, in quantitative terms and thus measured.¹²³ Then, by employing statistical procedures promoted and developed by Mill and Francis Galton, such measurements could be used to quantify intelligence or to determine the superiority of one educational method over another by quantifying and comparing educational outcomes.¹²⁴ In this way education could become more rational and

Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1962, pp. 10-11.

¹²¹Joncich, pp. 25, 79-80. The Law of Exercise state that "the oftener or more emphatically a given response is connected with a certain situation, the more likely it is to be made to that situation in the future." The Law of Effect states that "the greater the satisfyingness of the state of affairs which accompanies or follows a given response to a certain situation, the more likely that response is to be made to that situation in the future. Conversely, the greater the discomfort or annoyingness of the state of affairs which comes with or after a response to a situation, the more likely that response is *not* to be made to that situation in the future."

¹²²Ibid., p. 17; Button and Provenzo, p. 242-43.

¹²³Joncich, pp. 9, 18.

¹²⁴Ibid., pp. 12, 64; Chambers, pp. 97-98, 100-01.

efficient through the application of "the same general technique...which has serviced the physical sciences for the last two hundred years."¹²⁵ His development of this technique had a profound impact on the development of standardized testing and modern educational research. Thus Thorndike's laws of learning and his techniques for measuring educational outcomes provided the essential tools for the *teacher-technician* working within a technological theory of education. Like a *factory technician*, the *teacher-technician* applied a specific procedure to the "raw material" of the educational process--the students--and then evaluated the success of the procedure by reading the "gauges" provided by Thorndike's measurement techniques.

According to Thorndike, the task of educational science was to "know the effect of everything than any teacher can do upon every person to whom anything can be done."¹²⁶ The task of the teacher was to produce and prevent change, to control behavior by preserving desirable qualities and getting rid of undesirable qualities. "The art of teaching," Thorndike wrote, "may be defined as the art of giving and withholding stimuli with the result of producing or preventing certain responses."¹²⁷ He conceived of the teacher and her relation to administration as

¹²⁵Quoted in Chambers, p. 101.

¹²⁶Edward L. Thorndike and Arthur I. Gates, *Elementary Principles of Education*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1930, p. 236.

¹²⁷Joncich, pp. 60-61.

being "like that of the builder who is told to make the best house he can." Higher educational authorities decide what goals the schools will try to achieve, then it becomes "the special problem of the teacher to make these changes as economically and as surely as possible under the conditions of school life."¹²⁸ Again the teacher has little say in methods or goals; methods are formulated and tested by educational science taking place in the university while administrators set goals. The teacher's task is to implement the methods and goals of others, to operate the machinery of education, as efficiently as possible. Thus, from Thorndike's theories, with their themes of measurement and control, emerges a concept of *teacher as factory technician*.

Later in the 20th century, amid yet another round of criticism of schools, a new behaviorist psychology emerged claiming empirical support and promising more effective and efficient technology of education in which teachers would function as *programmers*.¹²⁹ B.F. Skinner's restatement of Thorndike's "Law of Effect" as "operant conditioning" introduced a "technology of teaching" which significantly effected the methods if not the goals of education.¹³⁰ Like Hall and Thorndike, Skinner saw human beings as products of their environmental

¹²⁸Ibid., pp. 56-59.

¹²⁹Power, p. 149; B.F. Skinner, *The Technology of Teaching*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968, p. 94.

¹³⁰Ibid., pp. 10, 61-61; Power, p. 150; Button and Provenzo, p. 292.

conditions, shaped by the process of stimulus and response.¹³¹ Understanding this fact was useful in achieving one of the central objectives of education-control. Skinner writes, "By arranging appropriate contingencies of reinforcement, specific forms of behavior can be set up and brought under control of specific classes of stimuli."¹³² What was needed, he believed, was "an effective technology of teaching derived not from philosophical principles but from a realistic analysis of human behavior." Behavioral psychology, operant conditioning, and contingencies of reinforcement constituted such an effective technology of teaching "from which one can deduce programs, schemes and methods of instruction."¹³³

The application of Skinner's operant conditioning to teaching required that "terminal behaviors" be identified and broken down to isolate the small intermediate behaviors that are necessary to the achievement of the terminal behaviors. The act of teaching then becomes the "arrangement of contingencies of reinforcement under which behavior changes" and the role of the teacher as being "directly concerned with conditioning and extinguishing respondent behavior."¹³⁴ Skinner maintained, however, that the teacher, "as a mere reinforcing mechanism,"

¹³¹Powers, p. 149.

¹³²Skinner, pp. 32-33.

¹³³Ibid., pp. 84, 59.

¹³⁴Ibid., pp. 113, 196.

is "out of date."¹³⁵ This is why the teacher needed teaching machines: to take over those aspects of the "technology of teaching" which could be carried out more efficiently by machines while she concentrated on other responsibilities. This technology of teaching in which both machines and human teachers played key roles was absolutely essential to the improvement of education. "Nothing short of an effective technology will solve the problem."¹³⁶

In Skinner's theory of education we see the most explicit formulation of the concept *teacher* as *technician*. Teaching is in fact, in his view, a technology which can be carried out either by machines, or by teachers, or by both. The role of the teacher is to manipulate that technology--devised and refined by psychologists and engineers--in order to bring about learning. Here we have a concept of *teacher* as *programmer*, for, like the computer programmer, Skinner's teachers write programs--achieve terminal behaviors--by identifying and isolating each intermediate step required to carry out the desired behavior and reinforcing or extinguishing intermediate behaviors as necessary to achieve the desired terminal behavior. In this way the student--who has no more influence on the selection of terminal behaviors than the computer disk has on the programs written upon it--is programmed to behave in certain ways when presented with particular stimuli.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 22.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 258.

The Conceptual Consequences of the Teacher-Technician

The dictionary defines a *technician* as an individual who is "trained or skilled in the technicalities of. . . the practical application of knowledge," a technology.¹³⁷ The definition implies at least two parties in the act of application: a subject, the technician applying the knowledge, and an object, the person or thing to whom/which the knowledge is applied. The technology is what mediates between the subject and object, what the technician does to someone or something. The definition also implies purpose, which takes two related forms: the purpose of the technology and the purposes of the technician. The purpose of the technology is *control* of some aspect of the object to which it is applied; the purposes of the technician include that same control as well as some larger purpose which such control is needed to achieve. Two key elements, therefore, in the underlying conceptual geography of *technician* are *control* and a *purpose* defined by the subject--the technician--rather than his object. Applied to the concept of *teacher as technician*, this suggests that the underlying purpose of the concept is control in the interest of achieving ends determined by the teacher, or someone else in authority, but not by the student, the raw material of this factory model of education.

The conception and exercise of education as a technology of control

¹³⁷*Random House Dictionary*, cons. ed. (1980). s.v. "technician" and "technology."

implies several basic philosophical assumptions regarding the relationship between *teacher* and student, the nature of knowledge, and the nature of reality. The concept of the *teacher-technician* assumes a subject-object relation between teacher and student. The teacher acts; the student is acted upon. The teacher determines ends or accepts the ends defined for the teacher by those in authority; the student passively allows himself or herself to be shaped to those ends. This control is justified by the further assumption that those determining the ends have access to objective knowledge about a concrete reality independent of the desires of any of the parties involved--society, teachers, or students--to which the parties must conform in order to survive. That reality is represented in the current experience of the parties involved. Therefore, the basic philosophical assumptions of the *teacher-technician* concept assume a functionalist philosophy of education in which the purpose of education is to shape students to the needs of existing society.

The *technician* can be distinguished from the artist, at least in part, by the fact that the artist *creates* something new while the technician *applies* what already exists, by the relative importance of *poiēsis*, calling something into existence, and *technē*, method or technique.¹³⁸ The artist obviously must have mastery of some

¹³⁸My understanding and use of these terms, as well as application of them to teaching leans heavily upon Jim Garrison's discussion of these concepts in *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1997.

technique, some technology, which mediates between that which already exists and the achievement of his or her creation of something new.¹³⁹ The technician, however, has no room for *poiēsis*, for something new, whether it comes in the form of the desire of his object (the student in our context) or in the form of some new order of reality because it undermines the fundamental purpose of the technician and technology: *control*. Though both are driven by desire, by *erōs*, they desire different things. Thus the concept of *teacher as technician* can function only within a theory of education closed both to the desires of its students *and* to the creative possibilities of alternative theories of reality since both inevitably undermine the control which is the heart of the concept.

The desire for control is explicit in the educational theories which advance the concept of *teacher as technician* and education as technology. They tend to view the student as a passive, though complex, animal whose desires are either to be extinguished or re-directed toward ends which are not determined by the student. Ends are determined by those who claim authority on the basis of their objective knowledge of a reality which is independent of human desires. Therefore, this desire and these assumptions disqualify the concept *teacher as technician* as a

¹³⁹This obviously suggests another concept of *teacher as artist*, a concept which I have chosen not to address in this inquiry since I do not believe it to be as common in actual practice as the concepts addressed here. My purpose here is merely to clarify and then critique the consequences of the concept *teacher-technician*.

concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and re-negotiating the relationship between religion and public education because it fails many of criteria, formulated in Chapter 1, which such a concept can be reasonably expected to meet.

Inadequacies of the Teacher-Technician

While educational scholars continue to articulate a scientific basis for teaching, it seems clear that the conception of *teacher* as *technician* implicit to the notion of education as a science-based technology is an inadequate response to the challenge posed in Chapter 1; namely, to formulate a concept *teacher* for our multicultural, multi-religious society that acknowledges the importance of religious faith in people's lives, promotes social justice, and responds to the tragic dimension of human experience.¹⁴⁰ It simply falls short on many of the criteria which Chapter 1 argued such a concept must meet. Though Spencer, Hall, Thorndike and others believed that science and "true religion" could be reconciled, their writing clearly rejected faith as most people experience it and contains concepts of the person, society, reality, and knowledge which are often clearly hostile to those contained in many religiously-inspired interpretations of the world and experience.¹⁴¹ This does not, of course, mean that one set of assumptions or the other is correct; it does

¹⁴⁰See, for example, N.L. Gage, *The Scientific Basis of the Art of Teaching*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1978.

¹⁴¹For a much more complete elaboration of this argument see Nord, op. cit..

mean, however, that neither position is an adequate framework for a concept *teacher* which can negotiate *both* positions since, to some extent, they define themselves in opposition to one another.

There are strong essentialist tendencies, for instance, in the way the proponents of a science of education conceive of the person.¹⁴² The individual human being is, essentially, a higher animal different, perhaps, in complexity and possibility but not in kind from the lower animals. Educational procedures rooted in this assumption, then, operate by manipulating those aspects of human behavior which we share with animals and utilize strategies of categorization which have been borrowed from science and which tend to naturalize racial and gender hierarchies. Thus they tend to objectify human "subjects" and contain possibly dehumanizing tendencies. Therefore, the concept of *teacher as technician* betrays a potentially devastating weakness in regard to the criterion which demands a *love ethic*, the affirmation of the transcendent worth and dignity of each human being. It is also ineffective in contributing to the ideal of school as a laboratory of democracy because it undermines the humanity of the individual and minimizes his or her participation as an agent in the educational process. Again, whether the conception of the person as a higher animal is correct or not, it has potentially

¹⁴²This may be a general tendency of the science of their times. For a discussion of this argument see Joyce Eastlund Gromko, "The Development of Scientific Thought as a Metaphor for Educational Practice," *Educational Theory* 45, no. 4 (Fall 1995): 519-524.

important ethical consequences and is anathema to religiously-inspired conceptions of man as created in the image of God. Therefore, it is inadequate to the task of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education.

The concepts of society and change implicit in the notion of education as a technology and the concept of *teacher as technician* contain a functionalist view of society as the natural product of evolutionary forces. This focus tends to be on explaining why things are as they are and fitting the student to the status quo rather than changing the social status quo. Where there is an interest in change, it tends toward the assumption that society should be brought more into line with scientific principles and aspire to a notion of efficiency borrowed from business and industry. The more scientific and business-like the schools become, this position suggests, the better they will be. In this respect the concept *teacher as technician* fails the criterion of *moral-ethical idealism* in that it is not oriented toward what ought to be but rather what is and thus truncates the potential for the moral growth of the individual.

Finally, the explicit epistemic and ontological assumptions of the advocates of a scientific basis for education and teaching are foundational: knowledge consists of facts about the world as it really is independent of knowers which are discovered and verified by scientific procedures. Anything outside this is opinion, "unmanly" supernatural myth, superstition, mere cultural conventions; it is not

knowledge. Thus the concept *teacher as technician* fails the criteria of *social authorization* and *non-"realist" ontology* by positing absolutist notions of knowledge and reality which necessarily exclude competing or contradictory notions. Thus the concept is not only vulnerable to the *indoctrination problem*, it embraces it and calls it teaching.

Weber claimed that science has no response to the normative questions Tolstoy claimed were the only questions important to us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?"¹⁴³ However, the proponents of efficiency and education as a technology do have an answer: Follow the model of science and business. And Weber, who Schwehn (1993) argues has had the most influence on the conception of the academic vocation in higher education, suggests that sociology--the science of society--cannot address "meaningless" phenomena, that is phenomena "that cannot be related to action in the role of means or ends but constitute only the stimulus, the favoring or hindering circumstances."¹⁴⁴ In this sense, human mortality is meaningless.¹⁴⁵ Yet death--the tragic--and Tolstoy's existential questions are precisely the fundamental concerns most central to us, concerns teachers cannot ignore without ignoring their students' humanity, concerns which

¹⁴³Weber, p. 290.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 231-232.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 237.

religion traditionally addresses. The *teacher-technician*, implementing the procedures of education as a technology, is not equipped to address these concerns because they are scientifically "meaningless" phenomena; science simply does not address them. Thus the concept fails the criterion of *meaningfulness* in that, even as it successfully explains natural phenomena, it fails to address the major existential questions and experiences which occupy and have occupied individual human beings subject to both natural and man-made tragedy.

Therefore, as useful and powerful a tool as the scientific approach to education is, and as effective as the concept *teacher as technician* may be in many vital aspects of teaching, they do not by themselves constitute an adequate framework for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education in a multicultural society marred by social injustice, confronted by the tragic, and made meaningful, for so many of its citizens, by religious faith. We must, again, look elsewhere for such a concept.

The Paradigm of the Teacher-Pragmatist

Evolution of the Teacher-Pragmatist

Though the concepts of *teacher as prophet* and as *technician* have had a long and profound influence on the ways American education has conceived of the role of teachers, their actual classroom influence pales in comparison to what is likely the most pervasive orientation of teachers toward their work, an "orientation

toward practical action or thought" which I will call *common sense pragmatism*.¹⁴⁶

While this orientation does not represent a systematic philosophical point of view, it does represent a set of values which has long held a dominant place in American cultural history.¹⁴⁷ It can be readily seen in the cultural icons of American literature and popular culture, which are replete with characters who eschew philosophical or ideological purity in favor of practical approaches to the down-to-earth tasks of carving a farm out of the wilderness, building a business, or creating a democracy.¹⁴⁸

Applied to the concept *teacher*, *common sense pragmatism* names the tendency among teachers to forego the systematic philosophical and methodological approaches to education taught them in teacher training programs

¹⁴⁶*Random House Dictionary*, cons. ed. (1980). s.v. "pragmatism."

¹⁴⁷I intend to make a distinction here between what I am calling *common sense pragmatism* and the philosophy *pragmatism* as articulated by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. I will address this aspect of pragmatism in the following section.

¹⁴⁸I am referring here to figures like those found in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain or the poetry of Walt Whitman. In asserting that there was and is a pervasive cultural value which eschews philosophical and ideological purity, I do not mean to suggest that American authors did not have clear philosophical or ideological orientations. I do mean to suggest, however, that their writing, which both reflected and shaped existing cultural values, popularized the ideal of the anti-intellectual, practical, rugged individual governed by good common sense. For an extended discussion of this element of American literature see Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature*, New York: Viking, 1991.

in favor of "what works" in the "real world" of their classroom, school, or community. "What works," or success, is defined by the teacher's ability to produce students who meet the expectations of the community he or she serves. Thus the concept of *teacher as common sense pragmatist* represents an adaptation of the teacher's charge to educate students to the value systems which dominate the particular culture in which any individual teacher teaches. In this way teachers achieve "results" that are recognized and valued by their community.

This concept of *teacher* is problematic, however, where the surrounding culture is characterized by diverse or morally objectionable value systems. In such a context, the *common sense pragmatist* can either conform to the dominant value system and promote it at the expense of other value systems or avoid controversy by avoiding topics which represent points of conflict between value systems. Such has been the response of *common sense pragmatists* to the current conflict over the proper relationship between religion and public education: active or passive endorsement of the dominant religious values of the local culture or careful avoidance of any topic that touches upon religious values. Neither response meets the challenge of a concept of *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education. The first represents acquiescence to the *indoctrination problem* while the second fails the criteria of *moral-ethical idealism* and *meaningfulness* which Chapter 1 argued were critical for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating that relationship.

Though perhaps not as influential at the level of classroom practice as *common sense pragmatism*, *philosophical pragmatism* has had a tremendous influence on educational thought through its "classical" articulation in Peirce, James, and Dewey, though the contemporary genres of *neo-pragmatism* and *prophetic pragmatism* are also relevant to education. Influenced, like the scientific movement in education, by Darwinian evolutionary theory and the rise of science, *philosophical pragmatism* arrived at quite different conclusions about the nature of man, knowledge, education, and the teacher.

Charles Sanders Peirce articulated no systematic theory of education or concept *teacher*.¹⁴⁹ However, his contributions to *philosophical pragmatism* did have a profound effect on educational thought through John Dewey. According to Cornel West (1989), Peirce's contributions to pragmatism highlight "the centrality of contingent and revisable social practices in acquiring knowledge," thus undermining the pillars of "modern" Cartesian philosophy while simultaneously affirming and limiting the power of science and preserving space for religion."¹⁵⁰ Peirce applied the experimental methods of the natural sciences to philosophical problems via a pragmatic method that located meaning in the practical

¹⁴⁹Israel Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey*, New York: Humanities Press, 1974, pp. 76, 87.

¹⁵⁰Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, p. 45.

consequences of particular truth claims, thus introducing a sense of contingency to such claims.¹⁵¹ This sense of the inevitable contingency of truth claims allowed Peirce to be critical both of "pseudo-scientific" proofs of religious tenets *and* dogmatic rejections of religious beliefs. He had the "highest disdain for the positivist followers of Comte and Spencer who tried to replace religious yearning by dubious sociological laws and a mechanical philosophy of evolution, respectively."¹⁵² However, he was also critical of theologians and others who drew doctrinal lines tighter and tighter until the "spark of religious experience" was extinguished.¹⁵³ Peirce hoped for a union of traditional religious institutions with a "progressive purification and universalization" of the religious sentiment through science that would strive for an organic "wholeness of spirit," a goal in keeping with his notion of reasonableness as a resolution of dualisms, "the bringing together of items into an organic whole."¹⁵⁴ Thus the idea of the contingency and revisability of all truth claims enables Peirce to suggest a resolution to the religious-scientific dichotomy, a significant contribution to the development of a

¹⁵¹Ibid., pp. 44-46, 50.

¹⁵²Philip P. Wiener, ed., *Values in a Universe of Chance: Selected Writings of Charles S. Peirce*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958, p. 345.

¹⁵³Ibid., pp. 354, 356.

¹⁵⁴Scheffler, p. 91; Wiener, p. 332. In fact, Peirce argued for the existence of God on the basis of "sound pragmatism." Vincent G. Potter, *Peirce's Philosophical Perspectives*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1996, pp. 155, 157.

concept *teacher* capable of negotiating the relationship between religion and secular education.

William James too saw pragmatism as a mediator that worked toward the resolution of dualistic extremes, a way of "unifying science and religion, since the test of all truth is in experience, and the religious experience of the individual person is surely a phenomenon that needs to be acknowledged as a fact."¹⁵⁵ This mediating aspect of pragmatism is evident in his conception of truth, which he saw as a value-laden, contingent, transitory category of knowledge which bridges the old and the new, tradition and the novel, thus minimizing disruption and promoting gradual individual and social change.¹⁵⁶ He also conceived of teachers as mediators. Teaching, he contended, is an art, rather than a science, which grows out of the "inventiveness and sympathetic concrete observation" of teachers who are creative, inventive, intelligent, discerning intermediaries between the theories of science and the goals and practices of education.¹⁵⁷ Though James' emphasis on behavior in his psychology echoes some of the language of Thorndike and Skinner, he is much more careful in his estimation of the power of science to explain and

¹⁵⁵Scheffler, p. 97; West, pp. 57, 64. For James' analysis of the psychology of religious experiences see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: Collier Books, 1961.

¹⁵⁶West, p. 65.

¹⁵⁷William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 3, 15.

control human behavior and learning.¹⁵⁸ He was, in fact, opposed to the necessities of mechanism in philosophy and psychology, recognizing that science cannot be absolutely helpful in education because education deals with thinking, responsive minds endowed with free will.¹⁵⁹ Thus James begins to make explicit a concept of *teacher as pragmatist* by applying to teachers Peirce's insights into the contingency and revisability of truth claims and the mediating role of pragmatism.

John Dewey's thought represents the most explicit application of the Peircean and Jamesian themes of the contingency and revisability of truth claims, the application of scientific method to thought, and the resolution of religious-scientific dualisms to a theory of education and a concept *teacher*. He also highlights the socially and historically conditioned nature of philosophical reflection, thus undermining key assumptions of Enlightenment philosophy in his development of the anti-foundationalist, non-realist epistemological and ontological assumptions implicit in pragmatism.¹⁶⁰ Every proposition regarding truth, he argues, is hypothetical and provisional, even those that have been verified so often by experience that we treat them as absolute truths, because we inevitably

¹⁵⁸Thorndike was a student of James' at Harvard. His doctoral research on the psychology and learning of chickens was carried out in the basement of James' home. See Joncich, p. 29.

¹⁵⁹Scheffler, pp. 97-98; James, *Talks to Teachers*, pp. 16, 24.

¹⁶⁰West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 69, 98-99, 111.

bring theories dictated by human purposes to the inquiry.¹⁶¹ Knowledge, then, cut away from any foundation in absolute truth is socially constructed, consisting of "that which has been organized into our disposition so as to enable us to adapt the environment to our needs and to adapt our aims and desires to the situation in which we live."¹⁶² Truth and knowledge claims are justified by their consequences, by their efficacy in achieving desired ends: "Here we have the whole of pragmatism in embryo," Dewey wrote.¹⁶³

Dewey was critical of the absolutist tendencies of traditional religion; however, he was not willing to reduce the religious dimension of human experience to the materialist explanations implicit within science.¹⁶⁴ The choice, he argued, was not between "absolutism and subjective relativism, authority or anarchy."¹⁶⁵ He advocated the reconception of religion along more naturalist lines

¹⁶¹John Dewey, "The Sources of a Science of Education," *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 5, 1929-1930*, Jo Ann Boydston, ed., Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984, p. 11.

¹⁶²John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 2: 1925-1927*, Jo Ann Boydston, ed., Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984, p. 12; John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, New York: The Free Press, 1916, p. 344.

¹⁶³Dewey, *Later Works, Volume 2*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁴Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 27. See also Neil Coughlan, *Young John Dewey: An Essay in American Intellectual History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 1-53.

¹⁶⁵Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 545-46.

as a way to free religious experience from the dogma of traditional religion and enable it to find new expression in the values of science and democracy, an expression of democratic humanism that would make central the concern of traditional religions with human suffering and evil but reject their reliance on supernatural solutions in favor of an emphasis on humanity's responsibility for its own advancement.¹⁶⁶ His democratic ideal is, in effect, "a radical reconstruction of Christianity" and his philosophy of education is religious, as he defined that term.¹⁶⁷ Thus his philosophy of religion and education is in part an attempt to resolve the secular-religious duality.¹⁶⁸ As with Peirce, the intersubjectivist and historicist turn of pragmatism provided philosophical grounds to demythologize science and take religion seriously even as they attempted to update it.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 264, 547; Siebren Miedema, "The Beyond in the Midst: The Relevance of Dewey's Philosophy of Religion for Education," in Jim Garrison, ed., *The New Scholarship on Dewey*, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995, p. 67.

¹⁶⁷Rockefeller, p. 549. Dewey defined religious activity as "any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value." *Common Faith*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁸Miedema, p. 69.

¹⁶⁹Miedema, p. 61. See also Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 107-142.

Dewey had a life-long interest in the philosophy of religion. See, for example, John Dewey, "The Obligation to the Knowledge of God," "The Place of Religious Emotion," "Soul and Body," "Christianity and Democracy" and "The Relation of Philosophy to Theology," *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882-1898*. Also "Religious Education as Conditioned by Modern Psychology and Pedagogy,"

Deweyan pragmatism emphasizes the conditions, possibilities, and necessity of ameliorative social change governed by critical intelligence, the application of the process of scientific method to thought, which for Dewey constituted the only authentic means of understanding the significance of human experience.¹⁷⁰ The object of Dewey's emphasis on critical intelligence--and thus his life-long preoccupation with education--is a "culture of democracy, of ways of life guided by experimental method, infused with the love of individuality and community...rooted in the Emersonian theodicy" and focused, not on epistemology, but rather on the ethical ideal of ameliorative individual and social growth.¹⁷¹

Given Dewey's views on the social production and verification of epistemic claims and his ethical ideal of positive individual and social growth, it is, perhaps, inevitable that he would make education the focus of much of his thought. He defined education as "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which

"Religion and Our Schools," "Early Group Life," "From Custom to Conscience," "Customary and Reflective Morality," "The Hebrew Moral Development," "Social Absolutism," and "Education as Religion," *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*. And "Bishop Brown: A Fundamental Modernist," *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*. See also Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*.

¹⁷⁰Rockefeller, p. 563; Dewey, *Experience and Education*, pp. 86, 88 and *Democracy and Education*, p. 163.

¹⁷¹West, *American Evasion*, p. 103.

adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."¹⁷² To Dewey it was both science and art because it employs the "scientific" procedure of careful, systematic reflective thought to create, like the artist, "something that is not the exact duplicate of some previous creation."¹⁷³ Though he affirmed the idea of education as a science, he was careful to note that it did not become such by passively accepting the results of other scientific disciplines but rather by using scientific method to address educational questions raised in the context of educational experience in the pursuit of educational ends.¹⁷⁴ Education is not subordinate to science but "an activity which includes science within itself."¹⁷⁵ Learning, Dewey contended, is a dynamic continuum of experience in which the learner is an active, creative participant; it cannot be reduced to a mechanical process without failing to know what education is as an "ongoing process."¹⁷⁶

Dewey used a variety of analogies to describe the role and importance of

¹⁷²Dewey, *Later Works, Volume 5*, p. 39; *Democracy and Education*, p. 76.

¹⁷³Dewey, *Later Works, Volume 5*, p. 20; *Early Works, Volume 5*, p. 94 and *Later Works, Volume 9*, p. 198 cited in Douglas J. Simpson and Michael J.B. Jackson, *Educational Reform: A Deweyan Perspective*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1997, p. 146.

¹⁷⁴Dewey, *Later Works, Volume 5*, pp. 9, 15.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 38; Simpson and Jackson, p. 127.

teachers, including two that echo concepts of *teacher* discussed earlier in this chapter: *teacher* as prophet and engineer.¹⁷⁷ Dewey saw a prophetic role for the teacher in terms of social progress; however, he opposed the promotion of religion in education.¹⁷⁸ And he saw a definite technical aspect to the teacher's role, but it is not the mindless, machine-like application of a technology of education devised by science. It is, rather the use of science in the service of art in the manner of the engineer.¹⁷⁹ Dewey wrote:

Teachers should not be clerks filling out the recipes that are prescribed by others. They should not be like cooks in the kitchen, who take a cook-book and mix ingredients in the proportion called for by the recipe in the book, not knowing why they do this or that, or with any expectation that they are going to make any discoveries or improvement....if education is going to live up to its profession, it must be seen as a work of art which requires the same qualities of personal enthusiasm and imagination as are required by the musician, painter, or artist. Each one of these artists needs a technique which is more or less mechanical, but in the degree to which he loses his personal vision to become subordinate to the more formal rules of the technique he falls below the level and grade of the artist. He becomes reduced again to the level of the artisan who follows the blue prints, drawings, and plans that are made by other people.¹⁸⁰

Dewey's *teacher-pragmatist* is as an active, creative participant in a

¹⁷⁷Simpson and Jackson, pp. 129-148.

¹⁷⁸Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882-1898, Volume 5*, Jo Ann Boydston, ed., Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972, p. 95; *Experience and Education*, pp. 17-18; *Later Works, Volume 5*, p. 5; Rockefeller, p. 262.

¹⁷⁹Dewey, *Later Works, Volume 5*, pp. 5-6, 20 and *Volume 15*, p. 180; *Democracy and Education*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁰Dewey, *Later Works, Volume 15*, p. 186.

learning community who engages in research and reflective inquiry and participates in the governance of education.¹⁸¹ She is an intellectual leader of the social group--whether classroom, school, or community--who provides, organizes, orchestrates, and participates in experiences for her students which stimulate thinking and enable growth.¹⁸² And she fulfills this role not as a dictator or *prophet* or *technician*, but as a worker in a cooperative spirit of give and take and dialogue in the production of a higher standard of intelligence in the community.¹⁸³ In short, the teacher is a strategically placed, vital, transformative agent charged with organizing experience in such a way that enables not only individual growth, but which promotes a culture of creative democracy as well.¹⁸⁴

Though obscured to a degree by the dominance of positivism and analytic philosophy, pragmatism after Dewey was characterized in part by "a greater sense of the tragic, by the problem of the willful self in a context of limiting, fateful circumstance and an inability to any longer accept the notion that the world is

¹⁸¹Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 44; *Democracy and Education*, p. 160; *Later Works, Volume 5*, pp. 23-24, 327; *Later Works, Volume 15*, p. 185.

¹⁸²Simpson and Jackson, p. 125; Dewey, *Experience and Education*, pp. 38, 76 and *Democracy and Education*, p. 160.

¹⁸³Dewey, *Experience and Education*, pp. 59, 72; *Later Works, Volume 11*, pp. 158-59.

¹⁸⁴Dewey, *ibid.*, p. 161 and *Later Works, Volume 5*, p. 7.

somehow congenial to human. . . aspiration."¹⁸⁵ This tragic vision of pragmatists like W.E.B. DuBois and Reinhold Niebuhr stemmed from their disillusionment with middle class notions of perfection and progress in a context of endemic racism and other moral shortcomings.¹⁸⁶ The recent resurgence of *neo-pragmatism* among philosophers such as Richard Rorty has revived pragmatist notions of theory as a "basic unit of empirical significance" and "fitness" as the test of truth claims.¹⁸⁷ Rorty, for instance, argues that the theory-laden character of observation precludes appeals to reality as a foundation for epistemic or ontological propositions. He takes, according to West (1989), the historicist directive: "to eschew the quest for certainty and the search for foundations."¹⁸⁸ However, Rorty and many other neo-pragmatists have not returned to the classical pragmatists' interests in religion and education.

Cornel West, however, does make religion central to his philosophy, though he does not specifically address education or the concept *teacher*. West's

¹⁸⁵Miedema, p. 62; Cornel West, "The Politics of American Neopragmatism," *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, John Rajchman and Cornel West, eds., New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 259-272 and *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 112, 123, 159-60; Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995, pp. 41-57.

¹⁸⁶West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 128, 148, 161-64. See also W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York: Signet, 1903.

¹⁸⁷West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 183, 185, 191.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 197, 200.

social and cultural analysis is informed by a radical historicism inspired by the pragmatic tradition but governed by religiously inspired moral and ethical norms. His historicism is rooted in Marx's and Dewey's claims that truth and knowledge are socially constructed and, therefore, historically conditioned.¹⁸⁹ As a result of this radically historicized view of truth and knowledge, the focus of philosophy, according to West, becomes ethical rather than epistemological since epistemic claims are grounded in the teleological assumptions of the community and its conceptions of what it means to be human.¹⁹⁰ Within these historicist and ethical parameters, West's thought essays a powerful critique of postmodernity and racism and re-envision the pragmatic tradition through the twin lenses of progressive Marxism and Afro-American protestant Christianity as a mode of cultural critique that responds to the plight of the "wretched of the earth" in a late capitalist culture marred by racism, sexism, homophobia and economic exploitation.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 226-39; Cornel West, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991, pp. 1-3.

¹⁹⁰West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 66, 99-100.

¹⁹¹For West's genealogy of racism see Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982. Further analysis of race can be found in *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America, Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume Two*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993 and *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993. Some of West's analysis of postmodernity can be found in *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume One*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993.

West articulates his own location within the pragmatic tradition and his contribution to it by identifying several key weaknesses in that tradition. While pragmatism recognizes the relevance of culture to conceptions of truth, knowledge, and the possibility of democratic culture, it fails, West argues, to adequately appreciate the significance of political and economic forces. West particularly faults Dewey's lack of understanding of Marxism and Rorty's failure to follow through on the economic and political implications of this thought in this regard.¹⁹² With the exception of DuBois, he argues, the pragmatists fail to understand or adequately address the problem of racism and display a general distrust of the masses as historical agents.¹⁹³ Most importantly, West argues, pragmatism lacks an adequate understanding of the tragic, "the irreducible predicament of unique individuals who undergo dread, despair, disillusionment disease and death *and* the institutional forms of oppression that dehumanize people."¹⁹⁴ "I believe," West writes, "that a deep sense of evil and the tragic must infuse any meaning and value of democracy."¹⁹⁵

West's understanding of his own project's contribution to the pragmatic tradition rests on these failures of pragmatism. It combines pragmatic philosophy

¹⁹²West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 106-111, 208.

¹⁹³Ibid., pp. 178-181.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 228; West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁵West, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 107-18. Quotation is from p. 114.

with the analytical tools of progressive Marxism and the moral and ethical norms of the prophetic wing of the black protestant church in a mode of cultural criticism which West names *prophetic pragmatism*.¹⁹⁶ Progressive Marxist theory--particularly Marx himself and Antonio Gramsci--provides the powerful analytical tools for understanding political and economic forces and the process of commodification in late capitalist society. Yet while West describes Marxist theory as indispensable, he also claims it is inadequate because of its failure to theorize culture as powerfully as it does the economic and political, thus West's rationale for combining pragmatism with Marxist theory: they complement each other.¹⁹⁷

The prophetic wing of the black protestant church makes two key contributions to West's prophetic pragmatism: first, a source of moral and ethical norms which provide a framework for analysis and lend direction to pragmatic experimentalism and second, a fully developed tragic sense which both preserves hope for a better future and requires struggle to realize that hope. The moral and ethical norms of protestant Christianity, according to West, are grounded in the notion that all individuals are created *imago dei*--in the image of God--and are, therefore, equal before God. The tragic sense, which West argues both pragmatism and Marxism lack, stems from what he calls the Christian dialectic of human

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 104; *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 211-13, 226-39.

¹⁹⁷West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 135-37, 141-43 and *Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, pp. xiv, xxvii, 87.

nature: the recognition of the dignity *and* fallenness of human beings who are called upon to struggle toward an ethical ideal which, because of their fallenness, can never be attained within history.¹⁹⁸ This, according to West, is what Afro-American protestant Christianity has done for African-Americans. Combining the philosophical perspective of pragmatism with this prophetic orientation of Afro-American protestant Christianity creates a form of cultural criticism which "analyzes the causes of unnecessary forms of social misery, promotes moral outrage against them, and organizes different constituencies to alleviate them, yet does so with an openness to its own shortcomings."¹⁹⁹

Unlike the classical pragmatists, whose faith in scientific methods was central to their thought, West's Christian faith is central to his. "I follow the biblical injunction to look at the world through the eyes of its victims," he writes, "and the Christocentric perspective which requires that one see the world through the lens of the Cross-and thereby see our relative victimizing and victimization."²⁰⁰ However, he does not ignore the failures of the Christian church or valorize Christianity over other religious traditions.²⁰¹ He explicitly acknowledges the

¹⁹⁸West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 15-20.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 133.

²⁰¹West, *Prophetic Reflections*, pp. 74-75, 137.

potential of prophetic orientations in other religious traditions.²⁰² In fact, West's philosophy of religion, emerging, as does Dewey's, from the philosophical breakthroughs of pragmatism--the "golden age" of philosophy of religion--shares certain important affinities with Dewey's philosophy of religion: rejection of the foundational truth claims of religious absolutism and positivist science and an emphasis on social and individual struggle toward the realization of socially defined ideals, for instance.²⁰³ West differs from Dewey in his sympathy for traditional expressions of religiosity, his recognition of their historic importance as sources of resistance for oppressed communities, and his refusal of the impulse to attempt a resolution of the scientific-religious dichotomy. West recognizes that science and religion have different purposes.²⁰⁴

West's *prophetic pragmatism* is overtly Christian because it is the tradition in which he is grounded. Furthermore, West argues, "the culture of the wretched of the earth is deeply religious."²⁰⁵ While it is not necessary to be religious or accept religious narratives to work on their behalf, their religiosity must be respected.

²⁰²West, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 132-34,

²⁰³West, *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, pp. 260-70.

²⁰⁴West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 132.

²⁰⁵West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 233.

Since the Enlightenment most of the progressive energies among the intelligentsia have shunned religious channels. And in these days of global religious revivals, progressive forces are reaping the whirlwind. Those of us who remain in these religious channels see clearly just how myopic such an anti-religious strategy is. The severing of ties to churches, synagogues, temples and mosques by the left intelligentsia is tantamount to political suicide.²⁰⁶

Conceptual Consequences of the Teacher-Pragmatist

Paradoxically, pragmatism has been described as a peculiarly American "evasion" of philosophy which has rejected the epistemology-centered conception of philosophy characteristic of post-Enlightenment European philosophy. This rejection of the epistemological focus of philosophers such as Descartes and Kant is based on the recognition of the "theory-laden" character of all observations which shapes the knower's perception of the universe, thus undermining dualistic notions of the knower and the known and problematizing the search for epistemic foundations. Because we cannot apprehend reality except through socially constructed intermediary structures like our theories of the way reality operates or language, "reality" cannot serve as the foundation or guarantee of epistemic propositions.²⁰⁷ Severed from the possibility of any firm foundation in the "really real," knowledge becomes a function of historically conditioned social practices

²⁰⁶Ibid., p. 234.

²⁰⁷West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 99, 201.

designed to achieve particular ends and truth becomes a species of the good.²⁰⁸

Therefore, pragmatism tends to be driven more by ethical rather than epistemic or ontological questions, and philosophy is no longer seen as an ultimate tribunal for the adjudication of epistemic claims but is rather a form of cultural criticism.²⁰⁹

Thus, without arguing that knowledge is subjectively "made up" independent of any reality separate from the knower, pragmatism dispenses with the rigid dualism of knower and known and postulates a theory of knowledge as a contingent product of a socially and historically conditioned dialogue among purposive human agents and objective reality.²¹⁰ Ideally, this dialogue is governed by the method of scientific inquiry, a process whereby human agents bring theories to their inquiry which suggest courses of action which then can be evaluated in terms of their consequences.²¹¹ The object of this process is not settled facts or truth but rather contingent truths which are useful for negotiating future experience and insuring growth.

Pragmatism postulates a knower who is actively engaged in the construction of knowledge, rather than passively receiving it through the senses,

²⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 66, 99-100.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 503; West, p. 111.

²¹¹J.J. Chambliss, *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Garland Publishing, s.v. "Pragmatism" by Sandra Rosenthal. See also John Dewey, *How We Think*, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991.

and whose mind and sense of self are a product of the individual's relationship to others in community, rather than solely the product of environmental stimuli and responses. He makes meaning rather than discovering it.²¹² Thus pragmatism rejects the implicit dualities of a foundational, spectator theory of knowledge and many of the assumptions that follow from it--behaviorism and the reduction of human experience to quantitative terms, for instance--as well as the teleological assumptions of many, particularly western, religions.²¹³

In/Adequacies of the Teacher-Pragmatist

Of the three concepts *teacher* examined in this chapter--*prophet*, *technician* and *pragmatist*--it would appear that the last, the *teacher-pragmatist*, holds the most promise for a concept *teacher* which is capable of doing justice to the place of religious faith in people's lives, responds in an ameliorative fashion to the tragic, and avoids indoctrination while respecting the cultural and religious differences of our diverse society. The philosophical contexts of the concepts *teacher-prophet* and *teacher-technician* both rest upon foundational epistemologies and a correspondence theory of truth: they both assume the existence of absolute truths independent of the knower, known procedures of objective access to those truths, the desirability of individual human beings coming

²¹²J.J. Chambliss, *ibid.*

²¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 500, 503. See also Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 169 and *A Common Faith*.

into conformity with those truths, and education as a process of achieving that conformity. These assumptions, which pragmatism reveals as historically contingent social constructs, make individual human freedom contingent within the parameters established by these truths, thereby diminishing the existential freedom of the individual and the fullest potential of democratic culture.

The pragmatic tradition, on the other hand, eschews such foundational epistemology and correspondence theories of truth in favor of anti-foundationalist epistemology and a coherence theory of truth: it assumes that knowledge is a product of the theory and experience of human individuals in community and that the truth of such knowledge claims is validated by their consequences vis a vis the attainment of socially defined ends. It too assumes rigorous methods for constructing such truths, but it differs in its assumption of the radical contingency of those truths and the active role of theory in creating them. Education becomes, therefore, a process of learning to negotiate that contingency, of learning to participate in the determination of social ends and the means of achieving them via critical intelligence. Thus truth and knowledge are contingent upon human freedom. This expands the existential freedom of the human individual and extends the possibilities of democratic culture.

The concept *teacher as pragmatist* then appears to satisfy most of the criteria established in Chapter 1 for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education. Its epistemic

and ontological assumptions correspond to the criteria of *social authorization* and *anti-"realist" ontology* thus enabling pragmatism to avoid the *indoctrination problem* and meet the expectation established in Chapter I for any new concept *teacher* that it *affirm diversity*. Because pragmatism recognizes the historical and social contingency of epistemic and truth claims it is incapable of formulating the absolutist notions which indoctrination requires. And in recognizing such claims as social constructions, it places a premium upon the widest possible participation in the construction of them by scrutinizing not only their practical but their ethical consequences as well. Ethics, rather than epistemology, becomes the basis for adjudicating truth claims.²¹⁴ Therefore the concept of the *teacher-pragmatist* also meets the criterion which demanded *moral-ethical idealism* of any new concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education.

But what of the place of religious faith? Does it necessarily require the subordination of individual freedom implicit in foundational epistemic claims and the correspondence theory of truth? Is religious faith compatible with the existential freedom central to pragmatism? Among the classical pragmatists, all of

²¹⁴West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 66, 99-100. Jim Garrison argues that Dewey's pragmatism is also prophetic because this evaluation of epistemic and truth claims on the basis of their ethical consequences is a mechanism for critiquing the status quo and calling something better into existence. Garrison, *Dewey and Eros*, op. cit..

whom were vitally concerned with religion, Dewey clearly thought faith and freedom were compatible. Their compatibility, however, required the sacrifice of traditional religion, the separation of the *religious* from *religion* and attaching it to the social practices and ideal ends defined by pragmatism. Thus Dewey resolves the religious-secular dualism, and education and democracy become fundamentally *religious* activities.²¹⁵ While such a conclusion may well be philosophically attractive to those disillusioned with or mistrustful of traditional religion, it is unlikely to be attractive to those who find comfort and meaning in it. And while Dewey may be correct in his assertion that modern western civilization is and should be evolving toward such a common faith, there is little evidence that we have made much progress toward it in the half-century since he wrote *A Common Faith*.²¹⁶

Classical pragmatism postulates as an ethical ideal a *religious* orientation toward scientific thought, education and democracy while rejecting traditional religion for its ethical shortcomings of moral and epistemic absolutism. However, according to West (1989) a major shortcoming of this traditional pragmatism is its

²¹⁵Garrison highlights this religious/spiritual quality of education and democracy in Dewey's work. See Garrison, *Dewey and Eros*, op. cit.

²¹⁶See, for instance, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990 or Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, Washington, CQ Press, 1992 for accounts of the growth of organized religion.

optimistic theodicy, its failure to put forth an adequate conception of the tragic which has long been a central component of the meaningfulness of traditional religious narratives in many people's lives.²¹⁷ Thus this traditional pragmatism falls short on the criterion of *meaningfulness* because it does not, according to West, offer an adequate conception of the tragic, the natural and man-made evils that beset individual human beings. It is also a less-than-ideal philosophical framework for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education because its response to the religious-scientific dichotomy which underlies much of the tension in that relationship is to imbue scientific narrative and democracy with a religious sentiment and cast off the traditional religious narratives that have long given form to the religious sentiment, made tragedy meaningful, and served as a source of ethical ideals that can inspire individual behavior. The concept of *teacher* as traditional pragmatist does not provide a philosophical framework for negotiating the relationship between religion and education; it provides a framework for rejecting traditional religion as an epistemic and ethical failure inadequate for contemporary society.

The object of this inquiry, however, is not to develop a specific philosophy of religion which resolves religious-secular dualisms or settles religious-scientific debates but to develop a particular component of a philosophy of education--a

²¹⁷West, *American Evasion*, pp. 226-27.

concept *teacher*--that recognizes religious faith as an aspect of human experience with educational significance that should be included in public education rather than excluded from it--as is the current practice--or suppressed in favor of a *common* faith. We are looking for a concept *teacher* which *negotiates* the relationship between faith and school. Within the pragmatic tradition, Cornel West's *prophetic pragmatism* seems to offer the most conducive philosophical framework for such a concept. While West himself says very little about education and nothing about the kind of teacher this inquiry is focused on, he does "highlight(s) the structural background conditions of [such] pedagogical efforts."²¹⁸ Unlike Dewey, he explicitly preserves a role for traditional religious expression even as he affirms a philosophical perspective on religion not unlike Dewey's. He does this by refusing the compulsion to resolve religious-secular, religious-scientific dualisms.²¹⁹ In addition, he sharpens and heightens Dewey's *prophetic* social criticism and ameliorative value orientation into a more radical and vigorous response to the tragic while eschewing--because of his pragmatic philosophy--the absolutism of the traditional prophets. Thus a Deweyan concept of the *teacher-pragmatist*, re-interpreted through the lens of Cornel West's *prophetic pragmatism*, appears to offer a useful response to the challenge this inquiry set out

²¹⁸West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 137.

²¹⁹West, *Prophetic Fragments*, p. 260.

to address: a concept *teacher* that responds to the religious aspect of people's lives and the tragic with an orientation toward social justice and is sensitive to the range of values in our multicultural, multi-religious society; in short, a concept *teacher* which can negotiate and renegotiate the relationship between religion and public education.

Conclusion

In Chapter I of this inquiry I argued that a heightened social tension over the appropriate relationship between religion and public education is an important motivating factor behind much of the current dissatisfaction with public schools as well as the frequent calls for school choice, vouchers, public support for private schools and other educational reforms. I argued that such trends threaten the Deweyan ideal of the public school as a laboratory of democratic culture. Responding to John Dewey's challenge to philosophers of education confronting such social conflicts to "indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the contending parties," I suggested that public education renegotiate the relationship between religion and schools by reconceiving the role *teacher* in a way that is more sensitive to the important place of religious faith in many people's lives but which avoids the very real dangers of indoctrination and bias for our multicultural and multireligious

society.²²⁰ Chapter I concluded with a list of necessary and sufficient--but not exhaustive--criteria for any such new concept of *teacher*.

In Chapter II I have applied those criteria to several contemporary attempts to re-envision the relationship between religion and public education, noting their failure to address the concept *teacher* or to adequately confront the important challenges to such projects posed in Chapter I. Chapter II then applied these criteria to three paradigmatic concepts of *teacher* which have dominated much of educational thought in the U.S.: the *teacher-prophet*, the *teacher-technician*, and the *teacher-pragmatist*. Each concept was found wanting, to one degree or another, as an adequate philosophical framework for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education in a democratic, multicultural, multireligious society still marred by social injustices.

One contemporary revision of the pragmatic tradition, however, Cornel West's *prophetic pragmatism*, seemed to offer a suitable philosophical framework for a new concept of *teacher* which might meet the challenges posed in Chapter I. In the remainder of this inquiry I will use West's philosophical framework to construct a conceptual portrait of the *teacher as prophetic pragmatist* and then evaluate that portrait against the criteria generated in Chapter I.

²²⁰Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 5.

Chapter III

Toward a More Inclusive Concept of *Teacher*:

Source, Approach and Ethics of the Embodied Critic

Chapter 1 of this inquiry offered a general survey of the current social debate over the proper relationship of religion and public education, noting in particular the threats posed by this highly polarized disagreement to the survival of common public education as a necessity for democracy. In that chapter I suggested that the philosophy of education take up John Dewey's challenge to construct an "intelligent theory of education" by ascertaining the "causes for the conflicts that exist and then, instead of taking one side or the other, to indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices of the contending parties."¹ In accepting Dewey's challenge, Chapter 1 noted that there were some reasonable complaints regarding the place of religion in public education, once one sorted through the "secular-humanist" conspiracy theories and the assertions that "putting God back in our schools" would solve all our social problems, that an "intelligent" democratic system of education should address. It also addressed a number of important challenges to the proposition that the relationship between religion and education may need to

¹John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York: Macmillan/Collier Books, 1938, p. 5.

be renegotiated in order to preserve public education. Those objections were answered in Chapter I and then used to define criteria by which an attempt to formulate a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education may be evaluated.

Chapter II reviewed literature on the history of educational thought in order to identify previous "plans of operations" which have attempted to define the relationship between religion and education and the formulation of one specific educational concept--*teacher*--implicit in them. I then traced the evolution of three concepts of *teacher*--as *prophet*, as *technician*, and as *pragmatist*--which represent three key formulations of the role of the teacher vis a vis the relationship of religion and education in the history of American educational thought. On the basis of this analysis I suggested that these conceptions of the teacher did not represent a "more inclusive plan of operations" which could meet Dewey's challenge amid the conflicts that exist over religion and education because they fail one or more of the criteria formulated in Chapter I. I concluded by suggesting that Cornel West's *prophetic pragmatism* might provide a more useful philosophical framework for a new conception of the teacher-as *prophetic pragmatist*-which might better answer Dewey's challenge and thus suggest a new "plan of operations" for the teacher which might reduce--though not entirely resolve--some of our conflicts regarding the relationship between religion and public education in the U.S.

In this chapter, I will identify the source and methods I intend to employ in

constructing a new concept *teacher* within the philosophical framework of prophetic pragmatism, a concept I will call the *prophetic pragmatic teacher*. In it I will explain and justify my selection of a literary text as a source and my deployment of a hybrid literary-philosophical analysis as an approach to this educational inquiry.

Fiction as Source

If, as I have suggested above, the conceptions of the teacher as *prophet*, *technician*, and *pragmatist* do not offer a suitable conceptual framework for an understanding of the teacher which might resolve some of the tension between religious faith and public education, and if, as I point out in Chapter II, West's *prophetic pragmatism* has not yet been applied to concepts of *teacher*, it should prove most instructive, if not in fact necessary, to turn to a source outside the mainstream of the philosophical canon on education in order to more fully demonstrate the potential negative consequences of these existing notions of teacher and to construct an alternative concept of *teacher as prophetic pragmatist*. I propose, therefore, to study a relevant work of African-American fiction which will provide the "data" needed to carry out the purpose of this inquiry: to critique existent concepts of *teacher* and suggest a more useful alternative. My source for this crucial data will be Nobel-laureate Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning

novel *Beloved*.²

My selection of this text rests on certain assumptions regarding the power and relevance of literature and takes place within a framework of decisions about what source to draw upon, the approaches to take, and the consequences of these choices. Deanne Bogdan (1992), in her analysis and defense of literature education, has named this framework, composed of the interrelation of problems of justification, censorship, and response, the *metaproblem*.³ Though Bogdan articulates the metaproblem in the context of literature education, her analytic framework is relevant to educational inquiry in general because it foregrounds the fact that, in any inquiry, a particular inquirer makes choices on the basis of his or her assumptions that have ethical, political, and epistemological consequences. In doing so, she eschews the "god trick. . . the illusion that scientific or ethical objectivity is achieved through the totalizing vision of abstraction which refuses to locate itself anywhere and is thus able to remain unaccountable."⁴ Thus the

²Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, New York: Plume, 1987.

³Deanne Bogdan, *Re-Educating the Imagination: Toward a Poetics, Politics, and Pedagogy of Literary Engagement*, Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1992, p. xxiv.

⁴Bogdan, p. 218. Lorraine Code calls this *malestream epistemology* and claims it as a common characteristic of epistemology since the Enlightenment which has been used to disempower women and minorities. See Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

limitation of the inquiry as an *interested* point of view rather than an objective, disembodied statement of unassailable facts is acknowledged and the danger of slipping into the "god trick" is thereby lessened.⁵

Bogdan's defense of literature education challenges three prevailing premises regarding literary criticism which are relevant to the selection of source and approach for this inquiry. She challenges the assumption of the logical priority of criticism over direct response, the sharp distinction between the literary and the political, and the separation of ordinary and imaginative experience. She counters these assumptions with three premises of her own: that literary experience is a form of real experience, that "literary response is an embodied form of knowledge, in which the capacity for aesthetic experience is shaped by the reader's situation in the world," and that "the ethical import of literature education is associated with the transforming function of poetic power."⁶ Bogdan's defense of literature as a form of real experience that has the power to teach for good or ill and thus transform reality is an assumption that underlies my selection of a literary text as a source for this inquiry. And her recognition that the subjectivity of the reader--what she calls the "feeling, power, and location problems"--means that criticism is

⁵Bogdan, p. 218. Bogdan describes the "god trick" as "the illusion that scientific or ethical objectivity is achieved through the totalizing vision of abstraction which refuses to locate itself anywhere and is thus able to remain unaccountable."

⁶Bogdan, p. xxxiii.

inevitably embodied and demands that I acknowledge the embodied--and, therefore, limited and partial--nature of my analysis of *Beloved* as well as the concepts of *teacher* addressed in Chapter II. The selection of source and approach must, therefore, be accountable both to the metaproblem and the feeling, power, and location problems of the reader.

The Justification Problem

I justify my selection of a work of fiction as a primary source for this inquiry for the reasons outlined above--the apparent inadequacy of existing conceptual frameworks and the neglect of West's *prophetic pragmatism* in educational discourse--and the premises Bogdan articulates regarding the relevance of literary experience and the power of literature to transform reality. Furthermore, much of the traditional canon of educational discourse either ignores or is tainted by the racism and sexism which prophetic pragmatism aims to resist as well as by the widely-held assumption that religious faith has no legitimate formal place in public education.⁷ In the creation of a work of literary art which portrays

⁷For discussion of the racism in culture and education see, for instance, Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, New York: Routledge, 1993; Christine Sleeter, ed., *Empowerment Through Multicultural Education*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979 or Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967. For analysis of the sexism of traditional educational, cultural, and philosophical discourses see, for instance, Jane Roland Martin, *Changing the Educational Landscape: Philosophy, Women and Curriculum*, New York: Routledge, 1994; Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?* op. cit. or Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*,

educational figures and which educates in itself, the author is often engaged in the realistic reproduction of actually existing teachers or, more significantly, in the creative re-imagining of what it might mean to be an ideal or a terrible teacher. Thus, the author's characterization of teaching figures may be read as a *thought experiment* which articulates what the teacher ought and ought not to be.⁸ Though, perhaps, not a traditional or common approach to educational inquiry, the use of literary sources is nevertheless well established in the philosophy of education: Maxine Greene (1978) has been a pioneer of this approach used by philosophers of education such as Jane Roland Martin (1985) and Susan Laird (1988). And Laird has established a precedent for hybrid literary-philosophical methods in educational inquiry.⁹

New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1938. For discussions about the relationship between religion and education see, for instance, Warren A. Nord, *Religion and American Education: Rethinking a National Dilemma*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995; Stephen L. Carter, *Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*, New York: Doubleday, 1993 or Nel Noddings, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1993.

⁸I base my understanding of "thought experiment" on Jane Roland Martin's use of the technique in her book, *The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

⁹See Maxine Greene, *Landscapes of Learning*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1978, pp. 22-41; Jane Roland Martin's analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* in Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; and Susan Laird's analysis of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Ntozake Shange's *Betsey Brown* in Susan Laird, *Maternal Teaching and Maternal Teachings: Philosophic*

To the extent that the work of fiction creates a world which its readers accept as, in some sense "real," it renders a portrait of a teacher formed from the collective desires and fears of ordinary people which the *a priori* or *a posteriori* ontological, epistemic, and axiological assumptions of various traditional schools of educational philosophy often ignore. As feminist philosopher of education Jane Roland Martin (1985) has written, "the general expectation that any educational theory worth recording is readily accessible in books or academic journals becomes unreasonable when the objects or subjects of educational thought are considered marginal. Thus...we will have to look to sources of data that the history of educational thought regards as far from standard: to personal letters, diaries, pamphlets, pieces of fiction, and to oral sources as well."¹⁰ Fiction has long been a mode of expressing educational ideas and should, therefore, be a legitimate source for philosophical inquiry on education.¹¹ Moreover, the use of literary sources is

and Literary Case Studies of Educating, Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1988 and her "The Ideal of the Educated Teacher: 'Reclaiming a Conversation' with Louisa May Alcott," *Curriculum Inquiry* 21, no. 3 (1991).

¹⁰Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation*, p. 180.

¹¹Examples of fiction as a mode of philosophical reflection on education include such classics of educational thought as Plato's, *The Republic*, Allan Bloom, trans., New York: Basic Books, 1968 and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, Allan Bloom, trans., New York: Basic Books, 1979. Novels have also been used to promulgate educational ideals or have explicitly featured education. Examples include Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, New York: Penguin, 1989 (1868) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, New York: Pantheon, 1979 (1915). Even fiction which is not explicitly focused on education, for instance, Ntozake Shange,

consistent with pragmatism's assertion of the social and historical contingency of knowledge claims: both fiction and knowledge are constructed.

The Censorship Problem

Though, as Bogdan reminds us, the selection of one particular literary tradition or work of literature over others constitutes an inevitable act of censorship, the fiction of an African-American woman is particularly relevant to this inquiry and thus justifies that act of censorship. Largely ignored in the literary canon until recently, the fiction of African-American women confronts the twin scourges of racism and sexism while exploring the possibilities and peculiarities of a sense of historical community.¹² According to Henderson (1990), it is characterized by a black female subjectivity which speaks dialogically "from a

Betsey Brown, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985 has proven a productive source for inquiry. See Susan Laird's "The Concept of Teaching: *Betsey Brown* vs. Philosophy of Education," *Philosophy of Education 1988*, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1988. Laird has, in fact, been a pioneer in the use of fiction as a source for contemporary educational reflection. See, in addition to those works cited above, Susan Laird, "The Ideal of the Educated Teacher," op. cit., and "Teaching in a Different Sense: Alcott's Marmee," *Philosophy of Education 1993*, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1993. Finally, the relevance of fiction as a source for the philosophical reflection on education is reflected in the 1996 presidential essay of the Philosophy of Education Society, Betty A. Sichel's "Beyond Moral Stories" and in Michael S. Katz's response, "Moral Stories: How Much Can We Learn from Them and Is It Enough?" *Philosophy of Education 1996*, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1996.

¹²Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Introduction" and Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition" in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, New York: Meridian Press, 1990, pp. 7, 137.

multiple and complex social, historical and cultural positionality" with the Other across and within racial and gender lines: "Black women writers enter into testimonial discourse with black men as blacks, with white women as women, and with black women as black women. At the same time, they enter into competitive discourse with black men as black women, with white women as blacks, and with white men as black women. If black women speak a discourse of racial and gender difference in the dominant or hegemonic discursive order, they speak a discourse of racial and gender identity in the subdominant discursive order." She names this simultaneity of discourses *speaking in tongues*.¹³ Thus African-American women's fiction decodes and resists both racism and sexism, giving it a potentially crucial insight into any reconception of *teacher* which seeks to avoid the racism and sexism of traditional educational discourse.

Other scholars have also noted the prevalence of religious language, themes, and structures in African-American women's fiction.¹⁴ In this vein, and in

¹³Ibid., pp. 118-22.

¹⁴See, for instance, Dolin Hubbard, *The Sermon and the African-American Literary Imagination*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994; Carla F.C. Holloway and Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulis, *New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1987; Ann Josephine Adams, *Sisters of the Light: The Importance of Spirituality in the Afro-American Novel*, Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1989; Loretta Ann McGrann, *Toni Morrison and the American Sermonic Tradition*, Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1989; Heather Joy Mayne, *Biblical Paradigms in Four Twentieth Century African-American Novels*, Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1991; and Peter Kerry

keeping with her analysis of the powerful insight of African-American women's fiction, Henderson (1990), for instance, writes "I propose...an enabling critical fiction--that it is black women writers who are the modern-day apostles, empowered by experience to speak as poets and prophets in many tongues. With this critical gesture...I intend to signify a deliberate intervention by black women writers into the canonic tradition of sacred/literary texts."¹⁵ And, one might add, educational texts, as Laird (1988) has demonstrated.¹⁶ Resisting both racism and sexism in its exploration of historical community via discourse suffused with the language of religious faith, African-American women's fiction constitutes a rich resource of material for this inquiry as it attempts to redefine the concept *teacher* in a way that takes religious faith seriously while eschewing racially, sexually, or religiously hegemonic discourses. For, as Henderson further states, "the objective of these writers is not...to move from margin to center, but to remain on the borders of discourse, speaking from the vantage point of insider/outsider...To maintain this insider/outsider position, or perhaps what Myra Jehlen calls the "extra-terrestrial fulcrum" that Archimedes never acquired, is to see the other, but also to see what the other cannot see, and to use this insight to enrich both our

Powers, *Principalities and Powers: Religion and Resistance in Contemporary Ethnic Women's Literature*, Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1991.

¹⁵Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues," p. 124.

¹⁶Laird, *Maternal Teaching* and "The Concept of Teaching," op. cit.

own and the other's understanding."¹⁷

I have selected a work of fiction by Toni Morrison as the primary source for this inquiry because of her significance as a writer: Cornel West has described her as the only great literary intellectual produced by black America, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has described her as perhaps "the most formally sophisticated novelist in the history of African-American literature."¹⁸ In addition, her work exhibits the characteristics of African-American women's fiction discussed above, characteristics relevant to the aims of this inquiry. Numerous scholars have noted the significance of religious language, names, and themes in her work as well as her deployment of the traditions and structures of African-American sermons.¹⁹ Morrison herself has described the African-American folklore which much of her work draws upon as a point of departure for history and *prophecy*; she has also compared the function of her writing to the preacher's and described it as being in the "tragic mode."²⁰ Thus, Morrison's art exhibits one of the key characteristics of

¹⁷Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁸Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 73; Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah, eds., *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, New York: Amistad, 1993, p. ix.

¹⁹See, for instance, Jan Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996; Gates and Appiah, op. cit.; Powers, op. cit.; Mayne, op. cit.; Adams, op. cit.; Hubbard, op. cit.; and McGrann, op. cit..

²⁰In Gates and Appiah, pp. 372-375.

Cornel West's prophetic pragmatism: roots in the prophetic tradition of Afro-American Christianity.²¹

In addition, Morrison's fiction displays a philosophical affinity with the pragmatist and neo-pragmatist traditions. Her novels are radically historical, both in the sense of being set in various periods of African-American history and in the sense of recovering and revising the past in order to enhance the possibilities of survival in a tragic present and helping to imaginatively shape a more hopeful future.²² They suggest a rejection of the modes of ordering and classification of the western philosophical tradition.²³ Morrison's fiction "makes clear the futility of trying to find absolutes in such a distorted and complex world" and "reveals the limits of hegemonic, authoritarian systems of knowledge."²⁴ And in interviews Morrison has alluded to alternative ways of knowing in the African-American community and a distrust of scientific data to explain "hopelessly unscientific things" as a part of her childhood experience.²⁵ Thus Morrison's fiction suggests a

²¹West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 139.

²²Susan Willis, "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison," in Gates and Appiah, pp. 309-12.

²³Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, pp. 93-111.

²⁴Trudier Harris, "Escaping Slavery but not Its Images" in Gates and Appiah, p. 339.

²⁵In Gates and Appiah, pp. 414-15.

strong affinity with the radically historicist orientation and rejection of epistemic foundationalism and correspondence theories of truth which characterize pragmatism.

Though Morrison's work is not in any way explicitly Marxist, it nevertheless deploys a sustained critical mistrust of capitalism and its complicity in the oppression and reification of African-Americans and poor whites.²⁶ Racism and slavery--the institutions which have inscribed her characters and which they resist in their struggle for identity and community--are, after all, socially constructed discourses designed largely to monopolize political and economic power. And Morrison has remarked upon how the definition of success in a "totally capitalist" society as the acquisition of things can lead to the loss of "spiritual things."²⁷ This economic subtext is clear in the characters of Guitar, Hagar and Macon Dead in *Song of Solomon* (1977) and Jadine, Margaret and Valerian Street in *Tar Baby* (1982).²⁸ Therefore, in addition to the prophetic traditions of Afro-American Christianity and the philosophical assumptions of pragmatism, Morrison's fiction also exhibits the third of West's three key components of prophetic pragmatism: social and economic insights very similar to those offered by progressive Marxism.

²⁶Willis, p. 317; Harris, p. 330.

²⁷In Gates and Appiah, p. 417.

²⁸Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, New York: Signet, 1977 and *Tar Baby*, New York: Plume, 1982.

Finally, while Morrison's fiction exhibits concerns that suggest a degree of affinity between her work and prophetic pragmatism, it exhibits far more material on the central concern of this inquiry--teaching--than is displayed in Cornel West's thought. While some scholars have noted the presence of educational figures and motifs in her work, they have tended to interpret them as representatives of "stereotypical repositories of how American society perceives its teachers" or as expressions of social ritual and culture or to focus on higher education.²⁹ The possibility that these figures may represent an educational subtext in Morrison's work which mounts a powerful critique of certain traditional concepts of *teacher* and which provides useful insight into an alternative concept of *teacher* consistent with Cornel West's prophetic pragmatism has not yet been addressed.

Though Morrison is not a pedagogical writer in the sense that her art is directly concerned with education or has an explicit pedagogical intent, her background, as well as the testimony of her work, suggests that she is indeed a potential source of real insight into issues of educational significance. Morrison wrote her master's thesis, for instance, on William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf,

²⁹See, for instance, John Howard Hedeman, *Images of Higher Education in Novels of the 1980's*, Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Joan F. Peterson, *The Portrayal of the Schoolteacher in American Literature Based Upon Colonial Types: 1794-1987*, Ph.D. diss., University of San Francisco; Linda Krumholz, "Dead Teachers: Rituals of Manhood and Rituals of Reading in *Song of Solomon*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 39 (1993): 551-574; Cynthia Dubin Edelberg, "Morrison's Voices: Formal Education, the Work Ethic, and the Bible," *American Literature* 58 (May 1986): 217-237.

one of the most often cited figures by feminist philosophers of education, and served as a college-level teacher for seven years at Texas Southern University and Howard University before publishing her first novel.³⁰ She has also been an important mentor of young black writers as a senior editor at Random House and has continued to teach, first at State University of New York-Albany and later at Princeton University.³¹ In interviews, Morrison has reflected on her own teaching, suggesting, perhaps, a professional if not theoretical concern with teaching, and she has served on such educational bodies as the New York State Education Department's Committee on Adult Literacy.³² She has also contributed to an article in an educational journal on the structures of privilege and oppression in schools serving Latino and African-American communities.³³

While her background and experience as a teacher do not make Toni Morrison an explicitly educational thinker, they do offer support for the assertion--made largely on the evidence of her novels--that she is a public intellectual whose powerful insight into human experience has something of significance to offer to

³⁰Furman, pp. 1-4. On Virginia Woolf's significance to the philosophy of education see Martin, *The Schoolhome* and Susan Laird, "Rethinking 'Coeducation,'" *Studies in Philosophy and Education*.

³¹Gates and Appiah, p. ix.

³²Ibid., pp. 390, 412.

³³William Ayers, "Can City Schools be Saved?" *Educational Leadership* 51, no. 8 (May 1994): 60-63.

education. Her insight into this topic is clearly displayed in an educational subtext which runs throughout her novels. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), for instance, explores the effects of white normative aesthetic values as manifested in elementary school readers, teacher values, and popular culture on the self-image of a young black girl and black female teachers. In this novel and *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *Tar Baby* (1982) Morrison creates characters whose aspirations for acceptance or success are pursued through a university education dominated by white, European cultural values. Their failures and perversions constitute a powerful critique of Eurocentric education and W.E.B. DuBois' parable of the "talented tenth."³⁴ In *Beloved* (1987) Morrison specifically critiques a concept of *teacher* named to "reflect the scholarly way in which racism was pursued in theology and biology in the Darwinian theory of evolution," a concept clearly rooted in the epistemological assumptions Lorraine Code (1991) has named "malestream" and which I, in Chapter II, associated with the concept of *teacher* as *technician*.³⁵ Throughout her novels—including *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1998), her two most recent works—we see the marginality of formal education in the lives

³⁴Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, New York: Plume, 1994 (1970) and *Sula*, New York: Plume, 1982 (1973); W.E.B. DuBois, "The Talented Tenth," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West, *The Future of the Race*, New York: Vintage Books, 1996, pp. 133-158.

³⁵Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, New York: Plume, 1987. Morrison quoted in Furman, p. 70. For Code's account of "malestream" epistemology see Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?* op. cit..

of African-Americans and the central significance of strong black women who teach a sense of identity, community, and resistance to evil in the mode of cultural criticism West has named prophetic pragmatism.³⁶

The Response Problem

As Bogdan points out, literary response--and thus literary criticism--is an embodied form of knowledge "in which the capacity for aesthetic experience is shaped by the reader's situation in the world."³⁷ Thus this inquiry will be shaped by the subjectivity of its author and therefore complicated and, I hope, enriched by the fact that it crosses race and gender lines along a path which parallels, in some respects, the racist and sexist discourses which have historically been deployed to silence and speak for women and peoples of color.³⁸ As a white, southern male of mixed--Anglo-Puerto Rican--ethnicity, my inquiry into the thought of an African-American philosopher of religion--Cornel West--and an African-American woman novelist--Toni Morrison--runs the risk of repeating the injustices and distortions

³⁶Toni Morrison, *Jazz*, New York: Plume, 1992 and *Paradise*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998. *Jazz* was the subject of a symposium at the 1997 annual meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, an indication, perhaps, of some degree of relevance of Morrison's fiction to educational thought.

³⁷Bogdan, p. xxxiii.

³⁸See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, New York: Orion Press, 1965; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, op. cit.; Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979; Franz Fanon, op. cit..

perpetuated in the past and present by white, Euro-American men writing about women and peoples of color, particularly African-Americans. I can claim certain common experiences with West--roots in a prophetic Baptist church--and Morrison--college English/writing instructor--and some affinity with both their experience and interest in Oklahoma.³⁹ However, these experiences are relatively superficial in comparison to the gulfs of race and gender which have divided American society for so long. There are undoubtedly nuances and themes in their thought and aspects of their experience as African-Americans and as a woman to which I may not have access given differences of race and gender. I will, therefore, make no claims about African-American or African-American women's culture but rather attempt to understand the relevant claims they and other African-American critics make about themselves and their culture and to apply these insights to the way we conceive of the role of teacher. In this way I hope to avoid as many of the pitfalls of previous inquiry across race and gender lines as possible and enrich our mutual understanding of the possibilities for education in a diverse society.

I undertake such a politically and ethically delicate inquiry on Cornel West's (1989) invitation to "all people of goodwill...to fight for an Emersonian culture of creative democracy in which the plight of the wretched of the earth is alleviated" and on Morrison's assurance that one of the characteristics of "black" literature

³⁹West was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Morrison's novel *Paradise* is set in rural Oklahoma.

(not necessarily that written by or about Blacks) is its openness to the participation of the reader: "I just hold your hand while you're in the process of going there and hearing it and sharing it."⁴⁰ It responds to Kal Alston's (1995) challenge to philosophers of education to "see the connection of your struggle to the success of mine" and to "broaden...logical strategies beyond pure linguistic argumentation...to include other forms of intellectual engagement...and submit to the scrutiny of prophetic, embodied, pragmatic practice..." and takes seriously Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's (1990) assertion that "the objective of these [black women] writers is...to see the other, but also to see what the other cannot see, and to use this insight to enrich our own and the other's understanding."⁴¹ Thus, my approach to this inquiry is premised on an invitation, extended in the Emersonian tradition of intellectual inquiry, to participate, in a spirit of responsibility and humility, in a philosophical discourse with African-American intellectuals in order to promote positive social change.⁴²

⁴⁰Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, p. 235; Morrison in Gates and Appiah, p. 418.

⁴¹Kal Alston, "Race Consciousness and the Philosophy of Education," *Philosophy of Education 1995*, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1995; Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues" in Gates, p. 137.

⁴²West describes Emerson's approach to intellectual inquiry as being characterized by personality, provocation, and power. In other words, it highlights the creative power of individuals inspired by or reacting to the past to formulate new ideas, new "orders of conceptions" rather than simply perpetuating already

The Source: *Beloved*

Beloved is a novel which explores the tensions between memory and survival where the past is so full of pain that it is never really past, where the tragic exists outside of time, visiting evil upon the past lives of women and men and threatening their present wherever and whenever memory slips through carefully guarded mental doors. It explores this tension in the experience of slaves who, brutalized by their captivity and exploitation, escape slavery to a physical freedom circumscribed and threatened not only by continuing white racism but by the overwhelmingly painful memories of their past. Rooted in the actual experience of individual human beings,⁴³ the novel concretizes the enormity of the evil suffered by the "sixty million and more" African slaves and former slaves to whom the novel is dedicated and raises profound questions about who survives and how.⁴⁴ Told from the shifting perspectives of a variety of sometimes contradictory, sometimes overlapping narrative voices, *Beloved* speaks in tongues.⁴⁵ It is

existing ideas. For a more complete discussion of this aspect of Emerson's thought see West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 9-41.

⁴³ Morrison has based her character Sethe on the actual case of a former slave, Margaret Garner, who killed her children rather than allow them to be returned to slavery. Jan Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996, p. 68.

⁴⁴ "I'm interested," Morrison says, "in survival-who survives and who does not, and why-and I would like to chart a course that suggests where the dangers are and where safety might be." Gates and Appiah, p. 402.

grounded, however, in the experience of Sethe, a former slave who grew up on a plantation called "Sweet Home" under a master whose relative benevolence masks the vulnerability and oppression of the human beings he owns. When he dies, he is replaced by Schoolteacher, a cold and sadistic overseer whose brutal treatment of Sethe and the other slaves drives them to attempt a dangerous escape across the Ohio River to join Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, who had been bought out of slavery through the extra labor of her son Halle. Only Sethe and her four children--the youngest of whom is born on the banks of the Ohio--reach Baby Suggs' home on the outskirts of Cincinnati.

For twenty-eight days Sethe and her children enjoy the life of the local community of free blacks. That life is shattered, however, when Schoolteacher and his slave catchers arrive to return Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home. The sight of Schoolteacher, and the prospect of her children's return to slavery, prompts Sethe to flee with her children to a small shed where she attempts to kill her children rather than permit their enslavement. Stunned by her action and

⁴⁵ I mean this in the literal sense of describing the variety of voices which speak in the novel and in the sense of Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's characterization of black women's fiction as being characterized by a black female subjectivity which speaks dialogically "from a multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural positionality" with the Other across racial and gender lines. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, dialectics, and the Black Woman's Literary Tradition," in Gates, *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, pp. 116-144.

believing all the children dead, Schoolteacher returns to Sweet Home, leaving Sethe to a brief prison term for the murder of the one child--a little girl whom she had not yet named--who did not survive. Eventually, Sethe returns to Baby Suggs' home at 124 Bluestone Road to live out her life ostracized by the black community and her own pride and haunted by the ghost of her dead child until the "last of the Sweet Home men," the former slave Paul D shows up to precipitate Sethe's and his own struggle to survive memory.

I have selected *Beloved* as the primary source for this inquiry from among Morrison's body of work because it most clearly exhibits the prophetic, pragmatic, and critical dimensions of her writing and because it offers the most explicit characterizations of traditional and prophetic educational figures of any of her novels. It has, in addition, been recognized and studied as a work relevant to educational thought.⁴⁶ *Beloved* is a powerful narrative account of an escaped slave's struggle to survive the grievous psychological wounds of her past set in the cultural and historical milieu from which West contends the prophetic tradition of Afro-American Christianity evolved. *Beloved* portrays its central character, Sethe, embroiled in "the irreducible predicament of unique individuals who undergo dread, despair, disillusionment, disease and death and the institutional forms of oppression that dehumanize people."⁴⁷ It also portrays three teacher-characters--

⁴⁶Susan Huddleston Edgerton, "Toni Morrison Teaching the Interminable," in McCarthy and Crichlow, pp. 220-235.

Schoolteacher, Lady Jones, and Baby Suggs--who, in their teaching, either seek to perpetuate this oppression, to ignore it in favor of the acquisition of useful knowledge, or to actively resist it by deploying the prophetic mode of Afro-American spirituality. Morrison's account of Sethe's and her teachers' response to evil--a struggle West accused pragmatism of ignoring--is instructive for the purposes of this inquiry where many other traditional religious responses to the existence of evil are not because it is the account of an oppressed people, a people without the power or luxury to formulate and impose a dogmatic or absolutist theodicy on others.⁴⁸ They are forced in their context of oppression and powerlessness to accommodate their African spiritual heritage, their Christian faith, and their existential reality, to critique one from the perspective of the other even as they refuse to reject or embrace either tradition entirely; in short, to borrow Henderson's (1990) formulation, they, through Morrison, "speak in tongues" as "prophets and apostles."⁴⁹ Thus *Beloved's* account of African-Americans forced by political necessity to articulate a religious expression which offers an existential response to the tragic and hope for the future without

⁴⁷West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 228.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 212, 228 and West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times: Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume One*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993, p. 32.

⁴⁹Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues," in Gates, p. 124.

attempting to supplant other modes of religious expression may have something to say to contemporary philosophers of education who would reconceive *teacher* in order to make space for religious faith in public education without ignoring the ethical necessity to respect religious and cultural diversity.

Critical Perspectives on *Beloved*

Since its publication in 1987 *Beloved* has received a significant amount of critical attention, an unsurprising development for a text Henry Louis Gates, Jr. described as "in many ways the Ur-text of the African American experience."⁵⁰ Though there have been a wide variety of critical studies of the novel, including at least one Marxist analysis and a wide variety of feminist readings, much of the criticism of *Beloved* has tended to focus on four themes: the trope of memory and its implications for history and survival, the discourses of racist and sexist oppression, the relation of the novel to the slave narrative genre, and its deployment of African and African-American mythological and folk traditions.⁵¹ In what follows I will review some of the critical literature *Beloved* has inspired before offering my own reading of the novel as work of relevance and potential

⁵⁰Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 143.

⁵¹For a Marxist-inspired reading of *Beloved* see Doreatha Drummond Mbalia's "Beloved: Solidarity as Solution," in her *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness* Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1991, pp. 87-102. For an interesting feminist analysis see Barbara Hill Rigney *The Voices of Toni Morrison* Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1991.

significance for any new conception of teachers which means to take seriously the place of religious faith in students' lives.

Perhaps the most common theme analyzed in the criticism of the novel is Morrison's use of memory as a trope which simultaneously explores the difficulty and necessity of remembering the horrors of a painful past in order to explore the interior lives of slaves and make healing possible.⁵² Morrison's characters--particularly her main character, Sethe--work to repress painful memories, to *disremember*, to *re-memory* as little as possible in the fear that to *re-member* may mean putting past events back together in such a way that they threaten the present once again with the horrors of the past. In deploying this trope to explore the interior lives of former slaves, Morrison "responds to Fredric Jameson's dictum to always historicize by illustrating the dynamics of the act of interpretation that memory performs on a regular basis at any given moment."⁵³

Beloved blurs the lines between past and present and seems to suggest a

⁵²Susan Bowers, "Beloved and the New Apocalypse" in David L. Middleton, ed., *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism* New York: Garland Publishing, 1997, p. 210. On the issue of remembering as healing see Patrick Bryce Bjork, *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for Self and Place Within the Community* New York: Peter Lang, 1992, p. 146. On Morrison's attempt to explore the inner lives of slaves see Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "A Different Remembering: Memory, History and Meaning in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" in Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Views: Toni Morrison* New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990, p. 191.

⁵³Mobley, p. 192.

conception of history as a place rather than a time.⁵⁴ Sethe tells Denver:

'I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place-the picture of it-stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world.... Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm-every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there-if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen gain; it will be there for you, waiting for you' (36).

In the person of Beloved, history and memory take on a flesh-and-blood reality which does indeed threaten the present and must be wrestled with in order to survive the present and preserve some hope for the future. Morrison's is a radically historicist vision in *Beloved*, suggesting the power of human consciousness, individually and collectively, to fashion and re-fashion reality.

The trope of memory also shapes the narrative structure of *Beloved*. Characters who repress memories, remember reluctantly, forget, reveal their pasts in disjointed fragments, and then revise their memories construct patterns of circularity in the novel reminiscent of the blues, and jazz, and the oral traditions of African and African-American storytelling.⁵⁵ The novel is an often dis-harmonious melody of voices, a "Bakhtinian heteroglossia" of partial points-of-view

⁵⁴ Mobley, p. 196. See also Rigney, pp. 74-75.

⁵⁵ Philip Page, *Dangerous Freedoms: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995, pp. 134, 142-143.

communicated in disjointed fragments in a call-and-response-like structure which dramatizes the power of words and stories to construct and reconstruct lived reality.⁵⁶ Thus the educational dialogue of particular interest to this inquiry among Baby Suggs, Schoolteacher, and Lady Jones is already implicit within the construction of the narrative. The novel, Morrison says, is about "the process by which we construct and deconstruct reality in order to be able to function in it."⁵⁷ And the reader is an active participant in this melody of voices, this social construction of reality. The reader is the implied listener. Morrison writes:

...the language has to be quiet, it has to engage your participation...It's not just telling the story; it's about involving the reader...My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it...He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking. The we...come together to make this book, to feel this experience. It doesn't matter what happens...I tell you in the beginning...what happen[s]...⁵⁸

This interaction of storyteller and audience and the influence of the trope of memory on narrative structure disrupts the "linear, progressive, monologic narrative of the Western tradition" in favor of the "spiraling, unfinished, many-voiced story of a community, where interest in the progression of plots is

⁵⁶Page, p. 153; Mobley, p. 193. Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991, p. 169.

⁵⁷In Elsie B. Washington, "Toni Morrison Now," *Essence* 18 (October 1987): p. 58.

⁵⁸In Claudia Tate, "Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Black Women Writers at Work*, New York: Continuum, 1983, p. 125.

abandoned in favor of the process of accumulating multiple stories, themselves merely indications of a people's lived creativity."⁵⁹ Morrison's conception of literary language, therefore, as well as her construction of the novel, make possible a reading of *Beloved* as a conversation on educational philosophy

Beloved's narrative structure also draws on the genre of the slave narrative as well as the myth and folkloric traditions of Africa and African-Americans. The novel is "a historical narrative sharing the purpose, thematics, and structure of slave narratives" which follow "Judeo-Christian mythic structure," moving from idyllic existence to the wilderness and struggle for survival to providential help followed by arrival in the promised land.⁶⁰ However, in a clear affirmation of Bakhtin's and Eliot's assertions regarding the relationship of the individual author to literary traditions, Morrison significantly revises the generic slave narrative.⁶¹ One of the characteristics of the classic African-American slave narratives was

⁵⁹Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin, *A World of Difference: An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 169.

⁶⁰Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Toni Morrison* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990, pp. 95-96.

⁶¹"Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its immediate past." Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist, ed., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans., Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 421; T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Twentieth Century Criticism: The Major Statements*, William J. Handy and Max Westbrook, eds., New York: The Free Press, 1974, pp. 28-34.

their treatment or non-treatment of particularly horrific experiences in order to avoid offending their white audiences.⁶² This is precisely the point where Morrison revises the genre. In attempting to re-construct the interior psychological-emotional lives of slaves, she fills in the gaps left in earlier slave narratives.⁶³

In re-constructing the interior lives of African slaves in the U.S., *Beloved* dramatizes the centrality of myth and folk traditions in their lives as well as the tension between those traditions and the dominant society. The novel's deployment of the trope of memory suggests a cyclical conception of time consistent with certain West African beliefs while the haunting and physical return of Sethe's murdered daughter, Beloved, is premised on other West African beliefs which assert that death is not the end of being.⁶⁴ Key characters in the novel resonate with stock figures from African mythology, particularly Beloved, who resonates with the tradition of the evil woman, the succubus, and the trickster, and Sethe, who is understandable within the tradition of the African Great Mother.⁶⁵ Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law whose rituals in the Clearing distill and epitomize the novel's blend of African myth, African-American folk traditions, and Christian religious sensibilities, is cast as the archetypal ancestor-figure and leader, the

⁶²Samuels and Hudson-Weems, p. 97; Mobley, p. 191.

⁶³Samuels and Hudson-Weems, *ibid.*

⁶⁴Bowers, p. 212; Harris, p. 154.

⁶⁵Harris, p. 160; Rigney, p. 69.

priestess who blends the sacred and secular into meaning-making myths which forge and preserve community.⁶⁶ This myth- and meaning-making aspect of Baby Suggs' character, and the novel as a whole, assumes the power of storytelling to shape reality and requires the active participation of the audience/reader because it is founded upon a fundamental premise that cultural affirmation and identity are grounded in and attainable through myth and folklore.⁶⁷ This grounding in folklore and myth, however, exists in a very basic tension with the scientific and technological assumptions upon which the dominant society--in the person of Schoolteacher--is founded. These assumptions deploy a form of power, an imperial gaze, which objectifies the other and constitutes a "didactic Western pedagogics" fundamentally at odds with the pedagogics of the storyteller.⁶⁸

One key element of the mythological milieu which *Beloved* simultaneously draws upon and constructs is the prophetic tradition of Afro-American protestant Christianity as it both replaced and was shaped by African beliefs. Morrison's deployment of Afro-American Christian spirituality recognizes its significance in the interior lives of slaves and free African-Americans. The church is, according to

⁶⁶Harris, pp. 173-174; Harding and Martin, p. 111.

⁶⁷Harris, p. 169, 172; Samuels and Hudson-Weems, p. 135.

⁶⁸Harding and Martin, pp. 95, 98.

Morrison, "the most pragmatic and realistic institution we have ever had."⁶⁹ Her recognition of the relevance of Afro-American Christianity begins with the epigraph to *Beloved*, a passage from "Romans" in which the apostle Paul contemplates the relationship of God to humanity, particularly the evils and inequities suffered, which casts the meaning of the novel and the events it relates in a mythological context meaningful not only to African-Americans but others as well.⁷⁰

Written in an apocalyptic tradition revised by an African conception of cyclical time which views the apocalypse as something to be survived rather than as an end to be desired, *Beloved* looks backward rather than forward for inspiration to survive the tragedies of Afro-American experience.⁷¹ It is permeated with biblical language and allusions and shaped not only by the Judeo-Christian mythic structures of the classic slave narratives, but by the strategies and structures of Africanized Puritan sermons.⁷² In this reading, Baby Suggs is cast in the

⁶⁹Toni Morrison, "Behind the Making of the Black Book," *Black World* (February 1974): 86-90.

⁷⁰In "Romans 9:25" Paul says "I will call them my people who were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." Paul notes how the Gentiles are redefined as acceptable and proclaims reconciliation and hope. He continues: "And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God." Noted in Margaret Atwood, "Haunted by Their Nightmares," in Bloom, p. 147.

⁷¹Bowers, pp. 209-212.

tradition of Negro preachers who, though untrained, answer and issue the Call to serve God and His people, leading them to the ritual grounds of the Clearing and its "exhilarating prospect of community, protection, progress, learning and religion."⁷³

The novel also deploys and revises the Eden myth in its characterization of Sweet Home, the season of Lent, the "Parable of the Loaves and Fishes" and the rites of communion and confirmation in Sethe's twenty-eight days of un-slaved life at 124 Bluestone, and the rite of baptism and the Pentecost event in its final scenes.⁷⁴ The Christian religious sensibilities displayed in *Beloved* strongly suggest that any reading of the novel must take into account its biblical and sermonic contexts and implies a prophetic role for Morrison: "Like the Puritans, Morrison draws from the past and tribal identity to address contemporary threats to the community she seeks to preserve. To have such an imagination...allies her with those who seek the role of prophet: one who speaks the truth to the health of the

⁷²On the Judeo-Christian mythic structure of slave narratives see Samuels and Hudson-Weems, p. 96. On the religious language of *Beloved* see Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, p. 99. For Morrison's use of sermonic strategies and structures see Loretta Ann McGrann, *Toni Morrison and the American Sermonic Tradition*, Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995, p. 3.

⁷³Peach, p. 98. Robert Stepto, *From Behind the Veil, A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979, p. 68.

⁷⁴Harris, p. 176; Samuels and Hudson-Weems, p. 119; McGrann, p. 109.

community."⁷⁵

Though *Beloved* does exhibit a significant element of Afro-American protestant Christian influence, it is not explicitly Christian. In fact, formal religion is largely absent from the novel.⁷⁶ And while it displays the considerable influence of African and African-American mythology and folklore, it is no simple valorization of African myth against American racist oppression. Rather, the heterogeneity of myths in the novel not only reflect the cultural and spiritual hybridity of African-American experience but suggest Morrison's mistrust of any single, controlling mythological framework. Just as characters in the novel such as Sixo and Baby Suggs engage in the blending of traditional ritual and myth with their slave masters' spiritual tradition to formulate adequate cultural responses to their current oppressive circumstances, Morrison, in *Beloved*, is engaged in the collection, re-interpretation, and re-evaluation of myths in an attempt to give form, coherence, and meaning to African-American experience.⁷⁷

Morrison's ambivalence toward myth in *Beloved* is, perhaps, the product of a DuBoisian "double consciousness" which simultaneously recognizes the power of myth to create and sustain communities against the threat of excessive

⁷⁵McGrann, pp. 24, 26.

⁷⁶Lawrence David, "Fleshly Ghosts and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in *Beloved*" in Middleton, p. 245.

⁷⁷Harding and Martin, pp. 124-125.

individualism even as it recognizes the oppressive potential of myth and community for individual members of society.⁷⁸ Her concern with the discourses of racist and sexist oppression are clear in *Beloved*. As a piece of women's writing, the novel challenges the traditional study of religion and literature because it transgresses traditionally represented religious boundaries and submerges conventions of traditional Christianity without offering utopic alternatives, thus eschewing absolutism.⁷⁹ It "subverts the masculinist biases" of religion and literature and creates in 124 Bluestone a "feminine world outside male, phallogentric logic" and suggests that "if men are going to be opponents to and not continuators of oppression, they must eschew the heroic quest pattern. . . [and]. . . outlive the delusion of exceptional destinies and participate in the fundamental rite of eliminating the principle of violence from society."⁸⁰ As a piece of African-American writing, *Beloved* also subverts authoritative racist discourses by challenging white myths like the benevolent slave master, by illustrating the link between the domination of language and the domination of the body in the

⁷⁸Denise Heinze, *The Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993, p. 5.

⁷⁹Ann-Janine Morey, "Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison: Reflections on Postmodernism and the Study of Religion and Literature" in Middleton, pp. 257-251.

⁸⁰Morey, 264; Rigney, p. 17; Harding and Martin, p. 80. Milkman is the central character of Morrison's third novel, *Song of Solomon*.

character of Schoolteacher and his treatment of the slaves on Sweet Home, and by dramatizing the courageous efforts of slaves and former slaves to challenge and revise dominant oppressive discourses.⁸¹

Reading *Beloved* as Educational Text

Though many readings of *Beloved* imply some educational significance in their discussions of the novel's treatment of memory and history, the power of storytelling and myth to shape reality and affirm cultural identity, and the possibility of resistance to racist and sexist oppression, few explicitly address *Beloved* as a novel with something to say about education.⁸² But surely a novel that places such a creative emphasis on names and naming and then names its central villain *Schoolteacher* is saying something about education and teachers as we conceive them. And surely a novel that purports to be about "the process by which we construct and deconstruct reality in order to be able to function in it" and then portrays at least two other key figures who are either explicitly or implicitly

⁸¹Peach, pp. 94, 96.

⁸²One notable exception is Susan Huddleston Edgerton's "Toni Morrison Teaching the Interminable" in McCarthy and Crichlow, pp. 220-235. Edgerton's focus, however, is on how the novel itself teaches rather than on what the novel may have to say about teaching and teachers. Others have analyzed *Beloved* and Morrison's fiction in general for its reflection of cultural stereotypes about teachers and education. See, for instance, John Howard Hedman, *Images of Higher Education in the Novels of the 1980s*, Ph.D. dis., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1993 and Joan F. Peterson, *The Portrayal of the Schoolteacher in American Literature based upon Colonial Types: 1794-1987*. Ph.D. diss., University of San Francisco, 1994.

teachers teaching others how to function in reality is worth analyzing for what it has to say about education and teachers.⁸³

I am not proposing, however, a revision or critique of the analyses of *Beloved* reviewed above; rather, I propose to foreground a neglected sub-text of the novel: its explicit and implicit conceptions of teachers. I will analyze the characters of Baby Suggs, Schoolteacher, and Lady Jones and pose questions designed to tease out their implications for how we conceive of teachers and how we might re-conceive them. What are the conceptions of teachers implied by Morrison's portrayal of Baby Suggs, Schoolteacher, and Lady Jones? How do they challenge or revise contemporary conceptions of teachers and teaching? How might they help contemporary educators re-imagine--"deconstruct and reconstruct"--our conceptions of teachers in a social context heir to the evils so vividly portrayed in *Beloved*--violence, racism, sexism, oppression, repression and despair, and haunted by the flesh-and-blood-real manifestations of past injustices, and torn by disagreement over the relevance of scientific-technological versus spiritual responses to these problems?

⁸³Washington, p. 58. Note the similarity of Morrison's comment on what *Beloved* is about and John Dewey's definition of education: "It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience." From John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, New York, NY: The Free Press, 1916, p. 76. The two characters I am referring to are Lady Jones, Denver's teacher, and Baby Suggs.

First Approach: "Embodied" Reader-Response Criticism

In order to accomplish this, this inquiry must employ methods which are responsive to the conditions of the invitation, which preclude as far as possible the hegemonic discursive practices common to past inquiry by white, male, propertied, Euro-American men across racial and gender lines. Therefore, the reading I offer of *Beloved* will be rendered from within the theoretical framework of *reader-response theory* while acknowledging its status as the product of an embodied critique. I will employ what Bogdan has called *embodied criticism*--which is itself a form of reader-response criticism--to produce a reading of *Beloved* which foregrounds the educational subtext of the novel and then deploy Cornel West's *prophetic pragmatism* to critique the conceptions of teachers implicit in that subtext and point the way to an alternative conception of the teacher as *prophetic pragmatist*.

Reader-response theory is not a conceptually unified critical position but rather a name for a range of critical positions which target for scrutiny the reading process and the response the experience of reading elicits in the reader.⁸⁴ Though reader-response critics differ considerably, they generally affirm the notion that the

⁸⁴Jane P. Tompkins, "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism" in Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, p. ix. See also Bill Corcoran and Emrys Evans, *Readers, Texts, Teachers*, Upper Montclair: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987.

work of literature exists not in the mind of the author alone or on the page but in the interaction that takes place between the text and an individual reading. Thus, the reader participates to one degree or another in the creation of a work of literature; the author is, in a sense, a co-creator of the work of literature.⁸⁵ Such a view of literature necessarily undermines assumptions about the objectivity of the text which were central to the earlier formalist/New Criticism that sought the meaning of literature in the pattern of images in the work. Such critics treated the work of literature as a separate, independent object.⁸⁶ And in focusing attention on the social and psychological factors that influence the reader's interpretive strategies, it draws on theories of the self, formulated by the American pragmatists Charles Sanders Peirce and Josiah Royce, as the product of inferences from perception. Thus reader-response theories also undermine neo-Cartesian models of an autonomous subject and discards what West (1985) calls the "spectator theory of knowledge" for a definition of knowledge as the "product of negotiation among

⁸⁵Tompkins, pp. ix-x; Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 4.

⁸⁶See, for instance, William J. Handy and Max Westbrook, *Twentieth Century Criticism: The Major Statements*, New York: The Free Press, 1974, pp. 2-5; Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975; Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, pp. 142-157.

members of an interpretive community."⁸⁷

In rejecting the notion of autonomous readers reading autonomous texts, reader-response theory posits a notion of the text as a set of relations with other texts, as something like a "cultural Salvation Army outlet."⁸⁸ This intertextuality can take either the form of explicit references as well as unannounced influences from other texts or presuppositions the text makes about its readers and what they know.⁸⁹ In addition, it posits a notion of the reader as an "interpretation" which brings either personal or social preconceptions to the task of interpretation. Thus the nature of the interpreter's self is problematized: interpretation becomes a function of identity.⁹⁰ And, as Bogdan and other critics applying the insights of feminist theory to reader-response criticism correctly point out, the identity of the reader is shaped at least in part by gender, race, class, and ethnicity; in short, the "feeling, power, and location problems."⁹¹

Reader-response theory sees the act of reading as an active experience in

⁸⁷Tompkins, pp. xxi, xxiii; Cornel West, "The Politics of American Neo-Pragmatism" in John Rajchman and Cornel West, eds., *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 259-272.

⁸⁸James E. Porter, *Audience and Rhetoric*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1992, p. 68.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹⁰Tompkins, pp. ix, xxiii.

⁹¹Porter, p. 64; Bogdan, p. xxxiii.

which the meaning of a text is produced rather than discovered. Wolfgang Iser (1989), for instance, describes a text as a sequence of "schematized views" of its object between which are gaps of "indeterminacy" which require the reader to participate in the work's creation by making meaningful connections between the views. "Every literary text invites some form of participation on the part of the reader...indeterminacy is the fundamental prerequisite for this participation."⁹² As these gaps become more numerous in novels--like *Beloved*--with multiple points of view, the indeterminacy, and thus the required participation of the reader, is also increased.⁹³ Iser sees in this activity "the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness." Thus critical activity takes on a moral dimension.⁹⁴

Other reader-response critics place less significance on the text in the production of meaning. Some argue that the experience, and thus the meaning, of a work of literature is limited by the linguistic and literary competence of the reader or by the preconceptions the reader brings to the reading so that the meaning of the text derives from the "interpretive communities" to which the reader may

⁹²Iser, pp. 8-10.

⁹³Ibid., p. 13.

⁹⁴Quoted in Tompkins, p. xv.

belong.⁹⁵ Others argue the work is shaped by the characteristic psychological patterns of the reader; the reader "copes" with literature the same way he or she copes with life.⁹⁶ The stress, however, in all these positions is the significance of the reader to the meaning of the text: "A text only comes to life when it is read."⁹⁷

Reader-response theory does not mean, however, that the text means whatever the reader wants it to mean. The meaning a reader constructs in the act of reading is constrained by the text and by the conventions and preconceptions of the particular interpretive communities to which the reader belongs, conventions and preconceptions which the author, to some extent, shares. Iser (1989), for instance, says that meaning is created both by what the text says as well as what it does not say--the gaps of indeterminacy which the reader fills. While it is impossible for the reader to know precisely the author's intent or the writer to know precisely how the reader will respond, the author can and does use indeterminacy to help guide the reader's construction of the text's meaning.⁹⁸ While other critics--Bleich (1980) and Holland (1980), for instance--ascribe even less

⁹⁵See, for instance, Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," Jonathan Culler, "Literary Competence," and David Bleich, "Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response" in *Tompkins*, pp. 70-100, 101-117, 134-163.

⁹⁶*Tompkins*, p. xix. See also Norman N. Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self" in *Tompkins*, pp. 118-133.

⁹⁷Iser, p. 4.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 34.

autonomy of meaning to the text or the intent of the author, meaning making is still constrained by interpretive structures and systems of values in which the author, text, and reader participate; meaning is the result of a conversation in which the author is as much a partner as the reader.⁹⁹

An important consequence, then, of reader-response theory is that it restores to literature the power to influence individuals and society and thus "repoliticizes" literature. For, as Tompkins (1990) states, "when discourse is responsible for reality and not merely a reflection of it, then whose discourse prevails makes all the difference."¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the recognition of the relevance of identity to interpretation, the relevance of the feeling, power, and location problems to identity, and thus the political and ethical relevance of literature not only unmask the autonomous, objective, disembodied knower as being, in reality, a subjective, embodied knower creating and deploying discursive power, but requires critical interpretation that is honest and aware of itself as positioned knowledge.¹⁰¹

I have elected, therefore, to render an analysis of *Beloved* using "embodied" reader-response criticism because it offers the most ethical approach

⁹⁹Tompkins, pp. xxi-xxv.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. xxv.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. xxiii.

given the significance of my own identity--white, male, southern, etc.--and the source I have selected, the novel of an African-American woman. Because an embodied reader-response critique targets for critical scrutiny the virtual work of literature that comes into being via the interaction of author, text, and reader that takes place in the act of reading and foregrounds the positionality of the critic and his interpretation, it preserves both the author's and the reader's authority to negotiate *a* reading of a text which is shaped by both the feeling, power, and location of the reader *and* by the words and intent of the author. Thus embodied reader-response criticism preserves the possibility of interpretation across racial and gender lines without denying the significance of race and gender in the interpretation.

Furthermore, such an approach is apparently consistent with Morrison's account of her teaching, with her own and other critics' accounts of her writing, and with the approach some African-American critics have used in interpreting her work.¹⁰² Other traditional and contemporary critical approaches are problematic

¹⁰²In Gates and Appiah, pp. 390, 418 Morrison described her use of literature in the classroom to enable her students to see how they felt, thought, saw themselves, and lived. She suggests, as does Wolfgang Iser, that the study of literature is in some sense the study of self. She also notes that one of the major characteristics of black literature is the participation of the other, the audience, reader. Of her own writing she said "I just hold your hand while you're in the process of going there and hearing it and sharing it." And in Claudia Tate, "Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Black Women Writers at Work*, New York: Continuum, 1983, p. 125, Morrison says "...the language has to be quiet, it has to engage your participation...It's not just telling the story; its about involving the

given this inquiry's focus on African-American thought across racial and gender lines. For instance, New Criticism, in positing the autonomy of the reader and objectifying the text, denies the ethical and political significance of criticism and hides the subjectivity of the critic behind a mask of objectivity.¹⁰³ Such an approach runs the risk of perpetuating the hegemony of certain discourses over others. Post-structuralism is also problematic in that its conception of the self and the author as well as the approach to literary criticism that derives from it--deconstruction--radically diminishes the significance of the author to the meaning of the text and advocates criticism as the deliberate disruption of the text's narrative intent. Thus the reader is free to "play" with the text's possibilities.¹⁰⁴ As West (1989, 1993), Baker and Redmond (1989), and Roman (1993) have argued, such an approach is

reader...My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it...Then we...come together to make this book, to feel this experience. It doesn't matter what happens..I tell you in the beginning...what happens..." I take these comments to be a clear indication of the relevance of reader-response criticism to the interpretation of Morrison's fiction. On the use of reader-response by African-American critics of Morrison see Deborah E. McDowell, "Boundaries: Or Distant Relations and Close Kin" in Baker and Redmond.

¹⁰³Handy and Westbrook, op. cit.; Brooks, op. cit.; Porter, p. 64. For a broader account of the significance of identity in philosophical inquiry see Code, op. cit..

¹⁰⁴Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins, *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, New York: Harper and Row, 1985, pp. 364-365. See also Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 101-120 and Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*, New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

ethically problematic when the authors in question are women and peoples of color whose discourses have only recently claimed the public voice denied them for so long: literary theory becomes, potentially, another excuse for ignoring marginal voices.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, reader-response criticism occupies a range of theoretical territory between New Criticism on one hand and post-structuralism on the other. It has certain affinities with both positions, evolving in part as a response to formalism and anticipating key aspects of post-structuralism. However, it minimizes the potential in both these positions to silence the voice of the author even as it clears a space for readers to negotiate a meaning of a particular literary text. It is, therefore, the most appropriate critical mode for my analysis of *Beloved* as a work of fiction which contains an educational subtext within the larger discourse of the novel.

Embodied Criticism: A Direct Response to *Beloved* as Educational Critique

Deanne Bogdan's reclamation of the reader's direct response to a work of literature as a moment of critical significance grounds my own reading of *Beloved* as a novel which is relevant to education and concepts of *teacher* in an existential context marked by "dread, despair, disillusionment, disease and death and the

¹⁰⁵West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 223-226 and *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, pp. 94-95; Baker and Redmond, p. 8; and Leslie G. Roman, "White is a Color! White Defensiveness, Postmodernism, and Anti-Racist Pedagogy," in McCarthy and Crichlow, pp. 71-89.

institutional forms of oppression that dehumanize people."¹⁰⁶ My reading of *Beloved* was and is marked by what, for me, was a particularly powerful direct response: I read as a father of a small boy the story of a mother of a small girl. As such, my reading of the novel was invested with my own understanding of the obsessions and fears--both rational and irrational--of a parent's love for a child, the sorts of feelings that move mothers and fathers to get up in the night to listen for a child's breathing, the powerful mix of biology and love that can imbricate identities to the point of doubting one's ability to survive if "something ever happened" to one's child. It was with a peculiar sort of relief that I read of *Beloved's* haunting of the house at 124 Bluestone and of her return from the dead: the very possibility, even though I was always aware that I was reading a work of fiction, was compelling. Paradoxically, this recognition of my own parental love in Sethe's maternal--or rather my reading of this character's emotions through my own, my participation with Morrison and the text in the creation of a *Beloved* that is, to a significant extent, peculiar to me--did not lead me to question Sethe's killing of her baby girl with a rusty handsaw.¹⁰⁷ I trusted her explanation: there was something worse from which she was obligated to protect her child. But as a teacher and

¹⁰⁶ Bogdan, *Re-educating the Imagination*; West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁷ The inevitability of such a reading is a major tenet of reader-response criticism and is consistent with Toni Morrison's own accounts of her writing and how she expects to be read.

educational theorist, I wonder how we might help parents and the culture in general enable children to survive such threats and what role religious faith may play in that process.

I also bring to this reading of *Beloved* my own identity as a straight, white, male of mixed (Anglo-Puerto Rican) ethnicity, mindful of the long and sorry history of white men writing for and defining African-Americans. Anna Julia Cooper's scathing critique of white writers who write on African-American topics also gives pause:

There is one thing I would like to say to my white fellow countrymen, and especially to those who dabble in ink and affect to discuss the Negro...it is an insult to humanity and a sin against God to publish any such sweeping generalizations of a race on such meager and superficial information. We meet it at every turn--this obtrusive and offensive vulgarity, this gratuitous sizing up of the Negro and conclusively writing down his equation, sometimes even among his ardent friends and bravest defenders. Were I not afraid of falling myself into the same error that I am condemning, I would say it seems an *Anglo Saxon characteristic* to have such overweening confidence in his own power of induction... ¹⁰⁸

Finally, my reading of *Beloved* is shaped by my vocation: teaching. I read the novel as a teacher of English who saw in it an innovative narrative structure and a story that would move students as it moved me. And I read as a philosopher of education convinced that Morrison's characterizations of Baby Suggs, Schoolteacher, and Lady Jones have something important to contribute to the

¹⁰⁸ Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 203.

philosophical conversation in education over the concept *teacher*, something that, given the pervasively prophetic and spiritual qualities of Morrison's work, can be of help in formulating a more inclusive concept *teacher* better able to negotiate and renegotiate the relationship between religion and public education. I offer this reading, however, with Anna Julia Cooper's complaint as an inevitable constraint on any theoretical claims and with Paul D's warning to Denver ringing in my ears: "Watch out. Watch out. Nothing in the world more dangerous than a white schoolteacher"(266).

My object here, however, is not to make authoritative statements about African-Americans or their culture. Any assertions about African-American culture or religious expressions are drawn from the work of scholars with far more claim than I to expertise in the area of African-American studies and appropriately documented. I approach my inquiry into the educational subtext of *Beloved* in the spirit of Jane Roland Martin's claim that we must look to other sources of data-- letters, diaries, books, oral traditions--for educational thought on objects or subjects considered marginal.¹⁰⁹ And I approach it not with the idea that I have anything authoritative or original to say about African-American culture, but rather with the compelling sense that this cultural tradition may have something very important to say about teaching, with the sense that this powerful novel has

¹⁰⁹Martin, p. 180.

something important to teach *me* about what it means to be a teacher. My reading of *Beloved*, therefore, is in the spirit of Emerson's conception of *provocation* as creative response.¹¹⁰ I situate my "embodied" critique theoretically in *reader-response theory*, an approach to literary analysis which targets for critical scrutiny the virtual work of literature that comes into being via the interaction of author, text, and reader and which preserves both the author's and the reader's authority to negotiate a reading of a literary text shaped both by the identity of the reader and the intent of the author.¹¹¹ In this way I hope to avoid the sorts of errors Anna Julia Cooper rightly condemns.

There is clearly much in this novel that I cannot understand and have, perhaps, misunderstood. I do not know how it feels to be a slave, to be black, to be a woman, to be tortured and oppressed, or even, thank God, to lose a child. But, in that direct response, I recognize that love that is, as Paul D says, "too thick" (164). I recognize teachers I have known and loved or disliked, concepts of *teacher* validated by my training, others I have been taught to suspect, and still others my experience has moved me to emulate. And in that recognition, in that participation in the creation of a *Beloved* which it enables, I am made more

¹¹⁰For a brief discussion of Emerson's notion of provocation see West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 25-28.

¹¹¹Clem Young, "Readers, Texts, Teachers" and Emrys Evans, "Readers Recreating Texts," in Bill Corcoran and Emrys Evans, eds., *Readers, Texts, Teachers*, Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987, pp. 7-21, 22-40.

intimately and immediately aware of the tragic and its resonance at various levels with experiences that have shaped my own culture: the "Trail of Tears," the dustbowl exodus, poverty, and the recent terrorism in the so-called "heartland." In this recognition, and the participation Morrison's writing requires, I am engaged with her in important questions: How do we survive and thrive in the face of the tragic? Who survives? How can we learn to survive? Who teaches us? How? Can we learn to teach others? These are questions of profound relevance to contemporary education; Toni Morrison's *Beloved* suggests equally profound responses to them.

Second Approach: Prophetic Pragmatism

After foregrounding what I take to be an educationally relevant subtext in *Beloved* and fleshing out the concepts of *teacher* implicit in that subtext, I will engage in a prophetic pragmatic critique of those concepts of *teacher* and then attempt to sketch an alternative concept of *teacher as prophetic pragmatist* by re-examining and revising Dewey's conception of the teacher through the lens of prophetic pragmatism. In this way I will offer a potentially more useful framework for our understanding of the role of teachers, a framework which may decrease the acrimony of our debates over the relationship between religion and education by exploring the meaning and value of the teacher as prophetic pragmatist for a religiously inclusive system of public, democratic, multicultural education.

West describes prophetic pragmatism as...

a form of American left thought and action in our postmodern moment. It is deeply indebted to the continental traveling theories such as Marxism, structuralism, and poststructuralism, yet it remains in the American grain. It is rooted in the best of American radicalism but refuses to be simply another polemical position on the ideological spectrum. Prophetic pragmatism calls for reinvigoration of sane, sober, and sophisticated intellectual life in America and for regeneration of social forces empowering the disadvantaged, degraded, and dejected. It rejects the faddish cynicism and fashionable conservatism rampant in the intelligentsia and general populace. Prophetic pragmatism rests upon the conviction that the American evasion of philosophy... is a rich and revisable tradition that serves as the occasion for cultural criticism and political engagement in the service of an Emersonian culture of creative democracy.¹¹²

Prophetic pragmatism pursues these aims via an approach that rejects the methodological monism that results from the imposition of any single theoretical framework on the whole of human experience. Rather, it views philosophy not as the "queen of the sciences" establishing the rules and defining the terms of intellectual inquiry on the basis of fixed and firm foundations but as a mode of cultural criticism which understands theory as a contingent framework to be deployed strategically in the interest of furthering "an Emersonian culture of creative democracy." Thus it does not employ a single method of inquiry, but draws on the historicist orientation of the pragmatist tradition and the theoretical insights of progressive Marxism guided by the norms and ideals of prophetic ethical-religious sensibilities in order to "promote existential sustenance and

¹¹²West, *American Evasion*, p. 239.

political relevance" for ameliorative social change.¹¹³

The pragmatic orientation of prophetic pragmatism views all knowledge claims, truth claims, beliefs, institutions, and practices as variably revisable, contingent social constructions whose validity should be judged by their relation to temporal consequences, by their efficacy in furthering democratically defined ideal ends. Thus pragmatism rests on three principle slogans: *voluntarism*--putting a premium on human will, power, and action, *fallibilism*--the notion of an open, risk-ridden future in which every claim is open to revision, and *experimentalism*--calling into question any form of dogmatism or orthodoxy in a critical, self-correcting manner.¹¹⁴ Such transient social practices are then the subject matter for philosophical reflection.¹¹⁵ It is a philosophical perspective consistent with the assumptions of embodied criticism/reader-response theory which will guide the first move of this inquiry--foregrounding the educational subtext--since neither pragmatism nor reader-response theory entirely locates reality or truth in the concrete/text nor entirely in the subjective imagination of the individual/reader but in the social interaction between and among individuals and the concrete. Thus West's slogans of voluntarism, fallibilism, and experimentalism reflect an emphasis

¹¹³Ibid., p. 232.

¹¹⁴West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, pp. 37-43.

¹¹⁵West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 130-31.

on individual agency in the context of contingent subject positions quite similar to that defined by Bogdan's feeling, power and location problems. From a location defined by these problems and inspired by these slogans, I will conceptually critique the portraits of *teacher* as *prophet*, as *technician*, and as *common sense pragmatist* contained in *Beloved* as revisable, contingent social practices which fail to meet the criteria enumerated in Chapter I for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education. I will then draw on those portraits for characteristics from which to construct a new concept *teacher*--the *prophetic pragmatist*--which should prove more effective in realizing that goal.

Prophetic pragmatism's critical focus on the existential realities of human experience yields an inevitable and profound awareness of tragedy--the disease, death, despair that plague human experience as well as the oppression of racism, sexism, homophobia and economic exploitation.¹¹⁶ Its moral estimation of certain aspects of human experience flow from its analysis of their consequences in light of ethical ideals which, though in themselves recognized as contingent, nevertheless serve as navigational aids for cultural critique and ameliorative social progress. For West, these ideals are articulated in the prophetic tradition of Afro-American protestant Christianity: the belief that human beings were created *imago dei*--in the

¹¹⁶West, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 132-33.

image of God--and therefore have the inalienable right to equality and dignity, the belief that the perceived discrepancy between man's divine origins and actual experience is testimony to the dialectical--both dignified and depraved--nature of humanity, and the "kingdom talk" that views history as the effort of fallible human beings to transform actual experience from what is to a what-is-to-be defined by the ideal of human being created in the image of God. These beliefs provide a model of social praxis which confronts the tragic nature of human existence without losing faith in the necessity and possibility of bettering the lot of people.¹¹⁷

Since West's religious heritage is similar to my own, I will use similar ethical ideals regarding human equality and dignity to analyze the consequences of the concepts of *teacher* I will critique as well as the one I will propose--the prophetic pragmatist--*recognizing, as does West, that these ideals too are revisable and contingent and that neither Christianity nor religion in general have any monopoly on ethical ideals worthy of guiding prophetic practices.*¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982, pp. 17-19.

¹¹⁸West, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 132-34. West's religious roots are in the predominately African-American wing of the Baptist church. His grandfather was a minister in this tradition, and he himself is a lay preacher. My own roots lie in the Southern Baptist church. Both denominations are results of a split in the Baptist tradition over the admission of African-Americans to the denomination in the mid-19th century. Thus, though the Southern Baptist tradition was and is still deeply tainted by racist beliefs and practices and thus is much less likely to display those characteristics West credits with providing sustenance for the oppressed, the theology, moral ideals, and religiously-inspired rhetoric of both denominations

They simply represent ethical ideals as they are expressed from a particular cultural location not necessarily superior or inferior to other expressions but potentially equally useful in guiding cultural criticism and ameliorative praxis. In this recognition of the inevitable limitations as well as the potential for insight from one's cultural location--one's positionality--prophetic pragmatism responds to the same insight which leads Bogdan to propose an "embodied" form of reader-response theory: the long history of hegemonic, white, male, Christian discourses imposed on women and people of color under the guise of "objective" truth.¹¹⁹ Prophetic pragmatism eschews such practices.

Finally, prophetic pragmatism recognizes that much of what West calls the tragic dimension of human experience has not only cultural origins, which philosophical pragmatism is particularly suited to analyze, but political and economic origins as well, the analysis of which, West argues, pragmatism is not as

exhibit important similarities. Though I am no longer a member of this denomination-I am now a member of the Episcopal Church, West's articulation of those ideals resonates with my own experiences of spirituality in my childhood and youth.

For a discussion of the history and current status of the Baptist church in the U.S. see Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.

For an alternative expression of a prophetic pragmatism without West's explicit religious orientation see Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1997.

¹¹⁹On this topic see Lorraine Code, op. cit..

well suited to as progressive Marxism.¹²⁰ Thus West's admission that his cultural criticism is based as much in the progressive Marxist philosophy of Antonio Gramsci as any other secular perspective even as it acknowledges the "severe limitations of the Marxist tradition."¹²¹ Though I will not attempt to offer a full-fledged Marxist critique of the portraits of *teacher as prophet, technician and pragmatist* in *Beloved*, I will address their political and economic consequences, as well as those of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher*, modeled on West's analyses of race and class problems in American society.¹²²

A Hybrid Approach: Embodied Reader-Response and Prophetic Pragmatic Critique

The dual, sequenced approach to this inquiry described above is in keeping both with the spirit of Bogdan's "embodied" reader-response theory *and* West's prophetic pragmatism and clearly within a channel of educational inquiry cut by

¹²⁰West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, pp. 60-61, 72-73, 90, 148-151, 194 and *Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991, pp. 94-101.

¹²¹West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 133.

¹²²See West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*; *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America, Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume Two*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993; *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993; and *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Greene (1978), Martin (1985) and Laird (1988).¹²³ It uses theory strategically to critique contingent social practices and construct "a new...conception [of *teacher*] leading to new [contingent] modes of practice...proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than that represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties" and intended to foster ameliorative social change.¹²⁴ It will not offer settled truths about our understanding of the teacher, but, proceeding from an understanding of philosophy as "conversation," will offer a concept of *teacher* as *prophetic pragmatist* to the ongoing conversation on the proper role for teachers in our gendered, multicultural, multi-religious system of public education in America.

¹²³Greene, op. cit.; Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation*, op. cit. and Laird, *Maternal Teaching*, op. cit.

¹²⁴Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 5.

Chapter IV

Alternative Conceptions of *Teacher* in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Thus far, this inquiry has advanced two fundamental propositions. The first proposition asserts that religious diversity, in particular our serious disagreements over the appropriate relationship between religion and public education, is a threat to the existence of the public school as an institution which fosters a democratic culture. The second proposition holds that three of the more influential educational paradigms and their corresponding conceptions of teachers--which I have named the *prophet*, the *technician*, and the *common sense pragmatist*--cannot adequately meet the challenge of religious diversity and, therefore, fail Dewey's challenge to philosophers of education faced with such disagreements to come up with a more inclusive plan of operations.¹ However, after reviewing the evolution of these paradigmatic concepts of *teacher* in Chapter II, it seemed possible that a contemporary branch of pragmatism, Cornel West's (1989) *prophetic pragmatism*, could offer a philosophical framework for a reconception of *teacher as prophetic pragmatist* which might contribute to a more inclusive plan

¹John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York: MacMillan/Collier Books, 1938, p. 5.

of operations vis a vis the relationship between religion and public education.²

Unfortunately, Cornel West has not participated in the pragmatic tradition's engagement with education. Therefore, the implications of *prophetic pragmatism* for education, or for the more specific question of the concept *teacher*, remain unexplored. It is the ambition of this inquiry to contribute to educational thought by exploring the meaning and value of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* for a more inclusive plan of operations capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education. There are, however, no clear conceptual models for the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* in traditional educational inquiry; nor does West attempt any application of his philosophy to educational questions. Therefore I have proposed, following Maxine Greene (1978) and Jane Roland Martin (1985), to look to a source "that the history of educational thought regards as far from standard;" namely, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*.³

In this chapter I will deploy a hybrid approach of literary and philosophical analysis pioneered by Laird (1988).⁴ I will utilize a form of reader-response

²Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

³Maxine Greene, *Landscapes of Learning*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1978; Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Concept of the Educated Woman*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 180; Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, New York: Plume, 1987.

⁴Susan Laird, *Maternal Teaching and Maternal Teachings: Philosophic and Literary Case Studies of Educating*, Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1988.

criticism Deanne Bogdan has named *embodied criticism* to foreground an educational subtext in Morrison's novel which includes portraits of three teacher-characters illustrating the three concepts of *teacher* whose philosophical premises Chapter II explained: the *prophet*, Baby Suggs; the *technician*, Schoolteacher; and the *common sense pragmatist*, Lady Jones.⁵ I will then analyze these conceptual portraits of teachers from the perspective of Cornel West's *prophetic pragmatism*. The objective of this chapter then will be to lay out, within the philosophical framework of *prophetic pragmatism*, a critical dialogue among the three conceptual portraits of teachers in *Beloved* from which this inquiry, in the final chapter, can construct the concept *teacher as prophetic pragmatist* and explore its suitability as a basis for a more inclusive plan of operations capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education.

Teacher Cases in *Beloved*

In my own experience, thinking about teaching and what it means to be a teacher coincided with becoming a teacher. I began my teaching career as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer in a predominately Islamic region of the southern Philippines in the mid-1980's. The university to which I was assigned had been founded only twenty years before to preserve Filipino Muslim culture and to help

⁵Deanne Bogdan, *Re-educating the Imagination: Toward a Poetics, Politics, and Pedagogy of Literary Engagement*, Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1992.

bring the Muslim ethnic groups of the region into the mainstream of Philippine society. My assignment there came less than ten years after a bloody war for independence for Muslim Mindanao and coincided with the last year of the Marcos dictatorship and the first attempts to restore democracy under Corazon Aquino. My first experience of being a teacher, therefore, took place in a milieu of Islamic and communist guerilla movements, military oppression, American neo-colonial interference, and political turmoil that made for an educational environment saturated with issues of religious-ethnic identity and social justice. Though my status as an outsider and a representative of the former colonial regime propping up the Marcos dictatorship rendered my own teaching marginal to the events of the day, my presence, and the relationship I formed with a Filipino teacher (whom I would later marry) deeply involved in those events, gave me a glimpse of ways of being a teacher that were far different from anything I had ever experienced.

In that brief but intense time I came to know teachers who very literally risked their lives, not to mention their jobs, in the service of a vision of social justice informed by Marxist analysis and given direction by ethical ideals deeply influenced by religious faith, two of the three philosophical coordinates of West's *prophetic pragmatism*. In a climate where tragedy was so common and injustice so blatant, the ethical issues seemed clear: teaching which failed to respond to injustice by inculcating either reactionary religiosity or status quo careerism was a moral failure. Though the return to a quasi-democratic government dominated by

traditional elites, the world-wide collapse of communism, and the blunting of the movement for Muslim independence left many of these teachers dispirited and disillusioned, their example constituted for me a compelling model of what it might mean to be a teacher, a model I find reflected in *Beloved* in the character of Baby Suggs.

Therefore, by analyzing the character of Baby Suggs as a case of the *prophetic pragmatic* teacher, I hope to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of this particular mode of being a teacher for a religiously and culturally diverse system of public education which confronts the reality of tragedy in children's lives. I will then use these insights to help construct a concept of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* as a mode of being a teacher which responds to social injustice while negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education.

Baby Suggs: A Clear Case of the Prophetic Pragmatic Teacher

Baby Suggs, described by one reviewer of *Beloved* as "the most memorable minor character since one of Faulkner's," is not a teacher in the formal sense.⁶ She is rather a teacher in a more ancient and traditional sense: she is the matriarch, the storyteller, the priestess, the tribal elder who, through her stories, teaches the people who they are and, through her prophetic exhortations, teaches them who

⁶Roger Sale, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" in Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Views*, pp. 165-170.

they should be. She represents a clear and inspiring case of teacher as *prophetic pragmatist*. A better understanding of her case, therefore, will be useful in delineating the relevance of this concept as a mechanism for negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education in a context of man-made injustice and existential tragedy.

Like most of the other slaves in this novel, Baby Suggs suffers from that condition described by Orlando Patterson as "natal alienation; that is, the loss of ties at birth to both ascending and descending generations."⁷ "Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, bought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized" (23). The past, therefore, is "unspeakable" (58). Before coming to Sweet Home she worked the rice and tobacco fields of the Carolinas where she was beaten so severely she broke her hip. She bears eight children by six different fathers, only the last of whom, Halle, she is allowed to keep and raise (139). As a consequence of these experiences she learns, as Paul D says, to "love small," to avoid the powerful attachments to children and other loved ones or to trust whites, whether benevolent or cruel, in order to survive the inevitable severing of those ties and betrayal of that trust. She is finally, however, allowed to keep her last child after

⁷Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988, p. 43.

she is bought by Garner to work as a house slave on the Sweet Home plantation. It is this last son, who is allowed to work away from the plantation for hire, who Garner allows to buy his mother's freedom when, she believes, "it didn't mean a thing" (23). "What does a sixty-odd-year-old slavewoman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for?" (141).

However, when Baby Suggs is carried across the Ohio to Cincinnati and freedom her life is transformed. "And when she stepped foot on free ground she could not believe that Halle knew what she didn't; that Halle, who had never drawn one free breath, knew that there was nothing like in this world" (141). She discovers herself, and owns herself for the first time: "These hands belong to me. These *my* hands" (141). She rejects her slave name, renames herself "Baby Suggs," and resolves that, "because slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,' she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart--which she put to work at once" (87)... "giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone" (137). In short, the possibilities of freedom revise the lessons of slavery; it calls her to love *large* rather than small.

Baby Suggs' heart becomes the heart of the black community in Cincinnati. Her home at 124 Bluestone Road becomes a literal community center, a way station where messages are sent and received, where people met and argued the

Fugitive Slave Bill and other political issues, where strangers rested, and where "not one but two pots simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long" (65, 87). It is, in effect, a school-house where former slaves are initiated into, and through which they sustain, community in freedom. While her house becomes the civic, political, and educational center of black Cincinnati, "Baby Suggs, holy" herself becomes the cultural and spiritual center of the community:

Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. In winter and fall she carried it to AME's and Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed. Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence (87).

In Spring and Summer Baby Suggs leads "services" in a clearing in the forest, services which distill and mix Christian teaching and African cultural practices and belie Anna Julia Cooper's criticism of the "rank exuberance and often ludicrous demonstrativeness" of this "semi-civilized religionism" as they deploy and compellingly revise Christ's great commandment.⁸ Every Saturday afternoon Baby Suggs leads "every black man, woman and child who could make it through" to

⁸Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 34.

Christ's great commandment: "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...and Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 23: 37-40, *King James Bible*. Baby Suggs revises this commandment with her commandment to "love yourself" as both a prerequisite for Christ's commandment and a necessary response to whites' failure to include blacks in the second part of Christ's commandment.

the "Clearing" where she gathers the people around her and leads them in a cathartic and profoundly educative ritual of laughter, song, and dance.

After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down. The she shouted, "Let the children come!" and they ran from the trees toward her.

"Let your mothers hear you laugh," she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.

Then "Let the grown men come," she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.

"Let your wives and your children see you dance," she told them, and groundlife shuddered under their feet.

Finally she called the women to her. "Cry," she told them. "For the living and the dead. Just cry." And without covering their eyes the women let loose.

It started out that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart (87-88).

The "lesson" Baby Suggs conveys through this cathartic ritual is the fundamental relationship between feeling and community. It is feeling, shared emotional experiences and ties that forge and sustain community. And it is only in community and through community that the kind of learning which enables survival--the focus of Baby Suggs' teaching--can take place. Fixation on individual feelings and experiences, such as Sethe's obsessive love of her dead daughter and her belief that she needed nothing else, threaten the existence not only of the community but the individual as well. The shared feeling of community, therefore, is the fundamental prerequisite of Baby Suggs' teaching.

In the silence that follows this ritual of laughter, dance and tears, Baby Suggs offers a sermon that does not accuse them of sin and threaten them with damnation but rather teaches them "that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine" (88). She calls on them to recognize and to claim their responsibility as a community to construct their reality and their knowledge of it. Reality, knowledge of it, and grace--the quality of one's experience in that reality--are social constructs born of the individual's capacity for self love and the nature of his interaction with others and with nature.

'Here,' she said, 'in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you!* And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. what you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver-love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your live-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize' (88-89).

Baby Suggs' lesson is more than an exhortation to a greater sense of

community. Whereas the ritual which opens her service suggests an emphasis on community as shared feeling and experience, her sermon establishes the importance of self love as a fundamental prerequisite to the capacity to love others and thereby forge and sustain community. In this she asserts a claim which Cornel West says is fundamental to Afro-American protestant Christianity: the irreducibility of the individual within participatory communities governed by the principle of mutual accountability.⁹

The message of Baby Suggs' sermon extends beyond the capacity of language to convey; therefore, she draws directly upon African cultural practices which survived the middle passage and the years of slavery. She deploys the aesthetic--in this instance dance and song--as a means of communicating spiritual truths which provide hope and enable survival in the face of the reification of human beings of African descent and the "lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and lovelessness."¹⁰ The object of her command to love is clear in the verbal portion of her sermon: "This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved"(89). In her dance, however,

⁹Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982, p. 17-19.

¹⁰Though Cornel West used these words to describe the experience of contemporary African-Americans, I think his words are also an accurate description of the slave life depicted in *Beloved*. Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, p. 14.

which is clearly a continuation of her lesson, the object of the love she commands is left deliberately and radically open. The dance becomes a symbol, a variable, to which meaning may be attached by any individual in her audience but which is not confined to that meaning. It becomes therefore an imperative: Love! Love large. This is the only response to evil.

"Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh" (89).

What Baby Suggs' teaches, however, is a response to evil, not a guarantee against it. For in spite of Baby Suggs' powerful message, she is unable to detect and thus unable to resist when the "four horsemen of the apocalypse"—Schoolteacher, his nephew, the sheriff, and the slave catcher--arrive to return Sethe and her children to slavery (149). When Sethe responds to their arrival by putting her children where they would be "safe"--attempting to kill all of them--Baby Suggs is unable to respond. She can neither condemn Sethe's alternative response to the existence of evil; nor can she condone it. She is puzzled by God and ashamed of Him for what happened in her backyard: "Her authority in the pulpit, her dance in the Clearing, her powerful Call (she didn't deliver sermons or preach--insisting she was too ignorant for that--she *called* and the hearing heard)--all that had been mocked and rebuked by the bloodspill in her backyard" (177). She gives up the Call and believes herself a lie and what she taught a lie (89). She

has lost her faith and takes to her bed to "fix on something harmless in this world," color (179). In short, she turns to another response to the existence of evil different from her initial command to love and Sethe's embrace of death. She chooses to focus on the trivial and thus ignore the response which our knowledge of evil's existence requires.

"You getting in the bed to think about yellow?"

"I likes yellow."

"Then what? When you get through with blue and yellow, then what?"

"Can't say. It's something that can't be planned."

"You blaming God," he said. "That's what you doing."

"No, Stamp. I ain't."

"You saying the whitefolks won? That what you saying?"

"I'm saying they came in my yard."

"You saying nothing counts."

"I'm saying they came in my yard."

"Sethe's the one did it."

"And if she didn't?"

"You saying God give up? Nothing left for us but pour out our own blood?"

"I'm saying they came in my yard."

"You punishing Him, ain't you."

"Not like He punish me."

"You can't do that, Baby. It ain't right."

"Was a time I knew what that was."

"You still know."

"What I know is what I see: a nigger woman hauling shoes" (179).

The bloodspill in her backyard shakes Baby Suggs' philosophy to its very foundations. It causes a radical shift in the epistemic assumptions on which her teaching was based. The philosophical foundation of her teaching before the "bloodspill" was a sense of good, of justice--"was a time I knew what that was"--governed by an ethic of love. Experience, however, has utterly failed to confirm the efficacy of that ethic: "They came in my yard." Now she knows what she sees: "a nigger woman hauling shoes." Her statement suggests a surrender to a more "realistic" philosophical orientation centered on knowledge claims which can be verified by observation. In this philosophical orientation feeling, community, love, grace are irrelevant. Faith, therefore, is irrelevant, but disappointment is no longer a threat.

Baby Suggs does not surrender belief in God's existence; she knew the "things behind things" and her belief in the reality of a spiritual dimension to the world she inhabits is matter of fact (37). What she loses rather is her faith. The fact that her message of love as resistance to evil is powerless to prevent evil from coming in her yard undermines her belief *that* God's words describing how one

should live in the face of tragedy are true and her *trust* that He takes some active interest on the side of good and against evil.¹¹ Her understanding of what is good--"knowing when to stop" (86)--challenges the goodness of the God who, in allowing the four horsemen in her yard, did not know when to stop, and suggests that Sethe's response--death--is the only realistic response to the tragic. And without her faith she is just what she *sees*--"a nigger woman hauling shoes"(179). Like the teachers I knew in the Philippines who lost faith and hope when the tool with which they hoped to transform reality--Marxism--collapsed, Baby Suggs is disillusioned by the failure of love to protect against evil. Without her faith in the power of love, she is simply the object of observation which Schoolteacher's epistemology always said she was.

Baby Suggs goes to bed and contemplates color until she dies. In her doubt and despair she considers herself a failure. And most critics who have written on *Beloved* and Baby Suggs suggest that hers is a beautiful, noble failure to find the formula for survival in the face of overwhelming oppression and tragedy.¹²

¹¹According to reformed epistemology these are the two basic elements of faith. Dewey J. Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason From Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 38-40.

¹²See, for instance, Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991 p. 175; Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin, *A World of Difference: An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994 p. 126; and Denise Heinze, *The Dilemma of "Double -Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels*,

However, such a reading of Baby Suggs and her teaching fails to note that her death is not the end of her teaching or her intervention in the lives of Sethe and Denver. At the most pivotal point of the novel Denver realizes that her mother and Beloved are locked in a relationship of consuming love, recrimination, and reproach that threatens to destroy them all. She stands on the porch of the house at 124 Bluestone Road, "ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch" (243), trying to muster the strength to leave the house--something she has not done in years--in order to seek help.

Out there where small things scratched and sometimes touched. Where words could be spoken that would close your ears shut. Where, if you were alone, feeling could overtake you and stick to you like a shadow. Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again...What was more--much more--out there were whitepeople, and how could you tell about them? (243-44)

At this pivotal moment, as Denver contemplates the inevitable tragedies that await her or anyone else who ventures out into life, Baby Suggs speaks to her.

Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn't leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked--and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. "You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my."

"But you said there was no defense."

"There ain't."

Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993, p. 113.

"Then what do I do?"

"Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on."(244)

For a novel in which the supernatural is treated in such a matter-of-fact manner and the title character is a dead child come back to life, it cannot be a misreading of this passage to see it as the actual counsel of Baby Suggs from beyond the grave.¹³ Even if these lines are read simply as Denver's recollection of Baby Suggs' teaching, they nevertheless constitute a profound response to the problem of evil which Baby Suggs learned from her experience of the "four horsemen" coming "in her yard" which she is now teaching Denver: There is no defense against or final victory over evil. There is only love as perpetual resistance: "Know it and go on out the yard." This is the heart of Baby Suggs teaching, teaching which rests on an undogmatic faith in the power and necessity of love, of loving large, as a necessary but not necessarily sufficient condition of survival in a world marred by evil.

Baby Suggs as Teacher: Aims, Achievements, Ends

As a teacher, Baby Suggs is distinctive in terms of her audience, aims, methods, and achievements. In this distinctiveness she represents a clear and particularly inspiring example of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher*. Thus she

¹³In an interview Morrison uses the term "enchantment" to describe "this other knowledge or perception," "the way the world was for me and most black people I knew." Quoted in Jan Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996, p. 81.

embodies a conception of *teacher* quite different from those described as the *technician* and the *common sense pragmatist* in Chapter II, a conception which challenges conventional modes of being a teacher through its unapologetic placement of an ethic of love at the heart of educational aims and practice and its frank recognition of the relevance of spiritual healing and wholeness to existential survival. While Baby Suggs' embodiment of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* is not without its shortcomings, particularly when translated to the context of formal education in a diverse society, it nevertheless exposes the disastrous inadequacies of more conventional modes of being *teacher* and highlights inspiring possibilities for a reconception of *teacher* for a religiously and culturally diverse society marred by social injustice.

One of these areas of inadequacy-possibility exposed through Baby Suggs' embodiment of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* concerns the parameters of the teacher's audience. Though Denver and Sethe are the most obvious of Baby Suggs' students in the context of the novel, her actual "students" consist of all the black men, women, and children of Cincinnati--rather than children only or those over whom the teacher seeks power--and by implication all those who cope with a life of "horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and lovelessness."¹⁴ Like the prophets, the audience for her teaching is the community as a whole rather than

¹⁴West, *Race Matters*, p. 14.

any single segment of that community. Her great sermon-lesson in the Clearing (87-89) includes grown men, women, and children who each in turn participate in the activities to which the others are called: "It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up" (88). Even where Baby Suggs is addressing particular segments of the community, such as when she preaches at the various churches, the message of her teaching is consistent: the centrality of an ethic of love to the spiritual-existential survival of individuals and the community.

The audience for Baby Suggs' teaching is a consequence of her educational aims and reveals the inadequacies of the more conventional concepts of *teacher as technician* and *common sense pragmatist*. For unlike the *technician* and *common sense pragmatist*, Baby Suggs does not seek to bring her "students" into conformity with a methodological ideal or the conventions of the dominant element of the community; rather, she strives to bring her "students" into conformity with an *ethical* ideal: love. Thus, where the *technician* postulates knowledge as an ideal end and ignorance as its antithesis, and the *common sense pragmatist* postulates conformity as an ideal end with non-conformity as its antithesis, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* postulates an ethic of love as the ideal end of teaching and injustice as the antithesis of that ideal. And from this fundamental postulate follow Baby Suggs' simple and clear "instructional" objectives: to forge a sense of identity and relatedness among a people suffering

from "natal alienation," to nurture the capacity for self love and, therefore, the capacity to love others and, through them, God, and to marshal the spiritual resources which will enable individual human beings to confront, resist, and survive both natural and man-made tragedy.

The achievement of these objectives is illustrated in the learning that happens both in the community and in Denver. And the core of this learning is the fact that love is an act of *will*: "*You* got to love it, *you*!" Baby Suggs says to her pupils in her Clearing sermon (88). It is not merely an emotion or feeling by which one is possessed, as both Beloved and Sethe attempt to possess one another. It is reduced to this when it exists in isolation from community. Love becomes a consuming force that threatens to destroy its object as the all-consuming love of Sethe and Beloved threatens to do in their isolation at 124 Bluestone Road. Love, therefore, must exist within the context of democratic community, of mutual accountability and responsibility.

This relationship between love and community is embodied in Baby Suggs. When the community withdraws from her in resentment of her generosity and Sethe's terrible act, Baby Suggs begins to die and the community that existed around her begins to collapse: love and community enable one another. Without the one, the other cannot exist, leaving all vulnerable to evil. Baby Suggs learns this fact only after her death, and teaches it to Denver in that moment when Denver stands on the porch attempting to muster the courage to step into the

world of community, which she has come to fear, in order to save her mother.

"Know it, and go on out the yard," she tells Denver from beyond the grave (244), know that while love-in-community is no defense against evil, it is our only means of surviving it for it enables and sustains our perpetual resistance. Baby Suggs' teaching, therefore, can be distilled to these three truths: love is an act of will, love can only exist in community, and love-in-community enables survival of the tragic.

Baby Suggs as Teacher: Methods, Tasks, Means

To achieve these ends and bring about this learning Baby Suggs deploys three distinct yet interrelated means: narrative, art, and *poiēsis*.¹⁵ Baby Suggs is a storyteller. The stories she tells Denver and Sethe, which Sethe in turn tells again to Denver and Beloved, are the primary means through which both of Baby Suggs' granddaughters attempt to forge their identities. Beloved hungers for these stories and implores Sethe to tell them again and again, as if the stories themselves are capable of giving her rather tenuous corporeal existence some permanence. Denver too participates in the storytelling, passing on and embellishing the stories passed on to her by Sethe and Baby Suggs, creating a coherent past in order to preserve the present and the possibility of a future. "She told me all my daddy's things," Denver says. "She told me my things too" (209). And Baby Suggs' words on the

¹⁵My understanding and discussion of *poiēsis* is largely based on Jim Garrison's use of the term in *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1997, pp. 76-88.

porch--"You mean I never told you about Carolina? About your daddy?"(244)--have the air of a teacher gently reminding a student of a lesson she has already been taught. Baby Suggs' use of narrative constitutes an act of creative imagination, a dialogue between historical events and present need that constructs a coherent epistemology that enables her "students" to attain the overarching goal of her instruction. Her narratives, however, are not divorced from historical reality, nor are they enslaved to it. They are a creative reading of historical reality in light of contemporary need designed to achieve a particular end: survival in the face of natural and man-made tragedy.

Narrative alone, however, is inadequate. Where words fail, Baby Suggs uses art--primarily dance and song--to convey lessons that can be conveyed in no other way. "Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music" (89). The arts Baby Suggs deploys are, significantly, art forms which allow for both individual and communal expression. The individual participates in the artistic expression of the community in a way that does not compromise or diminish the artistic expression of the individual even as the individual contributes to the construction of something larger than himself. In this way Baby Suggs' aesthetic method preserves the sanctity of the individual while emphasizing another aim of her "instruction:" the creation and sustenance of community. The success of her teaching is in the restoration and maintenance of

community, in Denver's ability to step off the porch and save Sethe by initiating the process of her reintegration into the community, the only context in which she can survive. When she believes she has failed in her teaching and takes to her bed to contemplate color, she fixes on the patches of color in a quilt, traditionally a form of communal art, as if this small tangible product of her teaching goals is a means of maintaining her sanity until death closes her struggle.

Baby Suggs' preaching, the prophetic voice that "speaks the truth to the health of the community," constitutes another teaching method which directly responds to the existential questions about how one should live in the face of the tragic.¹⁶ Her preaching, and the very model of her being, constitutes a form of *poiēsis*, a creative calling-into-existence of that which did not exist before.¹⁷ This power of the "call" is integral to her character: "she didn't deliver sermons or preach--insisting that she was too ignorant for that--she *called* and the hearing heard"(177). When she surrenders to the tragedy in her life and abandons her sermons in the Clearing, Stamp Paid urges her to return: "Can't nobody Call like

¹⁶In this aspect Baby Suggs mirrors Toni Morrison's objectives and methods. "Morrison draws from the past and from tribal identity to address contemporary threats to the community she seeks to preserve. To have such an imagination...allies her with those who seek the role of prophet: One who speaks the truth to the health of the community." Loretta Ann McGrann, *Toni Morrison and the American Sermonic Tradition*, Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995, p. 24.

¹⁷Garrison, p. 76.

you. You have to be there"(178). What Baby Suggs calls into existence in her sermon in the Clearing is self love and self worth, community, the existential armor that enables survival. She is called to her task by that love and calls it into existence in the lives of others. "The Word had been given to her and she had to speak it. Had to" (178). Baby Suggs' teaching is centered upon an ethical rather than an epistemological or social ideal, an ideal that calls her to "teach" and which she calls into existence through her teaching. That ethical ideal is love, not as mere sentiment or passion or individual desire, but as an act of will upon which community is founded and survival made possible.

Baby Suggs' Relations with "Students"

Baby Suggs' purposes and methods are enacted from within a distinctive relationship with her "students." She is not a leader in any political, ideological, or economic sense. She is "uncalled, unrobed, unanointed" and accepted no "title of honor before her name," though she accepted a "small caress" after it--holy (87). Her authority flows from and is vested in that "small caress" by which the community names her critical role as a link between them and the numinous, between them and a non-rational, non-cognitive, *felt* sense of a transcendent good which they name "holy."¹⁸ From her location at the "heart" of the community

¹⁸Thus "holy" is part of Baby Suggs' name. It is also, I contend, a characteristic of her teaching. For a discussion of the meaning of the concept see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

rather than its "head," Baby Suggs beckons to her pupils and points to this good, this love, which both exists, potentially, within their experience yet transcends it as well, thus providing an ethical orientation which may enable their survival. She does not attempt to capture or define the holy in the schema of words or existing mythic conventions--the conventions of the various religious denominations are equally suitable for her message, as is the more pagan ritual of the Clearing--rather, she *dances* it, literally and figuratively, in the manner of a honey bee scout--one of the workers, not a queen--who dances the directions and distance to a source for the pollen from which the community *creates* the means of its own survival. Thus a non-schematized sense of the holy sits at the center of Baby Suggs' teaching and at the center of her community, a sense of the holy which is not confined by but can be accessed through the myths of "Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds"(87), the quasi-pagan sermons and rituals of the Clearing, or the twisted-hip dance of Baby Suggs, holy.

Baby Suggs: Cultural and Philosophical Antecedents

Baby Suggs' cultural genealogy is, obviously enough, African-American. However, her character also exhibits the seminal influences of her African cultural heritage and Christian narrative influences. She enacts a number of traditional roles characteristic of West African cultures. She is the archetypal leader of the tribe or clan, the ritual priestess blending aesthetic practices such as dance and music with the mythic function of storytelling to enact rituals which make individual behavior

meaningful within the context of shared beliefs.¹⁹ She is also the folk healer, treating not only physical wounds--as when she treats Sethe's torn back and feet--but also the psychic wounds of her people.²⁰ Her repeated advice to Sethe as she massaged her daughter-in-law's shoulders constitutes a form of psychological healing: "Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of em down. Down by the riverside. Sword and shield. Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down. Sword and shield" (86). Her beliefs also exhibit characteristics consistent with certain West African beliefs, such as the conception of time as cyclical, her matter-of-fact acceptance of the idea that life is not the end of being, and her apparent use of "core-clichés"--"You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? Your daddy? (244)--which she repeats and elaborates upon in order to convey cultural values, another characteristic of African oral folk traditions.²¹ Baby Suggs is her community's connection to the ancient African myths; she is a "conjurer who is magic and prescient but also practical."²²

¹⁹Harris, p. 174 and Harding and Martin, p. 111.

²⁰Philip Page, *Dangerous Freedoms: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995, p. 147.

²¹Susan Bowers, "Beloved and the New Apocalypse" in David L. Middleton, ed., *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, New York: Garland, 1997, p. 212; Page, p. 143 and Harris, p. 154.

²²Barbara Hill Rigney, *The Voices of Toni Morrison*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991, p. 68. Baby Suggs' knowledge of the "things behind things"(37), and her enactment of myth in order to render experience meaningful is a quality Owen Barfield has named "original participation," a characteristic, he

The African roots of Baby Suggs' participatory ontology can be seen in the parallels between *Beloved* and Chinua Achebe's (1959) novel *Things Fall Apart*.²³ Achebe's novel, like Morrison's, portrays a people struggling for survival in the face of oppression by deploying myth and ritual in a communal system of belief that holds them together as a society. However, both novelists suggest that simply holding on to the old myths does not enable survival; the characters who attempt to do this--Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Sixo in *Beloved*--are destroyed. It is, rather, the individuals like Baby Suggs and Achebe's Akunna who are capable of adapting and re-creating myth in a jazz-like improvisation on cultural themes who hold out any hope in either novel of keeping or putting things back together and

claims, of pre-modern cultures. Barfield claims that modern physics teaches us that the phenomena of human perceptions are the products of "figuration," a mental activity that forms sensory data into the appearances of ordinary physical reality. Thus human consciousness plays an active, creative role in shaping the fundamental particles of matter into the phenomena we perceive; the mind "participates" reality. Barfield argues that "primal" peoples recognized the participated nature of reality in their understanding that "there stands behind the phenomena, and on the other side of them from me, a represented which is of the same nature as me." What we might today refer to as totemism or pantheism is really "original participation," a belief that the objects of the physical world are representations mutually constructed by the observer and something or one behind the thing observed. This is Baby Suggs' ontological orientation, an orientation which resembles in some ways a spiritualized manifestation of philosophical pragmatism. See Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965, pp. 24, 42.

²³ In a comment on her reading of African writers, Morrison has stated that "Achebe was a real education for me. In Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and J.A. Appiah, *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, New York: Amistad, 1993, p. 416.

insuring the survival of their societies and the individuals who comprise them. Thus Baby Suggs' mythic pragmatism has obvious African roots even as it has relevance for any people who live with the tragic inevitabilities of cultural change.

In addition to her African genealogical heritage, Baby Suggs' character also draws on Christian narrative, namely, the image and behavior of Christ.²⁴ Baby Suggs' unordained, untrained but "called" figure wandering and preaching from pulpit to pulpit to Clearing and gathering the faithful around her is reminiscent of Christ.²⁵ Her "gospel" of love, a clear revision of Christ's great commandment, and her counsel to "lay it down, sword and shield" are also powerful echoes of the gospel of Christ. The imagery of Baby Suggs in *Beloved* is also frequently reminiscent of imagery associated with Christ. For instance, her careful and gentle bathing of Sethe, particularly her horribly disfigured feet (93), mirrors Christ's washing of the feet of his disciples and the woman who washed his feet with her tears and is reminiscent of the numerous stories of Christ's "cleansing" and "healing" powers.²⁶ One of the most striking Christ-like actions of Baby Suggs is

²⁴A number of critics have noted Baby Suggs' function as a Christ-figure in *Beloved*. See, for instance, Bowers, p. 220 and Ann-Janine Morey, "Margaret Attwood and Toni Morrison: Reflections on Postmodernism and the Study of Religion and Literature" in David L. Middleton, ed., *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1997, p. 252.

²⁵See Matthew 4: 23, *King James Bible*.

²⁶See John 13: 5-12, *King James Bible*. See also Luke 7:38 and 16:20-24 and John 11: 1-45.

the celebration she devises for Sethe's and her children's arrival at 124 Bluestone Road. From Stamp's two buckets of blackberries grows a feast for ninety people.

Now to take two buckets of blackberries and make ten,
maybe twelve, pies; to have turkey enough for the whole town
pretty near, new peas in September, fresh cream but no cow, ice
and sugar, batter bread, bread pudding, raised bread, shortbread-
it made them mad. Loaves and Fishes were His powers...(137).

Baby Suggs' miraculous multiplication of two buckets of blackberries into a feast for ninety is a clear reference to Christ's feeding of the multitude with "five loaves and two fishes" and the Pharisees' resentment of him.²⁷ Baby Suggs' celebration also suggests communion, which is the ritual commemoration of Christ's last supper at Passover, the Jewish celebration of their delivery out of slavery in Egypt.²⁸ And, significantly, Christ is betrayed after the last supper. The purple juice of the blackberries and the various breads enumerated suggest the bread and wine of communion, the ritual by which the people come together and reaffirm their identity as a community. Clearly, as at least one critic has suggested, to read Morrison completely and correctly one must read her with a sensitivity to the biblical contexts of her narratives.²⁹

The fact that these two cultural streams--the African and the Christian--

²⁷Matthew 14:14-21 and Mark 6:35, Ibid.

²⁸Matthew 26: 17 and Exodus 12:14, Ibid.

²⁹McGrann, p. 26.

merge in Baby Suggs places her squarely in the tradition of Afro-American protestant Christianity as an archetypal example of the Afro-American preacher.³⁰ The clear call and response patterns of her Clearing sermon are characteristic of the Afro-American oral tradition in both vocal music and preaching.³¹ In a sense, then, Baby Suggs is a historical character because she exhibits the mixture of African and Christian cultural elements that constitute major influences in Afro-American culture. She is a creation of Morrison's jazz-like improvisation on and revision of Afro-American history and myth, her "Bahktinian heteroglossia," which devises new myths that can sustain community and enable individual survival.³² She embodies the jazz-like qualities of Cornel West's freedom fighter, "fluid and flexible and protean and open to a variety of different sources and perspectives" as she "both constitute[s] a usable past, and project[s] a future" through her use of narrative and poiēsis.³³

Baby Suggs as Prophetic Pragmatist

Like West's prophetic pragmatic freedom fighter and Gramsci's organic

³⁰Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982, pp. 101-108 and Peach, p. 98.

³¹Harris, p. 173 and Mobley, p. 193.

³²Page, pp. 143, 153.

³³Cornel West, *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race, Class and Power in America, Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Vol. II*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993, p. 242.

intellectual, Baby Suggs draws upon the best of the knowledge available to her to mount a devastating and relentless critique of the political and economic forces that oppress her people.³⁴ Her sermon in the Clearing constitutes a powerful critique of the racist domination and economic exploitation of African-Americans by whites (88). And she refuses Sethe's argument that some whites are not so bad:

"They got me out of jail," Sethe once told Baby Suggs.

"They also put you in it," she answered.

"They drove you 'cross the river."

"On my son's back."

"They gave you this house."

"Nobody *gave* me nothing."

"I got a job from them."

"He got a cook from them, girl."

"Oh, some of them do all right by us."

"And every time it's a surprise, ain't it?"

"You didn't used to talk this way."

"Don't box with me. There's more of us they drowned than there is all of them ever lived from the start of time. Lay down your sword. This ain't a battle; it's a rout" (244).

³⁴On West's debt to Gramsci see Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 231-235.

While this conversation can be read as a blanket condemnation of all whites, I believe it can also be read as an implicit recognition that the inequalities in political and economic power between blacks and whites perpetuate the oppression of African-Americans. Even those who "do all right by us"--the abolitionist Bodwins or the benevolent slave-master Gardner--still maintain the inequality on which their power is based. As a social critic, Baby Suggs is not fooled by those members of the "oppressor class" who "proclaim devotion to the cause of liberation yet [are] unable to enter into *communion* with the people."³⁵

Baby Suggs is literally and figuratively in communion with the people. She does not use her authority to seek prestige or adulation from people; she refuses any "title of honor before her name" and is "accustomed to the knowledge that nobody prayed for her" (87, 138). She does not, like Schoolteacher, seek power. Nor does she deploy her criticism from the intellectualized margins of her community, claiming leadership on the basis of her superior knowledge. She claimed "she was too ignorant for that" (177). Rather, she deploys her social, economic, and ethical critique from the heart of the community as a member of that community. She articulates the critique that emanates from the center of her culture. And so her home at 124 Bluestone Road becomes a center of economic and political resistance where messages are passed, fugitives are hidden, and the

³⁵Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 1990 p. 47.

community is sustained in its struggle to survive in the face of racist oppression and economic exploitation.

Baby Suggs' social criticism, like West's prophetic pragmatism, is rooted in a conception of what it means to be a human being. Her critique of whites boils down to a statement of hers that Denver recollects as she musters the courage to leave the front porch and seek help for herself and Sethe: "...even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry from what real human beings did" (244). Real human beings live together in a community governed by a mutual accountability that is love: Stamp's reminder to Paul D that he would be welcome to stay at any black person's house in Cincinnati and the coming together of the local women to rescue Sethe are evidence of this ethic (230, 256-59). Though at least one critic has noted Baby Suggs' distance from the traditional Christian world, I believe her conception of what it means to be human and of the proper relationship of individuals in community are identical to those West describes as being characteristic of Afro-American protestant Christianity.³⁶ This *imago dei* conception of human nature requires the fundamental equality of all who are made in God's image while the Christian dialectic of human nature--made in the image of the divine, yet fallen--and history--the inevitable failure of finite human beings to transform what is into what-ought-to-be--yields the principle of self-realization in

³⁶Harris, p. 173.

community and requires the democratic control of social institutions that regulate people's lives as they act out their history.³⁷ These conceptions yield, according to West, moral norms regarding individuality and democracy, norms consistent with Baby Suggs' and her community's values regarding the relationship between individuals and between the individual and society and embodied in her use of artistic expression as an educational method. Individuals are morally accountable for one another: this is the essence of Stamp's apology to Paul D. The individual is responsible to the community: this is the ethical value Sethe violates, not by killing Beloved, but by appearing to not need the community. And the community is responsible to the individual: this is what the women who come to Sethe's rescue finally realize after years of ostracizing her.

Baby Suggs' relentless ethical critique of "whitepeople" is based on these moral standards. Though she clearly struggles to adhere to them, and through her example teach others to adhere to them, neither she nor the individual members of the community fully live up to them. They are unattainable and do not guarantee any real protection against the tragic in human experience. They constitute, however, a model of social praxis which candidly confronts the tragic nature of human existence without losing faith in the necessity and possibility of social,

³⁷West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 16-19.

cultural, and existential amelioration.³⁸

The character of Baby Suggs constitutes, I believe, a clear case of a *prophetic pragmatic teacher* and an alternative concept of *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education. The model of *teacher* which she embodies meets the criteria identified in Chapter I as necessary and sufficient--though not necessarily exhaustive--for such a reconception. Baby Suggs' teaching is centered in a *love ethic* which encompasses the individual and the community but which also transcends both in a *moral-ethical ideal* of the good which becomes, and is named, *holy*. It is this moral-ethical ideal, this sense of the holy at the heart of her teaching which serves as the foundation of Baby Suggs' unrelenting critique of social injustice. But this sense of the holy, of the numinous, is given expression in terms that are *meaning-full* for her community: it is expressed equally well in the African traditions enacted in the Clearing or the protestant Christian traditions of the various churches of Cincinnati in which Baby Suggs preaches. Because she recognizes that the various mythic schema with which different groups attempt to clothe the holy are equally serviceable and equally inadequate, these groups recognize in her teaching a message which simultaneously reflects and transcends their own, thus her teaching gains *social authority*. Though Baby Suggs temporarily loses this authority, which

³⁸West, *ibid.*

leads to the fragmentation of the community, the loss as well as the concluding reassertion of that authority in the teaching--if not the person--of Baby Suggs is a clear indication of the necessity of social rather than divine or rational authorization. Baby Suggs is able to achieve this level of meaningfulness and social authorization for her message because she eschews absolutist epistemic and ontological claims. She claims *social authority* and espouses an *anti-"realist" ontology*. Knowledge is a contingent and thoroughly historicized product of a social dialogue between past and present events in the light of an orienting ethical ideal: love, the holy. Thus Baby Suggs' teaching *affirms diversity* in that it refuses to impose any single, authorized, or definitive schema on this orienting ethical ideal. While it recognizes the difference between the holy and "evil," it also recognizes that there are many equally useful, equally inadequate ways of understanding and expressing and aspiring to the holy.

What, then, does Baby Suggs' embodiment of the concept *prophetic pragmatic teacher* mean for contemporary flesh-and-blood teachers teaching children who must learn to survive the tragic and resist injustice in a multicultural, multi-religious educational milieu? How does her model of *teacher* differ from those named the *technician* and the *common sense pragmatist* in Chapter II? How might we translate the insights from Morrison's fictional portrait of a *prophetic pragmatic teacher* into the reality of contemporary public school teachers in contemporary public school classrooms?

Schoolteacher: A Negative Case of the *Prophetic Pragmatic Teacher*

One of the two clearest examples of teachers in *Beloved*, and by far the most disturbing, is the man the slaves of Sweet Home call Schoolteacher. The appellation bestowed on this character is both descriptive of what he does--he does "teach" two boys in his charge as well as the Sweet Home slaves--and his name as well, for the novel never offers any other indication of what this character's actual name might be. He is always referred to as "Schoolteacher." This name--bestowed by an author for whom names have a special significance³⁹--and the character's obvious teacher-like activities throughout the novel suggest a deliberate and profoundly disturbing critique which challenges the popular contemporary conception of *teacher* I have named the *technician*.⁴⁰ Through this character, I believe Morrison exposes the inherent destructiveness of an approach to the role of teacher which reduces the act of teaching to the production and control of economically valuable observable behaviors, an approach which has an ethic of

³⁹The importance of names and naming is stressed in *Beloved* in the character of Stamp Paid, who changed his name from Joshua to reflect his sense of debtlessness after refusing to kill either his wife or his master's son after the son had used Stamp's wife as a concubine for a year (232). Baby Suggs also rejects her slave name-Jenny Whitlow-to take the name of her husband-Suggs-and his pet name for her-baby (142). Thus naming takes on symbolic importance. Elsewhere Morrison has commented on her choice of names to reflect the importance of the Bible in the lives of African Americans. Gates and Appiah, p. 375.

⁴⁰Morrison says Schoolteacher was named to "reflect the scholarly way in which racism was pursued in theology and biology in the Darwinian theory of evolution." In Furman, p. 70.

power, rather than love, as its focal point.

As a former two-year college instructor and dean, this is a concept of teaching and *teacher* which has permeated the particular milieu of my own teaching experience and which I have struggled against to preserve some space for the arts and humanities in the education of rural poor students. I have time and again, in meeting after meeting, listened to colleagues, administrators, and state officials identify the needs of business and industry as the legitimate ends of teaching, espouse the values of business and industry as desirable values for educational institutions, and promote "scientific" methods of instruction as the most efficient, precise, and controllable means of achieving those ends. Underlying these views is, obviously enough, a controlling metaphor: the school as a factory, the teacher as a *technician*, and the student as raw material. Such values and assumptions, however, are not confined to my particular institution; they are the values and assumptions which underlie much of the current criticism of public schools. The moral and ethical consequences of these assumptions were never addressed in the institution I served, and they are rarely, if ever, addressed in the popular discourse on public school reform. But Morrison's characterization of Schoolteacher constitutes a thought experiment in which the moral consequences of the *teacher-technician* concept are drawn out and explored. It is useful, therefore, in helping to define what the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* is and is not.

Morrison's Characterization of Schoolteacher

Schoolteacher comes to Sweet Home with his two nephews after the death of Mr. Garner, the benevolent master of the plantation who had allowed his slaves a degree of freedom and afforded them a level of respect which was apparently rare in Kentucky and resented by his fellow plantation owners. Schoolteacher, the husband of Mrs. Garner's sister-in-law, is invited by Garner's widow to oversee Sweet Home since her ill health, as well as the social conventions of the time, prevent her from running a plantation and its male slaves alone. Schoolteacher arrives in a big hat and spectacles with "a coach box full of paper"(197). He is described as a short, small man who always wore a collar (38). In contrast to Garner, who allowed the Sweet Home men to use guns themselves, Schoolteacher disarms the men and keeps a shotgun constantly at his side (224). He is possessed of an apparently significant degree of "book learning" and characterized as gentle "in a lot of ways" and having "pretty manners." He "knew Jesus by his first name, but out of politeness never used it to his face" (38). He is a Puritanical, hard-driving taskmaster who "ate little, spoke less, and rested not at all." He allows no play (220). He is without emotion, displaying merely a mild sense of regret when forced to acknowledge the "unsuitability" of Sixo and Sethe, the two escaped slaves he recaptures. He is rational, calculating, and sexless. Returning from the capture of the escaped Paul D and Sixo, whom he has just pronounced "unsuitable" and murdered, Schoolteacher is reminded by his fellows that he need

not remain a widower. "My cogitation right now is Sweet Home," he responds (227). Schoolteacher's personality is that of the rational, objective, cultivated man of science and letters engaged in the scientific management of a business.

Schoolteacher's epistemic approach is noted repeatedly by Sethe and Paul D, the two former Sweet Home slaves who narrate much of the novel. His method is reminiscent of that of the modern social scientist: careful observation, precise measurement, interviewing/questioning techniques and careful recording of observations. After Paul D's recapture and Sixo's murder, Schoolteacher returns Paul D to Sweet Home in chains and an iron collar. Then "Schoolteacher looks at him for a long time before he closes the door of the cabin. Carefully he looks" (227). Soon after, before Sethe has an opportunity to make her escape from Sweet Home, she suffers through a brutal attack which permanently scars the psyche of this young mother obsessed with getting her breast milk to her three young children sent ahead on the underground railroad: she is attacked by Schoolteacher's nephews who hold her down and suck the milk from her breasts (16-17). Witnessing the scene drives her husband, Halle, insane. Schoolteacher, however, watches carefully and takes notes (70). Schoolteacher also takes measurements as a way of collecting data on this slaves. "Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth" (191). Then he records the measurements in his notebook. "I thought he was a fool," Sethe says. "And the questions he asked was the biggest foolishness of all" (191). The

questions, however, "tore Sixo up" (38). Schoolteacher apparently asks questions frequently, writing their responses up in his notebook for what, the slaves learn later, is a book about them (37).

Schoolteacher's data gathering is conducted in what the social scientist engaged in research would call an objective fashion, though to the subjects of his research it is anything but objective. He is never portrayed in the novel as showing any emotion. He is apparently never angry, sad, excited, happy. He is always detached, even while witnessing or participating in the brutal treatment of slaves, even when confronted with the horrific scene of Sethe cradling her "crawling already?" baby girl as blood jumps from her brutally torn throat and her two little boys lie apparently dead at her feet. He sees in such instances objectives--the beatings are designed to modify behavior--and economic utility--the loss of "three pickaninnies they had hoped to take back to Kentucky ...and raise...to do the work of Sweet Home...and the woman [who]....had at least ten breeding years left" (49). He is no "participant-observer" in his data gathering techniques: "Schoolteacher didn't take advice from Negroes. The information they offered he called backtalk and developed a variety of corrections (which he recorded in his notebook) to re-educate them" (220). He is, rather, an epitome of the detached, rational, careful observer gathering data and formulating "objective" knowledge "untainted" by any human subjectivities.

Schoolteacher as Teacher: Aims, Achievements, Ends

In addition to his scholarly interests, Schoolteacher is also, as his name suggests, a teacher. He has, however, two separate groups of students--his nephews and the slaves--and two separate though related educational aims. Schoolteacher's is a two-track system of education designed to prepare his students for their predetermined positions in the political-economic status quo via a curriculum centered on the possession of power. Indeed, claiming and exercising power or acquiescing to it seems to be the primary objective of Schoolteacher's instruction. For instance, Schoolteacher is teaching his nephews a way of knowing which dehumanizes others, reducing them to sets of isolatable characteristics that enable and justify the exercise of power over them. His purpose is to teach them how to manage a plantation, to manage slaves by claiming power over them. This is the object of his lecture about beating an animal "beyond the point of education" (149). When the nephew who "nursed" Sethe confronts the scene Stamp Paid names "The Misery"--Sethe's killing of her baby girl and apparent killing of her two little boys--he is shaken and confused.

His uncle had warned him against that kind of confusion, but the warning didn't seem to be taking. What she go and do that for? On account of a beating? Hell, he'd' been beat a million times and he was white. Once it hurt so bad and made him so mad he'd smashed the well bucket...But no beating ever made him...I mean no way he could have...What she go and do that for? (150)

The "confusion" his uncle had warned him of is clearly the danger of

responding to the slaves as human beings. Sethe's terrible response to her recapture touches some lingering sense of a common humanity in the nephew-- "Hell, he'd been beat a million times"--which must be guarded against. To Schoolteacher, the scene, this "datum" of experience, does not challenge the epistemic structure he has constructed to justify his actions--as it does his nephew--but rather confirms it. It is "testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (151). To teach this knowledge to his pupil-nephews requires the fragmentation, reification, and dehumanization of his pupil-slaves. They become sets of human and animal characteristics rather than fellow human beings. They are commodities to be bought and sold, valued and defined by their economic functions: "she (Sethe) had ten good breeding years left" (149). They are defined as and compared to animals: "coons" (151), a "bull" (148), a "foal" whose mother has "gone wild"(149). Schoolteacher's pupil-nephews must learn this language and the "knowledge" it represents in order to claim and exercise power.

Schoolteacher's pupil-slaves must learn that this master-slave relationship is natural, a truth outside their or the master's desires or whims, a fact they should already know. They must learn who is in charge, that "definitions belong to the definer-not the defined" (190). Their lesson compliments the lesson of the pupil-nephews. Indeed, the success of either lesson depends upon the success of the

other in learning what Schoolteacher teaches. The success of Schoolteacher's instruction of his pupil-nephews results in their acquisition of power and their exercise of violence in order to claim it and keep it. The failure of his instruction of his pupil-slaves--or perhaps the inevitable outcome of the "education" he practices--results in resistance: "It (the slaves' plan to escape to the north) is a good plan. It can be done right under the watchful pupils and their teacher" (223). Schoolteacher's instructional methods and educational objectives do violence to both categories of student, teach some students--the nephews--to practice violence against other students--the slaves, and drive the powerless victims of this violence to escape the school that is Sweet Home.

Schoolteacher as Teacher: Methods, Tasks, and Means

Schoolteacher and his nephew-pupils sit and do lessons some mornings until breakfast (223) and then study again in the afternoons (193). In the evening he writes in his notebook while his nephews clean, mend and sharpen tools (223). The rest of the day they are all engaged in the work of the Sweet Home plantation. Schoolteacher's methods would be familiar to any contemporary student or teacher: he lectures and his student-nephews take notes, or he reads and they take notes. The one assignment he is portrayed as giving his nephew-students involves their drawing distinctions between the animal and human characteristics of the slaves, matching them in one-to-one dichotomies, and arranging them in two parallel columns on a sheet of paper (193). He teaches them to observe carefully,

distinguish among and select "relevant" characteristics, and then use those characteristics to define the object of their observations, in this case human slaves.

The incident where the nephews take Sethe's milk as Schoolteacher observes and takes notes suggests--even in Sethe's account, marked as it is by her profound sense of violation and degradation--a field experiment designed, perhaps, to determine Sethe's suitability for "breeding" purposes or nursing the children of other female slaves. He also apparently utilizes a system of positive and negative reinforcement to direct his nephews' behavior. For instance, when Sethe escapes after being brutally beaten (while six months pregnant) by one of the nephews for reporting their "experiment" on her to the invalid Mrs. Garner, Schoolteacher chastises him:

...think-just think-what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. Or Chipper, or Samson. Suppose you beat the hounds past that point thataway. Never again could you trust them in the woods or anywhere else. You'd be feeding them maybe, holding out a piece of rabbit in your hand and the animal would revert--bite your hand clean off. So he punished that nephew by not letting him come on the hunt. Made him stay there, feed stock, feed himself, feed Lillian, tend crops. See how he liked it; see what happened when you overbeat creatures God had given you the responsibility of--the trouble it was and the loss (149-50).

Schoolteacher is described as being "as hard on his pupils as he was on them [the slaves]--except for the corrections"(220). Indeed, the "corrections" constitute one important methodological difference in Schoolteacher's "teaching" of his other pupils, the slaves. That they constitute another group of students is

clear: "Schoolteacher changed me," Paul D. says (72). Sethe says "Schoolteacher was teaching us things we couldn't learn" (191). In some sense his other methods are similar: he speaks/commands and the slaves, rather than writing his words down, are expected to act and remember them. Deviations from expected behavior are "corrected" with physical punishments. Sethe's "impertinence" in telling Mrs. Garner of her violation at the hands of the nephews and Schoolteacher is "corrected" with a severe beating. Though Schoolteacher chastises the nephew for beating her "beyond the point of education" (149), he clearly believes in the possibility of beating *to* the point of education.⁴¹ When Paul D is recaptured after his attempted escape he is locked in a cabin and forced to wear chains and an iron collar with three long spokes, which prevent his lying down to rest or sleep, and later to wear an iron bit in his mouth. Schoolteacher's preferred method for modifying the behavior of Sweet Home's slaves is physical and psychological punishment--in short, torture.

Schoolteacher also employs another common educational technique in his teaching: the Socratic method.⁴² In a scene clearly reminiscent of Plato's "teaching" a slave boy a mathematical formula, Schoolteacher teaches Sixo that "definitions

⁴¹A belief he apparently shares with contemporary advocates of corporal punishment.

⁴²Plato, *Meno*, in B. Jowett, ed., *The Works of Plato*, New York: Tudor Publishing Company, pp. 28-35

belong to the definers, not the defined" (190):

"Did you steal that shoat? You stole that shoat." Schoolteacher was quiet but firm, like he was just going through the motions--not expecting an answer that mattered. Sixo sat there, not even getting up to plead or deny. He just sat there, the streak-of-lean in his hand, the gristle clustered in the tin plate like gemstones--rough, unpolished, but loot nevertheless.

"You stole that shoat, didn't you?"

"No. Sir." said Sixo, but he had the decency to keep his eyes on the meat.

"You telling me you didn't steal it, and I'm looking right at you?"

"No, sir. I didn't steal it."

Schoolteacher smiled. "Did you kill it?"

"Yes, sir. I killed it."

"Did you cook it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then. Did you eat it?"

"Yes, sir. I sure did."

"And you telling me that's not stealing?"

"No, sir. It ain't."

"What is it then?"

"Improving your property, sir."

"What?"

"Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a better chance. Sixo

take and feed the soil, give you more crop. Sixo take and feed Sixo give you more work."

Clever, but schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers--not the defined (190).

Just as in Plato's account of Socrates teaching Meno, the teacher here already knows what it is the student should know. The object of the exercise is to lead the pupil to knowledge of a truth that is objective, independent of either knower, which is natural inasmuch as it is assumed that the pupil is already in possession of it. The knowledge is not revisable. It is not a human construction; it is certainly not negotiated between the teacher and pupil. Morrison's revision of this educational narrative shows that Schoolteacher's real object in this dialogue is not the definition of the concept of theft or of determining Sixo's guilt but rather demonstrating to Sixo who is in charge, who has the power. Her revision raises the disturbing possibility that the real point of the Socratic method is a will to power and the manufacture of a self-enforcing acquiescence to that power on the part of the pupil.

Schoolteacher's Relation to "Students"

An ethic of power lies at the center of Schoolteacher's embodiment of the concept *teacher*, and deployment of power is his primary instructional technique. This ethic and its corresponding technique necessarily establishes a dichotomy between those who have power--Schoolteacher and his nephews--and those who do not--the slaves. This dichotomy is reflected in the subject-object relationship

between Schoolteacher and his pupils. Schoolteacher is the "head," the "head-master" of the educational community of Sweet Home rather than its "heart." He alone engages in "cogitation" on the needs and future of Sweet Home and determines the means necessary to meet those needs. Unlike Baby Suggs, or even the former master, Mr. Garner, he does not invite his students--nephews or slaves--to participate in or contribute to such "cogitation." Sweet Home is not a community; it is a factory, and Schoolteacher is the boss. As such, he is portrayed at the head of the "classroom" or standing over his students when he instructs his nephews. With his pupil-slaves he is constantly on the fringes, watching, taking notes, and controlling. He does not *call*, he *commands*. Schoolteacher's relationship with his students constitutes a relation between subject and objects, both those who will one day be subjects in their own right and those who can never be anything more than objects. Thus Morrison's characterization of Schoolteacher suggests the inevitability of inequality and oppression in a concept *teacher* that is centered on an ethic of power defined in economic terms.

The conception of *teacher* which Schoolteacher represents has clear political and economic purposes. Paulo Freire calls it the "banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing deposits."⁴³ It is characterized, Freire states, by

⁴³Freire, p. 58.

student-teacher relationship which involves a "narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable."⁴⁴ It projects an absolute ignorance onto others, alienating the students "like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic."⁴⁵ Borrowing Eric Fromm's language, Freire describes the banking concept of education as *necrophilic*, a love that "is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things."⁴⁶ However, though the "mechanistic, static, naturalized, spatialized view of consciousness" of banking education attempts to transform "students into receiving objects," it contains contradictions which "may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality."⁴⁷

Freire's analysis of the banking concept of education is remarkably consistent with Schoolteacher's teaching practice, a conception of teaching I have referred to as the *teacher-technician*.⁴⁸ For instance, Schoolteacher's method of

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁶Eric Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, New York, 1966, p. 41. Cited in Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 64.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁸Describing this conception of the teacher as *technician* rather than using Freire's banking metaphor is more appropriate since deposits into a bank benefit

lecturing or reading to his nephew-students while they quietly take notes illustrates nicely the narrative character of Freire's banking education (193). His designation of any information the slaves offer him as "backtalk" further illustrates this narrative, rather than dialogical, nature of the student-teacher relationship which results from the conception of the teacher as *technician*; the slaves' backtalk is a violation of their responsibility to receive, file, and store deposits (220).

Schoolteacher's lessons, as Friere predicts, exacerbate the alienation between teacher-master and student-slave to the point of resistance, of struggling for liberation. Sethe says to herself, "When the train came I had to be ready [to escape]. Schoolteacher was teaching us things we couldn't learn" (191).

Schoolteacher fits Eric Fromm's description of the "necrophilous" person:

The necrophilous person can relate to an object—a flower or person—only if he possesses it; hence a threat to his possession is a threat to himself; if he loses possession he loses contact with the world....He loves control, and in the act of controlling he kills life. ⁴⁹

When he enters the woodshed to which Sethe runs with her children, he is confronted with this very "threat to himself," this loss of possession: "Right away it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing left to claim" (149).

the bank as much or more than it benefits the depositors. Schoolteacher's practice (his deposits) do not benefit his students (the bank). The technician metaphor names what Freire describes inasmuch as the technician manipulates objects (students) to his own purposes, purposes in which the object (student) has no say.

⁴⁹Cited in Freire, p. 64.

For Sethe had "something in her arms that stopped him in his tracks. He took a backward step with each jump of the baby heart until finally there were none" (164). Then "Schoolteacher beat his hat against his thigh and spit before leaving the woodshed" (150). Schoolteacher is stopped not by any sense of revulsion caused by this horrific madonna-child tableau but rather by the recognition that there is "nothing there to claim;" he is stopped not by the presence of death but rather by the presence of a love and a subjectivity so powerful in its resistance to his objectification that it can choose death as an option to be preferred over life under Schoolteacher.

The purpose of Schoolteacher, of the concept of *teacher as technician*, is to claim and maintain economic and political power for himself and his class. "Education as the exercise of domination," Freire writes, "stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent of indoctrinating them to the world of oppression." Its object is to "change the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them" in order to preserve the power of the minority to prescribe to the majority.⁵⁰ Paul D, the "last of the Sweet Home men," testifies to the process of this dehumanizing educational practice: "But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (72).

⁵⁰Freire, pp. 60, 63, 65.

Schoolteacher: Cultural and Philosophical Antecedents

In order to more fully understand the relevance of Toni Morrison's fictional character Schoolteacher for contemporary conceptions of teachers in recent educational thought, it is useful to tease out the philosophical implications of this particular concept of *teacher*. To accomplish this task I will again employ the mode of cultural criticism which Cornel West has named *prophetic pragmatism*.⁵¹ According to West, prophetic pragmatism "refines and revises Emerson's concern with power, provocation, and personality in light of Dewey's stress on historical consciousness and DuBois' focus on the plight of the wretched of the earth."⁵² As West practices it, prophetic pragmatism involves the strategic deployment of genealogical analyses of historical and philosophical antecedents, progressive Marxist-inspired critique of relevant political and economic issues, and ethical critique grounded in the conception of human nature and tragic sense of the prophetic wing of Afro-American protestant Christianity.⁵³ In what follows, then, I will address the following questions: What are the philosophical antecedents of the conception of the teacher represented by Schoolteacher? What are the political and economic ramifications of that conception of the teacher? What ethical problems

⁵¹West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 212.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 211-214, 226-235.

does this conception present?

Schoolteacher's philosophical antecedents place him in a distinguished company of educational philosophers. One might even say he is in the mainstream of traditional educational philosophy with roots in Plato, Rousseau, and the Enlightenment and the Weberian conception of the academic vocation. For instance, Schoolteacher's assumptions about education bear a striking similarity to those of Plato. In the one scene where Morrison portrays his direct "instruction" of the slave Sixo we see him utilize a dialogical method of questioning designed to lead his pupil-slave to the conclusion that he has indeed stolen the shoat. As I mentioned earlier, this is the same method Socrates uses in the *Meno* to teach another pupil-slave a mathematical concept.⁵⁴ Schoolteacher and Socrates also share a hierarchical conception of the ideal society where individuals occupy different social strata on the basis of their natural attributes.⁵⁵ Both societies are also, significantly, slave societies. The object of education and the role of the teacher is sorting and preparing individuals for their natural position in society.⁵⁶ This is readily apparent in the different objectives of Schoolteacher's instruction of his pupil-nephews and his pupil-slaves: He teaches his nephews how to work a

⁵⁴Jowett, pp. 28-35.

⁵⁵Plato, *The Republic*, Allan Bloom, ed., New York: Basic Books, 1968, p. 434 d.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 443 d, e.

plantation and manage slaves; he teaches his slaves to be obedient. He is preparing both sets of pupils for their station in life. The scholar-master Schoolteacher also holds a position in the totalitarian Sweet Home society not unlike Socrates' philosopher-king; he sits atop a social pyramid with absolute rule over a society founded on slave labor. As an academic, Schoolteacher also shares important epistemological assumptions with Plato. Though to the extent Schoolteacher's observing, measuring and note-taking suggests a scientific approach to knowledge acquisition rather than Platonic idealism, their epistemologies are both foundational.⁵⁷ They both assume that knowledge claims are grounded in a reality that exists prior to and separate from individual desires or social conventions and that there are individuals with privileged access to it.

There are, however, clear and important differences between Plato's ideal society and educational philosophy and Schoolteacher's. One of the most notable is their radically different basis for social stratification. Socrates would differentiate among individuals on the basis of their intellectual capacity; Schoolteacher differentiates on the basis of race. Socrates is open to the possibility that potential guardians may be found at any level of society and educated accordingly; Schoolteacher's racist ideal society cannot entertain the possibility of the slave

⁵⁷Hoitenga, pp. 7-8, 27-30.

having the same intellectual capacity as whites.⁵⁸ However, the similarities between Schoolteacher's and Plato's conceptions of education and the ideal society implicitly challenge the Platonic conceptions, as well as contemporary conceptions of society, education, and the teacher that look to them for inspiration, because Morrison's drawing out of the implications of those concepts for those who occupy the bottom rung of society--the poor and oppressed--dramatizes their horrible costs.

Morrison's account of Schoolteacher and his educational philosophy also share certain characteristics with Rousseau's philosophy as it is outlined in *Emile*.⁵⁹ In both *Emile* and *Beloved* we find education taking place in an idealized rural setting between a tutor and one or two pupils. Sweet Home is described in Edenic terms while the site of Emile's education is deliberately chosen for its isolation from the corruptions of social life. While Schoolteacher perhaps engages in more traditional lecturing, reading, and note-taking than does Rousseau, the education of both of their charges is significantly based on experiential learning. Schoolteacher's nephews are employed in the operation of the plantation, learning from their work and by drawing conclusions from careful observation of their environment. This is apparent from the lesson Sethe overhears where the pupil-

⁵⁸Plato, *The Republic*, p. 415 b, c.

⁵⁹Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, Allan Bloom, trans., New York: Basic Books, 1979.

nephews are determining her animal and human characteristics (193). Emile too is expected to learn by observing his environment—a bent stick in the water, the motion of the sun and the changing pattern of its setting, etc.—and drawing conclusions.⁶⁰ This approach to the acquisition of knowledge via observation, measurement, hypothesis, testing of hypotheses, etc. is precisely Schoolteacher's method.

Rousseau's philosophy of education also posits the existence of two very different kinds of individuals making up society, a difference which requires different sorts of education. According to Rousseau, men and women are of radically different natures and thus require radically different educational experiences.⁶¹ Where Emile is to be educated for intellectual independence and social power both within the state and the family, Sophie is educated for service and subservience to her husband and confinement to the home. This is reminiscent of Schoolteacher's different educational objectives for his pupil-nephews and pupil-slaves. His nephews are taught to exercise power within Sweet Home society; his pupil-slaves are taught to serve and obey. Interestingly, the attributes Schoolteacher valued in Sethe are not unlike the attributes Sophie is expected to develop: she made "fine ink (for Schoolteacher to write with), damned good soup

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 169-70.

⁶¹Ibid., Book V, pp. 357-450.

(she was a good cook), [and] pressed his collars the way he liked them besides having at least ten breeding years left" (149). And one of Schoolteacher's first actions upon taking over Sweet Home is to forbid the slaves from leaving their plantation home.

Clearly, though, Rousseau did not intend his educational experiment to be a Sweet Home. Rousseau isolates Emile in his education to protect him from corruption and thus ensure the development of the naturally good man who can take his place in a democratic society. His conception of the just society is one founded on love and tolerance and made up of men who are capable of extending self-love to others, of recognizing himself in others.⁶² However, the clear affinities between Schoolteacher's practice and Rousseau's philosophy raise disturbing questions about Rousseau's educational enterprise. Emile, who Rousseau admits is self-centered and amoral when he is first introduced to society, has been educated for independence in isolation, a very different education from that given Sophie.⁶³ Given their very different natures and education, how will they develop the capacity to pity the other, a sentiment Rousseau claims is the means by which self love is expanded to others and the love and tolerance on which the just society is

⁶²Rousseau, pp. 226, 304-8.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 207-8.

based produced?⁶⁴ Morrison's portrayal of Schoolteacher's nephews suggests that the production of difference and unequal power relations through education means that pity is *miseducative*--recall Schoolteacher's warning his nephew of "confusion," i.e. pity for Sethe (150)--and thus more likely to produce Schoolteacher's distopia than Rousseau's utopia.

Sweet Home is clearly not like the just societies Plato or Rousseau imagined. But all three imaginary societies--Morrison's Sweet Home, Plato's republic, and Rousseau's democracy--rest upon oppression--of slaves in the first two and women in the third. All three conceive of education as a process of sorting individuals according to their nature and shaping them to fit predetermined functions in the ideal social machine. The teacher in all three is a *technician*, a lathe operator taking raw metal stock and turning out precision parts for a machine. Just as the part has no say in the shape or purpose of the machine, the individual human student has no influence on the nature of the society for which he is fitted. The needs and ends of the social machine shape the student through education; the needs and ends of the individual human being do not shape the education or the society. Morrison's depiction of these common conceptions of education and the teacher in the person and practice of Schoolteacher shows us these philosophies from the perspective of their victims--the parts--and thus reveals their potentially

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 222, 224, 309-10.

horrific costs in terms of human suffering.

Schoolteacher is both a product and disseminator of notions of white supremacy inscribed in the very discourse of modernity.⁶⁵ Cornel West contends these notions emerge from a discourse consisting of four elements: Cartesian philosophy, scientific investigation, Greek ocular metaphors, and classical aesthetics.⁶⁶ Descartes' philosophical propositions regarding the autonomous subject and a representational conception of knowledge constituted the theoretical basis for the legitimacy of modern science and its two fundamental props: observation and evidence.⁶⁷ The revival of interest in Greek cultural ideals of beauty, proportion, and moderation during the Renaissance and Enlightenment provided a norm while Cartesian philosophy and modern science provided a comparative tendency. Together these elements produced a "normative gaze" which denied black "equality in terms of beauty, culture, and intellectual capacity."⁶⁸

This discourse of white supremacy is readily apparent in the character of Schoolteacher, which suggests, perhaps, racist propensities in the conception of *teacher as technician* which he represents. Schoolteacher is very much the

⁶⁵West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 47.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 48.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 51.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 48, 51-53.

autonomous subject. He apparently has no need for nor does he involve himself in human relationships: He does not need a wife for his "cogitation is Sweet Home" (227). He is portrayed as always observing, watching the slaves and taking notes. "Talking soft and watching hard" (197). He is the voyeur taking notes while his nephews take Sethe's milk (70). After he locks up the recaptured Paul D he "looks at him for a long time....Carefully he looks" (227). He is portrayed as constantly gathering and recording data, measuring them, numbering their teeth, and always asking questions (191). Schoolteacher, in effect, constructs a racist ontology and epistemology so powerful that, when confronted with the fact of a young mother who prefers to cut her baby girl's throat with a handsaw rather than allow her to be "measured" or have her characteristics listed on the animal side of the paper by Schoolteacher, it is interpreted as evidence of the "results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (151). In short, contradictory evidence is transmuted by the discourse of white supremacy into supporting evidence.

Schoolteacher represents a peculiarly modern conception of the academic which is the culmination of forces with their roots in the Enlightenment. Mark Schwehn identifies this modernist conception of the academic vocation with Max Weber, the German sociologist and historian.⁶⁹ Modeled on a scientific

conception of scholarship, the Weberian academic is an individualistic, alienated scholar relying on rigorous methodologies and focused on the production of knowledge rather than education for character formation, thoughtfulness, inquiry into the truths of human experience or other objectives of earlier religiously inspired conceptions of the academic vocation. The Weberian conception of the academic vocation moves western scholarship and teaching—at the university level at least—toward an emphasis on technology and control, toward an education for power rather than understanding, truth, or community.⁷⁰ It produces, Schwehn argues, alienated individuals with multiplist relativistic notions of ethics and morality.⁷¹ The epistemological assumptions upon which it is based conceal the subjectivities of the knower behind a mask of objectivity and detachment; they portray his knowledge claims as facts discovered in nature by means of rigorous methodologies which produce knowledge of the world as it really is independent of the desires of the knower.⁷² Lorraine Code's study of post-Enlightenment epistemology from the insight afforded by contemporary feminist theory demonstrates, however, that behind this mask lies a white, male, propertied

⁶⁹Mark R. Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 6-16.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 63.

⁷²Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, pp. 269-284.

knower.⁷³ Behind this mask lies Schoolteacher. Morrison's fictional portrait of this Weberian academic, this *teacher-technician*, penetrates the objectivist-rationalist mask, dramatizes its use in the production of racism, uncovers its real motivations, and lays bare its ethical consequences.

Schoolteacher vs. Prophetic Pragmatism

The "world of oppression" the Sweet Home slaves inhabit, and which, according to Cornel West, we still inhabit, is marked by two "sacred cows:" the sacred cow of "economic growth by means of corporate priorities" and the sacred cow of "endemic racism, patriarchy and homophobia."⁷⁴ The consequences of such a society include the commodification of culture and the commercialization of art.⁷⁵ It also results in the reification of human beings as objects, commodities that can be bought or sold, their relationships governed by the paradigm of the market.⁷⁶ This commodification of human beings, the essence of slavery, is one of the lessons Paul D learns from Schoolteacher. After his recapture Paul D learns that he is worth nine hundred dollars (226). This "market culture," as West calls it, combines with the natal alienation of blacks--the loss of ties at birth to ascending

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Cornel West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times: Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume I*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993, pp. 60-61.

⁷⁵West, *Prophetic Reflections*, p. 41.

⁷⁶West, *Prophetic Thought*, pp. 90, 148.

or descending generations--to produce the "highest level of forms of self-destruction known in black history" and right-wing, potentially fascist politics in the larger society.⁷⁷ These social products of market culture are dramatized in Sethe's "rough response to the Fugitive Slave Bill" and the proto-fascist political implications of the slave-based political and economic order of the Old South. The purpose of Schoolteacher then, of the concept of *teacher as technician*, was and is--according to the implications of West's analysis of contemporary late capitalist society--the changing of the consciousness of the oppressed to adapt to the world the oppressors have created in order to perpetuate the political and economic power of a few at the expense of the masses. Thus it contradicts the *love ethic* identified in Chapter I as a criterion for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating the relationship between religion and education within a context of cultural diversity and existential tragedy: it does not affirm the dignity and worth of the individual or the individual's ability to grow as a moral agent.

This concept of *teacher as technician*, what Schwehn refers to as the Weberian model, has profound ethical ramifications.⁷⁸ In keeping with Cornel West's prophetic pragmatic mode of cultural criticism, I will explore those ramifications from an ethical worldview informed by particular Christian moral

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 149-50, 194.

⁷⁸Schwehn, p. 63.

values. However, in doing so I in no way mean to suggest that such values are peculiar to Christianity or that Christian moral values are superior to those of other religious or secular traditions. I do so because one of the consequences of prophetic pragmatism's radical historicism is the recognition of the futility of any search for objective philosophic foundations for moral principles and the recognition that the only viable candidates for such grounds are "contingent, community-specific agreements people make in relation to particular norms, aims, goals, and objectives."⁷⁹ One consequence then of this historicist ethics is the idea that justification is not some last court of appeal to transcendent moral absolutes, but rather a way of reminding oneself of the particular community to which one belongs.⁸⁰ Modes of criticism, therefore, are guided by "moral visions and ethical norms which flow from synoptic worldviews, including such matters as the ideal of what it is to be human, the good society, loving relationships and other precious conceptions."⁸¹

For many of the wretched of the earth these synoptic worldviews are religious.⁸² Certainly the worldviews of both slaves and masters as they are

⁷⁹Cornel West, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991, p. 1.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸¹Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 132.

⁸²West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 233.

portrayed in *Beloved* have significant religious dimensions. Sethe has frequent "talk-think" sessions with God and Baby Suggs' preaching and spiritual power, equally rooted in both Christian and African religious traditions, is the community's cohesive force. Even Schoolteacher and his nephews go to church each Sunday. Furthermore, if prophetic pragmatism has any relevance for a reconception of the teacher which honors the importance of religion in people's lives as a source of moral guidance and existential hope in the face of tragedy, then it makes some sense to explore that relevance in the context of a Christian religious expression which saturates U.S. society in general and Afro-American society in particular.⁸³

According to West, the moral and ethical norms of protestant Christianity are grounded in the belief that human beings are created *imago dei*, in the image of God, and are all therefore equal before God. From this belief comes the moral norm of individuality and the equality of all before God. This equality, in turn, posits a principle of self-realization within community which requires democratic control of institutions that regulate individuals' lives as they act out their history. The individual is thus ideally irreducible within participatory communities governed by the principle of mutual accountability.⁸⁴ These moral norms, held as

⁸³Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1992, pp. 7-18, 99.

⁸⁴West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 16-18.

they are in the context of "disease, disillusionment, despair, and death" and the life-denying forces of "economic exploitation, state, repression, bureaucratic domination, racial, sexual and heterosexual subjugation, and ecological subjection," yield a dialectical conception of human nature as both dignified and depraved and a conception of human history as a continual struggle toward ethical ideal which, though unrealizable within history, nevertheless guide human conduct and preclude this world utopias or distopias.⁸⁵ These moral norms and the conceptions of human nature and history which follow from them provide a model of social praxis which confronts the tragic nature of human existence and provides a basis for critique of and resistance to injustice and social misery.⁸⁶

Schoolteacher's educational practices clearly contradict the criteria of *moral-ethical idealism* and *meaningfulness* which follow from West's description of *prophetic pragmatism* and were proposed in Chapter I as necessary attributes of a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating the relationship between religious faith and public education and responding to the existence of tragedy. He denies the individuality and dignity of the Sweet Home slaves through processes of dehumanization and commodification, processes which substitute economic ends for ethical ideals. They are not human beings made in the image of God, but rather

⁸⁵Ibid. and West, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 132-33.

⁸⁶West, *Prophecy Deliverance!*, pp. 17-19.

"coons," "baboons," "foals," and breeders, "creatures God had given [him] the responsibility of" (150). He teaches Sixo that definitions belong to the definer, and then defines him and the other slaves as animals, as "something less than a chicken sitting in on a tub in the sun" (190, 72). With this redefinition he is able to reject the democratic principle of self-realization within participatory communities because it does not apply to animals. Thus meaning is not made by the community as a whole; it is made by those in power for those in power.

Schoolteacher, the *teacher-technician*, necessarily undermines and subverts the moral principles of the dignity and equality of individuals because the foundational epistemic and ontological assumptions of his philosophical worldview separates ethics and knowledge and objectifies human beings in order to produce the inequality on which his economic, and hence political, power rests.

Schoolteacher's embrace of absolutist claims about knowledge and reality are the foundation of his assumption of the fundamental inequality of himself and the Sweet Home slaves. Therefore, the concept of *teacher* which he embodies clearly does not meet the criteria of *social authorization*, *anti-"realist" ontology*, and *affirmation of diversity* identified in Chapter I as necessary attributes of a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education in a context of cultural diversity and existential tragedy.

The *teacher-technician* simply will not do: the worldview which the *teacher-technician* functions to maintain cannot and does not perceive the tragic,

for to do so would entail accepting one form or another of the principle of the equality and dignity of individuals and thus recognizing its own violations of that principle. Instead of tragedy it recognizes economic loss. And because it cannot perceive tragedy, it cannot help human beings confronted by the tragedy of human experience, the existential facts of "disease, disillusionment, despair, and death. It can only perpetuate tragedy. Thus Morrison's depiction of the "four horsemen"--Schoolteacher, his nephew, the sheriff, and the slave catcher--riding up to 124 Bluestone Road to reclaim Sethe and her children takes on, appropriately, the air of apocalypse. Though Schoolteacher does, in some partial sense, meet the criterion of *social authorization*, and his use of a conscious technique may be a useful lesson for our reconception of *teacher*, Morrison's depiction of the consequences of the *teacher-technician* concept reveals the utter inadequacy of authority without love, of method without an ethical ideal, of teaching without a sense of the *holy*. Lacking these qualities, the *teacher-technician* is incapable of negotiating the relationship between religion and public education or helping children resist injustice or face existential tragedy. Schoolteacher will not do.

Lady Jones: A Borderline Case of the *Prophetic Pragmatic Teacher*

Perhaps the clearest case of a teacher-character in *Beloved* is the character known as Lady Jones. Though her character is much less developed than the other teacher-characters examined in this inquiry she is most recognizable as a teacher because she so clearly embodies the characteristics commonly associated with a

traditional image of the teacher: female, educated, teaching groups of children to read and write in the school house (inverted by Morrison to read "house-school" to reflect the lack of formal schools for black children), inculcating the general religious and culture values of the dominant society, and providing children with the basic academic skills for further "book" learning or to take their places as members of society. In this character Morrison renders a sympathetic, composite portrait of the rural, small town schoolteacher as the respected pillar of the community who, with a firm hand and genuine affection, helps mold children into solid members of their community. In this character I see my grandmother, who, like Lady Jones, spent much of her life teaching young children to read and write and do arithmetic and develop a sense of Bible-based morality in one-room "schoolhouses" and small, rural schools, whose no-nonsense demeanor masked a genuine love of children that resulted in life-long student-teacher relationships characterized by mutual respect and affection. In this character Morrison embodies much of what is best in the traditional schoolteacher.

However, in spite of this positive portrait, interpreted as it is through the lens of my own respect and affection for my grandmother as a truly beloved teacher, I will argue that neither Lady Jones nor my grandmother offer adequate models for a conception of *teacher* cable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education. They constitute a best-case embodiment of the *common sense pragmatist teacher*. And though this best-case

embodiment, like Baby Suggs, meets many of the criteria identified in Chapter I as necessary for a reconception of *teacher* which can meet the challenge of religious diversity, it falls short of Baby Suggs' model in one vital aspect: its understanding of the *holy*.

Morrison's Characterization of Lady Jones

Lady Jones is a woman of mixed race with grey eyes and yellow hair, which she hates. At some time in earlier life she had been "picked" because of her light skin to attend a "colored girls' normal school" in Pennsylvania. Self conscious about her "high yellow" status, she deliberately married "the blackest man she could find, had five rainbow-colored children and sent them all to Wilberforce, after teaching them all she knew right along with the others who sat in her parlor" (247). In many other respects she is much like the other women of her community, cooking, keeping house, raising children, serving on church committees, baking for church activities, etc. Her mixed race and education however make her unique, marginalized in important ways. She is described as disliking everybody "a little bit" because "she believed in her heart that, except for her husband, the whole world (including her children) despised her and her hair" (247). However, after receiving her education, "she dispensed with rancor and was indiscriminately polite, saving her real affection for the unpicked children of Cincinnati" (247).

Lady Jones' school is in the small parlor of her home because there are no schools for the colored children of Cincinnati. In a scene reminiscent, somewhat,

of both Schoolteacher and Baby Suggs, Lady Jones is portrayed teaching two hours every afternoon from a straight-backed chair to the children who sit cross-legged around her and write with chalk on slates (102). Thus she is both separated from and "above" her pupils, like Schoolteacher, but situated at the center of her classroom-community, as was Baby Suggs. "For a nickel a month, Lady Jones did what whitepeople thought unnecessary if not illegal: crowded her little parlor with the colored children who had time for and interest in book learning" (102). She teaches both boys and girls, the "unpicked" children of Cincinnati who "played in dirt until they were old enough for chores" (247).

Lady Jones as Teacher: Aims, Achievements, Ends

Lady Jones' teaching displays two pedagogical goals which serve a single, overarching educational aim: the acquisition of skills in literacy and numeracy and the development of a shared sense of morality which will enable her pupils to take their place as adult members of the community. In the context of the novel, Lady Jones represents Denver's connection to the community outside 124 Bluestone after Sethe's murder of Denver's older sister, Beloved, and the death of her grandmother, Baby Suggs. She, in effect, represents community and the ordinary day-to-day relationships with others that constitute community. It is Lady Jones who provides, via her "house-school," an opening into the community for Denver after she and her mother have been ostracized over the murder of Beloved. Lady Jones discovers Denver's childhood spying on the activity of the school and invites

her in: "Come in the front door, Miss Denver. This is not a side show" (102). The seven-year-old Denver studies with Lady Jones for a year, two "precious" hours each afternoon learning to spell and count and write, until a young boy asks her a question about her imprisonment with her mother, forcing long-repressed memories to the surface and traumatizing the child to the point that she no longer hears or speaks, which causes her to drop out of Lady Jones' house-school.

Many years later, however, when the devastating emotional struggle between the returned Beloved and Sethe threatens to destroy her mother, Denver ends her long confinement to the house at 124 Bluestone by seeking out Lady Jones for help. The teacher initiates Denver's reintegration into the community by orchestrating the anonymous donation of food to prevent the starvation of Denver, Sethe, and Beloved and beginning to teach again her now grown former student. Thus Lady Jones and her school serve as a vital link for Denver to the community from which she has been cut off since Beloved's murder. Preparing children to enter the community is clearly the central function of Lady Jones' teaching.

Lady Jones also teaches her pupils to read "the deeply mournful sentences from the Bible Lady Jones used as a textbook" as well as to write their names on slates and to do arithmetic. Her only text is the Bible, which she uses both as a reader and, presumably, to inculcate in the children the shared moral values of the community. The novel portrays her as a caring, effective teacher who has earned the affection of her students and the appreciation of their families, and who has

trained children who are, evidently, reasonably considerate of one another. Even Nelson Lord, the boy who asks Denver the question that "blocked up her ears," asks it with "no meanness in his face or voice. Just curiosity" (102). Later, his caring words will open her mind (252). An important achievement, then, of Lady Jones' teaching is a moral capacity in her pupils which enables them to display genuine compassion for others.

Lady Jones' success in achieving these goals is evident: her own children and Denver acquire sufficient academic skills to attend Wilberforce and Oberlin (252, 266), Nelson Lord is portrayed as a compassionate and caring child, and her role as teacher is the catalyst for the reintegration of Sethe and Denver into the African-American community of Cincinnati.

Lady Jones as Teacher: Methods, Tasks, Means

Lady Jones' identity as a teacher is less important to the plot of the novel than is her role as Denver's means for re-entering the community; therefore, her instructional methods are not fully realized in the text of *Beloved*. However, the teaching that is described supports the assertion that Lady Jones is an embodiment of the conventional educational ideals and methods which I have named the *common sense pragmatist*. Lady Jones, not unlike Schoolteacher with his nephews, employs recitation as one instructional strategy: Denver first sees her "saying something too soft to hear" which the children then repeat or write down on their slates (102). And like Baby Suggs, Lady Jones deploys aesthetic

appreciation and practices to inculcate academic skills and moral precepts: she teaches the children songs to spell and count by and apparently fosters an aesthetic appreciation for the music of Bible verses as well as their moral content (120). Finally, Lady Jones utilizes what Jane Roland Martin (1994) has called the "reproductive processes"--in this case the preparation and presentation of food--as an expression of and a curriculum in the "care, concern, and connection" that makes community, and Denver's re-entry into it, possible.⁸⁷

Lady Jones' Relation with "Students"

Lady Jones' place is very much a part of the community yet simultaneously marginalized within it. She serves with other women in the community on a church committee organized to feed the hungry. She clearly knows and is known by everyone. When Denver attempts to return the dishes left by the anonymous donors of food organized by Lady Jones, it is Lady Jones who helps her identify the owners. When Stamp Paid reminds Paul D that any family in the community would give him shelter, he specifically mentions Lady Jones. In spite of her education and mixed race, she clearly shares in the community's moral bottom line that no black man or woman will go hungry, homeless, or unaided.

Yet Lady Jones is also marginalized from the community in very important ways. Though she attributes her underlying unease with others in the community to

⁸⁷Jane Roland Martin, *Changing the Educational Landscape: Philosophy, Women, and Curriculum*, New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 7-8, 113-115.

her mixed race, the equally likely cause of her alienation is her education. It earns her the title "Lady," a telling contrast to Baby Suggs' refusal of any honorific title, and makes her an important person in the community, a person one wants to impress (46). The extent of her alienation is illustrated by her relationship, or lack thereof, with Baby Suggs. Baby Suggs is seen by the black citizens of Cincinnati as the heart of the community. To them she is "Baby Suggs, holy." She is the "mountain" to their "sky." Her home at 124 Bluestone Road is a way station, the community crossroads where people meet, leave messages, gather for news, etc. To Lady Jones, however, she is Denver's "ignorant grandmother, a "woods preacher who mended shoes" (247). Lady Jones' education, sophistication, and perhaps her conventional Christianity render her unable or unwilling to believe the reports of Beloved's "haunting" of Sethe. She "didn't believe the story and hated the ignorance of those who did" (257). For most others in the community, however, the news is a confirmation of what they have long accepted as true--that death is not the end of being--and a call to reassert the boundaries between this world and the other and rescue Sethe.⁸⁸ Lady Jones is, therefore, unable or unwilling to take part in Sethe's "baptism" back into the African-American community of Cincinnati.

⁸⁸The belief that life is not the end of being is, according to Trudier Harris, characteristic of West African belief systems. See Harris, p. 154. Morrison has made clear in an interview that such "enchantment" of the world was "the way the world was for me and most black people I knew. See Furman, p. 81.

Lady Jones' image of Baby Suggs and her "hatred of the ignorance" of those who believed the enchantment taking place at 124 Bluestone Road suggest a certain level of intolerance of some of the more African elements of the black culture in which she lives. That intolerance alienates her from a very deep and important part of her cultural milieu. She evidently does not participate in the gatherings in the Clearing where black people from the area engage in a cathartic ritual of song, dance, preaching and laughter which combines West African and Christian religious practices in a "service" that provides strength and solace for a people just out of slavery and suffering under racist oppression. She evidently does not believe in the enchantment of the world around her. Her alienation from these aspects of her culture is, in fact, alienation from her past, the history of her people. She is, in an important sense, a dangling person, cut off from the identity, solidarity, and solace others find in their traditions, prevented by DuBois' veil from ever fully taking a place in the dominant culture, and "gifted with [a] second sight...that only lets [her] see [herself] through the revelation of the other world."⁸⁹ With the handicap of this alienation, it seems there are lessons which her students need to learn but she cannot teach.

Late in the novel, Denver, in reminiscing about her own education, recalls a story Baby Suggs told her about her father, Halle. He had been taught by his boss,

⁸⁹W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York: Signet, 1903, p. 45

Mr. Garner, to read, write, and do arithmetic. Garner offered to teach the other "Sweet Home men," but they refused. "One of them with a number for a name [Sixo] said it would change his mind--make him forget things he shouldn't and memorize things he shouldn't and he didn't want his mind messed up. But my daddy said, If you can't count they can cheat you. If you can't read they can beat you" (208). This debate, even though it occurred on Sweet Home long before Denver or any of the other characters have met Lady Jones, contains an implicit critique of the teacher as *common sense pragmatist* personified by Lady Jones. As valuable as the literacy and numeracy skills she teaches are, they do not protect Halle from being beaten or cheated: he is driven insane by Schoolteacher's abuse of Sethe in spite of them. And, as Sixo warned, they have made Lady Jones forget some things she shouldn't. They cannot sustain the individual confronted with tragedy or oppression. As vital as her preparation is for her pupils' entrance into their community, it cannot sustain community in the face of Sethe's tragedy. It takes a different kind of teaching and a different kind of teacher.

Lady Jones: Cultural and Philosophical Antecedents

Though Lady Jones does play a crucial role in the plot of *Beloved*, she is a comparatively minor character as far as the amount of text devoted to her development is concerned. Consequently, there is really not an abundance of textual evidence on her teaching practice to fully tease out her philosophy of education. There is, however, enough information in the novel on her background

and values to recognize clear affinities between this fictional portrait of a teacher and a particularly influential tradition of educational philosophy. Thus it is possible to infer the general outlines of her educational philosophy. Such an analysis shows Lady Jones to be an excellent representation of the sort of teacher those modern critics have in mind who refer to a golden age of American education when God had His proper place in the school. Specifically, it suggests a pedagogical and philosophical lineage that includes Catharine Beecher and Anna Julia Cooper. I will, therefore, explore the affinities between the portrait of Lady Jones and the thought of Beecher and Cooper and then attempt to clarify where the concept of *teacher* they embody falls short of this inquiry's goal of a conception of *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education.

Catharine Beecher's educational philosophy was widely influential in the 19th century U.S. Beecher saw women's most important ministry as the physical, intellectual and moral education of children.⁹⁰ Though she counseled subordination for women in matters outside the home, she argued for indirect political influence through the inculcation, via education, of virtues such as rational self-control,

⁹⁰Catharine Beecher, "Essay on the Education of Female Teachers" in Shirley Nelson Kersey, ed., *Classics in the Education of Girls and Women*, Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1981, p. 288. See also Susan Laird, "Beecher, Catharine Esther" in J.J. Chambliss, ed., *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1996, p. 50.

piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity in themselves and submission of will, self denial, and benevolence in children.⁹¹ Though Beecher's philosophy has been read as rationalizing women's subservience, she in fact sought to assert a social and political importance for the activity of women in the home equal to that accorded to the activity of men outside the home.⁹² She accomplished this via a curriculum that included both the domestic tasks associated with managing a home and children and a broad liberal education in such subjects as mathematics, language, literature, the sciences, philosophy and religion.⁹³

With her emphasis on a broad liberal education and the development of rational self-control, Beecher "granted epistemological authority to reason and to the evidence of sensory and revelatory experience."⁹⁴ Emphasizing "learned moral conduct rather than conversion," Beecher advocated a system of moral and religious education in schools, arguing that its absence led to "vice and discontent" and suggesting that the Bible be taught in all schools.⁹⁵ She counseled teaching through "love and patience rather than fear," called for the establishment of teacher training institutions, and suggested that those unable to afford the training they

⁹¹Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation*, pp. 105, 111, 127-28.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 122-23.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 112-13.

⁹⁴Laird, "Beecher," p. 51.

⁹⁵Laird, "Beecher," p. 50; Beecher, pp. 290-292.

offered "shall be furnished gratuitously with what they cannot purchase; while all who receive these advantages shall consider themselves pledged to devote themselves to the cause of education."⁹⁶

Lady Jones' values and educational practice are quite similar to those espoused by Beecher. Perhaps the most obvious is her sense of "ministry." Because she was "picked" to attend a normal school she repays that privilege by teaching the "unpicked" children of Cincinnati, just as Beecher suggested she should (247). She is engaged in the physical, intellectual, and moral education of children through a curriculum which complements the domestic education children receive in their homes--those who played in dirt until they were old enough for chores--and includes academic subjects--arithmetic, reading, and writing--and moral education through the reading and study of the Bible (102, 247). Unlike Schoolteacher, she does not employ punishment or fear as a pedagogical method but rather the love and patience Beecher advocated. The results of her educational efforts are well educated, benevolent children. And though one can do little but speculate about Lady Jones' likely political activities--she is not portrayed participating in the lively political conversations at 124 Bluestone or the direct political resistance of helping escaped slaves--the fact that she is engaged in what "whitepeople thought unnecessary if not illegal" suggests that she sees the

⁹⁶Laird, *ibid.*; Beecher, *ibid.*, p. 294-95.

potential political influence of her teaching and that, while she may do what she can with her subordinate social position as a black woman, she is subservient to no one.

In many other respects Morrison's portrait of Lady Jones also displays strong affinities with the life and thought of Anna Julia Cooper, the African-American social critic, feminist, and educator whose work has been recently "rediscovered." Both Lady Jones and Cooper were born during slavery and are of mixed race. Both are permitted to attend normal schools which have been opened to African-Americans. Lady Jones repays that privilege by choosing to teach the "unpicked" children of Cincinnati while Cooper spends her entire career educating African-American children and vigorously promoting expanded education of "undefended" poor blacks. Like Lady Jones, Anna Julia Cooper has five children, the grandchildren of her half-brother whom she adopts in 1915.⁹⁷ Both are firmly rooted in the soil of the African-American church and dedicated to a social meliorism which grows out of their sense of Christian moral values: Lady Jones serves on a church committee charged with feeding the hungry locally while Anna Julia Cooper's social activism was driven by the "engine" of her faith.⁹⁸ The

⁹⁷Mary Helen Washington, "Introduction," to Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From The South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. xxxi-xxxviii.

⁹⁸Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 302.

superior education and Christian-influenced social activism of Lady Jones and Cooper breed a mild elitism and condescension toward some of the cultural beliefs and practices of poor African-Americans. Lady Jones, for instance, dismisses Baby Suggs as "the ignorant grandmother, a woods preacher" (247). Similarly, Anna Julia Cooper speaks of the "semi-civilized religionism" of ordinary African-Americans and their "peculiar faults of worship--the rank exuberance and often ludicrous demonstrativeness of their people."⁹⁹

Many of Cooper's views on women in society and the importance of education are consistent with those of Catharine Beecher. Though, like Beecher, an eloquent and forceful spokesperson for the rights and education of women, her arguments on behalf of black women are influenced by the "ethics of true womanhood," an idea, shared by Beecher, that saw women's proper spheres of influence as the home, the education of children, and work in voluntary organizations rather than direct involvement in politics.¹⁰⁰ Cooper's philosophy of education consisted of a faith in the power of education to change society and a proto-Deweyan emphasis on knowledge as it is applied in daily life.

The youth must be taught to use his trigonometry in surveying his own and his neighbor's farm; to employ his geology and chemistry in finding out

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 34. Mary Helen Washington also notes Cooper's tendency to speak "*for* ordinary black women" rather than speaking "*to* them." Mary Helen Washington, p. xxx.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. xlvi.

the nature of the soil.....; to apply his mechanics and physics to the construction and handling of machinery-to the intelligent management of iron works and water works and steam works and electric works. ¹⁰¹

...knowledge of physiology makes them better mothers and housekeepers; their knowledge of chemistry makes them better cooks; while from their training in other natural sciences and in mathematics, they obtain an accuracy and fair-mindedness which is of great value to them in dealing with their children or employees. ¹⁰²

Thus her philosophy of education seems to constitute an intervention in the DuBois-Washington debate over the relative merits of academic vs. vocational training for African-Americans. ¹⁰³

Cooper also argued for the social value of racial and cultural diversity for social progress and wrote eloquently in support of the rights of other minorities, particularly Native Americans. ¹⁰⁴ She wrote, spoke, and taught against racism and the domination of women and in favor of the social "uplifting" of African-Americans, the poor, women, and other racial minorities. ¹⁰⁵ She mounts a powerful critique of capitalism and its role in perpetuating social misery and inequality. ¹⁰⁶ And she critically engages the dehumanizing and objectifying tendencies of the sort

¹⁰¹Cooper, p. 262.

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹⁰³DuBois, pp. 79-95.

¹⁰⁴Cooper, *Voice*, pp. 123-125.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 48-79, 80-118.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 130.

of post-Enlightenment, positivist epistemological assumptions represented by Schoolteacher.¹⁰⁷ Cooper is moved to take these positions by a belief in the possibility of human improvement and an ethical imperative to struggle for such improvement, both of which grow out of her Christian faith. She takes as her fundamental moral premise the belief that man is created *imago dei* and that there is in fact a brotherhood of man which places a moral burden on the individual to respond to the needs of her brothers and sisters. Faith is what enables the individual to respond to this moral imperative; agnosticism, she argues, cannot provide the necessary positive motivation.¹⁰⁸

Though I in no way intend to make the claim that Lady Jones is Catherine Beecher or Anna Julia Cooper, or even to imply that Morrison had either of these two important philosophers of education in mind when she created Lady Jones, I do contend that the affinities between the fictional teacher and these real teachers are clear. These affinities make it possible to gain a fuller understanding of Lady Jones through the thought of Beecher and Cooper and a fuller understanding of Beecher and Cooper through the lens of Morrison's portrait of Lady Jones. And recognizing the image of these women and their ideals in the actual lives of ordinary teachers like my grandmother makes it possible to recognize the

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 286-293.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 295-303.

continuity that draws a line from this fictional character to these historic women and to the thousands of ordinary teachers who have served and serve in our public schools. With this fuller understanding it is possible to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of not just the ordinary *common sense pragmatist* described in Chapter II, but some of the most admirable instances of the *common sense pragmatist*: Catherine Beecher, Anna Julia Cooper, my grandmother, and Lady Jones.

Lady Jones and Prophetic Pragmatism

The conception of *teacher* embodied in Lady Jones, Catherine Beecher, Anna Cooper, and even my grandmother exhibit most of the characteristics described in Chapter I as necessary and sufficient criteria for a concept *teacher* adequate to the challenge of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education in a multicultural context marred by natural and man-made tragedy. Though there were segments of society that disapproved of their thought and work, it nevertheless enjoyed a degree of social authorization to the extent that it appealed to a clear sense of *moral-ethical idealism* that was recognizable by their society even if their society often failed to live up those ideals. Their work and thought also clearly exhibited a *love ethic* which is intimately connected to what Cornel West (1982) has described as the Christian dialectic of human nature: the innate dignity and simultaneous fallenness of human beings created *imago*

dei.¹⁰⁹ This ethic is most beautifully expressed in Lady Jones recognition in Denver of "the unmistakable love call that shimmered around children until they learned better" (247). And the fact that their ethical ideals are expressed within a recognizably protestant, Christian framework make their thought and work *meaningful* to their audiences. Their thought and work also exhibits an *affirmation of diversity* in that it promotes the expansion of education to those to whom it has been denied.

It is, however, in this apparent *affirmation of diversity* that we begin to see the weakness of the concept *teacher* embodied in Lady Jones. For Lady Jones is unable to appreciate the significance of the "ignorant back woods preacher" to a community for whom she is the "mountain to their sky" (247) or to do anything other than "hate the ignorance" of those who continue to entertain a spirituality opposed by her conventional Christianity (257). This intolerance of religious diversity is mirrored in Anna Julia Cooper, who, in spite of writing approvingly of Buddha and Mohammed as examples of faith-inspired actors on behalf of human improvement, also denigrates Arab, "oriental," and Turkish culture as "effete and immobile civilization[s]."¹¹⁰ And though she frequently writes approvingly of the African heritage and Afro-American folk culture, she criticizes

¹⁰⁹West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 15-24.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 9-11, 154, 302.

the "rank exuberance and often ludicrous demonstrativeness" of African-Americans who embody that heritage and culture in their lived experience.¹¹¹

Though Cooper criticizes Christianity's failures in its treatment of African-Americans, she is an eloquent proponent of the propagation of the Christian gospel around the world and the evangelization by the Episcopal church of African-Americans in the south in order to correct their "semi-civilized religionism."¹¹² And though she rejects fundamentalism--"the straight-teaching of irreproachable credos"--and defines truth as closely related to belief rather than the product of "cast-iron formulas"--a position remarkably close to the anti-foundationalism of pragmatism¹¹³--the evangelical bent of her own Christian faith suggests a fealty to a truth she believes is superior to others and which she feels morally compelled to propagate.

Cooper's and Lady Jones' models are European. They accept the academic assumptions of their day which characterized ancient, non-Western civilizations as stagnant and valorizes European cultural products and ideals as the goal toward which all-Europeans and African-Americans alike-should aspire.¹¹⁴ In short,

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 238, 234, 34.

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 33-34, 43-44.

¹¹³Cornel West, "The Politics of American Pragmatism," in John Rajchman and Cornel West, eds., *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 259-272.

¹¹⁴Cooper, pp. 153-161.

Cooper's thought, and Lady Jones' example, as inspiring and morally compelling as they are, are limited somewhat by the "orientalist" intellectual biases of their day which defined cultures in comparison to a Euro-American culture seen as the pinnacle of cultural evolution.¹¹⁵ Thus there are cultural and political dangers in their near total faith in education to transform society and improve the lot of poor African-Americans, for the "knowledge" disseminated in such education contains within it assumptions which continue to define the cultural origins of African-Americans as inferior to those of Euro-Americans and will, therefore, not by itself change society. This is the substance of Sixo's warning that education can "make him forget things he shouldn't and memorize things he shouldn't" (208) and the lesson of Halle and W.E.B. DuBois' parable "Of the Coming of John."¹¹⁶ Anna Cooper, Lady Jones, and my beloved grandmother as well ultimately fail the criteria of *social authorization* and *anti-"realist" ontology* because they subscribe to an epistemic and ontological foundationalism that is rooted in their Christian faith. They adhere to a fixed and clearly defined conception of the *holy* and are

¹¹⁵For a discussion of "orientalism" and its evolution see Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

¹¹⁶DuBois, pp. 245-263. In this story DuBois tells of a young black man who receives an advanced liberal education and returns to his community to teach and improve the lives of his people. His education and aspiration however do not change whites' reaction to him. He kills a white man who has attacked an African-American woman. The story ends with John's lynching at the hands of a white mob.

thus unable to affirm religious diversity, a fatal flaw for a concept *teacher* which aspires to negotiate and renegotiate the relationship between religion and public education in a culturally and religiously diverse society.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored three fictional portraits of teachers portrayed in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. I have attempted to flesh out the portraits of these secondary characters and define their relevance to the task of constructing a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education by clarifying their relationships to particular philosophies of education and to the common concepts of *teacher* discussed in Chapter II. I have then examined each of these more philosophically detailed conceptual portraits against the criteria developed from the *prophetic pragmatism* of Cornel West (1989) and proposed in Chapter I as necessary and sufficient conditions for a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating the relationship between religion and education in a context of cultural and religious diversity marred by natural and man-made tragedy.

The results of this analysis suggest that Morrison's fictional portrait of Baby Suggs constitutes a powerful conceptual model of the *prophetic pragmatist* as *teacher*, a model which meets the criteria proposed in Chapter I and which is distinguished from the other conceptual models embodied in the characters Schoolteacher and Lady Jones by a fundamental difference in their conception of

the *holy* as an ethical orientation. For the *technician*, Schoolteacher, nothing is holy. For the *common sense pragmatist*, Lady Jones, the holy is defined and circumscribed by the conventions of her Christian faith. For Baby Suggs, the *prophetic pragmatist*, the holy is real but undefinable: it can only be pointed to, temporarily, imperfectly, and indirectly clothed in the language of story, dance, song and the lived experience of the individual. The analysis of this chapter suggests that it is Baby Suggs' orientation to and understanding of the *holy* that is crucial to a concept *teacher* capable of meeting the challenges outlined in Chapter I of this inquiry.

But Baby Suggs is the furthest of the characters analyzed here from the reality of classroom teaching. Schoolteacher and Lady Jones are much more obviously teachers. Baby Suggs is a prophet, preacher, healer, community leader, wise woman, and archetypal grandmother. How might we adapt the insight of this creation of Morrison's artistic genius to the more recognizable teaching milieu of a contemporary classroom? Would Baby Suggs have anything to learn from Lady Jones or Schoolteacher? What would it mean to place Baby Suggs' orientation toward the holy at the heart of the concept *teacher*? What are the possible consequences of such a reconception for a democratic system of public education buffeted by cultural and religious tensions and challenged to respond to the tragedy in the lives of children?

Chapter V

A More Inclusive Concept of *Teacher*?

The Prophetic Pragmatist and a Sense of the Holy

Chapter I of this inquiry reviewed the current social conflict that rages over the proper relationship between religion and public education, noting the threat that this polarizing debate may pose for the survival of democratic public education and taking up Dewey's challenge to philosophers of education confronted with such conflicts to look for a "more inclusive plan of operations."¹ I suggested that there were compelling ethical and philosophical arguments for renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education which did not entirely depend upon or reject the assumptions of either side in these debates. I then focused this inquiry on an analysis of the inadequacies of three common concepts of *teacher* and the need for a reformulation of that concept for any renegotiated relationship between religion and public education. The chapter concluded with the proposition that any reconception of *teacher* adequate to the challenge of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and public education must meet six necessary and sufficient--but not necessarily exhaustive--criteria: it must *affirm diversity*, exhibit a *social authority* grounded in

¹John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York: Collier Books, 1938, p. 5.

non-foundationalist epistemic claims and an *anti-"realist" ontology*, display a *moral-ethical idealism*, be centered in a "*love ethic*," and represent a "*meaning-full*" response to its audience's experience of the tragic.

Chapter II of this inquiry then reviewed the philosophical lineage of three conceptions of *teacher*--the *prophet*, the *technician*, and the *common sense pragmatist*--which are now and have been prominent in educational discourse and practice and which contain certain implicit assumptions about the proper relationship between religion and public education. I claimed, based on an analysis of these concepts, that they are either unacceptable or inadequate as conceptual models of *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education for a democratic, multicultural system of public education confronted with the reality of natural and man-made tragedy in the lives of children. The analysis presented in Chapter II, however, concluded that a contemporary revision of philosophical pragmatism, Cornel West's (1989) *prophetic pragmatism*, could offer a more suitable philosophical framework for a reconception of *teacher* capable of meeting the challenge posed in Chapter I.²

Based on the pioneering approaches of Maxine Greene (1978), Jane Roland Martin (1985), and Susan Laird (1988), Chapter III argued for the relevance of literary fiction as a source for philosophical reflection on teacher-

²Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 211-242.

cases that would support my claim that the concepts of *teacher as prophet*, *technician*, and *common sense pragmatist* are unsuitable for a renegotiated relationship between religion and education, primarily due to their inadequate responses to the fact of religious and cultural diversity and the existence of oppression.³ In that chapter I identified a suitable source for such an inquiry--Toni Morrison's *Beloved*--and identified two relevant methodological approaches to it: embodied criticism/reader-response theory to foreground the educational subtext of the novel and prophetic pragmatism to critique the cultural and ethical consequences of the conceptions of *teacher* represented in the novel.

Chapter IV essayed a close reading of *Beloved* through the lens of embodied criticism/reader-response theory, foregrounding the novel's educational subtext inherent in its characterizations of Baby Suggs, Schoolteacher, and Lady Jones. My analysis of these teacher-characters through the twin methodological lenses of embodied criticism and prophetic pragmatism suggested that two of these characters--Schoolteacher and Lady Jones--were fictional embodiments of the *technician* and *common sense pragmatist* concepts discussed in Chapter II. As such, they constitute, respectively, a negative case and a border-line case of the

³Maxine Greene, *Landscapes of Learning*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1978; Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; Susan Laird, *Maternal Teaching and Maternal Teachings: Philosophic and Literary Case Studies of Educating*, Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1988.

concept *prophetic pragmatic teacher*. The character Baby Suggs, however, embodied an important revision of the *teacher-prophet* concept which was consistent with the tenets of prophetic pragmatism and the criteria proposed in Chapter I as necessary and sufficient--though not necessarily exhaustive--for a concept *teacher* suitable for a renegotiated relationship between religion and public education. I concluded, therefore, that her character embodied a clear case of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher*. I concluded Chapter IV with the proposition that the most significant defining characteristic of Baby Suggs as a *prophetic pragmatic teacher* was an morally orienting but non-absolutist sense of the *holy*.

In this final chapter I propose to explore the meaning and value of a conception of *teacher as prophetic pragmatist* centered on a morally orienting but non-absolutist sense of the *holy*. I will begin by identifying the explicit parallels between Morrison's characterization of Baby Suggs and West's description of prophetic pragmatism. I will then tease out and delineate the conception of the *holy* implicit in both. Finally, I will begin to explore the meaning and value for contemporary teaching of a concept of *teacher as prophetic pragmatist* centered in a radically open conception of the *holy*. What would such a conceptual model mean in the day-to-day context of real-life teachers in ordinary public school classrooms teaching children from a plethora of cultural and religious backgrounds? What are its implications for teachers' aims and achievements, their methods, or their relations with students? What is its value in terms of school

children's experience of the tragic? What is its value in the on-going cultural and political conflict over the proper place of religion in public education?

Baby Suggs as Prophetic Pragmatist

Cornel West locates *prophetic pragmatism* within the pragmatic tradition by embracing the historicist orientation and anti-foundationalism of pragmatism while identifying key failures of that tradition which West's project rectifies.⁴ He argues that pragmatism fails to adequately appreciate the significance of political and economic forces; therefore, progressive Marxist social analysis is an indispensable analytic tool, balancing this weakness of pragmatism even as pragmatism compensates for Marxism's inadequate theorization of culture.⁵ Furthermore, the pragmatic tradition--with the exception of W.E.B. DuBois, the African American sociologist and philosopher of education--ignores race, displays a distrust of the masses as historical agents, and lacks an adequate understanding of the tragic, "the irreducible predicament of unique individuals who undergo dread, despair, disillusionment, disease and death *and* the institutional forms of

⁴Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 107-118, 135-141.

⁵Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982, pp. 95-130; *Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991, pp. xxi-xxiv; *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America, Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume II*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993, pp. 177-182.

oppression that dehumanize people. I believe," West writes, "that a deep sense of evil and the tragic must infuse any meaning and value of democracy."⁶

The prophetic wing of the black protestant church makes two key contributions to West's *prophetic pragmatism*. It offers an articulation of moral and ethical norms firmly rooted in a cultural tradition which guides analysis and lends direction to pragmatic experimentalism. And, of equal importance, it offers a fully developed tragic sense which both preserves hope for a better future and requires struggle to realize that hope. These moral and ethical norms are founded on the belief that all human beings are created in the image of God and are, therefore, equal before God and alike in their claims to individual dignity and the respect of others.⁷ The tragic sense, which West argues both pragmatism and Marxism lack, stems from the "Christian dialectic of human nature"--the recognition of the dignity *and* fallenness of human beings who are called upon to struggle toward an ethical ideal which, because of their fallenness, can never be attained. This struggle is carried out both on an individual level and in communities which simultaneously support and critique the individual's struggle to realize these ideals. The individual is thus irreducible within participatory communities governed

⁶West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 128, 137, 228.

⁷West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 16-18.

by the principle of mutual accountability.⁸ This ethical perspective precludes this-world utopias or dystopias often promised or delivered by vulgar Marxisms while it candidly confronts the existential facts of human existence--"disease, disillusionment, despair, and death"--without giving up the struggle for a better world or giving up hope for an ethical ideal which, though recognized as unattainable within history, nevertheless guides human actions. This is, according to West, what the black protestant church, in particular, has offered African Americans since its inception.

West uses the term *prophetic*, therefore, "in order to harken back to the rich, though flawed, traditions of Judaism and Christianity that promote courageous resistance against, and relentless critique of, injustice and social misery."⁹ Attaching the term *pragmatism* creates a philosophical point of view which "analyzes the causes of unnecessary forms of social misery, promotes moral outrage against them, and organizes different constituencies to alleviate them, yet does so with an openness to its own blindnesses and shortcomings."¹⁰

West's Christian faith is central to his conceptualization of *prophetic pragmatism*. "I follow the biblical injunction to look at the world through the eyes

⁸Ibid., pp. 17-19.

⁹West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 139.

¹⁰Ibid.

of its victims," he writes, "and the Christocentric perspective which requires that one see the world through the lens of the Cross--and thereby see our relative victimizing and victimization."¹¹ However, West does not ignore the crimes of the Christian church or valorize Christianity over other religious traditions. He repeatedly recognizes and criticizes the racism, patriarchy, and homophobia of Christianity in general and the black church in particular.¹² And West explicitly affirms the relevance of prophetic orientations grounded in other religious or even secular traditions, though he claims secular traditions have not had the time or maturity "to bequeath to us potent cultural forms of ultimacy, intimacy, and sociality comparable to older and richer religious traditions." West's *prophetic pragmatism* is overtly Christian simply because it is the tradition in which he is grounded, which provides him meaning and sanity and because *he* has found none better for *himself*.¹³

West's political and philosophical response to oppression and the tragic not only articulates and embodies a distinctive mode of intellectual life, it strongly suggests a radical reconception of the progressive teacher working with a culturally diverse society still steeped in religiosity and marred by social injustice.

¹¹Ibid., p. 133.

¹²West, *American Evasion*, p. 233.

¹³West, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 132-134.

His conception of the intellectual is based on Antonio Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual," one who is familiar with the best of contemporary thought but is firmly rooted in the traditions, institutions and everyday lives of the masses. The organic intellectual is a freedom fighter equipped with powerful analytic tools, governed by a normative vision, and committed to creative praxis in the spirit of jazz, "an improvisational mode of protean, fluid, and flexible dispositions toward reality and suspicious of either/or viewpoints, dogmatic pronouncements, or supremacist ideologies."¹⁴ The intellectual's role is to help build institutions across racial, ethnic, gender or religious lines--to *re-bind* in the etymological sense of the word *religion*--in order to mold people with the dispositions to seize the fleeting "hot" moments, to respond to the cultural crises that make progress possible.¹⁵

West's various descriptions of the intellectual vocation that follow from his philosophy of *prophetic pragmatism* exhibit several common themes that suggest a single underlying conception of the academic vocation which is obviously applicable to the role of the teacher. Organic intellectuals, for instance, are those "who, because they are organically linked to prophetic movements or priestly institutions, take the life of the mind seriously enough to relate ideas to the everyday life of ordinary folk." They are distinguished from traditional intellectuals

¹⁴Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, p. 105.

¹⁵Cornel West, *Prophetic Reflections*, p. 6.

who "revel in the world of ideas while nesting in comfortable places far removed from the everyday realities of the common life" and who are alienated, out of touch with the common people, especially in their understanding of the place of religion in ordinary people's lives. "Organic intellectuals," on the other hand, "are activist and engaged; traditional intellectuals are academic and detached."¹⁶ The organic intellectual is thus not an individual academic ensconced in the ivory tower of the university, writing for other academics, and imparting knowledge for the sake of knowledge but a "critical organic catalyst" rooted in the traditions and institutions of ordinary people and working for the transformation of society in solidarity with the oppressed.¹⁷

The Christian freedom fighter, West argues, operates on three levels: the normative, the analytic, and praxis.¹⁸ The normative level of operation rests on three key moral assumptions of the Christian tradition: the idea that humankind is created in the image of God and is, therefore, equal before God; the notion of mankind's fallenness, which requires checks and balances on all institutions and continual critique of imperfect individuals and institutions; and the tradition of

¹⁶Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988, p. 271.

¹⁷In bell hooks and Cornel West, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*, Boston: South End Press, 1991, p. 30.

¹⁸West, *Prophetic Reflections*, p. 183.

"Kingdom Talk," the faith in ultimate success which sustains hope for those engaged in struggle against overwhelming odds. At the analytic level the prophetic Christian freedom fighter strategically deploys theory to analyze and demystify the social, psychological, cultural, political, and economic forces that undergird social inequality and oppression. At the level of praxis, the prophetic Christian freedom fighter, armed with a clear understanding of actually existing social conditions and guided and inspired by the normative ideals of the Christian tradition, translates and fuses theory and practice into intelligent action: the conscientization, organization, and mobilization of people to change society.¹⁹ This notion of the prophetic Christian freedom fighter highlights the importance of a compelling moral vision which both guides and is subject to critical analysis as indispensable to praxis. "My notion of the prophetic," West says, "is a democratic one in which, in the midst of the quotidian, the commonplace, in the midst of the messy struggle in which one's hands are dirty, that one is holding on to moral convictions and tries to convince others that they ought to be accepted even though these moral convictions themselves can still be subject to criticism and change in vision."²⁰

Though Morrison does not portray her as an intellectual, Baby Suggs is nevertheless a clear case of the *prophetic pragmatist* because she embodies the

¹⁹West, *Prophetic Reflections*, pp. 183-195.

²⁰Ibid., p. 67.

tenets of *prophetic pragmatism* and the practice of the "Christian" freedom fighter. Hers is an analysis and experimentalism guided by moral and ethical norms which are rooted in the cultural traditions of her community. Hers is a thoroughly historicized vision which appropriates the past and recasts it in narratives designed to tell Sethe, Denver, Beloved and others who they are by reminding them of where they have been. "She told me my daddy's things," Denver says (209).

You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never to told you all that? (244)

And the purpose of such narrative, of the historicized vision, is to enable intelligent action and survival: "Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my" (244). Those stories should enable Denver to walk down the steps and seek help from the community. That is what they were meant to do.

Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing is a powerful social critique of unnecessary forms of social misery and oppression. It correctly identifies the source of their oppression in the racism "out there" where "they do not love your. . . hands. . . neck. . . heart" and correctly identifies the only response to that oppression which can enable survival: the ability to love oneself and one's neighbor (88). She recognizes the false generosity of even "good" whites like the benevolent slave master Mr. Garner or the abolitionist Bodwins who, even in their apparent generosity, preserve the disparities in power which enable oppression.

"They got me out of jail, Sethe once told Baby Suggs.

"They also put you in it."

"They drove you 'cross the river."

"On my son's back."

"They gave you this house."

"Nobody *gave* me nothing."

"I got a job from them."

"He got a cook from them, girl."

"Oh, some of them do all right by us."

"And every time it's a surprise, ain't it?" (244)

Baby Sugg's analysis is framed and given direction by a deep sense of evil and the tragic and by moral-ethical norms. "Everything depends on knowing how much," she said, and "Good is knowing when to stop" (87). Evil is, presumably, not knowing when to stop: "There was no bad luck in the world but whitepeople...They don't know when to stop" (104). Love, loving large, is the key to the survival of both the individual and the community, even though it is in the end no defense against evil (87-89). Misery is the four horsemen--Schoolteacher, his nephew, the slave catcher, and the sheriff--coming in her yard (148-153). These norms give direction and purpose to her struggle and a resilient hope for its ultimate success that, though beaten down in her life, resonates in her command to Denver from beyond the grave: "Know it and go on out the yard" (244).

Like West's organic Christian freedom fighter, Baby Suggs is rooted in the traditions, institutions and everyday lives of the masses. She is the heart of the black community of Cincinnati. She has shared their experience of slavery and oppression and lives their cultural mix of West African spiritual practices and Christian faith. And like West's freedom fighter she is engaged in the effort to *re-bind* a community and mold people with the dispositions to respond to the cultural crises that make progress, and survival, possible. She engages this struggle at the three levels at which the freedom fighter operates: the normative, analytic, and praxis. And her praxis clearly expresses the spirit of jazz, that "improvisational mode of protean, fluid, and flexible dispositions toward reality. . . suspicious of either/or viewpoints, dogmatic pronouncements, or supremacist ideologies."²¹ It is the spirit which inspires in the Clearing her to dance "with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music" (89).

Though West's *prophetic pragmatism* is articulated in explicitly Christian terms, those terms are provisional. He recognizes that the moral-ethical norms which orient his thought and guide his praxis are not limited to their Christian articulation. They may be articulated in the language of other religions or no religion at all. Like West, Baby Suggs eschews absolutist expressions of the moral-

²¹West, *Race Matters*, p. 105.

ethical ideals which animate her praxis. Her message is intelligible to the "A.M.E.'s and Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed" (87). It is also intelligible to those who recognize the West African origins of her Clearing rituals. These ideals are not contained by the language used to express them. The language is merely a convenient mechanism for pointing to them, a means of expressing an ultimately inexpressible sense of a transcendent good in terms that are culturally meaningful and useful in orienting ethical behavior. The language, like Baby Suggs, dances around a profound sense of the *holy*. This is what lies at the heart of both West's *prophetic pragmatism* and Baby Suggs' praxis.

Beloved Teacher: Baby Suggs, Prophetic Pragmatism, and the Holy

In Chapter IV I concluded that one crucial difference between Baby Suggs and the other teacher-characters--Schoolteacher and Lady Jones--was this sense of the holy. For Schoolteacher, nothing is holy. For Lady Jones, the holy is exclusively defined by the tenets of her apparently conventional protestant Christianity. For Baby Suggs, however, the holy is something that can be expressed in the religious tenets of the Sanctifieds, Holinesses, etc. but is not limited to them; it is something that can be expressed in the unspoken language of dance but is not limited to it either. It exceeds the power of any language to fully express it. Yet it provides the inspiration and direction for her preaching, for her dancing, for her loving "large."

West's *prophetic pragmatism* is also inspired and directed by an orientation toward that which provides a source of moral and ethical ideals but which is not in any way defined by those ideals. It exceeds any ideal articulated by fallen, fallible human beings. And it is equally understood and misunderstood by the various religious and secular narratives which attempt to comprehend it. A sense of the holy sits at the heart of West's *prophetic pragmatism* and Baby Suggs' teaching. Thus a sense of the holy lies at the heart of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher*. But what, exactly, does the concept *holy* mean?

The German theologian, Rudolf Otto (1917/1958), suggests that the concept *holy* originally referred to the "numenous," a term he uses to name the non-rational, or supra-rational aspect of certain ideas that cannot be contained in the conceptual formulations of reason.²² Though the concept *holy* has come to mean absolute good or absolute moral will, this is but a "schematization" of the numenous, an attempt by reason to comprehend our experience of the numenous by describing it conceptually, by describing it in terms of the already known, the only means reason has of grasping the novel. According to Otto, *holy* originally referred to this "overplus" of meaning beyond what can be captured or defined in the conceptual formulations of reason and language. "There is no religion in which

²²Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

it does not live as the real innermost core," writes Otto.²³

Otto characterizes our experience of the *holy* as a sense of "mysterium tremendum," a sense of awe, and wonder, and mystery that is often awakened in our experiences of nature and of other human beings and which somehow exceeds our power to name it, to comprehend it in language. Our attempts to do so are "schematizations." While these schematizations are accurate--in some sense--they do not fully contain the holy, the numinous. It extends beyond them. According to Otto, the concepts of religion and philosophy, as well as the narratives of myth and scripture, are analogies, metaphors--schematizations--which attempt to explain the unexplainable, to explain that which is "wholly other" and thus beyond reason.²⁴ There is something more to beauty or love, for example, than is contained in the conceptions and formulations which we deploy in language to describe them. Thus religious language and thought, in fact all language and thought which attempts to comprehend the "mysterium tremendum," is fundamentally poetic. Unfortunately, the analogies and metaphors lose their character as analogy and metaphor and are taken literally, thus losing their poetic character and diminishing the holy. This is the mistake Lady Jones has made and Baby Suggs has avoided.

In *A Common Faith*, John Dewey makes a distinction between *religion* and

²³Ibid., p. 6.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 25-31, 41-50.

religious that is quite similar to the distinction Otto makes between the *schematizations* and the *holy*.²⁵ According to Dewey, a religion "always signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization" which holds "that the essential framework [of reality, good and evil, etc.] is settled in its significant moral features at least, and that new elements that are offered must be judged by conformity to this framework."²⁶ *Religious*, on the other hand, denotes a quality of "any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value."²⁷ Religion is a body of "schematizations" of the human experience of nature and the holy which have long since lost their metaphoric quality. Because of this, Dewey concluded, "the opposition between religious values as I conceive them and religions is not to be bridged. Just because the release of these values is so important, their identification with the creeds and cults of religions must be dissolved."²⁸

Baby Suggs, as *prophetic pragmatic teacher*, is clearly religious, as Dewey defines the term. However, because her sense of the *holy* is consistent with Otto's articulation of that concept, her character calls into question Dewey's call to

²⁵John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934.

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 9, 26.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 27

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 28.

dissolve the relationship between religion and the religious. For, as Otto suggests, religions are poetic "schematizations" of the *holy*. They are necessary, though necessarily imperfect, attempts to explain the human experience of *mysterium tremendum*, to explain that which cannot be adequately expressed in any other form than the poetry that is religion. Though any particular religion might disappear, the need to articulate this aspect of human experience will simply result in new schematizations, new religions. Both Baby Suggs and Cornel West implicitly recognize this fact in their clear awareness that the religious traditions which they live out are simply convenient, contingent, imperfect but culturally meaningful "languages" within which they attempt to comprehend the *holy*. Therefore, to "dissolve" the link between *religion* and *religious* may be impossible and undesirable for many individuals. However, to avoid the hardening of poetic schematizations into literalist dogma which both Dewey and Otto criticize is both possible and desirable. *Prophetic pragmatism* and Baby Suggs' teaching are both premised on that possibility.

While Dewey's call to dissolve the link between *religious* and *religion* may be impossible and undesirable, the loosening of the exclusive identification of the two is useful to the goal of this inquiry to develop a concept *teacher* capable of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education in a multicultural, multi-religious democracy. It raises the possibility within schools of purposive activity imbued with a "religious" quality: "pursued in behalf of an ideal

end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value."²⁹ This possibility and the concept of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* implied in Cornel West's thought and embodied in Morrison's creation of Baby Suggs yield potentially profound consequences for public school teaching at a historical moment characterized by divisive secular-religious tensions and marred by both man-made and natural tragedies. What value, then, might the concept *prophetic pragmatic teacher* hold for contemporary public school teaching?

The Prophetic Pragmatic Teacher in Contemporary Public Education

In many important characteristics the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* might not be radically different from the *technician* and *common sense pragmatist* to the extent that the latter embody significant aspects of being a teacher which are missing from the characterization of Baby Suggs. For instance, Lady Jones' focus on basic academic skills in curricula and the overall goal of adapting to one's contemporary society are important goals of teaching. And the notion of a conscious technique embodied in Schoolteacher's practice is a worthwhile lesson for teachers even if the particular technique he used is morally problematic. However, in the final analysis, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* is a radical departure from the traditions embodied in the *technician* and *common sense*

²⁹Ibid., p. 27.

pragmatist because its basic orientation is fundamentally different. Though it recognizes the importance of occupational skills and assimilation into society, these goals are not the central purpose of teaching.

The *prophetic pragmatic teacher* eschews the idolatry of the *technician* and the *common sense pragmatist* in favor of a practice that places a sense of the holy at the heart of teaching. In a learning community governed by a *love ethic*, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* would strive to acknowledge the sense of the *holy* implicit in the experience and beliefs of students, to develop and strengthen that sense through students' growing awareness of its centrality in human experience, and to foster a religious devotion to the moral-ethical ideals which their sense of the holy inspires.

This is, to be sure, religiously loaded language. However, by keeping in mind Otto's conception of *holy* and Dewey's definition of *religious*, such a description of *prophetic pragmatic teaching* begins to sketch the rough outlines of a teaching practice which acknowledges the "schematizations" of these concepts offered in different religions but is not limited to any one of them or even to the more general concept of religion. Otto's conception of *holy* described a sense of *mysterium tremendum*, a sense of mystery, awe, and wonder, a sense of the "wholly other" that is unexplainable but which elicits a rational-emotional response that nevertheless attempts to explain this very human experience in the rational schema of myths, religious narratives, or scientific theories. And Dewey used the

schema of myths, religious narratives, or scientific theories. And Dewey used the term *religious* to describe a quality of human activity that may include religion but is not necessarily confined to it. Therefore, the use here of the concepts *holy* and *religious* as aspects of *prophetic pragmatic teaching* denotes a teaching practice that is centered on that existential sense of mystery, awe, and wonder, that is centered on questions rather than trivializing answers, that is radically open rather than closed and recognizes the various religious, secular, and scientific narratives as historically contingent, more or less imperfect rational-emotional schematizations of the *mysterium tremendum* that inspires our search for knowledge and which characterizes our response to the *holy*.

The concept of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* then defines a mode of being *teacher* that would respond to the current tensions over the proper place of religion in public education by including, rather than excluding or ignoring, religious--as well as secular and scientific--voices and narratives on their own terms as historically contingent, imperfect, but meaningful instances of that human impulse to explain the mysteries of human existence and thereby derive some moral-ethical structure by which we might order our individual and collective lives. As such, it contains profound implications for the aims, achievements, methods, and relations of contemporary teachers.

Aims, Achievements, Ends

In many surface aspects the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* might not appear

basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and science common to contemporary curricula could be a part of the *prophetic pragmatist's* curriculum as well. And, given the undeniable importance of productive work, relevant occupational skills would not be ignored. Where the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* would differ most radically from the *prophet*, the *technician*, and the *common sense pragmatist* is in terms of its most basic aims. It would reject the indoctrination of the *prophet*, the commodification of the *technician*, and the assimilation of the *common sense pragmatist*.

The most fundamental educational aim of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* would be to foster that innate sense of wonder and awe before the fundamental mysteries of our existence from within communities governed by an ethic of love. Such a governing principle, combined with this radical openness to what Otto called the numinous, creates the assumption of the basic goodness of the numinous. It creates, in short, a sense of the *holy* which functions as a kind of screen onto which students project *moral-ethical ideals* that guide and inspire *religious*--in Dewey's sense of the term--struggle.

A concomitant educational aim of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* would be a sense of intellectual humility before the *holy*, a recognition that our various attempts to comprehend it in scientific or mythological narratives are historically contingent, provisional, variously imperfect schema which we project on it rather than absolute truths which we discover. Thus the *prophetic pragmatic teacher's*

approach is a non-foundational, radically historicist understanding of both scientific and religious narratives as the attempts of finite beings to understand the mysteries they both inhabit and embody. This would not necessarily preclude judgements of the relative merit of one such narrative over another, but it would move the basis for such judgements from absolutist epistemic or ontological claims to the more pragmatic ground of the narrative's *meaningfulness* for particular communities in achieving particular ends at particular times.

These aims might be accomplished via a curriculum that does not ignore basic academic or occupational skills but which focuses on the various scientific, cultural, aesthetic, and religious schema as imperfect, provisional attempts to understand what we do not understand. Students would be allowed to identify with a particular narrative if, for reasons of culture or identity or personal affinity, it is meaningful to them, but they would be taught foremost to identify with the search itself, to learn and take inspiration from the various attempts of others to create meaningful answers to existential questions and lead ethical lives. Such aims suggest a curriculum which emphasizes the humanities and the sciences, but which also includes religious narratives as important instances of individual's and communities' attempts to organize their lives and explain their existence.

Methods, Tasks, Means

Once again, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* would not necessarily eschew many of the instructional techniques now common in schools; however, she would

reject the dehumanizing methods of the *technician* as well as the conformist practices of the *common sense pragmatist* as inconsistent with the *love ethic* that governs the prophetic pragmatic learning community and a violation of the sanctity of the individual. Central to the *prophetic pragmatist's* instructional method would be questions rather than answers, large, open-ended questions that convey to the student the idea that learning is not the acquisition of pre-determined answers but rather the growing ability to ask the right questions and live with the ambiguity of necessarily provisional answers. The *prophetic pragmatic teacher* might deploy a Whitmanesque method of indirect allusion to an orienting but unarticulated center through the examination of multiple, ultimately inadequate, attempts to articulate it.³⁰ This, I believe, is the method embodied in Baby Suggs' dance in the Clearing. It is an invitation to the learner to participate in the construction of tentative, meaningful answers to existential questions; it is an invitation to the learner to

³⁰I am referring here to Walt Whitman's use of long lists of different, often contradictory, images, scenes, stories, and self-identifications to indirectly point to a transcendent truth which is embodied in each item in his list but not exhausted by any single item. I am suggesting that the various scientific, aesthetic, and religious narratives would serve a purpose similar to the items in Whitman's catalogs; they embody, but do not entirely comprehend the numinous. When they are examined together, as in Whitman's "Song of Myself," they indirectly and imperfectly outline the mystery that is the numinous. And when they are examined from within a learning community governed by a love ethic, they suggest an unschematized conception of the holy that can define a moral-ethical orientation without *defining* moral-ethical ideals. See Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*, Edwin Haviland Miller, ed., Arlington Heights: AHM Publishing, 1970, pp. 16-85.

participate in the construction of knowledge.

Embodiment of the Prophetic Pragmatic Teacher

Like Morrison's Baby Suggs, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* would be the heart, rather than the head, of her learning community. She would be a learner among learners rather than the repository of answers designed to shape students to the purposes of others. Because her practice is centered on a conception of the *holy*--an openness to existential mystery from within a community governed by an ethic of love--she embodies a moral-ethical orientation, articulated in contingent *moral-ethical ideals*, which inspires relentless and uncompromising criticism of injustice and oppression *as well as* the moral dogmatism of religious or ideological prophets. In this she is *religious*, in the Deweyan sense of an activity pursued "in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss."³¹ Just as Cornel West identifies himself as a Christian because that narrative tradition has meaning for him, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* may also be religious in a more conventional sense.³² However, she will recognize that the particular narrative schema that she finds meaningful is contingent and imperfect and does not exhaust the meaning of *holy* or trump other religious or scientific narratives. Like West, she will recognize that it is useful and meaningful for her and that other

³¹Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 27.

³²West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 232-233.

narratives may be useful and meaningful for others.

The *prophetic pragmatic teacher* will be able to eschew both ethical relativism and ethical absolutism because she embodies a moral-ethical orientation which follows from the sense of the holy at the heart of her practice but which is articulated in the moral-ethical ideals of a particular community that she recognizes as imperfect and contingent. She does not have to resort to the moral dogmatism of the *prophet* or the *common sense pragmatist*; nor does she have to resort to the amorality of the *technician*. Because of the tension between the *prophetic*, which calls on a long tradition of critique of existing societies from the perspective of supposedly transcendent ideals, and the *pragmatic*, which recognizes any articulation of those ideals as imperfect social constructs, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* is able to go between the horns of this dilemma. She would, therefore, teach and practice the moral critique of human actions, including not only social, political, and economic injustices but the ethical ramifications of subjects which are often considered objective--science, for instance--from the perspective of the moral-ethical ideals embodied in the narrative "schema" of different communities. However, in recognizing the contingency of these ideals, the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* would also recognize the inevitable imperfection of her own and her students' attempts to realize those ideals, maintaining an ethical humility while striving for them that is all too often lacking in those who would make "traditional" values the focal point of education.

The Prophetic Pragmatic Teacher, Religion, and Public Education

The concept of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* offers a more useful conceptual framework for the challenge of negotiating and renegotiating the relationship between religion and education in a religiously and culturally diverse system of democratic public education. It constitutes a useful response to John Dewey's challenge--to "indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the contending parties"-- which motivated this inquiry.³³ It indicates such a plan of operations by locating an unschematized sense of the *holy*--a radically open response to existential mystery from within communities governed by an ethic of love--at the heart of teaching practice. It recognizes both religious and scientific narratives as imperfect, contingent, socially constructed "schematizations" which have attempted to comprehend this existential mystery, this "numinous." And it does so while steering a course between the Scylla of ethical relativism and the Charybdis of ethical absolutism because it hews to a moral-ethical orientation implicit in the concept *holy* while recognizing the imperfection and contingency of any specific articulation moral-ethical ideals.

Thus the concept of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* defines a teaching

³³John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York: Collier Books, 1938, p. 5.

practice that would include religious and scientific narratives on their own terms as historically contingent products of the human impulse to understand what we do not understand. It would not exclude religion from the realm of public education simply because it is religion. Nor, with the important exception of violence against children and others, would it place arbitrary conditions on the sorts of religious expression that are acceptable in the school by demanding that particular religions surrender certain tenets of their belief as the price of their admission into the dialogue of the public school.³⁴ However, it would also prohibit any imposition of the particular tenets of any individual faith as an ethically and epistemologically unwarranted instance of indoctrination, of offering definitive answers that trivialize the profound questions that underlie the concept *holy*. The *prophetic pragmatic teacher* says to all "believers"—secular or religious—"you can bring your most cherished beliefs to the dialogue, but you cannot expect to impose them on others." While such a plan of operations is unlikely to satisfy the absolutists on either side of the debate over the appropriate place of religion in public education, it can help minimize the tension by substituting a response of "both/and" for the "either/or" character of much of the contemporary disagreement.

³⁴I am referring here to John Dewey's and the theologian Leonard Swidler's insistence that religion give up its absolutist claims before being admitted into dialogue with others. See John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 33 and Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, p. 66.

The concept of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher*, in focusing the practice of teaching on existential mystery from within communities governed by a love ethic, centers teaching practice in a sense of the *holy* from which contingent, undogmatic moral-ethical ideals can be derived to guide "Deweyan-religious" activity. It, therefore, includes religion but is in no way confined to religion. Thus it accomplishes the task of identifying a more inclusive plan of operations than those represented by the contending parties in the debate over religion and education because, underlying its inclusion of religious and non-religious narratives, is a recognition that learning and wisdom are not a result of having definitive answers, but rather of recognizing the contingency and insufficiency of our answers, of recognizing, in short, our ignorance.

Issues for Further Inquiry

The limited object of this inquiry has been to explore the possibilities of a concept *teacher* which can acknowledge the place of religion in the lives of many students and teachers and negotiate the relationship between these beliefs and public education in a democratic, multicultural, multi-religious society. I have concluded that the concept of the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* is better able to meet that challenge than the more traditional conceptions of *teacher* as prophets, technicians, or common sense pragmatists, and I have attempted to identify the conceptual characteristics by which we can identify *prophetic pragmatic teachers* other than Baby Suggs.

The rethinking of any concept as basic as *teacher*, however, inevitably raises questions about other aspects of education. What, for instance, would the concept *prophetic pragmatic teacher* mean for curriculum? How might learning take on a different character because of it? What are its consequences for teacher education? How does the *prophetic pragmatic teacher* face the challenge of religious fundamentalism? These are but a few of the important theoretical questions which the reconceptualization of *teacher* addressed here raises. They are, however, beyond the scope of this inquiry. I must leave them for my own future studies and, in the Emersonian spirit of "provocation," for the future study of other scholars as well.

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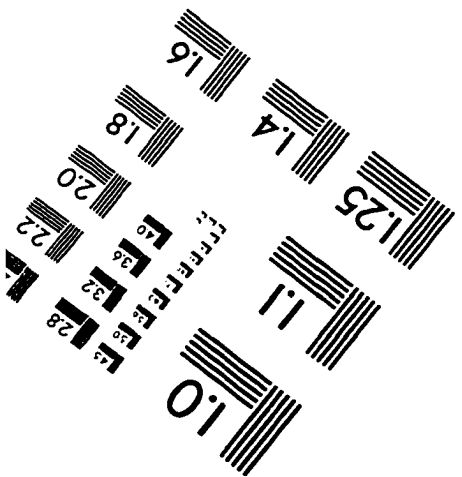
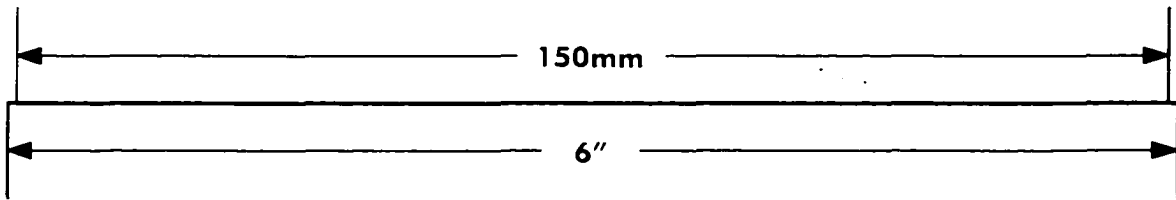
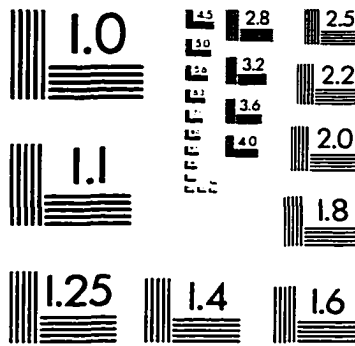
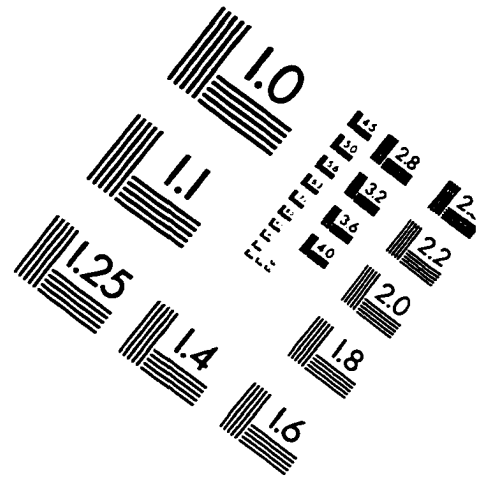
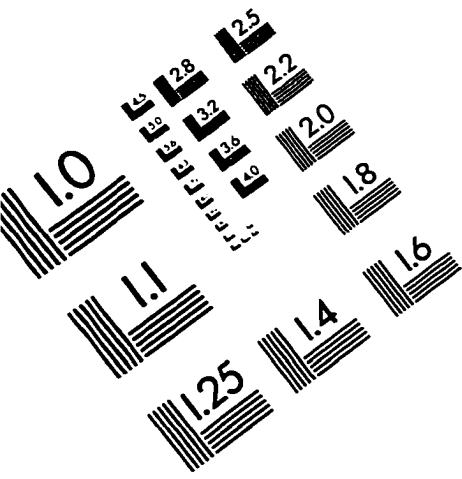
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