



## The Search for Religious Metaphors in the Language of Education

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The use of metaphor is a way of shedding new light on an already existing phenomena, by looking at and speaking about that phenomena from a totally different perspective. In this way we obtain a transfer of meaning, and thus an opening up of awareness.

Religious language could be used as metaphor to look at and speak about educational events and phenomenon. This assumes that religion and education are more or less independent realms, and that language usages can be transferred that will enable us to see the already familiar educational events and phenomena as strange or different and hence see them anew. But this work is not of that kind. In fact that very process of transferring religious language to education strikes me as being foreign to what I am about, and in part would distort the story of my own life as an educator.

112

Perhaps a brief aside to describe what I think I have been about will provide a perspective for interpreting my comments. Most of my professional career has been a search for more adequate and powerful ways to describe education—as it occurs in various places and as we try to think about it critically and creatively. That search has taken me through the language of psychology, sociology, and other behavioral sciences. It has also taken me into diverse schools of philosophy—analytic, existential, phenomenological, critical theory, Marxism, structuralism and those schools now drawing upon the new hermeneutics. That search has also lead me into theology and other religious languages of the west and of the east. Over the years I have been led more and more directly into studies of and work in theological and religious education. My own faith community commitments are Christian, although I have worked with many students and some colleagues who are educators within the Jewish tradition. This work with students and colleagues within the Jewish and Christian faith communities has gradually shifted my perspective, and it is that perspective which I will try to place in coherent public form here.

I accept Whitehead's (1959) statement that "the essence of education is that it be religious" (p. 23). My acceptance of that position

carries with it profound consequences. The search which engages us is not for metaphors. If “the essence of education is that it be religious” then the natural language for talking about education is religious language or language which articulates religious experience. Our problem is not to locate metaphors within the language traditions of the faith communities that might illuminate educational experiences and events. The problem is to recognize that the language now used to talk about education is already metaphorical. The habitual use of these metaphors blocks our ability to recognize more appropriate language to describe our work as educators. Herb Kliebard’s (1977) work, identifying some of the metaphors in educational discourse, is only part of the needed unmasking, or demetaphoring. Metaphors of growth, production, agriculture system, political control, and socialization hide from us what we are really about when we educate. Even the language of learning is metaphorically carried over from that human activity of studying animals, including the human being as an object. It is not descriptive of what we do when we educate.

Let me return to Whitehead and flesh out his statement. We too often stop at his one sentence and do not read the paragraph that follows in the first chapter of *The Aims of Education*.

A religious education is an education which inculcates duty and reverence. Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events. Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice. And the foundation of reverence is this perception, that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, the whole amplitude of time, which is eternity. (1959, p. 23)

The roots of Whitehead’s statements could be found in the sacred books of a variety of religions, but for reasons of familiarity I choose to find the roots within the Biblical traditions of the Jews and Christians. We can see in Whitehead’s “duty” reflections of the first creation story in Genesis 1:

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He them, male and female He created them. And God blessed them and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the heaven, and over the beasts, and over all the earth.

Whitehead’s use of the term “control” suggests subduing and dominion. In this day of ecological consciousness, we might advise Whitehead not to focus on the Genesis 1 creation story, but the Genesis 2 creation story, wherein subduing and dominion over the world is replaced by the charge to “serve” and “keep” the Garden of Eden. But we need not engage in such fine points here. That concern for duty, however, is not simply for the earth, but for the people of the

earth as it is expressed in the second great commandment found in Leviticus 19:18: "Love your neighbor as yourself" and in Leviticus 19:33-34:

When a stranger resides in your land you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

My interpretation of Whitehead's concern for education as duty is that it is a response to, indeed a response-ability for, the earth—the flora and fauna—and those of us—neighbors and strangers, friends and foes—who people it. Thus education is a call from the other that we may reach out beyond ourselves and enter into life with the life around us. Duty is that dimension of education which leads to the identification, elaboration, and presentation of content.

Whitehead proposes reverence as the other dimension of education that makes it religious. The foundation of reverence "is the perception that the present holds within itself . . . eternity." In the present is the past *and* the future. In the present is the sum of all existence. In the words of the mystics, the present is the eternal present or the presence of the Eternal. In the traditions of the Jewish and Christian faith communities, in the present dwells God—beyond comprehension, beyond knowing except for the glimmerings and the hints that shine forth in acts of love, dwell in the awesome appearances of beauty, and overwhelm us at the gift of life in birth and the loss of life in death. For me, reverence is spoken in the first great commandment announced in Deuteronomy 6:4-5:

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

The otherness that informs and accompanies education is the absolute Otherness, the transcendent Other, however we name that which goes beyond all appearances and all conditions. Education is the lure of the transcendent—that which we seem is not what we are for we could always be other. Education is the openness to a future that is beyond all futures. Education is the protest against present forms that they may be reformed and transformed. Education is the consciousness that we live in time, pulled by the inexorable Otherness that brings judgment and hope to the forms of life which are but the vessels of present experience. To interpret the changingness of human life as "learning" and to reign in destiny by "objectives" is a paltry response to humankind's participation in the Divine or the Eternal.

The source of education is the presence of the transcendent in us and in our midst. We can transcend ourselves, go beyond ourselves,

become what we are not because we participate in the life which is transcendent and transcending. If we do not “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” then our education comes to an end for we cannot get beyond ourselves and we are no longer open to that which is new. We can be drawn out of our present self and present forms, we can be educated, only if we recognize the possibility of the transcendent in us. “Motivation” seems like a niggardly expression and distortion of the first great commandment.

How, then, can we speak of education? Education is not something that we do to others, although it can only happen in community. Education happens to us. If we accept the Latin etymology as significant, (from *ducare*—meaning “to lead”; and the prefix *e*—meaning “out”) then education is indeed a leading out. But the leading out is not as a horse is lead out of the stall by a would-be rider, it is a leading out by the Otherness that is the source of our transcendence. It is a component of being a human being. The reason, it seems to me, that Whitehead emphasizes the necessity or importance of reverence, is that if we forget the transcendent foundation of education and assume that it is a consequence of human agency, then we lose the possibility for continued education and assume a maturity that presumably completes education. Forgetting the Shema and substituting human agency for the absolute Otherness, means that we fall into idolatry and away from the source of our education. To prevent that fall we are instructed to impress these commandments upon our children and to recite them “when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.”

But education is not only a leading out from that which I am, it is also a leading toward that which I am not. Thus the significance of the second commandment which calls our attention to our neighbor, to the stranger in our midst, and even to our enemy. My recent thinking about this dimension of education has been greatly influenced by my colleague, Parker Palmer (1981), who in his book, *The Company of Strangers* clearly depicts the educational significance of the stranger in our midst. In a similar fashion, Hans Kung (1976) in his book *The Church* speaks of the educational significance of the heretic, the alien in our midst. The stranger, the alien, the enemy—anyone who is different than I am—poses an unspoken question to me, in fact to both of us. The question is why am I as I am, and why is she as she is? Her life is a possibility for me as mine is for her. And in the meeting of the two of us is a new possibility for both of us. The difference and perhaps the tension between us is an opening into new possibilities for us. Differences are manifestations of Otherness. They are openings in the fabric of everydayness. They are invitations to be led out, to be educated. We fail to recognize the invitation

when we forget the source of education. We cannot recognize the invitation if we look at the other as a mirror image or extension of our own self. We reject the invitation if we pass judgment on the other and ourself, and assume that we know either.

When we speak of the stranger, the neighbor, the alien, we appear to refer to dimensions of experience that are not part of our normal ways of thinking about education. That appearance is a result of our taking for granted metaphors which now describe, and in part obscure, education. The language of learning, of systems, of production, of goals and objectives seems to make familiar that which is unfamiliar. However, ask a student about the stranger, the strangeness of content. When does one feel at home with a new content area? When is it no longer strange and alien and when one shares a new life form. To speak of the stranger, the neighbor, the alien is to speak of the content which is necessary for any educational experience. The opening of possibility requires the presence of otherness.

Content is otherness. The presence of other life in this world, life of which I am not yet a part, is the content of my future education. That life is the comings and goings of other people. In their comings and goings—their journeys and pilgrimages—they house themselves, construct tools and equipment, negotiate institutions, engage and interact with flora and fauna. And when they rest and relax from the struggles of life and have time to contemplate and converse, they tell stories of where they have been and where they are going, they sing and dance and paint and build and write so they will not forget what they have endured and experienced and hoped. They express so their past will not oppress and their hopes and dreams will not be repressed by fatigue and failure.

We have fallen into the language habit of saying that we teach content. This doesn't work if the stranger and her comings and goings are the content. We do not teach the stranger, the alien, and neighbor; nor do we teach about them. Our task is to bring the stranger, and the fruits of her comings and goings, into the presence of the person to be educated—to be led forth. How do we make present the stranger? To the young child, the stranger is almost everyone. To one who has become accustomed to almost everyone, the task is to call attention to those who have been ignored or are outside the field of attention. Communication and transportation systems are vehicles for this. Much educational material can be appropriately spoken of as a means of communication. To those who appear to have made everything and everyone familiar and known, the task is to make strange that which seems familiar or hidden from view. Within ourselves we have the stranger lurking, in the sexuality and anger that is suppressed, the hurts and disturbing feelings that have been repressed. Within our social world the stranger lurks in the

stereotypes and roles that we use for social convenience. Here the task is not one of communication or transportation, but the educational use of weakness and power in the intersubjective relationship.

I have been dwelling on the educational significance of our participation in the transcendent and of the stranger as a manifestation of the Otherness that confronts us. If education is the “lure of the transcendent,” “openness to the future,” “a protest against present form,” a “consciousness which brings judgment and hope”; then education carries with it the possibility of the unknown. If education requires giving up that which we are so we may have more life, then it carries with it participation in death as we willingly or perhaps forcefully give up part of ourselves. If education demands or requires acknowledging the stranger and alien in our present, it also requires that we acknowledge the possibility that the stranger or alien will overpower us rather than empower us. To give up that which we know or are for that which we do not know or are not yet is threatening. The lure of the transcendent must be present for education to happen, but that lure is threatening.

How can we face the threat of the unknown and the threat of the stranger outside of us and inside of us? It is not easy. We need the assurance that we will not be destroyed, that life will indeed be enhanced rather than destroyed. Love is that assurance. We can face the threat of the unknown and of the stranger if we are not alone; if we are in the presence of love which affirms life.

Love is a sticky wicket in educational circles. The word appears to be verboten in education as if it conjures up images of softness, privatization and indulgence. Too bad. We owe it to ourselves to explore the distortion of that word, its misuse and hence our hesitation to use it. Unfortunately, I have neither the time nor the expertness to engage in such retrieval. Rather, I shall draw upon my understanding of that word as I have encountered it and reflected upon it from within the Christian faith community. The first reflection concerns the locus of love. The second concerns its healing quality, love as reconciliation or a concern for wholeness. These are educational concerns whether consciously recognized or not.

The religious community, as I understand it from within the Christian tradition, is one that embodies love as the norm. Love among people is possible because faith communities have carried the tradition of love through the centuries and across generations. We love one another because we have been loved and because we know, from our tradition, that life without love is empty and perhaps meaningless. Thus, the tradition instructs us to care for the hungry, the poor, the ill, the broken, the powerless, the children, the foreigners in our midst. To ignore the least of these is to break with the

tradition that guides and shapes our community. The community of faith is a community that makes manifest that love. In words that are perhaps less loaded with specific religious affiliation, we could speak of the structures of care in our world society—who cares for whom and for what reasons. If we do not care for someone, why should we participate in their education—in their being led out to find new forms of life? We often assume that the only structure of care in our society is the home. That appears to be an unwarranted assumption. The usual loving relationship between mother and infant does not continue naturally and evenly through infancy and childhood, let alone adolescence and adulthood. Sometimes it does not exist even in the first few months of infancy. The intrusion of “careless” social structures occurs early, quickly, and forcefully in many homes or domiciles. As the past several years have indicated, the schools cannot be depended upon as structures of care in this society. As schools are tied more tightly to the dominant forms of technology and social-political control, competency and discipline have replaced care. Teaching has been construed to mean helping someone learn. The “careless” structures of our society appear to have become dominant in schools and other formal places of education.

118

Those who claim to be educators must care for, indeed love, those whom they would presume to educate. The source and renewal of that love is primarily within the faith communities, for they are the primary keepers of the traditions of love and care. Even the faith communities, however, frequently come under the domination of social forces that are “careless”—management, public relations, media, self-righteousness. If education is to happen in other places and locations within society, then the vitality of these faith communities must be maintained. Their traditions must be remembered and celebrated. The distortions of that love, whether by institution, knowledge, or social habits, need to be identified so they can be a focal point of critical and creative struggle within the public domain.

What does love do in education? When faced with the new, the possibility of loss or destruction as we reach beyond ourselves, love provides the assurance that we will not be destroyed, that we can be whole again. The power of love can acknowledge weakness. Love heals the differences within us. It reconciles the new tensions and divergences in our life. There are three forms of healing that love assures.

First, the presence and acknowledgement of the stranger in our life upsets the desired unity of thought, feeling, and action that we struggle to establish over time. Confronted by something new, forced to give up a part of our self, that unity is disrupted by new

thoughts, new feelings, or new actions. Trust, patience and conversation provided by one who cares or loves provides the time, support, and language necessary to bring discordant feelings, thoughts and actions into new unity. A relationship of love and care is a relationship of assurance—assurance that you will not be overcome by the stranger, and that you will still be loved even though you are no longer what you were but have taken on new life and new memberships in the world.

The encounter with the stranger also tears apart the integral relationship between past, present, and future. Encounters with the new and giving up of part of what we are means that past memories may now seem inappropriate, dreams of the future may be altered, or that forms of present life have been transformed. Being with another who cares, listens, celebrates and hopes with you, provides the occasion for recollecting that which had been forgotten or ignored. Being with another who cares is an invitation to rework dreams and hopes. Being with another who cares makes possible the reconstruction of new forms of present life. Love is reconciliation. The parts of me that got out of wack by the acknowledgement of and response to the stranger are reconciled one to another. The disruptions that could tear me apart are healed and brought into wholeness.

Finally, the presence and response to the stranger upsets the fabric of social relationship established through time. The birth of a second child disrupts the existing social fabric of the home. The presence of a foreigner at dinner disrupts the normal patterns of conversation. The presence of a new white person in a congregation of blacks or vice versa changes the dynamics of exchange. The presence of a non-English speaking person in a classroom, changes the expectations within that classroom. The presence of a new idea in the structure of understanding that binds two or more people together, upsets that common understanding. Love and care, as reconciliation, provide the patience, trust, collective memories and hopes, and conversation to heal the social body—to bring wholeness to the family, class, organization, or gathering which appeared to be disrupted by the newness. Love and care provides the assurance that the family or social gathering will not be destroyed if it gives up some of what it has come to value, but will find new life and new meaning.

What of Whitehead's concern for knowledge and ignorance: ignorance as possible vice and knowledge as related to duty? Because ignorance and knowledge are major educational concerns we cannot pass over them lightly. The traditions which inform our use of these two words are so extensive that any discussion here must be limited and perhaps distorting.

Earlier I suggested that Whitehead's concern for education as duty could be understood as a response-ability for the earth and those of

us who people it. Knowledge is related to our ability to respond to the neighbor or stranger. It is an acknowledgement of the presence of otherness in our life.

Knowing is a relationship between the person and the other, as indicated by the Biblical use of "to know," to describe sexual relations. The work of Piaget affirms this in one sense, for hypothetical-deductive knowledge consists of schemas of interaction between the person and environmental phenomena.

Ignored by Piaget, but recognized by Schutz and others of similar intersubjective persuasion, knowledge is also a schema of intersubjective or interpersonal relations. Knowledge as a symbolic structure, is a structure of personal relation. Thus knowledge, as a referential system, as a symbolic system that points to something beyond those using it, is a twofold relationship. It depicts our love, or lack thereof, for the earth and those of us who people it. Thus, knowledge is also a manifestation of duty and of reverence for the stranger and the transcendent. It is a manifestation of love and its distortions.

Knowledge is often understood as a pre-existent structure. Because it has been produced elsewhere, we see our task merely to reproduce it. We forget that knowledge came into being through someone, that it was created by other people. We forget the origins of knowledge, and thus forget our own involvements in history. Hence knowledge is seen as fixed, as reified. Knowledge appears removed from the interactions that link person to environment or person to person. We fail to recognize it as an invitation to join hands with someone else in their involvements with the earth. We fail to recognize it as an invitation to establish a relationship of care and being cared for—a relationship of duty, love, and reverence. In forgetting this history and these invitations, knowledge becomes a vehicle of power and oppression.

It is important to remember that knowledge is, first of all, a relationship with something that was, at one time, strange. Thus knowledge is a consequence of our being called forth by the otherness of the world. In play and in science, in just messing around and in systematic inquiry, we circle the stranger, poke and pinch it, ask it questions by a variety of "if . . . then . . ." manipulations until we presumably know it in its comings and goings. Bridgeman and a variety of philosophers of science, have pointed out that knowledge does not describe merely an object. It describes our operations on, our interactions with, or perhaps more appropriately our dancing with, the object.

As that knowledge, that set of interactions and intersubjective relations, is moved from the scientific community to the technical com-

munity—as it becomes technical knowledge rather than scientific knowledge—we shift our relationship with the phenomena to which the knowledge points. As technical people with technical interests, we make the objects of the world care for us. We harness these objects, their qualities and characteristic, to our needs and wants, frequently destroying them, and gradually the earth, so they can serve us. The mutuality of love and reverence is broken in technical communities, for we no longer care for that which cares for us. The lore of the American Indian and the concerns of the emerging ecologically conscious communities remind us of the significance of love and reverence in the structure of knowledge.

The scientist lives, in her own special field of inquiry, with reverence, whereas the technician forgets the reverence and duty which is the source of his power. The scientist is, presumably, always open to the other which is the object of her work. Even the theory which presumably describes the dance between the scientist and the phenomena of inquiry is a tentative theory. The evolution of science requires the search for negative evidence or proof. Existing theories must be capable of being overthrown or displaced by negative proofs as the phenomena shows new dimensions of its being and as the scientist awaits the call of the transcendent other. To be otherwise is to form idols and to participate in the structures of idolatry. Thus the creation of scientific knowledge requires participation in the transcendent and a responsiveness to the other. In one sense, the one who is a scientist is one who lets the object, the phenomena which is other, love her. She is one who gives up her present ways that she may be formed anew by that strangeness, that otherness before and beyond her. The scientist accepts this incomplete relationship with the world and gives of herself to be drawn out, to be educated or transformed by that which is before her.

Scientific knowledge, a symbol system which describes a dance of love with other phenomena, is also a conversation, a dialogue, with human beings. It is a consequence of meeting someone else and of saying, "this is the way I dance with the world. Is it also the way you dance with it? If so can we dance together?" But the other may dance differently, and the conversation leads to new meanings of what it is to do in the world. Knowledge, as social meaning, is always constructed with other. Knowledge is a social construction, not an individual construction. New knowledge, that which comes from others, is a description of their comings and goings in the world. Hence knowledge which comes from others must always be interpreted. We must always engage in conversation with those who construct and give it. That interpretation is also a manifestation of transcendence and love, of being open to and responsible for the other.

Knowledge is a gift from the stranger and may be considered from two points of view. My present way of being with others in the world and the conjoint symbolization of that can be described as a system of meaning. The meanings of others, that is their knowledge, is legitimately a source of criticism of our ways—in that it brings our ways under question and doubt. However, a knowledge or meaning system is also an invitation to new meanings, new ways of being in the world. The meaning systems of other, their knowledge, is also a source of creativity for us—an invitation to be part of other life forms. Hence, education as communication of knowledge or meaning system is criticism and recreation. It is threat and possibility. It is the stranger in symbol, and hence must be made present in a community that assures new life. New knowledge, as a symbol of the stranger, must be made present in a community of care and love.

If knowledge is not seen within the fabric of a faith community, if it is separated from the pull of the transcendent and the duty and responsibilities of love, then we risk idolatry. We risk falling into the struggles among the principalities and powers which appear to be overpowering and oppressing those of us who people this earth—in schools, homes, governments, through activities of production and communication, and in developing, underdeveloped, and overdeveloped lands. Idolatry exists where knowledge is presented as if it is removed from those who construct it and use it. Idolatry exists when knowledge is not part of the story of a particular people with their particular faith commitment. Idolatry exists when interpretations and meanings are standardized by textbooks or standardized evaluation forms. Idolatry exists when teachers present knowledge, forms, symbols, as if interpretation and conversation are frills rather than duties informed by love and responsibility.

We have no choice but to take a stand as individuals if we want to participate in the happening of education—in this openness to the transcendent and to the stranger who shares this earth with us. Professional knowledge and professional organization have been shown to be caught in the struggles among the principalities and powers. They are outside of the communities of care—the communities of faith which are a safeguard against oppression. But even communities of faith fall prey to these principalities and powers.

As we know, not all strangers in this world call us forth to live a new life. Some invite us to live their restricted life, closed to the possibilities of their own transcendence, broken off from communities of love and care. They would educate, but not be educated. They would use knowledge as a manifestation of power, not as a manifestation of reverence and duty.

Within one faith community, we are urged to give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. Other faith communities have other memories

which recall the struggles with these principalities and powers. Those of us who choose to help in the happening, which is education, are constantly faced with the difficult task of discerning the siren call of these principalities and power from the call of the transcendent. We are faced with the choice to be a part of the community of care or the community of idolatry. We are faced with the hard decision to give to Caesar only that which is Caesar's—and to be certain that we give no more.

If we recognize that education is a response to the otherness of the world, that the stranger of the world will not destroy us if we meet him or her in the reconciling communities of care and love, and if we see in the structure of knowledge the manifestation of otherness and love; then perhaps we can be more certain that Caesar will get only his share. These difficult tasks are easier if they occur among people who participate in communities of faith, no matter what their specific tradition.

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