Chapter 4

Teaching with the End in View

The next three chapters comprise part 2 of this book. These chapters concern the language of teaching when the verbal part of teaching goes beyond the choreographing of bodily movement. In this case, human language can be examined as a movement in its own right. Each of these three chapters deals with what I call a “family” of languages used in teaching.¹ The teacher is still concerned with choreographing movement, but speech is now used with more self-awareness that speech is at least part of what is being designed.

The moral problem of teaching becomes evident at this juncture, where speech emerges from bodiliness and takes on a life of its own. When a child says, “Teach me to swim,” the presenting of the body is evidence for receptiveness to the skill. But when a would-be teacher walks into a room and sees a group of people sitting there, the situation does not provide clear evidence of what, if anything, they are prepared to learn.

Before anyone opens his or her mouth to teach with words, the question has to be asked: Why are these people sitting here? Perhaps in some settings the answer may seem obvious. If they are sitting in a movie theater, they wish to see a film; if at a press conference, they expect a government briefing. The question nonetheless needs to be asked on every occasion. One of the main reasons for a moral problem to exist with teaching is that an inappropriate form of speech is used for the occasion. The teacher must ask, What license do I have from these people? What form of speech is therefore appropriate and justified in this setting?

In response to those questions, chapters 4 and 5 form a contrasting pair. (Chapter 6 will introduce further considerations.) The contrast between the family of languages in this chapter and the family in chapter 5 is based upon a difference in relation to end, that is, whether an end is in view. In the discussion up to this point, I have concentrated on

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situations where intention and its accompanying speech are embedded in bodily movement. As speech can take on a life of its own distinct from the body, so the individual can conceive of ends that move beyond immediate physical behavior to the future, to the spiritual, to the universal. The emergence of such ends, and the language accompanying them, is the great glory of the human race, along with the source of its terrible delusions and violent outbursts.

This chapter's title refers to the language of teaching when the end is in view. John Dewey uses the phrase "end-in-view" as a human guide for action, an end that can be seen and talked about. The human mind can conceive of a good that it wishes to reach (for example, an increase in salary or improved health) and a teacher can have the task of showing how to get from here to there. A danger ever present is that the particular end in view can be misconceived as the ultimate good in life. This danger is offset by the languages in chapter 5 — teaching when the end is not in view. I do not wish to choose between these two sets of languages, but rather to hold them together in a healthy tension. If one set acts as corrective to the other, both can be effective — and moral — acts of teaching. Radically split apart, each set is the manifesting of a human weakness that corrupts teaching.

Since the two sets of languages are so wedded, a case could be made either for the present order of the chapters or the reverse order. Depending on circumstances — for example, the age of the learner — one set may seem to take precedence over the other. In actual practice, over a long period of time, each one succeeds the other.

The languages of chapter 5 — removing obstacles to achieving an end — could be argued to have an ontological priority. It would seem that a person first has to remove obstacles (for example, fear or rage) before proceeding toward the end that is seen and desired. In fact, however, people usually discover the obstacles only through their efforts to reach an end in view. I start with the first set both to describe its powerful possibilities and also to note its limitations and the need for other languages. From that context, the set of languages described in chapter 5 has a better chance of being recognized as teaching at all.

My organizing principle largely determines how I name individual cases within both sets. Given that there are hundreds of names and dozens of classification systems, any choice of languages is bound to be somewhat arbitrary. The absence of the name of a particular language does not necessarily mean that it is unimportant; it may simply fall within a different way of classifying language and therefore cut across the names I have chosen. For example, is poetic language a language of teaching? If poetic is the alternative to prosaic, then I would hope for a poetic quality to every example that follows. If, however, the reference is to distinct poems or poetry, then there are several places in the overall description where poetry (or a novel, short story, or play), can be an example, and I will indicate some of those spots.

Along a different line, someone might note the absence of "political speech." If the alternative is apolitical speech, then all of the languages in this chapter are political. However, if what is meant are the speeches of politicians or the discussions of political science, then these forms could be included in several places. Something similar could be said about aesthetic speech, ethical speech, or religious speech; they are too important to be embodied in just one of the forms I describe.

A Community Activity

The first family of languages, described in this chapter, arises from a community existence. Every community has a set of beliefs. The family of languages described here is intended to persuade people to act on the basis of those beliefs. The element of command or directive makes this set of languages resemble the choreography of the body. The difference is that the commanding is directed toward the beliefs of the community, rather than toward the body. "We say we believe this [e.g., the good of children]; it follows that we should do that [provide child care]." This family of languages is persuasive of the community. The ancient meaning of "rhetorical" captured the intent of this language. Wayne Booth, describing this meaning of "rhetoric," says it "was practiced when the first mother or father went beyond simple caressing or physical restraint and managed to convey, in sound or picture or sign language, 'No, because...', with a reason not present to the senses at the moment.'

The teacher in this situation steps forward before the community or, better, steps into the center of the community. The person can be elected, appointed, ordained, chosen by lot, licensed by some trusted group, or be biologically responsible. But this temporary assignment of "teacher" should not mean that some people are teachers and some are not. A group of people who claim to be a community have to con-
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teacher cannot rely on a style that would be out of touch with memory, faithfulness, hopes, and conviction. The individual teacher realizes that he or she contributes only a small part in that the words arise from the community and are quickly submerged again. The teacher nonetheless seized the moment to shape the words for their greatest effect.

The teacher tries to become one with the words that are spoken. There is little space for "critical thinking" that would raise doubts about the truthfulness of the teaching. There will be other occasions for self-critical reflection, but this first family of languages is concerned with speech in relation to biddleness. The speech is interesting, practical, and effective before the reflexive question of truth is raised. Again one can easily see the vulnerability of this teaching to manipulators of truth and falsehood.

For the individual, the community's beliefs are prejudices; the more common term is "prejudices." Community teaching precedes the individual, encompasses the individual. A person does not simply begin searching for truth at the "age of reason." Instead, a child has already absorbed a world of beliefs. He or she is a prejudiced person at the dawn of conscious reflection: the way his or her family acts is the right way.

The language of the eighteenth century, which we still speak, assumes that prejudices are bad and should be replaced by rational thinking. Education's aim, according to eighteenth-century writers, is to free the child from the prejudices of the father, but if community is to be allowed a place, then the beliefs of the community cannot be assumed to be negative. Some of what is provided to the child may turn out to have some truth. Every prejudice should be open to questioning.

Hans-Georg Gadamer distinguishes between blind prejudice and justified prejudice. We cannot get rid of blind prejudice until we accept the fact of prejudices and begin testing each of them for truth as well as falsehood. "The fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment," writes Gadamer, "was the prejudice against prejudice." The blind prejudice that each individual should shed whatever beliefs he or she has and invent the world within his or her own private reasoning took deep root in our modern culture.

Because of this prejudice against prejudice, some comments have to be included here concerning the possible charge that all of the languages in this chapter are "indoctrination." One route of defense would be to distinguish two meanings of "indoctrination." What Gadamer does with "prejudice" could be tried with "indoctrination." Leszek

sider, as an important criterion of community, Is every member of the group in some way and at some time a teacher to all the rest? If only a small number of people are recognized as teaching, then the likelihood of a mutuality of persons — the hallmark of community — is greatly diminished.

Most groups, whether social, political, religious, or familial, tend to segregate the word "teacher" for a few. It then becomes the task of these few to keep turning the term "to teach" back to the whole community. If other persuasion is to be effective, persuasion as to who are the teachers cannot be overlooked. To teach is to show people how to live; living as a human being includes the act of teaching. "We know a man for a poet by the fact he makes us poets." We know a person for a teacher by the fact he or she makes us teachers.

A teacher in and for the community taps into the memory of the community. The beliefs that are consciously held are a result of a long process of community formation. The process includes forgetting as well as remembering; no set of beliefs can capture the community's most valuable experiences. A teacher with the end in view is someone who can retrieve what underlies community belief, thereby placing the beliefs in a new configuration. Older people in the community have a special place in this kind of teaching; they are linked by personal memory to the vital force that grounds the community and provides continuing cohesion. In one sense, nothing new is added in the teaching, no information previously unknown. In another sense, everything is made new as the past is brought to consciousness in the present and everything is seen through the prism of well-articulated speech.

Embodied in the community's existence is the conviction that the end is known, the good to be attained by this group is evident. The teacher does not have the job of discovering the end or proving any scientific hypothesis about it. The teacher's task is to link the past with this end in the future so that the energies of the present are unleashed. This kind of persuasive teacher is in need of style, a distinct way of assembling words and delivering them.

The great teacher knows how to touch just those spots of memory so that people are moved to action. It is obvious, of course, that attention to style can be abused. Many political and religious leaders have manipulated masses of people on the basis of style without substance. But that problem arises when community has broken down and left the "mass" of individuals desperate for a leader. In a genuine community, a
Kolakowski is one contemporary thinker who endorses indoctrination as educationally defensible. He even writes that indoctrination "is included in the acquisition of language itself. . . . Hence, education without indoctrination is noneducation."

I do not think Kolakowski faces up to the totally negative connotation that the term "indoctrination" has. While there is some foothold for resistance with "prejudice" (and its close relative, "discrimination"), neither history nor contemporary usage offers a realistic basis for what Kolakowski tries to do. I think one has to start with a premise opposite to his, namely, education with indoctrination is noneducation. I would therefore say that the family of languages that presupposes a community and an end in view is not in itself indoctrinative.

Successful indoctrination results in a person so attached to one version of reality that multiple perspectives, ambiguity in language, and the ability to stand at a distance from one's own beliefs have been eliminated. I cannot deny that a use of the first family of languages could lead to indoctrination. The only sure prevention is an effective presence of the other two families. The fact that A can lead to Z does not mean that A is a form of Z.

What the parents and community show to a child is a way of life to which the child responds in his or her own way. Since the community's way of life is bounded by definite beliefs, the child's unique response is within definite limits. Some day those limits must be confronted and in one way or another transcended. But first a world with limits has to be absorbed.

Language, which exists in particular and limited form, is a gift that the child appropriates. Being able to speak a language makes possible a human encounter with all reality. Each particular form has its own restrictions and disadvantages. For example, if you wish to speak French in life, you would best be born in France. If you wish to speak English as a second language, it helps to be born in Sweden rather than in Finland. That is just the luck of the draw in every childhood; Finns have their own advantages. Learning any language does not cut off the possibility of multiple perspectives and self-critical distance.

The testing of the community's prejudices takes place over a long period of time and is finally measured by how the small community contributes to the human community. One of the beliefs of the community may seem to be irrational, but a single belief may derive its intelligibility from its connection to a whole complex of beliefs that has its own human logic. The teacher has to comprehend the connection among the community's beliefs and not merely the beliefs.

The child, for its part, also grasps, in however primitive a fashion, the pattern or structure of belief. For a child, there has to be some kind of world order that provides the security of knowing that someone understands all these confusing pieces and that a benevolent force rules all. The child will fight fiercely for the truth of some propositions because their denial would unravel the fabric of the established world.

The related problems of blind prejudice and indoctrination arise when the mind that was proper to a young child resides in an older child or an adult. In this case, the truth is still dependent on the opinion of a powerful adult; the growing person has not really acquired any beliefs as his or her own. The beliefs have been delivered and accepted. Unless something else happens to the beliefs, they will gradually become more rigid. Paradoxically, they also become more fragile in relation to the external world and therefore in need of greater and greater defense.

The child who is more fortunate is gradually exposed to a plurality of views. There are few places in the world today where plurality is absent. Too much of this plurality too soon could overwhelm the child and lead to a withdrawal from plurality. Parents and other teachers of the young have to gauge the amount of diversity that a child can handle. The child need not be exposed to hundreds of viewpoints on every subject. A good beginning would be two points of view. For a child beyond age 6 (and possibly younger), the teacher has to convey these two views: the truth that the teacher is convinced of and the acknowledgment that another truthful view is possible. This "other view" may turn out to be a dozen, hundred, or thousand views. With other teachers (including the learner as teacher), the learner can continually reshape the overall perception that he or she has of the world.

There are crucial moments in the lives of individuals when the mind breaks through to the recognition that to live the truth one knows does not require attacking anyone else who has a different view. Not all teachers (including schoolteachers) have themselves reached this position. A repressive form of teaching might be perpetuated over generations. The fortunate thing is that one need not have been taught only by very competent teachers. In fact, if a person meets just one or two good teachers in life, that might be enough to break through blind prejudice to receptive listening, respect for others, and an intelligent grasp of complex issues.
At this point it will be helpful to consider three examples of teaching with the end in view: telling stories, delivering a lecture, and preaching a sermon.

**Storytelling**

The first representative of this family is teaching by storytelling. My intention here is to use a term that can encompass all sorts of oral and literary forms that are siblings within this family. Storytelling extends from a mother telling the tale of "Three Little Pigs Went to Market" to a historian trying to recount the rise and fall of civilizations. What links the many forms is a presumed community that is "on the way." The community has some end in view, although stories at their best do not reduce the end to a simple termination point. The end may be a complex image or metaphor that not only allows but invites a filling in.

Storytelling is a universal human trait, or at least it would be difficult to imagine human lives that do not involve the recounting of tales both for entertainment and instruction. As far back as we can investigate, humans have been telling stories. Earlier and simpler cultures, perhaps, show more evidence of storytelling as a central fact of life. In the contemporary world, people do not sit around a campfire telling stories, though they might sit around the television watching soap operas. Whether this change shows progress is to be questioned. But storytelling certainly does exist in the present in hundreds of forms.

The parent's way of communicating with the small child is largely by story. A great fund of children's stories has been built up throughout history. Some of the best stories are the oldest; they have been tested over time. The "end" they offer is not a moralistic message about good behavior but a complex image of good and evil. Often when people try to invent new tales for children the moral is too obvious and the children see through it. Richly textured stories can be engaged at many levels and allow the listener to take whatever he or she is ready to take. The story needs little or no explanation; the teaching is in the telling.

The great Australian historian Manning Clark, while writing of his own work, could also be describing children's stories: "All the great stories of mankind are told without any comment at all. Perhaps that is why they have outlived their generation, and said something to men at all times and places." Clark goes on to say of these stories, "They make us explicitly aware of what we had vaguely noticed before of what life is like, of what will happen to us if in our folly or in some mad passion we defy the wisdom of humanity."7

Traditional fairytales usually deal with the great cosmic struggle of good and evil. The storyline often has frightening elements of child kidnapping, wicked stepmothers, threats of murder, and cannibalism. Adults usually wish to protect children from encountering such horrors. However, if something can be told as a story it becomes bearable, and an artistic story well told is educational. The inner fears of the child find expression in a story of what happened in a land far, far away. The story comes to a resolution and the people live happily ever after. This end is, in fact, an invitation to imagine what follows after the crisis described in the story.

Starting in childhood and continuing throughout life, people adopt storylines with grand designs of where "my people" came from and what we are going toward. It is not an accident that the term "myth" has a double meaning: a story of foundations and a story that is false. We know that the great epic myths that tell of the origin of the world, the human race, or the nation involve fanciful details. But at some level below factual inaccuracy, the great stories of the Book of Genesis, the Iliad, or the Bhagavad Gita provide insight into the human story. Northrop Frye, referring to Macbeth, says, "If you wish to know the history of eleventh-century Scotland, look elsewhere; if you wish to know what it means to gain a kingdom and lose one's soul, look here."8

The master stories of the world, the human race, or the nation do not always get told directly or explicitly. They may be so thoroughly woven into the texture of ordinary life that the lesser stories are constantly reaffirming them. For example, the master story of the United States is America. From the time of its invention in 1507, "America" has been the name of a great myth, the story of the promised land and the chosen people. The artificially constructed nation known as the United States has from the beginning identified itself with the dream, the ideal, the myth of America. So successful has the identification been that people throughout the world use "United States" and "America" interchangeably. Even more forcefully is the calling of U.S. citizens the Americans. Every fourth or fifth sentence spoken in the United States reaffirms the story of America, the promised land of freedom, justice, and wealth.

No one can doubt the formative power of this particular story. Many people arriving in the country are disappointed; they expect to find America and what they find is the United States. Those who live under
the enveloping myth of America have difficulty getting any critical distance from it. Without using convolutions of language, U.S. people find it impossible to distinguish between their country and a myth; the result is a confusion between politics and religion. With the constant assertion (and diversion) of the "separation of church and state," the politics of the United States is very often the religion of America.

The United States is not alone in having a myth to hold it together. This country is a dramatic example because its nationhood is so precarious. The modern world with its nationalism practically requires that people have a myth of origins, unity, and greatness. Europe, after the passing of "Christian Europe" or the "Holy Roman Empire," depended on the cohesion of nation-states. There is an old European saying, "A nation is a group of people united by a common error concerning their ancestry and by shared hostility to their neighbor." Nevertheless, even as these states warred with each other, Europe exported nationalism to the rest of the world. In some places it took easily, blending in with tribal loyalties; other places resisted. The "Islamic community," for example, cannot really comprehend independent nation-states, but nationalism surfaced even in the Muslim world.

My only interest here is to note the power of master stories that shape the lives of billions of people. They may not know the story, they may even wish to reject the story, but the stories do exist and have overwhelming power. I have intimated that these stories, while inevitable, are not all to the good. Storytelling is often romanticized in uncritical ways. As I have said of this whole family of languages, which includes stories, the only protection against the possibly corruptive influence is the presence of other families. Especially needed is academic criticism of the story when it envelopes whole nations, or other ethnic, religious, and racial groups.

At the everyday level, storytelling takes up much of life. Like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who was unaware he had been speaking prose, we often do not reflect on the narrative character of ordinary conversation.1 These brief and often fragmented stories are a continuous form of teaching. Take, for example, gossip. Almost no one would be proud of being called a gossip and yet practically everyone deals in it. Gossip should perhaps have a better reputation than it has. When the gossip becomes malicious, then it needs restraint or criticism. But condemning gossip itself has little effect. As in telling jokes, it is a way of testing out the self in relation to the fabric of community existence.10

Among literary forms, consider the mystery/thriller/crime story. It is usually not praised as a literary genre, though it can range from the real potboiler (where the only point is to get to the end) to the textured writing of Elizabeth George or P. D. James. Reading such stories gives people a sense of order in the universe. One is comforted by the fact that by page 250 Commander Dalgleish will have solved the mystery and a balance of justice will be restored in the world. Everyone knows that the world is not so completely ordered, but that does not lessen our need to discover, affirm, or create order in parts of the world. For some people, to be engrossed in light fiction is a guilty pleasure for four hours on a plane or an afternoon on the beach. However, light fiction or gossipy conversation is better teaching than most of the sensationalistic television that appeals to the same instincts.

Those people who are blessed with native talent and a solid education can have their lives sustained by richer, more complex stories. Most of the teachings of great philosophers and religious figures exist in the form of stories. Plato’s myth of the cave or Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son never lose their force for those willing to enter the story. In the Jewish tradition, the process of midrash goes on today, story about story layered throughout the centuries. Biographies and autobiographies, short stories and novels can become lifelong teachers.

At their best, television and film can be a lively complement to written and oral speech. The evidence of five decades suggests that television is really good at two things: soap opera (the bad and the sophisticated) and “live” talk of the day's events, including neighborhood politics, the sporting match, or the weather. Television, together with the computer, is the single greatest potential for educational reform in the present era. Whether that potential is ever realized, and despite the dreary lineup of most evenings on commercial television, the television set is now the background to most human conversation.

Probably for the first time in human history there is worldwide gossip, some of it boring, some of it malicious, some of it inspiring. Television, along with the computer Internet, enables the verbal and nonverbal art of one person to appear in a living room anywhere in the world. The eighteenth century's conception of “humanity” is starting to be filled out with something more than a few white men and their romantic notions of what they supposed primitive people to be.

The film industry, especially in the United States, has a profound effect in shaping the culture. Even people who do not go to the movies
live in the environment of the world on film and videotape. Along with rock music, film has become an international language. There is danger in too much of the language coming from one place on the globe that exports fluffy narrative and orgies of violence. Movies of today, just as in the 1930s and 1940s, run the gamut from truly awful to spectacularly good. The same could have been said of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. We have a few hundred masterpieces from the thousands of pieces that were read and tossed aside like today's tabloids. Teaching by story involves not just the profound side of human nature, but the mundane side as well.11

Perhaps the greatest difference between today's stories and the traditional novel of the nineteenth century is the disappearance of the omniscient narrator, at least in much of the literature of the second half of the twentieth century. The result is a voice from within the story giving us a fragment of life. There is an absence of trust in someone telling us the whole story and where it all leads. "We trust only the voice of the witness," as William Styron puts it.

In the world of contemporary literature, the language shifts away from "teaching with the end in view" toward the second family, where the end is not in view. Much of modern fiction, poetry, and drama gives up all instructional tendency and mirrors the confusions and uncertainties of a world in which neither divine nor human intelligence is felt to be in charge. The term "story" has not disappeared. People cling to plot lines, even in fragmented form, to get to next year or next week. But more than ever, other forms of language are needed to complement storytelling. Neatly plotted master stories are too rich for many bewildered people. Other languages of teaching need to complement and sometimes precede storytelling.

**Lecturing**

The second language in the family of rhetorical persuasion is the lecture, a term that means "reading." It usually refers to a particular kind of reading with an instructive or didactic purpose. The typical approach of authors who teach in universities is to attack the form of lecturing and then go right back to using the term for the language of university teaching.12 A whole set of jokes exists for describing lectures; for example, the lecturer is someone who talks in someone else's sleep; or a lecture is what passes from the teacher's notes to the student's notes without passing through the head of either.

In this section, I wish to take exactly the opposite tack from one that ridicules lecturing as a form and then resignedly accepts its use in the classroom. I think that lecturing is to be affirmed and valued as a form of teaching; I also think it is unacceptable as a description of classroom instruction. On the one hand, I think it is a scandal for professors (and ex-professors) to ridicule lecturing. On the other hand, I think universities cannot examine what it means to teach in their setting until they remove the term "lecture" from center stage.

In a book on university teaching, Kenneth Eble begins the chapter entitled "Lecturing" by saying, "The best general advice to the teacher who would lecture well is still, 'Don't do it.'"13 Eble does not take his own advice, proceeding to discuss the use of lecturing in the university classroom. On the persistence of the lecture form, Eble says, "As has been pointed out countless times, the lecture was outmoded by the invention of printing and by cheap and easy access to printed works." He then expresses at least partial disagreement with this statement by saying that the book did not sweep out lecturing "for the simple reason that human beings remain responsive to all forms of intercourse with other consenting humans."14 Although I agree with this conclusion, it does little to match this form of intercourse with the appropriate setting.

When a university installs a person in a chair, the occasion is often marked by an "inaugural lecture." Such a lecture is appropriate so long as it is understood as an inauguration of the professor to his or her colleagues and not the beginning of the daily work in the classroom. Lecturing is a highly ritualized act in which a person addresses a community; the end that the lecture has in view is some rational conception of humanity. Far from becoming outdated in the seventeenth century, lecturing began to come fully into its own about that time. The spread of books and book-ordered learning is the precondition of, not the competitor to, the modern lecture form. What has happened in the twentieth century is a fragmenting of the cultural assumptions of book learning. Books (and lectures) have by no means disappeared, but they need complementing in the contemporary diet.

A person reading from an easily available book is not a very effective form of teaching; a person reading notes that he or she has taken from easily available books does not make much sense, either. How-
ever, an author reading his or her own words, particularly if done with dramatic style, can sometimes be effective teaching. For the lecture as appropriate form, a whole set of conditions has to come together.

For teaching by lecture, the speaker and the text need a ritualized setting. The listeners need to be capable of appreciating well-written prose delivered with a forceful style. The author needs to speak words that come from the depth of the self. The aim of a lecture is to change, however imperceptibly, the listener’s actions as a human being. A lecture to a three-year-old is pointless; to a seven-year-old, a lecture (no longer, say, than one minute) might sometimes be called for. Listening to a 30- or 45-minute lecture is something most of us are ready for only a few times a year. And most of us are ready to deliver a lecture even less frequently.

Some people have a responsibility to give a lecture on a fairly regular basis. A president is expected to deliver a State of the Union address each year. Such an occasion should provide an example of careful preparation, clear presentation, and reflective response. It deserves an audience of both Houses of Congress and other important government officials. The speech is delivered in a historic setting. The televising of the event to millions of homes need not interfere, can indeed enhance, the ritualizing of the event.

Neither a U.S. president nor anyone else can churn out lectures daily, weekly, or even monthly. The practices of the election campaign tend to subvert the idea of the thoughtful speech in a ritual setting. Television adds to the destruction of lecturing because the presence of the camera becomes the excuse to produce thirty seconds — or less — of clever attack. Television becomes both cause and devourer of such speech.

Consider two examples of teaching by lecture. The first is a memorable speech that Mario Cuomo delivered in 1984 at the University of Notre Dame. It was a political lecture with moral and religious overtones. Cuomo was trying to make intelligible his position on abortion, primarily to his co-religionists but also to any reasonable person. The text was prepared over several months and involved the speaker in considerable study of history, politics, and theology. The choice of a university to give the lecture was a signal of its rational inquiry, and the fact that the university was Notre Dame suggested a serious religious twist. The evening was a very formal ritual in which Cuomo set out a position that involved his deepest personal beliefs and risked his political future. The lecture was broadcast live on cable systems around the country.

Was this a successful lecture? It presented Cuomo’s position on abortion as no other format could have done. Many people were not convinced by the careful line the speaker tried to walk. But even those who disagreed, from left and right, could probably appreciate the attempt to frame an argument with careful thinking and well-articulated speech. For years afterward, people continued to refer to the Notre Dame lecture as the standard source for Cuomo’s position on abortion.

My second example is a speech that Vaclav Havel gave in Washington, D.C., in February 1990. He addressed the Congress of the United States from the well of the House. The politicians, I suspect, were startled by his taking out a yellow pad on which he had written his speech. The lecture had immediate urgency for the several hundred people present. Its appeal, however, was to reasonable men and women everywhere. Havel had spent a good part of his adult life in prison, thanks to Soviet officials. Yet here he was urging Congress to give aid to the former Soviet peoples.

Havel’s lecture had all the marks that I have cited for teaching by the form of lecture: the ritual setting, the personal involvement in the message, the carefully crafted words, the appeal to rational order. He was appealing to the self-interest of his hearers, but the ultimate basis of his speech was his own particular humanism. The only thing he may have lacked was a sufficiently thoughtful audience. His speech did not succeed in its immediate mission to provide economic aid. On a larger scale of political history, however, the lecture may have given a ray of hope within a depressing world of ordinary wheeling and dealing. Clement Atlee said of Winston Churchill in 1945, “Words at great moments of history are deeds.” One could say that great words at any time are deeds. At great moments of history, the deedful quality of careful speech is powerfully demonstrated.

Preaching

Only a thin line divides the lecture and the sermon. In its immediate task, Vaclav Havel’s speech could be called a sermon. When politics becomes partisan, when the speech is a rousing call to action directed to the loyal faithful, then politics is more sermon than lecture. Mario Cuomo became an overnight sensation after his keynote address to the
Democratic Party convention in 1984. The response to that sermon was an emotionally charged "amen."

Preaching a sermon is an activity closely identified with the church, and rightly so. The Christian church developed the sermon into an art form. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom ("golden mouth") complained that the congregation expected a performance in church that was proper to the theater. But Chrysostom himself expected cheering and stamping of feet; "What greater disgrace," he writes, "than to walk from the pulpit with blank silence."18 In the Middle Ages, some of the great rhetoric of the culture is found in sermons. Meister Eckhart's soaring mystical teaching is found not in his Latin treatises but in his German sermons. We have access to his teaching because nuns in the congregation copied down the sermons.19

Whereas lectures are written to be read, the sermon is spoken to be heard. Christianity did not begin as a "religion of the book." It resisted literary language and used the spoken language of the day (Koine Greek).20 In the sixteenth-century Reformation, the call was not to read a book but to hear the word preached. Martin Luther, who wanted the church to be a "mouth house" and not a "pen house," could not have imagined how overwhelming would be the effect of the printing press. The power of the spoken word tended to be eclipsed. In the late twentieth century, however, we may be witnessing a resurgence of the spoken word as what tips the balance of power.

In preaching, there is a text that expresses the community's beliefs. A man or woman steps forward, or steps into the center, to comment on the text. The appeal to understand does not neglect emotion and will. The intention is to move people to do something about injustices of the world. Jonathan Edwards was one of the great preachers in North American history. When Edwards preached a sermon, he was often surprised at the emotional outpouring it sparked. The sermons were learned and intellectual, but deep knowledge, far from being opposed to feeling, is fused with it.21 The result is that people get up from their seats and engage in political activity.

I have suggested that politicians frequently deal in preaching sermons. They often seem embarrassed by that fact; unfortunately, preachers who are embarrassed to be preachers give terrible sermons. The politician's vocation often calls not only for "discussing issues," but for moving people to action. The focus of belief is tighter than for a lecture; the end sought is more socially oriented. The Gettysburg Address, in Garry Wills's interpretation, was Lincoln's commentary on the Constitution in the light of the need to rethink equality and union. "He came to change the world, to effect an intellectual revolution. No other words could have done it. The miracle is that these words did."22

Often it is said that we should not preach to the converted, but that is exactly the group to be preached to. Preaching to the unconverted can be both ineffective and offensive. Here we have the other side of the indoctrination charge: trying to impose a set of practices when the beliefs of a particular community have not been accepted by the listeners. When black preachers on the left get into politics, they are often assumed to be doing the same thing as fundamentalist preachers on the right. The usual difference is, however, that right-wing preachers preach a "Christian America" while the left wing preaches the Bill of Rights. To preach to U.S. people that they should live up to their Declaration and Constitution is entirely fitting; they are already converts.

Journalists in the newspapers or on television are on occasion called to be preachers. Newspapers pride themselves for putting only facts on the front page and reporting stories with objectivity. The editorial and op-ed pages admit to opinion; most writers there would prefer their essays to be called lectures rather than sermons. Nevertheless, the urge to get one's message across in 750 words often pushes the writer toward a sermon. A television reporter often has the camera's picture as the objective fact and is called to offer commentary. Most of the time the language is a form of storytelling. On occasion, the picture is so emotion-laden — in war, famine, storm, or joyful success — that any commentary becomes a small sermon on the human condition.

Journalists might be horrified by the naming of what they do as sermons. Like politicians, they might preach better if they were not embarrassed to be cast into that position. Their journalistic integrity is not compromised if they touch an emotional chord by letting their own emotions be reached when the situation is profoundly moving. No extra layer is laid upon the facts; instead, one can really grasp the facts within the context of an emotion-filled commentary on the obvious text. Edward R. Murrow, a figure of mythic proportions in the history of radio and television, was a young reporter in London during the London blitz. His evening reports to the United States stirred a whole nation. He wrote in a letter to his parents, "I remember you once wanted me to be a preacher but I had no faith, except in myself. But now I am preaching from a powerful pulpit. Often I am wrong, but I am trying to talk as
I would have talked were I a preacher. One need not wear a reversed collar to be honest."

The preacher can and should presuppose a language that has acquired rich association over years or centuries. Those who sit in front of a preacher give license to him or her to so use that language that the listener will be moved to action. There is necessarily a distinction between the inner language of the community and language external to it. Community cannot exist without a language of intimacy that is not entirely comprehensible to the outsider. However, the social relation of outsider and insider need not be hostile.

A test for any preacher is to stir the hearts of the community with its intimate language while not insulting or offending outsiders. I recall going to the synagogue one evening, at the invitation of the local rabbi, to hear the great Talmudic scholar Aiden Steinwzalz. I feared I would not be able to understand his scholarly address, but he spoke in very simple terms of what it means to be a Jew. As the only Gentile in the audience, I could only listen as an outsider. While he spoke the intimate language of the Jewish congregation, he said nothing disparaging of other people. Would that all preaching were so finely tuned.

The main preaching on television is not confined to Sunday mornings. The fifteen-second commercials that blanket commercial television are expensively contrived sermons; they demand that the listener act. If one is not, say, a member of the beer-drinking community, then Bud Lite preaching can be experienced as offensive. The assumption is made by advertisers that the listeners belong to a community that would like to be rich, sexy, and powerful. The challenge is to show and to say something that will convince the viewer that if I use this toothpaste, I will be sexually irresistible; if I buy this car, I will be judged a success in life; if I eat this cereal, I will live forever. The preaching may be very low key, if the reigning theory is that soft sell works better.

The relentless television advertisements are perhaps a symptom of what happens in a culture when storytelling, lecturing, and political preaching are ineffective. The culture becomes addicted to preaching of the worst kind while thinking it has escaped the preaching of sermons. Because the intellectual leaders do not go to church at 11 A.M. Sundays, they believe they are not enmeshed in sermonizing.

"Preaching is not teaching, except in a church," wrote Philip Rieff to his colleagues. I doubt that he meant preaching really is a form of teaching in churches, but that churches only think that preaching is teaching. Rieff's book, Fellow Teachers, like many tracts on politics, education, and economics, is a passionate plea that has the qualities of a sermon. Preaching can be a legitimate form of teaching in and out of church; so also preaching can be completely inappropriate in and out of church. When all the conditions are right, a sermon can be among the most powerful forms of teaching. The fact that sermons are often preached when the conditions are lacking is the reason for the negative connotations of "sermonizing" and "preachership."

I finish with two examples of preaching, one from 1963, one from 1992. Both sermons were preached by a man named King. At the Washington Monument on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. gave one of the most stirring sermons in U.S. history. No one knew what he was going to say that day (perhaps not even he), but everyone knew that the conditions were right for a nation to be moved. The speaker's life and words fused in a dramatic moment that could not be completely predicted or controlled.

As any good preacher does, King started with a text that his hearers knew: "When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir ... it is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned."

The task of the preacher, after establishing the text and the failure to live by the text, is to stir the listeners to carry out the implications of what they claim is their belief: "I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed — we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." The cadence and much of the imagery were biblical, but the text was the equality promised in the founding documents of the United States.

A different situation prevailed, though the underlying problem was similar, when Rodney King stepped forward on May 2, 1992. The city of Los Angeles was burning behind him; the tape that showed King being beaten by police officers and the subsequent trial of those men were the ostensible reasons for the violence. King had no text in hand; he had little sense of what to say. In words wrenched from his obvious anguish, he pleaded for calm. "Can we all get along," he said. "We just gotta, just gotta, you know. I mean we're all stuck here for a while."
sermon, which pleaded for an end to the violence, took less time than the eighty-one seconds of the original tape.

Whatever his past or future, King spoke at that moment from complete conviction and undeniable emotion. His text was the belief that no one wishes to see everything destroyed. He evoked a powerful response in many people. Whether he saved buildings and lives is difficult to say. But he surely put to shame all the politicians who could not summon up a few sentences that were adequate to the situation. To Rodney King's words, one might apply Nietzsche's line, "And if someone goes through fire for his teaching — what does that prove? Truly, it is more when one's teaching comes out of one's burning."[28]

Chapter 5

Teaching to Remove Obstacles

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his chapter, starting with the title, is the most paradoxical one in the book. Can we remove obstacles by teaching? Why should we be trying to do so? What obstacles need removing? The answers to such questions involve some strange twists of language and a refusal to accept things as they first appear. The forms of language described in this chapter may seem to have nothing to do with the act of teaching. Nevertheless, these languages in their proper setting are needed to show someone how to live and how to die.

In recent centuries, teaching has been closely connected to the first family of languages described in chapter 4. That is, to teach has been identified with "to explain." The art of persuading the mind to accept rational explanations has dominated the philosophy of education. I described within this family three representative forms: storytelling, lecturing, and preaching. Not accidentally, I think, the first and third have tended to collapse into the middle. Storytelling is thought to be a helpful softening up for rational analysis, while preaching is anathematized as the opposite of teaching. What remains is lecturing, stripped of its ritual. Teaching becomes telling people the truth backed up by empirical facts and logical reasoning.

For several centuries, hope rose that the success of the scientific method would eventually solve the problem of teaching. Explanations could be logically arranged in books and lecture notes. A reasonable person, by reading books and lectures, would acquire the knowledge to live a rational human existence. However difficult it might be to achieve the aim of education, the aim itself seemed clear: the autonomous individual.

Total confidence in reason and scientific knowledge has been slipping away throughout the twentieth century. From a few artists and philosophers who were skeptical of science's capacity to carry the bur-