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 com-
plete conviction and undeniable emotion. His text was the belief that
no one wishes to see everything destroyed. He evoked a powerful re-
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 sum-
mon 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

Conclusion

The teaching languages described in this chapter presuppose a precise
set of conditions. There has to be present a community receptive to the
power of language. Someone from the group is prepared to teach and
is accepted for the occasion as teacher. The story is told, the lecture is
delivered, the sermon is preached. How the teacher uses the language
is as important as what is said. Often, no new information is conveyed;
the text is likely to be quite familiar. But the individual, as part of the
group, gets a firmer grasp on the good to be attained and is inspired
to surmount the obstacles to its achievement. To teach in this first
instance is to move people to act by appealing to their understanding of
the beliefs of a particular community that is representative of the whole
human community.

Chapter 5

Teaching to Remove Obstacles

This 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 ac-
cept 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 ana-
thematized 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 slip-
ing away throughout the twentieth century. From a few artists and
philosophers who were skeptical of science's capacity to carry the bur-
den of life’s teaching, the attack today is from all sides. The ideal of the “rational man” is charged with being sexist, apolitical, unfeeling, class-biased, and so forth. In response to such criticism, the lecturer may try to incorporate the narrative texture of storytelling or the passion of preaching. The real problem, however, is the absence of the clear end to teaching. And yet the dominance of lecturing is so complete that it remains in place even when its raison d’être no longer seems to exist.

The argument of this chapter is that the explanatory lecture needs help not only from other family members but from another family. Unfortunately, this family has suffered an almost total eclipse in discussions of teaching. Far more than the first family, this collection of languages requires ritual, that is, social patterns that continue from one generation to the next. Modern times have been hard on the traditional rituals that surround birth, courtship, marriage, family life, religion, and death. Important rituals cannot be reinvented overnight. What we need to look for are rituals of everyday life that have survived even in fragmentary form. These rituals have to be nurtured and sustained as we await the slow development of new rituals.  

I will refer to this second family of languages as “therapeutic.” They are the languages that calm, soothe, and heal. Therapy is a central need of human life; it should be recognized as central to teaching. This second family has always been the precondition of the first. For example, if someone is distraught with fear or overcome with grief, a lecture, no matter how well ordered, is not going to succeed. Often the need for this therapeutic family becomes evident only as someone tests the limits of the first family. In whichever sequence the two sets of languages emerge, they have a complementary relation.

The perennial need for therapeutic languages has been rather suddenly enlarged. The end of life and the aim of teaching had seemed securely in place. But the scientific ideal that largely replaced classical philosophy and Christian religion was itself undermined. Science was part of its own undoing. It succeeded in getting rid of “final causes.” The question now thrust upon increasing numbers of people is, How do you live in a world where no one knows the purpose of things? People still rely on science to bring them wonderful new technology, but they do not on those grounds accept that science can teach them how to live and how to die.

This feeling of sudden abandonment can lead to skepticism or ni-

hilism. In the flight from all claims to know the truth, therapy can proceed to swallow every other language. People can become addicted to therapy; a whole culture can slide in that direction. In the 1960s, Philip Rieff wrote a book entitled The Triumph of the Therapeutic. The intervening decades have seemed to move further in the direction he was describing, namely, the reduction of politics, economics, and education to a massaging of the emotions. And as lecturing took over the meaning of “to teach” in the first family, the reaction against lecturing tends to be a single form of therapy: the bull session. In the world of the classroom, the alternative to the lecture is usually assumed to be “group discussion.” In these groups, whether anything is learned or not, everyone is supposed to feel better at the end for having expressed his or her opinion. With radio call-ins, television talk shows, and computer chat rooms, the whole country sometimes seems to be a bull session.

Consider once again the literature on “adult education.” I noted in chapter 1 that if teaching is confused with big people telling little people what to think, then to teach an adult is impossible. To try to teach an adult is insulting. The alternative is taken to be adults talking to each other with the aid of a facilitator or group leader. Adult-education theorizing is enveloped in therapeutic language. It opens with “needs assessment:” tell me what you need and I will try to design a program that fits your need. While youngsters are or could be challenged to think about new things by studying subjects they have never imagined, adults are supposedly only interested in solving problems they can readily identify. A low-cost group therapy is the result in many adult-education classes.

This narrowing of education to “facilitation” is a major problem in today’s culture. It is particularly deleterious for disempowered people. A culture intent on making people feel good is a comfortable place for the rich but a hopeless place for the poor and the dispossessed. Parallel to what was said in the previous chapter, the cure for the dominance of one therapeutic language is twofold: the acknowledgment of other languages with a family resemblance and the affirming of other families of languages. There is nothing bad about feeling good. It becomes bad only when individuals become obsessed with feeling good to the undo-

ing of their own best selves and to the obscuring of severe injustices that support a feel-good culture.
The Fragmented Community

The therapeutic does not presuppose a well-functioning community in which the goal of teaching is inspiring people to act on their beliefs. On the contrary, the therapeutic assumes a fragmented community in which the individual is trying to find him- or herself. It is the nature of human communities to be imperfect and to have individuals who feel some disconnectedness. However, recent times have cast the individual into a confusing overlay of communities, with doubt arising as to how any particular community relates to a universal human community. The disconnected feeling that has concomitantly increased is likely to include the individual's own bodiliness. The right of people to choose for themselves is more strongly insisted upon, but how that "willing" relates to the bodily organism is not so clear.

One sign of this individual aloneness is the talk of "human rights." No one is sure of the "common good," but individuals should have the right to engage in their own search. Or, since the good is unknown beforehand, the individual may have to will it into existence. Immanuel Kant was, if not the inventor, at least the gatekeeper of this way of conceiving ethics and political philosophy. At the beginning of a book on morality, Kant writes, "Nothing in the world can be conceived of as good, without qualification, except a good will."14 Kant himself pushed on toward a reunification of "man and nature" but the solitary consciousness took over in his wake. By the late twentieth century, the feeling of aloneness has spread far and wide. It sometimes manifests itself in outbursts of violence; at other times, the individual withdraws into bouts of apathy and depression.

When these problems become severe enough, society calls upon the prison and the mental hospital to stem the tide. The prison uses harsh, repressive language to cure the problem; however, it would be difficult to find anyone who thinks that prisons cure anything. Similarly, well-staffed mental hospitals can help the sick, but many hospitals are holding areas that return disturbed people to the streets.4

Most people are not at these extremes. What most people do need at certain moments of a day, a year, or a lifetime, is the help of restorative language. The help needed is not a complex theory that explains life but ordinary speech that calms and comforts. Speaking is itself a therapeutic process. Violence, terror, anxiety, and depression leave us outside conversation. The person who is sick has to learn to trust in words, using speech to relate to other humans. Part of the strange technique that Freud developed is that people should talk about whatever comes into their minds. The point of the conversation is not to reach any particular conclusion; it is to allow the force of life in the form of the will to reemerge in the context of ordinary life.

The family of therapeutic languages therefore ranges from the most ordinary of expressions to the most paradoxical of twists. At the surface level, we can be taught something by someone saying "uh-huh:" the bond is holding, it is safe to continue.6 Below the surface, human beings trap themselves in plans and projects that they can neither execute nor let go. Effective speech here has to dart behind and below the obvious; it is, as Buddhists say, speech to destroy speech.

Even if one does not go all the way with Buddhism's search-and-destroy mission, selective strikes on the mind's imprisonment of itself in story, lecture, and sermon can be helpful. All of the main religions have used enigmatic sayings to teach the human mind that it has limits. One needs a technique to stop the mind from chattering on. At the center of speech there has to be a profound silence. Forms of therapeutic speech are constituted more by silence than by sound.

In teaching with therapeutic languages, one tries not to "move the will" but to restore the person to willing. However, there is no direct way to accomplish that; the disempowered cannot be directly empowered. Any direct assault ("pull yourself together") will likely drive the problem deeper. Freud rediscovered what most religions knew, that what we think of as free will is not free. Human freedom is at a deeper level where a yes or no is given to life. One has to be able to act; just as important, one has to be able to not act, to stop speech and allow what is not verbal to lead.

Much of twentieth-century philosophy has abandoned the project of explaining reality with a grand theory. Philosophy is turned back on itself and released from its pretension to take up a view that God had before creating the universe. Wittgenstein is most explicit in seeing philosophy as therapy: "The real discovery is the one that makes one capable of stopping philosophy when I want to — the one that gives philosophy place.... Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off."7 In the early Wittgenstein, the silence is found by going up a ladder to the point where speech is surpassed (he contrasted what could be shown to what could be said).8 In the later Wittgenstein, the silence is found at the
center. Our many games of language show a way but the greatest philosophy is what stops philosophy and leaves us at what Wittgenstein calls "the mystical" at the center of ordinary life.

The frequent mark of therapeutic speech is the double negative. When language is negating life, the solution cannot be more of the same speech. What has to be negated is the negation so that life can flow. Philosophy or religion can seem negative when it is constantly nay-saying. The question is whether its nos are single or double. Most of the sayings and stories in Buddhism deal in double negatives, which the West has often mistaken for nihilism. A famous Buddhist saying begins, "Monks, there is a not born, not become, not made, not compounded"; this is offered as the way to overcome the "born, become, made, compounded." One could miss the point that the negatives are the "born, become, made, compounded." At least, they are negative insofar as each is a fracture, a split unity. What is presented as alternative is not a simple image of oneness but a language of nondualism. That is as far as language can carry us.

Western mystical tradition is just as rich in this kind of nondualistic speech. When Maimonides asks if God is alive, his answer is that God is not dead. An image of a living being is still too confining; "not dead" affirms life with no limiting image. Thomas Aquinas says that "God is not a being" because for Aquinas being is a limitation of the act of to be. Of course, simply saying that God is not a being could be misconstrued as simple atheism. Aquinas's last word on God is that God is "not not being." In a similar pattern, many mystics (Meister Eckhart quite explicitly) deny that God "exists." To exist is to be one among many, divided from the others. The ultimate healing unity cannot be expressed in speech as a thing in isolation from other things. One can only hold out as hope the overcoming of division.

**Development**

A possible modern way to speak of teaching when there is no end in view is the term "development." This term began to come into prominence in the economics of the late eighteenth century and part of its meaning is still weighted in that direction. In the late nineteenth century, "development" came to overlap "progress" and "evolution." By absorbing psychological meaning, it came to be more comprehensive than either "evolution" or "progress." For a while, "development" almost became a subset of "psychology" ("child development"), but it is not confined there today.

"Development," meaning "to come out of the envelope," is an alternative to having an endpoint that would predetermine movement. Teaching for "human development" would therefore mean removing whatever object starts acting as endpoint. Of course, within the process of teaching without end we still need the stimulus of short-range goals. The student turns in a paper to receive a grade; the student takes a required number of credits to get a degree. Goals such as these, which are static objects to possess, have the danger of becoming the end of education.

"Development" in educational circles arose in reaction to a form of teaching in which adults had tried to force-feed children and fit children into a preexisting mold. A favorite contrast of educational reformers has been to replace "push in" with "pull out." The latter may be some improvement as educational policy, although it is not clear that it represents an alternate metaphor. The possible etymology of education as "to lead out" does not of itself avoid authoritarianism. A teacher leading out a student still suggests a highly directive process that goes wherever the teacher wishes it to go. If "development" is really the issue, a teacher has to use more indirect means and use a variety of languages, some of which are spelled out below.

The paradox is how to move from knowledge that is in some sense already present to knowledge that is actual and gets dis-covered by the learner. In the story of Alexander the Great's visit to Diogenes, the famous teacher is asked if he needs anything. Diogenes's reply was, "Only stand out of my light." Some people may require a little more help than that, as in Plato's Republic, where teaching is understood to be the teacher turning the student's mind toward the light.

Comenius, in the introduction to The Great Didactic, says, "While the seeds of knowledge, of virtue, and of piety are naturally implanted in us, the actual knowledge, virtue and piety are not so given. These must be acquired by prayer, education and by action." I would agree, except that I prefer to use "education" in a broader sense so as to encompass prayer and action. Education includes people sitting in seats and being instructed by story, lecture, or sermon. Education also includes both action of a social-political nature and stillness at the contemplative center of life.
Wittgenstein also includes "praying" as an example within the cluster of languages that he associates with ritual. He lists "asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying." Although his statement is a major inspiration for this chapter, I do not think he was trying to make a complete enumeration of this cluster. Thus, I do not feel compelled to follow his lead in naming this set. I do not name "praying" as a language because it cuts across several that I do name. Similarly, "asking" seems to me not a distinct language but a grammatical form that shows up in many forms of teaching. "Cursing" is an interesting case, although I prefer a different term for some of its meaning. His other two examples, thanking and greeting, I address directly. Wittgenstein's great contribution is his recognition of the many languages in life and in teaching. Especially important is his calling attention to this ritual cluster that provides a therapeutic effect in teaching.

When these languages are neglected, they tend to collapse at the threshold of the professional psychotherapist, much like explanatory teaching is handed over to the professional schoolteacher. In both cases, the burden is too great. To receive therapy becomes equivalent to putting yourself in the hands of one person, presumed to possess a curative skill. People who really are sick may not have the means for this kind of treatment; those who do have the means to get treatment may be misled about the nature of healing, helping, and therapy. As James Hillman often insists, the analyst is not the one who heals; he or she can at best mediate the healing forces within the person and between people.

The therapist as teacher engages in teaching with the strangest of languages. A therapist saying, "Yes, that's interesting, continue," may not sound like he or she is doing much. However, most of us cannot be still enough to allow the conflicting elements of another's personality to be brought forth and healed. In Albert Camus's novel, The Plague, one of the characters says that he is certain only "that there are victims and there is the plague, and as far as possible I do not wish to be on the side of the plague." This stark contrast and choice is softened by another passage where it is suggested that there may be some people who are healers. The rest of us should take notice of people who seem to ameliorate the effects of plague.

As in much of tribal religion, we seem to be returning to the figure of the teacher as healer; not the one who lays claim to the title of healer but the one whose effect on a community is healing. There may come a time when great visionaries arise who can point the way out of the desert night. For the present, we can only help people "to stand fast, with their souls in readiness, until the dawn breaks and a path becomes visible where none suspected it."

### Therapeutic Examples

I wish to illustrate this cluster of languages with three paired terms, plus a pair that is presupposed by them. The three pairs are: welcome/thank, confess/forgive, mourn/comfort. I precede these three examples with a discussion of praise and condemn. Why do I list pairs? The format of pairing is not strictly necessary, but it does call attention to the therapeutic as a constant giving and receiving. The person who is teaching can be on either side of the pair, and the teacher and the learner can easily reverse positions. Giving can be understood as a form of receiving, and receiving as a form of giving. The healing occurs because of this flowing back and forth.

This characteristic of the therapeutic cluster contrasts with the operation of the first set of languages in chapter 4. In storytelling, lecturing, and preaching, the teacher is much more clearly on one side. A lecturer might learn something from an audience, but it is nearly impossible for the teaching to flow smoothly in both directions. In the name of democracy some church congregations have tried "dialogue sermons." But without other changes in physical setting, clerical role, and congregational size, such dialogue tends to be awkward square pegs in round holes. When the educational setting invites stories, lectures, or sermons, there is nothing wrong with the teacher using these forms. But in the forms described here, the teacher is never entirely in control of which language and which side of the language is operating.

### Praise and Condemn

This first pair of languages is both precondition and continuing theme for the other pairs presented. Praise and condemn form a link with the first family of languages. Praise and condemn may seem more appropriately linked to the sermon. Aren't praise and condemn what preachers do? Indeed preachers, as well as storytellers and lecturers, often do praise or condemn. But these two languages are dangerous on that side
of the divide. Both praise and condemn should not be personalized, at least not too quickly. Preachers tend to condemn people, which is not what I have in mind. And even praise is not to be easily assigned to individual people. As teaching languages, praise and condemn start from an impersonal or nonpersonal basis. Most of the therapeutic languages have a strongly interpersonal character, but praise and condemn begin with an attitude toward the universe.

At stake in all the therapeutic languages is a freeing of the individual from its egocentric predicament. So long as a man or woman is striving to control the world, the self is not receptive to what the universe is offering. The cosmos is ready to teach, but the individual has to let go in order to learn. Aristotle believed that philosophy begins in wonder, in being awestruck by the miracle of existence. There are technical problems to be solved but why bother unless there is a sense of wonder about it all.

I use "to praise" to describe the language that is evoked by wonder and awe. Praise is often given in the form of poetry or song; one sings a "hymn of praise." Religious people may imagine a definite object to the praise ("the creator of the universe"). However, in the soul of every man and woman lies a song of praise waiting to be brought forth. The praise is directed toward "all," the universe and every marvelous element within it. Why praise? True, it has no end, no function, no good to be attained. It simply is the special response of the human being to being human within a universe of surprise, beauty, and invitation.

Praise is thus concerned with both natural environment and human accomplishment. It is related to people's actions more than to people themselves. Who exactly should get "credit" for an action's good results is often not clear. With communal activity, an individual can take some pride in being integral to the praiseworthy actions. But the motivation for the individual ought not to be the receiving of praise.

Especially with children, praise should be used sparingly. The child has to learn that the reward for doing good is the good action, not the praise that may or may not follow. A child dependent on praise is vulnerable to a confusion of self-identity when the praise is absent. More important, the child who is doing his or her very best may not be able to accomplish much of what is praiseworthy. That may not be the child's fault; various social and environmental conditions may interfere with the child's efforts at successful actions.

Ordinary life can gradually wear away the attitude that expresses itself in praise. The song no longer comes from the heart; all attention is directed to "making a living." Religions have insisted on the need for ritualized times that allow praise to be renewed. Festival days are celebrated annually; some religions set aside one day of the week. Six days may be devoted to making money, one day for being quiet at the center of life. The secularized version of the holy day is the holiday, although being off the job does not guarantee a nourishing of wonder, awe, and praise.

The term I have paired with praise is "to condemn." The relation is one of opposites. If the natural environment and human accomplishment are to be praised, then what destroys these realities should be condemned. The opposite of praise might seem to be blame. However, blaming carries the sense of personal focus. To blame individuals is to assign guilt for their actions. Aside from the imputation of legal guilt that society must use to defend itself, guilt is not for assigning by human beings. If human beings can be taught to recognize the impact of their actions, then they will accept responsibility, which sometimes includes guilt.

Good teachers do not condemn people, but they sometimes are outraged by situations that ought not to be tolerated. The capacity to feel joy that is expressed in praise implies the capacity to feel anger, outrage, and disgust. The two capacities do not have equal shares in life. What is to be condemned should be condemned directly and quickly; what is praiseworthy should be praised at length. The emotions connected to condemnation have to be carefully budgeted. In one direction, they can overrun an individual's life; in the other direction, they can be unworthily exhausted on trivial situations.

Despite the dangers in the act of condemning, there are times when a person has to say, "This is an intolerable situation that needs to be condemned." If young people are destroying their lives with drugs, if the poor are homeless in the streets, if the rivers and seas are being polluted, then a parent or a politician, a schoolteacher or a social worker, an economist or an environmentalist ought to get angry. Who exactly is to blame is of less importance than marshaling whatever forces are available for changing the situation.

There will be need for technical solutions to technical problems. But the motivation for such actions cannot just be reasonable calculation. David Hume thought that the basis for human ethics is "sympathy." He thought that reason needs the drive of a powerful emotion. His
point is well taken, so long as sympathy embraces more than the interpersonal. One has to sympathize with the suffering earth and sea, as well as with individual human beings.

No human being is in a position to offer ultimate condemnation of another human being. Here again the child is the dramatic case in point. Whatever correcting of a child's behavior may be needed, the child's person is never worthy of condemnation. Even when the situation into which the child has been born is indeed deserving of condemnation, the child remains a being of illimitable potential. Human possibilities deserve to be praised at length. A realistic assessment of human failure has to be distinguished from a mean-spirited perception that does not let itself praise.

One of the most famous intellectual battles of this century pitted Reinhold Niebuhr against John Dewey. Niebuhr saw himself as the "realist," acutely aware of the arrogance and self-delusion that can corrupt the loftiest human projects. Dewey, however, wished to know why Niebuhr had "to believe that every man is born a sonofabitch even before he acts like one, and regardless of why and how he became one."21 Niebuhr's attitude was based on the Christian doctrine of "original sin." That doctrine ought to be understood as a statement about the social conditions into which people are born rather than the imputation of a fault to the individual. If Christians want to cope with original sin, let them feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and provide shelter for the homeless.

To condemn situations that breed poverty, suffering, and shame says nothing against people having to "take responsibility" for their own actions.22 Condemning a situation is never the whole story; but it is the initial step in intolerable cases, a release from a cramped rational calculation. If genuinely experienced, the next step can be vigorous action to relieve the intolerable situation.

Welcome/Thank

This pair of therapeutic languages, welcome/thank, are not opposites such as in the manner of praise and condemn. Rather, they are reciprocal and interlocking expressions. One leads to the other and then back again so that one could say thank/welcome or welcome/thank. The sequence is to some degree arbitrary, although I think that welcome/thank brings out the relation a little better.

Like praise and condemn, welcome/thank can be directed to the universe as a whole and all manner of natural and human greatness. But unlike praise and condemn, welcome/thank deserves to be brought directly and fully to interpersonal exchanges. Welcome/thank exists not primarily in the song of a poet but in the carefully staged rituals of daily, hourly life. Civilized life could not exist without these fragile arrangements that structure the delicate give and take of human life. The other animals can rely on their built-in rituals of instinct; the humans have to maintain rituals of politeness, formalities that some people dismiss as silly and unnecessary.

Television's MTV produces a documentary series, "The Real World," on a group of young people living in an apartment. The program was initially advertised as "life as it really is, beyond the niceties of politeness." The assumption is a strange one that runs throughout much of modern ethics. If you wish to know what humans really are, put them in a lifeboat with no food or water for a week and then examine them when they wash ashore.

Teaching by welcome/thank begins from a different assumption. A welcoming receptivity is what greets the universe and all its surprises. The person who welcomes life, taking it in as it reveals itself, is freed from having to try to invent it every day. The human being remains human, not something absorbed into the rest of nature, but nonetheless moving with the rhythms of nature.

If welcoming is a basic attitude to life as a whole, then expressions of welcome to other human beings generally follow with ease. For friends, welcome is expressed in highly individual expressions; for strangers we need formulas that convey respect, lack of hostility, a readiness to be helpful. The formulas have to be simple and clear, though they are bound to cultural particularity. For an outsider to the culture, expressions of welcome may seem forced or silly. Being met at an airport by a stranger who lays some kind of necklace on you may not be your brand of welcome. Nonetheless, one can appreciate the significance of the gesture, and even the words in a language foreign to you.

A homey example is the U.S. custom of replying to "Thank you" with "You're welcome." The reciprocal character of welcome and thank is neatly captured in this exchange. However, for many speakers of British English this U.S. custom seems a bit ridiculous. Perhaps the phrase, "You're welcome," comes across with an ironic or cynical twist. Or perhaps it has the effect of abruptly ending an exchange in which one
person has just extended a word of gratitude. This latter objection does have weight. What is a neat closure in one way of looking at things is also the breaking of dialogue. As for the former objection, the danger of cynicism in the phrase, that problem depends on the tone of the person using it. When some people say, “You’re welcome,” they convey welcome; other people suggest that they wish you had not bothered them.

In the cause of international understanding, I offer the following reflection. Perhaps the two parts are right but would make more sense if they were reversed. If the one person offered “You’re welcome” before there was thanks, the cynical twist would largely be eliminated. The “thanks” is directed toward the experience of being welcomed. The first moment is welcome, the second is gratitude, the third is further welcome. Since the movement is a reciprocal and continuing one, the U.S. practice was not all wrong. Welcome is a kind of thanking and thanking is a form of welcome. Whoever says what first is less important than the recognition that we are thoroughly dependent on the kindness of strangers.

I do not expect U.S. custom to change in the direction I have proposed. However, a change has been occurring in recent decades. “You’re welcome” seems to be on the wane. Other phrases are sometimes substituted, such as the jaunty “No problem.” More often, the word “Thanks” is being met with “Thanks.” This development can cause confusion among people who expect closure to the exchange. The nervous interaction sometimes runs, “Thank you. Thank you. No, thank you.” Although there may be no clear logic in both parties saying, “Thank you,” the wish to acknowledge mutual exchange is clear enough. And the scattering of “Thank you” in all directions (similar to Germans with the omnipresent bitte) is probably bringing U.S. and British English closer together.

As another example, take the phrase, “Have a nice day.” When it arrived rather suddenly and aggressivly on the scene, many guardians of the language reacted with horror and ridicule. But the phrase proved to have staying power. The main objection to the phrase was that it seemed to be an order. It replaced polite acknowledgment of gratitude with a command to feel a certain way (the word “nice” being especially grating). However, as the phrase has blended into ordinary speech, the well-intentioned meaning has become easier to accept: “[I wish that you might] have a nice day.” A phrase such as “good-bye” probably once sounded a bit pushy: “[I wish that] good be with you as you go.” Such expressions are the rituals of speech that carry good will, kindness, and willingness to care.

The thanking that is the correlative of welcome applies to the universe as a whole as well as to individual people. To the extent that someone feels welcome in the universe, the recipient of miraculous gifts, then expressions of gratitude are called forth. In Wittgenstein’s statement cited above, thanking follows asking and leads to greeting and praying. In any genuine form of religion, praying is more about thanking than asking. Thanking is a human necessity, a response to being in the universe.

As with praise, religious people say “thanks” to God. For many people, the sudden removal of God from the map of life creates a vacuum. In The Brothers Karamazov, what worried Alyosha about the possibility that there was no God was “whom shall we thank, to whom shall we sing our song?” He goes on to ridicule the idea that “humanity” can simply step in as replacement. And this century supplies considerable evidence that our abstract idea called “humanity” cannot bear all of the burden of religious devotion. The human race would have to go through a long process of concretizing gratitude in rituals that mutually relate men and women, humans and nonhumans.

Our ability to think at all depends on a receptive and thankful attitude that presents the world for our thankful response. Martin Heidegger playfully relates thinking and thanking, which comes across in English as well as in German’s denken and danken. Thinking is the human way of saying thanks. In our day, Heidegger and other philosophers have feared that thinking is being reduced to one form of calculating, technical rationality. We need a kind of thinking, with praise and embodying praise, that frees us to try out the range of languages.

The sequence and the precise formulas are not most crucial here. The therapy is in the interaction. We should welcome/thank with bodily presence and with whatever words best convey our attitude. Whenever our offer is reciprocated, then we heal and we are healed by the exchange. The language can be as simple as “yes” (or “uh-huh”) said at a moment when affirmation is called for. With rituals of welcome and thanks, the human world goes on to the next day without interruption.
Confess/Forgive

The next pair of languages, confess/forgive, become necessary when human life does not flow smoothly. Human beings exist in the context of promises about the future. We all make agreements about how we will act. On occasion, we all fail to keep our promises. Sometimes the culpability is clear; because of fear, laziness, avarice, or other motives, we are guilty of breaking a promise. Sometimes other factors intervene that prevent us living up to the agreement. But very often we are in a gray area where we are not sure of our own guilt. Perhaps we could have kept the promise; perhaps it was too much to expect.

Whether or not we are guilty, humans need a ritual of confession to remove the burden. Hannah Arendt notes that only really bad people have good consciences; that is, they live behind a veil of culpable ignorance that hides them from guilt. The rest of us have at least a partial sense of our failings. Unless we can deal with that feeling, it threatens to become dead weight in all our actions.25

Confessing, similar to other therapeutic languages, is as wide in scope as the whole universe and as narrow as an individual saying, "Excuse me," for blocking an aisle. The premise of confession is that there has been a rupture in the life of a community. A balance needs to be restored and the individual needs to be brought back into the community. Traditional religions had elaborate rituals for this restoration, such as the scapegoat carrying away the faults, or the Catholic church's sacrament of penance. Even though the confession was directed to God, the community that suffered the disruption also had to heal its split.

In Jewish history, the symbol that carries the community's promise is "covenant." The people are related to God in being related to each other. One commentator on the story of Moses at Sinai says that there were 503,500 covenants, the supposed number of adult males at Sinai; no, says another commentator, there were 503,500 x 503,500 because the covenant is also between the people. The idea of covenant carries the element of covenant renewal, when the people recall their past failings and promise to do better. Confession of faults is made externally and verbally to the community or its representatives.26

The modern era secularized the idea of covenant and came up with the symbol of "social contract." The individual has an implicit agreement to live according to the laws of society. The law court becomes our confessional box and place of exoneration. If an individual throws him- or herself on the mercy of the court ("I plead guilty"), the penance is likely to be lessened. However, our courts are very limited in the kind of behavior they can judge. There is no confession/forgiveness for the daily failings in the interpersonal world. If there are not other rituals for confess/forgive, the professional psychotherapist will soon be needed to heal the splits within family, between friends, and on the job.

The ability to promise is at the heart of human life. Other animals do not make promises; only the humans can contemplate the future and place their lives in their hands. A handshake or a statement on a piece of paper is the foundation for many human ventures. Because we cannot know the future and because we do not fully know ourselves, we are bound to fail sometimes in living up to promises. Our stories, lectures, and sermons often include promises; praise and thanks also imply a world of promise. The restoration of what has been broken needs to be shown by a teacher if other teaching languages are to be effective.

Human trust is fragile; it depends on the trustworthiness of a person's words. A person who regularly tells lies undermines the whole social structure. The United States was founded on the basis of covenant or contract. Every new immigrant has to swear allegiance to that agreement. In this context, lying is considered an especially grievous failing. We often put people in jail for perjury about their crimes, rather than for those crimes. The only thing worse than telling a lie in this country is denying the lie when found out. Richard Nixon probably could have saved his political career in 1973–74 if he had just said, "I'm sorry. I told a lie." Numerous other people in public life could also have saved their souls, if not their powerful positions, by saying, "I'm sorry." And in the intimate exchanges of private life, love often requires (pace the line from Love Story) the simple statement, "I'm sorry."

The healing effect of confessing depends on its reception in the act of forgiving. The one who has been wronged is the one best able to do the forgiving. The act of forgiving re-creates the world. It is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.27 If no one in particular has been hurt, but the fabric of the community has been torn, then a representative of the group may provide a ritualized forgiveness.

What about between peoples or nations? The possibilities for confession and forgiveness become cloudy, especially when the passage of
time is involved. Can a religious group confess its persecution of another group many centuries ago? Who exactly is doing the confessing and what exactly is being confessed? Should the European invaders of North America or Australia confess their guilt to the remnant of the native peoples? Perhaps in some cases a ritual asking for forgiveness would not be a bad idea if coupled with specific help for the surviving population. The legal complications are often staggering.

Should German leaders ask Jews for forgiveness for the Holocaust? Perhaps a ritual of confession shortly after World War II would have helped to overcome the horror. At this point, with most Germans having been born since World War II, a national confession is not as meaningful as efforts to see that any similar horror never occurs again. On the Jewish side, survivors of the Holocaust have to consider their personal feelings of forgiveness toward individual people. The collective Jewish people is not in a position to issue generalized forgiveness.

The standard cliché is, “Forgive and forget,” a strangely illogical phrase. If we were to forget, there would be no need to forgive. We forgive what we remember. Our hope lies in “re-membering,” the gathering together of members, to forge a new unity. The memories are good and bad; both have to be preserved in the re-membering. Where we have failed, confession is called for; where others have failed, forgiving is called for. The readiness to forgive is acknowledgment that we are vulnerable to failure. The one who teaches by forgiving knows that in another place on another day he or she will have to teach by confessing.

Mourn/Comfort

The final pair of therapeutic languages is directly related to the final experience of life: dying. Unless we can talk about dying, then all of our other talk becomes veiled in illusion. Plato saw philosophy as a meditation on death. Traditional religions were centrally concerned with funeral rituals. Modern philosophy has been, in large part, a flight from death, a distancing of the self from remembrance of mortality. Since the most fundamental meaning of teaching is to show someone how to live and how to die, the flight from death is also a flight from teaching. Conversely, the languages of teaching must include the language of mourning and its correlative, the language of comforting. 28

Nothing is more certain about human life than mortality. “They give birth astride a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more.” As to the fact of death, the humans “die like all the animals”, as for meaning, however, the human being alone can foresee death and can retain death both in memory and in outward results. “The gorilla, the chimpanzee, the orang-outang and their kind, must look upon man as a feeble and infirm animal, whose strange custom it is to store up his dead.” 29

We mourn the death of someone we love; we also mourn our own deaths in anticipatory ways. A teenager mourns the death of childhood; a middle-aged man mourns the passing of youth (in more concentrated fashion than women do, it seems). 30 In these and other instances throughout life, what seems dark and destructive is actually new life trying to break through.

The feeling of grief and loss needs outward expression lest it turn against the griever in the form of violence or depression. “Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o’er fraught heart, and bids it break.” Paradoxically, the absence of joy is the sign of our inability to mourn. Turned in on our own grief we cannot rejoice in life or turn our attention to the hurts of others. Thus, the language of mourning is crucial to all the other languages of teaching.

Like the other therapeutic languages, except more so, mourning requires a ritual. An era impatient with ritual has been especially hard on the language of mourning. Geoffrey Gorer’s study of grief in the 1960s found an almost total absence of ritual for mourning. He compares mourning in the twentieth century to sex in the nineteenth: no one admits to it in public. 31

In the last thirty years there has been some change; in fact, on the surface there has been a lot of talk about death. The books of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and the historical studies of Philippe Ariès, followed by the extraordinary success of Sherwin Nuland’s book, are a welcome sign. 32 Courses on “thanatology” have become part of some school curricula. At the national level the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., in stark contrast to the thrusting swords and guns of the other war memorials, is a place of genuine, ritualized mourning. It is unclear, however, how much has changed in the lives of individuals and groups concerning their rituals of mourning.

Mourning is mostly waiting; at the most elementary level it consists of a “no to death” followed by a “yes to death and no to life,” and then a “yes to life inclusive of death.” All of that takes time. “Every cell of the body must be informed of what has been lost.” The middle of mourning
is a period of withdrawal in which the acceptance of death is symbolized by not taking part in ordinary life. Each of the religions specified a definite length of time for mourning and detailed prescriptions of dress, food, responsibility of friends, and so forth.34

The funeral rite in the past often mixed the living and the dead in ways bewildering to the modern consciousness. Describing nineteenth-century Irish wakes, S. J. Connolly writes, “To outsiders the results may have appeared incongruous and shocking; but they may also have relieved those who took part from some of the burdens of anxiety and guilt with which more modern modes of reacting to death have made us familiar.”35

The modern cemetery, which dates from the mid-nineteenth century, was conceived as a way of hiding death. So also is the practice of embalming in the twentieth century and much else in the funeral industry. Religious rituals of death that look so strange to the outsider had the effect of holding together the community while the individual was temporarily cut off from life. When all such rituals disappear, we are returned again to the couch of the professional psychotherapist. For teaching to be effective, the remaining rituals of dying need preserving and new developments (for example, in relation to hospital technology) need careful shaping.

Comfort is what the ritual of mourning should bring. The ritual itself in supporting the mourner brings comfort. The words spoken by relations and friends are also comforting. “To comfort” means to bring strength. Death, which is our point of greatest vulnerability, can also be a source of strength. Usually, those who can best comfort are those who have learned to mourn. The comforter can sympathize with the mourner, which is itself strengthening.

The therapeutic languages tend to be fragmentary, indirect, and illogical. Often at funerals, the first thing said is, “I am sorry,” which sounds like a confusion of comforting and confession. The point is to express some solidarity with the mourner. We reach for formulas because few people can come up with original and spontaneous statements.

The Book of Job is one of the world’s masterpieces on the subject of grief and mourning. Harold Kushner says that Job’s friends did two things right: they showed up and they listened. But the mistake they made was in assuming that when Job asked, “Why?” they should answer by explaining.36 There are many right ways to comfort; there are a few wrong ways. One wrong way is to explain why the loss is for the best; another is to tell people not to feel bad. Both of these mistakes are often made with children.

Comforting is a simple process that greets us as one of the first things in life and, if we are fortunate, it accompanies us in the end. We begin and end life in silence. Comfort is what breaks the silence for the infant; the difficult transition from uterine to extrauterine life is managed with physical embrace and the language of lullaby. Similarly, at the end of life, there may be little to say, except “We are still here” or “I love you.” The dying person who cannot converse may still be responsive to physical touch and to song.

Between birth and death we all need comforting for the hurts and crises that constitute the little deaths within life. When the first child goes to school or the last child leaves home, when a career falters or a marriage dissolves, when the body or the mind begins to weaken, then comforting the mourner is called for. A gesture and a few words give the grieving person a chance to heal. The saying, “Time heals all wounds,” is not necessarily true but time is an ingredient in whatever healing is possible.

“You’re on earth and there is no cure for that” can be a depressing thought if no word is spoken in comfort.37 But for those who can mourn, it becomes the passage to new life. The young man in Edmund Wallant’s Children at the Gate experiences the death and mourns the loss of his friend. At novel’s end, “a blade switched into his heart, beginning that slow, massive bleeding he would never be able to stop, no matter what else he might be able to accomplish. He was surprised and puzzled as he walked with that mortal wound in him, for it occurred to him that, although the wound would be the death of him, it would be the life of him too.”38