SCHOoled in dReaMs: counter-Posing “tHE oNTOlOgy oF ASCeNT” wITh “aURas oF tHe oTHeR” tO rE-enChanT in/VocatIon in sITes oF lEarNIng and bEIng

by

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A tHeSIS suBMTitted in pArtIAL fuLfIlMent oF tHe rEqUIrements FoR tHe dегee oF dOcToR oF phIlosoPhy

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ABSTRACT

This work is a multi-disciplinary conceptual inquiry into some of the historical structures and strictures of the ascetic-ascendant moral ontology that invariably conditions, and makes disparate, voice and vocation in educational spaces. Whereas the western philosophical tradition has become complicit with empiricism and supposed to do away with transcendence, the sublime remains, but has albeit lapsed into new programs of ascent with conspicuous devotion to new ‘fashions’ of asceticism (Weber’s work-promise analytic inflected ascetic-ascendant). Against all secular sensibility, the salvation effect (Nietzsche) has intensified (Gauchet). Instead of drawing ‘moral sources’ (Taylor) from the enchanted (Other), we imagine them in the immanent (Ontic); instead of destiny being subjective and relational, destinations are taken up instrumentally in what is more narrowly teleological. To the extent that moral sources shift immanent but are residually fantastic, I develop for reflective criticism the Dream Ontology: a work-promise matrix that circumscribes self-regard (identity) and world-engagement (morality) in alluring closures of meaning, whose tacit dislocating moral force initiates unsuspected agonistic effects. By profiling salient moral moments in the west, therefore, and attempting a genealogy of their cultural transmission, I explore how by means of the Dream Ontology the characteristic feature of modern life is fundamentally schismatic and self-buffering – cutting persons off from mythic sources, and affectivity more generally, in a barter to secure fanciful flourishing (promise) in the world. In remediation of this beguiling naturalization of disjoined voice and vocation, the Prophetic Mode will re/member being by sourcing transcendence (enchantment) in the Other, who ‘as’ sub-verse and ‘by means of’ solicitous counter-speech, affectively disrupts the dominion of dreams that reign thick in the text/ures of western schooling.
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APPENDIX 1 – ‘SENSES’ OF THE DREAM IN EARLY POPULAR LITERATURE
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NOTE TO READER

Whereas a dissertation typically identifies a problem and promises solutions, this project does not neatly close the gap between the problem and what I favour as a counter-Pose than a “solution.” For this reason, I invite you into the text with specific pre-understandings laid out to better facilitate reading clarity.

Theory and Voice. Although this work takes up the recovery of voice, its beginnings are admittedly theory laden, with an appeal to intellectual traditions sometimes disparate, for the express purpose of arriving at a forceful enough critical schema I call the Dream Ontology. Rather than breaching theoretical realism, I suggest the variety of voices adds urgency for the totality I wish to counter. Neither could I have found the extent of my own voice had these directions not been pursued. As such, this work is to be read as “a journey” from discovering the problem, by means of prophetic theorists, toward my own voice becoming the counter-pose, its remediation, but without re-entering the theoretic so as to iterate a political reaction.

Politics and Posings. Such as this paper incriminates the Dream Ontology as a monological totality, it is tempting to observe the prophetic mode of speech as a counter-politic. It must be noted that the prophet is not a political figure, but is one whose mode of poetic speech re-im/poses infinity by pointing away from any objectified reality that takes sights from the primacy of personhood. Such an event is not a pole or a solution, but an e/vocative summons, to pro/pose for readers a renewing ethical musing that unites being and vocation.

Searing Criticism. This work does not entertain a conversation about dreams but dares to charge the order of things with one panacea for knowing and being-in-the-world. Brueggemann and Reimer agree that “fearless criticism” is the beginning of prophetic vocation, after which time “creative renewal” must follow. My work, therefore, emulates the prophetic pattern by first deconstructing the dominant text in our midst.

Limitations. As this project offers a counter-vocational musing for what it can mean to more ethically teach, it will not dispense more ethical strategies for teaching but will consider a posing anew for “ways to be ... responsible” to voice in the classroom. The promise I make, therefore, is not a new politic as such, but a restatement on what is promise, so possibilities for learning and being can become more truly infinite.
CHAPTER 1 – DIMINISHED POSSIBILITIES FOR ‘BEING’ UNDER THE SPELL OF ASCENT

This chapter lays out the broad strokes of an inquiry that counter-poses disembodied ontology (human fullness realized abstract of being) with the prophetic summons for originary voice and vocation, which is to value life intrinsically, in contrast to instrumental schemes for ‘achieving’ the good. I first show how revaluing vocation in perfunctory (moral) forms thins difference (voice) to consolidate meaning in competing cultural currencies. In such a case, a dominant text emerges to determine what is real and how we must then be oriented to earn the privilege of exercising voice (proving our eligibility for promise). Against this unjust and often unseen state of affairs, I invoke the prophetic to re/mind and re/enchant what it means to be ‘fully’ human (to widen what is real; to recover what is possible). Thereafter, I lay out how I will more discretely explore the narrow ascetic-ascendant ontology in the rest of this work.

We have changed both what is real and what is valuable.
-- Heesoon Bai (2009, p. 140)

Were one to take an unassuming drive across the average Canadian city today they’d be hard pressed to ignore one of two dominant messages that gapes out at them from a bus shelter, a side panel on a transit vehicle or splashed across an imposing billboard decorating our cityscapes. Flipping on the radio and scanning one station to the next, they’ll encounter the very same themes, and at their destination be accosted yet again – at the grocery store, the quick stop at the bank or when fetching their children from school or the local skating rink. Even upon arriving home – there too, a place where we shut out all the noise, so it would seem – are its thick residues in the deluge of daily mail, the flyers and newspapers, and of course, drenched in the images and jingles on TV. They are everywhere! But that they are rarely noticed presents us with a disturbing contemplation on what it means to be truly free – free from these dominant texts of modern culture, that we so unabashedly honour them; that they define, more or less, the circumference of our existence or what we assume is simply the way things are. While it may not be imminently clear after admitting them for reflection, if we stay awhile and linger in what a good body of contemporary theory tells us – that, on account of their profound and pervasive moral evocation we are among the least emancipated people in modern history – we may very well wish to take a second look at what it truly means to be … human; or, if truth is a difficult word, what is means to be human otherwise.
The two themes: Work Hard, Never Give Up! Go, Lay Claim to Your Dreams! That’s right, *work* and *dreams*. If anything characterizes modern life, it is in the vast expanse of these two fine campaigns that declare, ostensibly, the sum of human endeavour. In fact, there is no more abundant language in schools and youth culture more generally, in the texts and textures of learning places and social exchange, and in the frames that drive the abundance of our motivations than work and dreams, vocation and destiny. And while some buy in knowingly, others suffer terrifying malaise or opt out of the game altogether – the ‘poor among us.’ Of course popular protest asserts that the endless available options to *work out for ourselves* a lifestyle or identity dissolves the charge that we are so constrained. Others are quick to wage that freedom *is* the achievement of the work-dream relation – the proud among us, they certainly must be. But, whether or not either is true is not really the question. For consideration is whether there is any other way to know the world and live in it; any other order of things from which we may draw our sense of *who* we are, what we can *do*, and what it all *means*. It is an ethical question. For the way we know the *real* will ground the very possibilities from which we can draw upon the *good*: the basis from which we answer (response-*ability*), in our practice, to what is most worthwhile in life, shaping the very modus by which we relate to one another.

At rare times, we stumble across or are led to an expression that seems to capture the whole essence of a struggle in one stirring evocative swoop. As regards the above, the first came to me from Max Weber (1958) in a curious assertion that the world has become disenchanted (p. 117). His insight waxes prophetic in two senses: first, the world has indeed *become* disenchanted in the larger ways he foresaw, as mounting evidence will later show; second, his invocation haunts us with a stirring of profound loss, that something important has been left *behind* – and by the admission of his very words, we feel somehow called back. Enter the prophetic! A speech act from below that has us bewildered in the familiar; confounded even that we have taken up a different way. As it is, having been cut off from former ways, broadly speaking, I will attempt to demonstrate through the voice of Weber and his devotees that we have forged ramifying closures on meaning and moral pre-occupation to lock our life-world in an “ontological monism” (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 191); one that Taylor (2008) insists has waged our own “subtraction story” as late moderns.
Another ‘word event’ contemporaneous with Weber’s prophesy’s the relative effects, and as well calls us back to an eerie wonderment. Here I have in mind Heidegger’s (1962) ‘forgetting of being’ and what he would later call ‘the darkening of the world’ (1977). As will become clear, these two proffer more than a lament for dehumanization by virtue of the drive toward the rational-instrumental. They demarcate radical shifts in sensibility away from the human and affective, toward the calculated and prosaic: a slow progressive phenomenon that fundamentally erodes the foundations on which we would know the personal and the ethical (our subjectivity and highest good). Their speech act, taken together, in one sense or another, offers starting points for examining what Foucault (1984) called the “limit-attitude” (p. 46) of modern self-making; that is, how limited meaning horizons hold captive our attentions and affections to compromise the ways we take to knowing, valuing and thus orienting ourselves in the world.

What qualifies them to be taken as prophetic is itself much of my interest – that words can speak and linger so poignantly to transform how we think about and anticipate possibility is itself a methodology; one I will take up after exploring, in the early going, how these expressions distinctly speak to late-modern world relations. To linger on the prophetic for a moment, were it not for the ‘voices from below’ – the sub-verse that disrupts dominant texts (Brueggemann, 2000b) – we may not even be able to know we are far from home (Heidegger’s ‘house-of-being’), or suspect anything amiss in the first place. Ability to ‘realize’ difference (or break the spell of in/difference) is given by what Hanson (1996) calls the prophetic mode, the history of which goes back to the essence of the human cry (Hebrew za’ak in the heart of captivity, prior to the Exodus). In The Cry for Myth, May (1991) gives stories pre-eminence for their ability to fathom the reaches of human yearning. In The Call of Stories, Cole (1989) says that only stories can rescue us (p. xii) because they emanate from places most primary. And so, when stories are cut off, Brueggemann insists that prophetic utterance is a responsibility ‘to’ those who cry out, ‘for those’ whose cry is mute and yet registers when they are themselves numbed (p. 3) by a moral mood (‘what’ is valuable) that drifts away from what is human (Bai, 2009, p. 135). Against this travesty, the prophetic summoner inhabits a justice-centred (for-the-human) counter-story which entreats sight beyond the spectacle to call out and call down the dominant text’s discernible failure of solitary persons or groups. Whereas cultural leaders in the Hebraic tradition are
implicated for failing the single being, prophets are taken to task for not registering a complaint against such failures: for ‘not saying’ “where is the justice” when “people have forgotten” (Jer. 2:7-8, 32) and the order finds favour in/for the monological royal consciousness. Do note, the indictment has no relation to failed action (what we regard as doing in today’s moral lexicon) but was explicitly registered against “not speaking.” By so speaking, the prophet depicts ‘cry’ as being itself (Levinas’ insufficiency). As “the condition of my speech … brings me into being” (Butler, 2005, p. 81), speakability (voice) is justice.

And so, prophetic tradition exemplifies that a dynamic interplay between the dominant cultural story and the vital communal stories on the periphery (Angus, 2008) is critical for justice to be served. A healthy society would, thus, offer ‘speech-space’ for would-be seers to confront imperial ambitions when single persons are excluded, when the centrism of state imperatives are one-eyed, effectively annihilating the voices in the margins. As such, the prophetic utterance constitutes “advocacy for a certain rendering of reality and a polemic against other renderings of reality” (p. 3), to widen ontological space for person (and communal) renewal. What I intend to draw out is not only that we fail to speak from counter-story sub-texts but far more significant is that the modern frame has succeeded at eliminating counter-stories altogether (Lasch, 1991 p. 46; Angus, 2008, p. 4); ironically, through a derisive and deceptive moral play, by issuing transcendence in a new key. As late moderns, we have fully co-opted our own conscience with royal forms, thus completely eradicating any other speech – any ‘speech from the Other’ – that would modulate Empire oration, the empirical story, the final word on what it means to be fully human. When only one story is left, the order of things becomes naturalized. And so it is that a singular text in our midst offers ‘the’ account of reality from which we are to take our place in the world and engage its ‘given’ relations. As this is the case, Angus (2008) – whose interest is in relations between justice and identity of Canadians locked between two dominant empires – says “one must look both backward and forward to rescue the specificity of the socio-cultural formation from contemporary amnesia” (p. 3). What is for us a specificity of cultural formation that I position as the ‘dream’ calls out for renewal. But how so when we have amnesia: when we have forgotten our storied humanness otherwise than in fanciful kinds; or, as Brueggemann would wage, when empire imperatives have already anaesthetized our pathos such that its injury no longer even registers unjust.
Taylor (2004) shows how the erosion of stories emerged from a slow ex/tradition of closely knit communities (late 18th century) when social exchanges (Locke) were slowly consolidated into burgeoning centres, the moral dynamics of which cannot be missed. Not only did this phenomenon dispose persons to more elusive centralized ambitions which insidiously eradicated difference, but as the communal vacuum was all too apparent and residual urges to belong galvanized into a more abstract shared ethos, it appears that the ‘spiritual (speaking) space’ between persons and their mythic relation was severely diminished. Foucault is well known for demonstrating how the innovation of masked authority achieved for modern cultures ‘increasingly’ centralized aims. With a perception that power is absent, and that moralizing ‘from without’ is no more, human aspiration is sensed to be more or less uninfluenced, the effects of which, if not its outright irony, Bauman (2008) illustrates well. Within the ambit of showing how ethics is paralyzed by the emergent consolidation of cultural imaginaries (with a globalized consumptive ethos being its fruition), empires became extra-territorial, no longer given by boundaries, so neither would its texts be apparent to consciousness. His suggestion is that as we lose our sense that life is scripted in “specific” ways, neither by implication will we anticipate the reciprocal: that we are being un-storied. How can we, Bauman adds, when we are dislocated by non-disclosing schemes, when the new “imperial sovereignty is to be found in a ‘non-place’” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 4). The point is not just that a controlling story is hidden, or that one’s own is annulled, but so long as every story comes with a moral – what is worth living for – our own highest expression of fullness will no longer be our own under these conditions.

In this case, the placeless, faceless (unaccountable) dominions of late modernity make mobility the grand ethic, never minding for a moment that it is upwardly aimed. Significant is that movement and drift, in the invisible ways they proliferate, plunder memory and incapacitate renewal by killing originary speech. As such, solitary persons are rendered valueless and fragmented, left to value their humanity alter/natively, since the moral (valued), says Taylor, can never be effaced, just redirected, suggesting that in this mode of moral play, we abdicate who we are to become valuable later in a favoured scheme of culture. What then is the core value of those whose privilege is to capture imagination: preserve the perpetuity of homelessness; keep irrelevant our interest in the storied – procuring outright dis/interest in the inter-human – and in all ways,
with irreverence for life, to move us forward … faster (Bauman aptly coins it *liquid modernity*). If we can chase the forward, in fictive fashions peddled (what dreams may come), we can by working the game in which we are located (Bourdieu, 1977), *graft* its very order into our self-regard and unknowingly aspire to *its* orchestrated pride (our fullness on its terms). In this sense, values are of no use at all, and in fact, matter not. In the absence of antecedents for being – a belonging without story – worth confers by efficacy alone!

Efficacy *is* worth: nothing more than the *feeling* that we are closer to promise. Action, and faster kinds of it, *is* the modern value. Just be busy, something will feel right. Providence will *seem* ever within reach. Create “a sense of things happening, of propitious times ahead” (Terkel, 1980, p. xxii), and everyone will comply. Effectively, what we are left with in the betrayal of stories is an unseen moral *order*: Just work and dream.

As we in ever more and faster ways engage the world *abstract* of native being, our advantage and advancement in the world *must* follow the itinerary of the dominant order, to yield Brueggemann’s despair that under its spell we are *numbed* of our ability to know reality otherwise – the ontological question. Bai (2009) is just as disconsolate, suggesting that “psychic numbing” (p. 135) has been produced by “the spell of the discursive” (p. 142); that is, an abstract and instrumental reality “gets thicker daily” and exerts “an increasingly larger claim on our consciousness.” As we betray our *stories* (source being) for a mere *visage* of personhood (future being), affectivity succumbs to the effective, producing “moral lethargy” (Houton, 2000, p. 1) that derives from “a utilitarian concept of responsibility” (p. 3). No longer moved (evoked) *by* persons, *from* the heart, we now move *toward* destinations in the fanciful and abstract – *el/vocation* without ethics! Inasmuch as we travel in ‘swarms’ instead of ‘groups’ – laying down ‘anchors’ from one node to another, irrespective of ‘roots’ (Bauman’s terms) – we are vulnerable to the call of time-forward *alone*. So disposed, the extra-territorial order *naturalizes* consumption by *materializing* (making *ontic*) the real. Under such an “immanent frame” says Taylor (2007), we only *know* one way to *be*. Ontologically monological, we take up all meaning *from* what is essentially meaningless – dead things, ideas, dreams. Any advocacy for variable visions is a nuisance, an interruption to progress; and if any polemic is to be waged, it is just another single-item (*anti*-political) ‘solution’ – too often characterizing today’s post-modern offense-taking – to will no less a story of power, no greater a renewal than a *competing* state/ment on moral saming.
Negri (2008) says that “social ontology … underpins the definition of empire” (p. 1) with specific interest in “the ontological constitution of a new world” (p. 2). I suggest that beyond this naturalized work-dream reality lays more dynamic possibility for ‘sourcing’ self (Taylor) – to realize our fullness more richly than by the story of culture that promises abstract ascendency in exchange for hard work. But it will only be discernible if we tell our stories, if we speak from behind, from beneath, from the anterior, the arriere-pays, and by so doing interrogate the ‘totalizing’ and ‘saming’ center that so fervently commands our narrowing. Neither will any single-syllable polemic displace our rigid ontology, yet they too often herald educational correctives today. In stark contrast, the prophetic, theorized by the likes of Brueggemann, Hanson, and Purpel, in no way poses re-action on account of dashed expectation – the felt slight of one’s own forward fiction (dream). Instead, the prophet calls from within the flesh – animated by ‘em/bodied’ tradition, against which the story from above (the empirical, ‘taken’ as true) exerts, for strategic reasons, our ex/tradition.

And so, from the sub-vers(e)ive spaces of Weber and Heidegger – and many who in retrieval (Ricoeur, 1980) are similarly summoned – I endeavour to explore how “texts that linger, words that explode” (Brueggemann’s prophetic aphorism) may pose radical renewal and recovery for ‘ways of being’ and ‘ways of learning to be’ in school. As the lofty dream is contested by the humble prophet, we return to the re-enchantment ethics, to re-state the storied as the locus of summons which betrays, by implication, any forward fiction that would promise fullness later by cold moral command. In the mode of the prophetic, the ethical is to ask ‘what does it mean to be … response-able’ and yet not anticipate worded dictums, but flesh come forth, in the incarnate word, as counter-speech itself – embodied – where first utterance lives, where voice and vocation are one. Therefore, to realize subjectivity in its fullest (the ethical) is not to dream after all, nor even to work at a project. It is not even to make decisions. It is to be affectively disposed to the cry of the Other, to await our fullest dis/closure in a radically other kind of transcendence.
The Dominant Text of Modern Life

Weber’s critique of rationality as the accepted dominion of everyday life for ascendant practice (achievement, growth, progress) is a lament for lost humanness. In this spirit of loss we are left to ask, what is the nature and trajectory of modern and postmodern culture; and beyond this, how may we develop a response to the ongoing rationalization and disenchantedment of the world. (Hennis, 1988, p. 23)

At this juncture, I would like to lay out the essential problematic of our modern time that unites my observation of contemporary life with Max Weber’s disturbing incantation. I began with an illustration that life today is characterized, indeed naturalized, by a ‘hard work ethic’ and its ‘achievement of dreams.’ Between these poles, disparate as they are, we incur our greater sense of mission and meaning in the world, even to know who we are. Of course, there are in many moments, respites from work and remissions from dreams, but the greater trajectory of our lives happens in the frame of these dominant constructs. Where this arises, and what it signifies is, in my estimation, profoundly brought together in Max Weber’s theorizing of the modern personality. In his sociology of religion and its particular application to work/s (calling), which I take up in the next chapter, Weber uncovers that what was once a communal-transcendent relation to the cosmos lapsed into a personal-ascendant relation in the social. Work has increasingly grounded relation to higher things, to what we value; and more recently, how we achieve moral status in the world. What he theorizes as ‘proving’ (self-demonstration) vis-à-vis ‘providence’ (the most valued and hoped for) – now, devoid of cosmic relation, and therefore disenchanted – Taylor (2007) calls ‘moral sourcing’ in the immanent (we demonstrate our value and draw fullness from the strictly social). Both are saying that a self proves (by work) its worth, contingent on most valued perceptions of fullness. The matter at hand is to show that as fullness has shifted horizontal, lingering transcendent ambition has lapsed into a disenchanted ontology, isolating for human action single measure demonstration. Such moral ordering belongs less to our native orientation when no longer sourced by the intimate, the inter-human. Bai (2009) concludes the point well to say that this “Cartesian ontology” (p. 136) has shifted “intrinsic worth” to “instrumental worth” (pp. 135,
necessitating for practical purposes a “disembedded and disembodied self” (p. 137). We are to take leave of who we are to become most fully human.

We are to take leave of who we are to become most fully human. Work is now the most immediate relation to promise; that is, work becomes most meaningful only in the context of a particular aspiration toward ‘providence’ or salvation; or the acquired feeling of being-enlargement, as others will later show. What I draw from Weber is an ontological formula that I suspect constitutes self-making in the present and I propose that if this monism has the moral force I suspect, then we are in desperate need of prophetic utterance against its violence – against its un-seen, un-spoken about limitation; that is, its ‘kind’ of imposed limits on what it can mean to be human. Brueggemann (2001) is among the most emphatic spokespersons for this ethical failing – and for which he offers would-be seers a prophetic summons. Any dominant text throughout history is “an empire imagination,” whose hegemony exerts a ‘royal consciousness’ that consolidates vistas for personal possibility in the singular ambitions of the dominant power. To extend Brueggemann’s application to life today, if our attentions, affections and dispositions are most constituted in and by the imperative of this ascetic-ascendant matrix, then we default to co-producing the dominant power’s agonistic relation to the world; ironically, being against ourselves.

If Weber’s sociology of work makes anything clear, it is that the intensification of work, now so central in modern life, ‘makes religious’ our being against nature, forging enmity between personhood and nature (disenchating who we are). Abram (1996) brings this out in The Spell of the Sensuous to speak of dreams otherwise, and Levinas too recovers ‘sense’ for in/vocative possibilities not by issue of the state (or moral state/ment), but by initiation of the human Other. Weber’s thesis and Brueggemann’s alike go hand in hand on his point: that the greatest legacy of empire is its separation of people from places, and where else has this been more exemplary than through work – in the practices of modern corporations, no less. Furthermore, inasmuch as the empire imagination vicariously attracts cultural members to take up their own expansive projects in empire themes, it will ‘completely story’ who we wish to be. In this respect, I must demonstrate how the Dream Ontology is fundamentally unethical (against us). Bereft of any ability to counter-Pose meaningfulness (our home) – being-in-the-world as Heidegger prophesied – we, in drift,
succumb to being-in-dreams. Our ‘personality,’ as Weber calls it, or our morally sourced ‘identity’ (Taylor, 1989) suffers a limit-horizon on what we can draw on for meaning, self-knowing and fullness. In yet another noteworthy expression from Weber (1958), being is locked behind the bars of an “iron-cage.”

What lies unseen in the present, and is particularly conspicuous if we’re achieving our so-called freedom, is not only that work is the dominant feature of contemporary life, but that its dimension and nature has intensified. Once we worked long days, but today, we rarely stop working at something, making us ‘obsessively ascetic.’ We work in a job, we work at our status and we work on our bodies, just to name a few. Meanwhile, billboards and by-lines invent ever new kinds of things to work at, on, with or in daily – defining the parameters of life and liberty. Why? Because, says Weber, ‘proving’ and self-improve/ment is the causal connection to ‘promise.’ Puritans may have ‘proved’ their salvation by a turn to works, says Weber, but doing ‘a good job’ has never had the moral force we accord it today. We simply don’t expect that our destiny projects issue moral commands in the present to ‘prove us’ for an ultimate providential dream later on. Soteriologically, religion remains: the salvation urge only intensifies (Ferry, 2005, p. 10-13; Gane, 2002, p. 28; Gauchet, 1997, p. 67ff). But vocationally, work increases, laden with proving schemes (the imperative by which we acquire value).

Capitalism is not only imbued with religion, it is providence in a new order. Weber’s proving and providence is a work-promise schema still at large, albeit in different clothes. Whereas ancestors cursed God but still showed up at church on Sunday morning, we no differently loathe a consumptive state of affairs, but are nonetheless spotted at malls in seasons of commercial worship. Works and work – ascetics and its ascendant presumption – dominate the pneuma of modern life! “One must – whatever happens, whatever the cost – develop in order to develop, advance or perish, and no one can really tell whether development for its own sake ... procures more happiness and liberty than was true in the past” (Ferry, p. 10). Work today, in endless striving horizons is cultic. “Quite comprehensively” says Ferry, this drive “encourages (and even renders obligatory) a veritable cult of performance for its own sake.” And with every cult comes unassailable allegiance, irrepressible moral rectitude; total loss of voice.
To Lough (2006), Weber’s ‘work’ demonstrates “the persistence of religion” (p. 1). “We live in a spectacularly religious society” even though we “are adrift on a sea of unbelief.” If so, then here is the rub: we are spectacularly moral, so we spectacularly moralize. To be shown and interrogated is that the ontology we’ve fashioned for modern life unexpectedly narrows us and diminishes our fullness. We give up great abundances of freedoms – time, creative space, and energy; even incurring personal repression (Becker, 1973) and social alienation (Reisman, 1950) – to purchase the chance to play a card with fate. Never mind whether heaven is true or not, never mind that small percentages reach their destiny. We need to feel our worth, says Becker (1973, p. 26), and if we were aware of what we do to achieve it, we’d be shocked. The question that nags his Pulitzer Prize winning text is “how conscious is [man] of what he is doing to earn his feeling of heroism” (p. 5), or that the urge (to prove worth) is spiritually rooted? “In this sense everything that man does is religious and heroic, and yet in danger of being fictitious and fallible.” “Human heroics is a blind drivenness ... a screaming for glory as uncritical and reflexive as the howling of a dog” (p. 6).

Furthering Lough’s admission, “Every society thus is a ‘religion’ whether it thinks so or not” (p. 7). The dreams we wield and the orders we take up to realize them make modern life more religious than ever. But so long as this is kept symbolic and disguised, we can just keep believing, never mind what for. Meanwhile, the destiny that does get fulfilled stays masked, says Ellul (1965), with clever insight on why. The ortho-praxic has subsumed the ortho-doxic of the past, but what is to be seen is a moral sleight of hand that maintains the religious structure. What strangely unites the two opposing Western epochs, to retain one way of being, lies square in the fact that the ortho (correct, right) never disappeared. By making palpable transcendent cause “as” solutions (contra relations), we’ve created new locations for moral attentions, new kinds of action (ascetic disposition) for human preoccupation.

Charles Taylor (2007), who takes up the identity-morality relation in an ‘immanent frame’ notes Ferry’s angst of salvation inverted, of transcendence shifted sideways. “He argues a kind of transcendence of our ordinary experience, but one which is ‘horizontal’, not ‘vertical’” (p. 677). Ferry himself says, “‘The deification of man’ that followed the death of God in the nineteenth century retained the essential elements of
the structure of religion” (p. 57). The only difference, says Ferry, is that the former “offers the promise that we will be saved,” whereas “philosophy invites us to save ourselves” (p. 19). Now *theoria* makes doctrines so we can do a better … job. “The more the world becomes disenchanted, the less it is inhabited by the gods, and the more legitimate it seems to have to save oneself by one’s own efforts.” Promise and effort bear a *more* intimate relation! But how we work things out in the modern is to ironically work our way out of being. Such is the moral subterfuge of a confined ontological *form ula* purchased in the late modern play. If disturbed by religion, or commissions not our own, there is cause to think again about what we are doing, what we do believe in or what we think will save us. Against such profuse religious limit, who else but a prophet can speak? And so, Oration meets the Oracle to summon disruptive vocation.

In David Purpel’s (1989) chapter “Education and Prophecy,” from his cherished book *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*, he writes “a basic theme of this book is the intimate interconnection between culture and education, and in this chapter we will focus more sharply on the implications of the proceeding moral and religious analysis for educational practice.” Like Purpel, this work bridges larger relations between the “cultural, social and moral views [that] permeate the schools and classrooms in powerful ways” (p. 101). My interest, like his, is to bring together for prophetic scrutiny any shortcomings that, as educators, our best practices rely on to ‘prove’ us having done ‘a good job.’ “We are, alas, a very weak profession, captured in part by our difficulty in admitting to our condition,” one that he says “reflect the culture’s basic ambivalence about the power and value of education.” While I do not suspect Purpel is calling teachers weak, the profession seems reluctant, for whatever reasons, to put up a more forceful front against the power structures that dominate its given charge. I uphold that teaching is a high calling, as high as the human we teach. Accordingly, “both the culture and individual educators need a profession with a critical capacity and the courage and expertise to provide insights into cultural problems and suggest reasonable responses to them” (p. 104). Here, critical cultural inquiry links with hopefulness for vocation, wherein we might ask: what kind of reflection will have us speak *differently*, to renew ‘higher relations’ between persons (voice) and work (vocation).
Purpel offers one take on what could be prophetic in this asking. “Education would be working within the prophetic tradition” when it “seeks to remind us of our highest aspirations, of our failures to meet them, and of the consequences of our responses to these situations” (p. 104). Though I will at the end of my work – following the wider scrutiny of culture and education – offer a ‘prophetic method’ for re-imagining ontological fullness beyond the rigid confines I suspect, Purpel hints at what it will take:

The educator as prophet does more than re-mind, re-answer, and re-invigorate – the Prophet-educator conducts research and joins students in continually developing skills and knowledge that enhance the possibility of justice, community, and joy. His concern is with the search for meaning through the process of criticism, imagination, and creativity. Such a role (as Socrates found out) is in fact seriously threatening to those fearful of displacing the status quo. Most importantly, the educator as prophet seeks to orient the educational process toward a vision of ultimate meaning. (p. 105)

I suspect ultimate meaning has much more in mind than a limited self-realization scheme. “The great prophets … performed their critical and creative functions within a broad but particular conception of the meaning and significance of human creation and destiny.” From this standpoint, “Educators who accept the concept of their profession as having a prophetic function must affirm a set of sacred or moral principles – a mythos, a set of metaphysical or religious assumptions – or commit themselves to that which has ultimate meaning to them.” Implicit is value beforehand, in the storied, which makes primary our speech. As the work-promise orientation not only limits possibilities for meaningfulness, but omits the ‘human’ from starting points concerning what is most valued, the question of what is ultimate (promise) arises if it does not include the human. It begins to sound absurd, never mind unjust. And if we are not clear on the matter of human value being originary, how can we be sure we’re responsibly handling our moral charge – that is, resisting ‘narrowing preoccupations,’ indwelling the world fully engaged, and avoiding conditioning by the dominant cultural text. As the prophet is for promise, and promise most truly resides in storied being (mythic, world-belonging), in the texts we are, nothing should be disenchanted about learning. In as much as we
embody value (Bai’s intrinsic worth), to learn is ‘embodied wonder’ in a natural condition of being beholden to one another in covenant (sacred) trust. Here education becomes inherently dignifying, inhering the human in what is good. In such a case of “caring otherwise” the summons to act is transformed, and in turn, our vocations realize us full.

To so speak is to occupy a vocation of care, of which we must note two kinds. One begins in care (affective, en/chant/ed, called forth sinuously); the other, learned from Kierkegaard (sorge), is what we care about (what possesses our affections), and is best noted as ultimate concern, here offered vocationally.

The educator as prophet needs to be particularly concerned about the degree to which the culture and the profession are keeping their sacred commitments. Prophetic educators must facilitate the dialogue on what the sacred commitments are, how they are to be interpreted in the light of particular situations, and what constitutes appropriate responses to them. (p. 110)

Unmistakeable is that we are to be in constant reflection on, and vigilant for, a meaningfulness sourced from below, from the sub-texts we are, from where we cry for return to home, to-be with one another. By association, we must ‘speak from below’ against whatever kinds of meaningfulness impose an ascetic kind of ascendancy, ‘achieving’ our fullness – the transcendent – without embedded and embodied relation. If so cared about, suggests Purpel, “schools can be transformed from warehouses and training sites into centers of inquiry and growth.”

Disenchainting the Dominant Texts of Schooling

While I will more generally make broad sweeping charges against dominant culture, my interest as an educator is to explore these dominions in what contextualizes theories and practices in education; more specifically, to uproot and comprehend the underlying moral effects of the ascetic-ascendant equation in schooling. Of concern is the extent to which Canadian sites of learning are unknowingly complicit with Zimmerman’s (2004) ‘ontological monism’ (p. 191) in the particular fashion Weber’s fuller analytic will
demonstrate in the next chapter. As Ellison (2009) says, “An organic unity exists between a functioning society and its institutions in that each institution is a process operating under the logic of a larger social totality” (p. 335). And so we can pose ‘broad’ questions, which may include several of the following. Are we who theorize and teach, in professions of care, teaching our children to care about dreams, to take up a Dream Ontology as the fundamental educational project, their fundamental vocation for realizing what it means to be fully human … outside of who they are?

If so, are we aware that the work-dream relation ‘institutes’ a requisite agonism toward our self, our world and the human Other? Or else, what are we teaching students to care for? To what ends do we direct their affections and attentions: the disenchanting (formulaic, calculated, rational-instrumental ambition that renders them and their consumptions of knowledge ‘inert’ until useable; proven valuable) or the enchanted (the mystery of the other, in humble stance toward the greater cosmos, embedded in storied excitations with one another)? Do we know the ‘moral force’ behind what we teach? What would be a profession of care, or prophetically, what are we called to confess in the material we profess. In these textures – this project which David Smith (1999) calls our “pro vocare (what I call for)” (p. 139) – I take up the voice of a provocateur (Daignault, 2009) to ‘explode’ how we fortify pride and shame in the narrow moral constructs that underlie the liturgy of dreams.

Nowhere, it seems, is the ascetic-ascendant (agonistic) relation better exemplified for exerting such a fierce moral force than in education. For one, education finds its historical voice and thrives in the hues of rational-instrumental progress (125 years of being relatively unchanged, reminds Ellison, 2009, p. 331); second, it conceives and delivers its product in what Donmoyer (2004) says is an ineradicable “achievement ethic,” not to mention being replete with a moral shaming apparatus along the way; and third, it has the distinct charge of reproducing culture (Bourdieu) in currencies of the empire’s most pressing needs, doing so in ways that intensify competition, in closed (strictly measurable) systems so schools can ‘give account’ to the dominion. From its provincial charge to its grandiose mission statements, from classroom protocols to their physical design, and from rigid learning outcomes to endless assessment, schooling’s moral force
remains long after the learning years. As work is modern life, and school’s ascetic order trains for it from first days, what occurs in school is our I/destiny (forgive the neologism): the promise of being realized – who we are, made complete, after all that work. As it is, education and ontology share an intimate relation. In fact, we know little outside the way we are educated ‘to be,’ and we are offered no real alternative for imagining life outside the bounds of these educationally habituated dreamscapes.

**Excursus: A Personal Dream Narrative**

Throughout my youth, I sought the self triumphant, in furious strides ascending the imagined pinnacles that promised my fullness. It was the proper way after all, to both think about and orchestrate my life, that is, if I was to be a certified somebody. Beneath the glossy childscapes, I hear the insidious dictum: Thou Shalt Substantiate! But after living out its charge, in the employ of every conceivable style, I must now lament “the dream” as the very mockery of who “I am.” As the fundamental training ground that engulfed all ambition, it is a trap, a noose, a daunting enclosure, one that not only kills the soul, but claims the heart’s very affect/ions in every beat along the way. In the order of schooling was a moral matrix, and under its spell, an inescapable and consuming per/version of what it means to be human. Here, the sum of existence is an incipient self, realized in a destiny scheme. Spun in tales of vastness, it is the program that imperceptibly makes small. Charged to be known, masked is that we diminish. In its deceit, I must take control, lest I fall back and losing the dream, lose myself.

The dream is, arguably, the most uncontested social convention in modern time, with little thought given to why we are so uncritically endeared. Having eased its way into prominent discourses spanning childhood, school, work, church, family, national consciousness and mass marketing par excellence, and transgressing boundaries which by any other measure are incommensurable, the dream inexorably absorbs and defines the modern person. As ubiquitous as any cultural artefact, its dominion is guaranteed by its cunning to transcend and transgress virtually every cultural boundary to render it exclusive (hegemonic). In religion, science, business and academia, the people dream. Adherents, no matter how contentious by any
other means, are effectively ONE by virtue of dreaming. It is the currency in every corner of society: the ivory tower, Sunday school, and the trenches of common labour. It is a gentleman in its “appeal to our betterment” and it is good in its “promise of unification.” In short, “the process of making up goals and then chasing ever harder after them” makes “the dreams of every person have some sort of equal value” (Kerr, p. 4-5). To dream is to be! They are the picture of heaven without the religious baggage to get there, without preaching or penitence, so we suspect. If there is anything taken for granted, mocked if assailed, and whose denouncement we would in every other respect prove false, it is to dream. So I must ask, is that all there is?

*A Summons for Prophetic Vocation in Education*

Just as we may not draw immediate connection between dreams and Weber’s modern asceticism, his application may not seem so germane to education either; that is, until we look at the specific elements of disenchantment – primarily, his lament for how the rational-instrumental is the controlling doctrine for institutional responsibility, but as well, how it would consume our own educative sensibility. And while we have to wait to grasp the fuller sense of the ascetic-ascendant (agonistic) frame that constitutes the Dream Ontology as I apply it to education, we can at this point note that his disenchantment, the prophetic term he is most known for uttering, originated in the very context of educational vocation. In his essay, *Science as Vocation*, Weber (1946) distinguishes between a teacher and a leader, rationality and art, a professor and a prophet. His most referenced quote frames my concern, as it platforms the shift to an all out narrowing of world relation and requisite self-regard, or else, how the Dream became a rational-transcendent moral tool.

The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’ Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life … into the transcendental realm of mystic life. (p. 133)

What is curiously left out of Weber’s most quoted passage is what immediately precedes it: “The Prophet for whom so many of our younger generation yearn simply does not exist.” I am fascinated by the
background in mind here, since he does not elaborate on the point in the text. We are left to wonder what for him is the meaning space between ‘need for a prophet’ and ‘professions in a rational age;’ or else, what ‘is’ possible for vocation, prophetically, given dominions of rational practice? It is a terrifically generative musical space to be sure, with the question at heart calling up the counter-storied: “which of the warring gods should we serve? Or should we serve perhaps an entirely different God, and who is he? Then one can say that only a prophet or a savior can give the answers” (p. 131). With respect to artistic vocation, “our greatest art is intimate” (p. 134), and it is the prophet, he inter-poses, who may direct it: “only within the smallest and intimate circles, in personal human situations, in pianissimo, that something is pulsating that corresponds to the prophetic pneuma, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand.” We may ponder if in Weber’s estimation there is a prophetic vocation in the spaces of teaching especially after theorizing a new tyranny of asceticism in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

In his abundant references to disenchantment in the spaces of educational vocation, Weber (1946) draws upon Tolstoy: “what shall we do, and, how shall we arrange our lives” (p. 131). Or, we might ask: what shall we teach, and, how shall we arrange persons? Posing vocation in this way impinges on the kind of ‘leadership’ the prophet and artist will take up, to meet head on what is more than just a seasonal drought in education. It concerns where we source fullness of meaning, yet again. “We happen to come to lectures in order to experience something more than mere analysis and statements of fact” (p. 127). Students “crave a leader and not a teacher.” Mischievously taking the matter to (he)art, “the primary task of a useful teacher is to teach his students to recognize inconvenient facts” (p. 125), or as Felman (1987) says, “teaching … has to deal not so much with lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge” (p. 79). Therefore, prophetic vocation could very well be to sink our tongue into the inconvenience of dreams, so long as they get ‘in the way’ of our fullness! Ofelia Ortega (2006) certainly makes the case. “To have ‘vocation as empire’ means that we are not in front of a simple economic fact, but rather of an ideology that reaches all the levels of social relations” (p. 41). In other words, if we are not made full in our storied world relation, doctrine (anything abstracting who we are) will take its place! Fullness occurs in its fictions. Here then is vocation to interrogate a summative ontological frame, to wonder at vocational possibility in the midst of wonder itself,
to ask what is it to be enchanted again, but in *syn/aes/thetic relation* with students, where ‘speaking space’ anticipates what it means to *most* fully be. “For teaching to be realized, for knowledge to be learned, the position of alterity is therefore indispensable: knowledge is what is already there” (Felman, 1987, p. 169).

I am personally blessed to have as doctoral advisors leader educators who as prophets, artists and poets pose tensile word play between the storied and the empirical – that is, who each interrogate the royal consciousness from the hinterland to re-enchant over again. Bai (2003) speaks against the detriments of the “ethics of instrumentalism” (p. 41) as a “hegemonic ethics we have been collectively enacting for the past two to three hundred years [in] instrumentalism,” derogating how our disenchantment and its underlying agonism forges “power relationship between beings.” As an artist-educator, Bai’s invocation is to explode the dualism we find in an *ascetic-ascendant* schema and to re-realize unitary expression with our being-in-the-world. By means of Zen Arts, “putting the discursive mind to rest and opening up the consciousness” (p. 49), resides a “freeing [of] oneself from the tyranny of the languaged consciousness,” from the dominant texted ontologies of empire, as it were, for a renewal of relations that Brueggemann issues as the chief charge of the prophet. Embodied vocation, suggests Bai, is being-with what we do, and an ‘experiencing’ of world-embedded relation devoid of instrumental agency. In my estimation, Bai takes up Weber’s call in the aesthetic prophetic voice.

Meyer (2005) has done landmark work in the area of *Living Inquiry*, which as a parallel to Bai’s aesthetic (nature-elicited) educational philosophy specifically contemplates *place, language, time, and self/other* to provoke ‘pedagogies of presence.’ In Karen’s work is the imaginal force and spiritual risk taking that reinvigorates being-world relations devoid of duality, with the intent of re-centralizing our oneness with the natural that Weber’s ‘instrumental disenchantment’ altogether agonizes. As a benefactor of Karen’s first course on Living Inquiry, I attest to how it transformed my own sense of *being* present, effectively disrupting the ‘ways of being’ I had ‘bought into’ prior to encountering her initially disturbing invocations. Being sinuously human is not easy when we have spent years constructing who we are in the alter-frames. I can only wonder now why I *thought* it was morally right to be so constituted, so composed. I recall the
remarkable experience of a final project which animated, with a group, what had not yet been put into words in advance of the performance. Such a daring approach to education – and the permission she gave to play in it – lingers not only for the risks we can take as educators, but for what it ‘taught me’ about being alive in my lessons, being transcendent in my living relations. She is a supreme pioneer of the prophetic in educational vocation in the distinct offering of enchantment at its most direct level: nature, wonder, spontaneity, relationality. If Bai is the artist, Meyer is the canvass. She, seemingly, is the sky, the mountains, the birds and the air itself that painter Bai might bring together in magical reverie.

And among the most celebrated for the effects he has had on my educational life is Carl Leggo. I have great admiration for the recent projects Carl has taken up – Life Writing, métissage, and variants aplenty of autobiographical exploration and narrative voice to break down and break out of the centers of self-saming that occur in the dominions of text. While Roth (2008) offers métissage as a way of identity-writing that allows us to “escape the hegemonies that arise from the ontology of the same—which, as I show, undergirds much of educational thought” (p. 891), Carl and his stunning orations of poetry and prose may be its most incisive provocateur. If not known for being entirely scandalous in sub-versions of textual play – and they are very naughty – then surely his stubborn refusal to concede a text to static and still standing will cause any who’ve crossed Carl’s path to quickly remember his excitations at the hardening of the word. They are to remain as fleshy as our stories themselves. Narration is the only way a text can stay alive, I can still hear Carl fomenting, and when theory runs after it with a pen, what was once flesh has lost its voice to definition.

What is remarkable about my attraction to Carl is that while his corpus of work does not share a direct relation to the writers I take up, there seem correspondences unceasing between what we are both seeking to release. I am most grateful for the inspirations (using that word intentionally) under Carl’s lead that exposed and exploded my own expectations of language’s purposes – from definition to infinity – and how the way we take to language is the way we take to personhood itself. Living poetically will never be the same. To live and to write are one, and such as they are, words can be truly enchanted. I am grateful that Carl
summoned me to bring voice into “vocation.” I can honestly say I have now found it. I can say, unabashedly, that I have found in living language enchanting possibility. Here then is a model call for what is prophetically possible in educational vocation: to artfully lead speech to the restor(i)ed, slippery, sinuous and scandalizing space that offends all ‘moral sensibility’ of our culturally mastering texts.

Re-Enchanting the Ethical: Establishing Warrant for this Quest

I offer these three educators to hint at prophetic possibility in vocations of education, where from our very most natural hinterland we might be able to denude and denaturalize the ontological hold that otherwise conditions our praxis in spaces of schooling, and in kind, the products we make of students we teach. If the essential theme of disenchantment is that it narrows, and if disenchantment exerts the dominion on world relations that I suspect, then the deception that we think otherwise, or imagine ourselves free from, may now come more clearly into view. Where I go from here is to make the case. How is it, for example, that we imagine freedom, if ‘from within’ disenchanted spaces and by its very tools we seek transcendent possibility after all? If we are so disenchanted but the enchanted is an abiding condition that motivates at least to some extent much of our striving, then important questions linger. The most pressing and central occur in ethical varieties since what we value most will be formative of moral selfhood (ontology), Taylor will later show.

Here, Emmanuel Levinas meets our discourse. If the transcendent is already the human, and not something to be reached (which I am calling the ascendant imposter, if not a transcendent tautology), we have an occasion for reversal; to go ‘back’ to first ethics, to who we are. There is for humans an “a priori relation to … height” (Levinas, 1996, p. 11), where our “commitment is a promotion” (p. 18), but one fully otherwise than dreams. In fact, when a “principle of immortality striving” (Becker, 1973, p. 64) is exploited by culture to enable its glory, the prophet is the great re-minder, the ‘troubler of Israel,’ as it were, to put all enclosed ontology under suspicion. As Brueggemann will show, the one who truly knows freedom is she who knows how to cry. She knows dealt blows to the spirit, to have ‘flesh barred from being.’ Taking up the cry is the beginning of ethics, as condition and vocation. Such is to animate being in the lived question of the
enchanting Other to whom I am answerable for my ultimate dis/closure and good. In this way, the Other as promise, is the ethical: my fullest and most authentic self-demonstration – transcendence realized.

The paradox that initiated this project is how we can be captive without tears. If we are captive and yet cry not, then this quest is prophetic ‘beyond words.’ Here, persons more naturally dwell before being brought ‘down’ to reality – pre-scribed, in the thick ontology of ascetic-ascendant ambition. And it is here where Levinas calls us to ‘vocations of speaking;’ laying the ethical ground for saying against the said, as being-dis/posed to the living call of the Other to realize truest vocation. But lest we think in binary, ‘words’ are not to be the enemy, and neither are dreams a villain. After all, voca/tion is ‘to speak’ and to voca/lize is ‘to be human.’ I am thus asking for a high/er ethics, where work and words can be unitary! Thus, the matter is whose language we emit, and in/for whose currencies are we working for/under. As with any tool, how we employ them is answerable. When the employ of words is morally normed, manipulated to a ‘higher’ order (dreams), effectively laying low and readying human relations for ascriptions of shame (Kristeva’s ab/ject), we invoke the failure of our very own genus, which is to de-incarnate ethics.

Under the aims of the dominion, where work has ‘left behind’ personhood and words inscribe us finite (contra the enchanting infinity we are), the ethical shifts moral (the static), to a shame-appropriating utilization. When what is by nature transcendent (beyond words) shifts to being-realized in the ascendant (self-measured destiny), care is inverted says Wineberg (2007). Whereas care was once concern for others, we are now careless if we tend to another outside the meagre allowances of policy. Charged to realize our cares in the abs/tract (“drawn away” from the real), we sub/tract what it is to be fully alive. Noteworthy too is how forces ‘defining’ our late modern reality summon us to ‘cares of relative insignificance,’ fully implicating references to ultimate things. As such, what we’ve made ultimate comes into view – at least I hope to make this apparent – and what so distresses is that work and dreams occlude the very organism for which they were supposed to confer greater meaning. How this got inverted presses my concern at some level, but that it is invisible, even considered natural, more significantly sounds my grief. If under taxing command dreams only make us inert, confirming Becker’s thesis that the most dominant aspect of modern
life is repressive (ascetic), and if modern life is for persons to be increasingly shut-up, as Kierkegaard had prophesied, then dreams are to be the finest ambassador of our demise.

After leaving tucked-in from places of work with faces of steel that emit no more ‘fleshy’ a word, I know many who cry in the dark over a humanity stolen through work. Meanwhile, the priests of culture are mandated to root out the affective and pathetic (the enchanted) to ‘keep their jobs’ so we can all reach … their dream. It is the circle of life in lands disenchanted, all the way up the chains; we pass on the virus, and at the top, its end, we wonder what for? It’s a brilliant game for a program called progress, but rare is the inquiry on regressions that follow. For this reason, I had need of leaving schooling’s hardened managing spaces to inquire at the moral sources from which it feeds and draws ambition, from where I was finding and imparting vocational life. I offer for appraisal my findings, with an itinerary for how I will proceed.

*Introducing the Research Question: Charting a Pro/thetic Dis/ruption*

In offering the execution of this work, I start by expressing my debt to Charles Taylor. From his scholarship concerning sources of self – effectively, ‘where’ being draws its highest values to most realize its flourishing – I reformulate and imagine the Dream Ontology. I produce this convenience of language for its resonance at probing late modernity’s highest kind of self-knowing and world-engagement, which when applied to education deprives the fullest (and unified expression of) voice and vocation of its communicants. I arrive at my research question by deduction. First, Taylor’s ‘moral ontology’ asserts that ‘to be’ and ‘to act’ are synchronous with what is taken up as promise. As goes one’s sense of promise, action orients toward it and the phenomenon founds self-regard. Identity (sense of self) follows morality (what has worth); we define who we are by what we value. From this theoretic platform, I offer by way of a second deduction that so long as modern promise doctrines through dreams evade the human, and so doing elude our fullness, they fail the ethical. How we can know and value who we are is counter-intuitively cut off from fuller possibility. Third, by virtue of identity’s synchrony with promise, I will anticipate how we may re-imagine promise otherwise to prospect, reciprocally, a fuller world-relation. That is, if we can open vocational possibilities beyond the
closed ascetic-ascendant quest, I imagine we may be able to realize what we know in the phenomenological tradition as Ethical Subjectivity (Fryer, p. 5). This question will widely govern ruminations on what it can mean to be human, and to most humanely teach. Effectively, in tensile space between being-human and to-dream, where oracles in the ontic take precedence over the aura of the Other, I enlist a prophetic counter-_pose to reconsider in/vocation most ethically in the spaces of teaching.

Prior to exploring this enclosed ontology at length, it will be necessary to solicit plausibility for the concern and to derive a sense for where this kind of self-making originated. To do this, I will in Chapter 2 present some foundational terms of reference while citing key contributing scholars, and thereafter frame the ascetic-ascendant (agonistic) relationship that grounds the Dream Ontology. In effect, as the ascetic (both sacred and secular) has become the chief posture by which persons secure promise in the west, they are constituted to be against the good. Living itself is staged as an event for overcoming limits, with a virulent schism conditioning our world engagement. Becker (1971) says in the modern scheme “people derive their sense of value” (p. 36) and “work out their urge to superiority by plying their ... attractiveness” (p. 71), but as this occurs, we’ve “set a great distance between ourselves and the rest of nature” (p. 13). “By placing the conceptual over the perceptual” (Bai, 2009, p. 136), “we have lost the ability to hear nature” (p. 135), both internally and externally, to the effect that “‘man’ is a divided being, alienated from within” (p. 138). Not only though have we disenchanted the very natural urge that conditions transcendence in the first place, but by revising “what counts as real” (p. 139), we have ironically handed over promise to idols, to what has no life to give back after our faithful subservience.

As this heroic spirit has increasingly identified western persons, moral formation has moved from an embedded relation in the world and with one another, to one of proving worth in competitive social exchange borne of an economic model. That is, as such a model locates promise outside being, vocation shifts to laying hold of it in moral terms given; and as it drifts away from originary voice, from dwelling in one’s most native and unitary expression, to world occupation that has split persons in roles (for advancing to occur), we do not merely default to being competitive with one another, but being against nature in every sense, enact violence
against our very own self. In short, we have disenchanted who we are and our relations with one another by taking on radical affirmation projects that dispossess the enchantment we ‘are’ already, or else by locating promise (the enchanted) in the strictly ontic. By defining the problem of ontology as the drive to get out of being, the Dream Ontology becomes the ordering tool for realizing our own annihilation.

Chapter 3 takes up a genealogy Weber began in the second chapter to demonstrate that as the work-promise relation shifted horizontal (transcendence moved ascendant) formerly ‘virtuous’ referents for action are expressed in more ‘virile’ possibilities (in frontier imaginaries). As the relationship between persons and world became increasingly rational, given to more fiercely consumptive attentions, the ethical suffers an all out decline, whereby relationality in the world is given to rationality over it. In this Geist, I note how 19th century ethical programs increasingly conformed ‘the good’ to notions of production (work) and by so doing initiated in sites of schooling and society radically practical and progressive approaches to moral sourcing. As the moral drifts from neighbourliness to more objective (yet abstract) ideals, self-knowing is increasingly confined by the per/form/able. In the shifting of moral sources from the infinity of the affective to definitive effective ends, response-ability (to the good) is reified progressive; so too would go what it means “to be.”

Chapter 4 goes beneath these historical ontological developments to deliberate the ‘anterior aspect’ of the moral in order to comprehend what really conditions moral sense; or, instrumental relations to aims. After admitting Taylor’s ‘moral ontology’ – that which grounds our sense of the transcendent in advance is the catalyst for self-realizing aims – I suggest late modern sources to be invariably conditioned by dreams. Effectively, I demonstrate how the values most commonly drawn upon to formulate identity’s (our proving) highest condition (promise), if ‘cut off’ from the human (enchanted), will produce a hollowing experience in general, to oppose the meaning all efforts at promise anticipated. By trading what is already enchanted (an a priori relation with the world and others) with what intrinsically is not, makes the whole quest toward height not only self-emptying, but absurd. In as much as the modern self takes up its causa sui by means of what is disenchanted (lifeless) at the outset – trading adventure in the world for advancement over it – it incurs a kind of being and action in the world that effectively undermines its sought fulfilment. Worse, it exacerbates
its separation from the world to fulfil Weber’s prophecy that promise conditioned by rationality will lapse into irrationality: we ‘live out’ our devaluation by what we sought as our salvation.

In the hues of Taylor and Weber, I will demonstrate in Chapter 5 an abundance of ways whereby the Dream Ontology rather than securing favoured self-knowing and promise, in fact wages the demise of both. By imposing a schism in our more native vocalis (voice and vocation; Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2004, p 1400) – which the instrumental Dream Ontology necessitates – we achieve and live out our own opposition. As work (vocation) will now consist of mundane subsistence labours and fantastical projects of affirmation, being (voice) not only falls behind but is antagonized by vocation (the urge toward right action), in which case originary meaningfulness is dismissed as disruptive and needs to be morally chastened proportional to the promise program at hand. It is by this very process that the self-double – a fitting exemplar for this schism – demonstrates the Dream Ontology carried to its logical ends.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I reposition ‘the real’ as speech that emerges embodied by summons of the enchanted human Other. To illustrate how the human is the initiate or in/vocation for realizing fullest voice (thus recovering our fuller humanity) I counter-pose the Dream Ontology with the Prophetic Mode. As the pro-phet (before + to speak) exists prior to and speaks from below (as sub-text) the dominant hardened texts of culture, it not only embodies the ethical by living as sub-verse to given reality, but by ad-vocating from truest flesh (care, call, cry) accuses ascent in any alter/native way. To counter-story reality as such is not to make new versions, but to live in our storied anterior, where being re/membered is dis/closed by in/vocation (enchanted summons) from the human Other. So dis/posed (in syn/aesthetic relation) is to re-imagine the ethical in the enchanted, in a holism of relations that necessitates the Other as the anticipation of promise. As this invokes renewal possibility for education, I solicit an ‘ethical dis/position’ for the classroom, calling out originary latencies of Care-Call-Cry, to re-enchant and re/member being’s home.
CHAPTER 2 – LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE ASCETIC-ASCENDANT FRAME

This chapter introduces the problem of sourcing human possibility in objective and immanent moral limits to expose the disenchanted ontology of modern personhood. I first appeal to the “problem of ontology” (Levinas) or the taking up of ‘ascendant’ moral sources (Taylor) that narrowly constitute persons in a work-promise horizon (Weber) after which time I inflect Weber’s analytic to conjecture its fullest rationality in the Dream. Effectively, by assimilating culture’s ‘uplift instruments’ we get caught up in ascetic registers that consign being (voice) to ambitions (vocation) of ‘proving,’ to ironically betray promise (sought fullness) altogether.

We fashion unfreedom as a bribe for self-perpetuation
-- Becker (1973, p. 51)

... man thus confers a unique meaning to being, not by celebrating it, but by working it, for the sake of promise
-- Levinas (1996, p. 44)

Reference Points, Part One: Sourcing the Problem ... of Ontology

It seems to me that those whose livelihood is to do the work of the state may have the hardest time accepting that viable disruptions to its kept order of things may exist. Pierre Bourdieu was one who saw the tight relation between educators and state aims, noting that happenings in the boundary of school are, at the most significant level, reproductions of the dominant cultural texts. Yet, educators often state that their aim is to liberate the child from cultural strictures. Going back in time, I recall a similar liberty being the great ambition of the modern project, before schooling was popularized in its ideas. Yet, this freedom seems not much more than ‘a variation’ on a still dominative theme; and if this is not understood, then neither will be our endearment to its inheritance than an all out departure from a prior epoch disdained. Of course, I am leading us to Weber’s suspicion that the modern order is the fulfilled ‘rationalization’ of its precursor than its eradication, of which we boast – a historical reification nuanced in the same root idea. Most troubling then is how our inability to discern the Geist leaves us bereft of imagining reality outside the monism given – or is presumed natural – to know no other liberty than this kind; no way of being human otherwise. Would most educators for example recognize that predicates for personhood in our social location are derivations of just another kind of monotheism? If so, would they readily share agreement with its essential doctrines?
A few things converge on this point before I elaborate on the underlying problem in this chapter. For one, the dominant expectation in schooling is that life’s purpose is to rise, to improve. Two, the assumption underlying its possibility insists ‘in advance’ the constituting principles (moral order) to best be laid hold of. Third, we must by means of rationality master the principles to exploit their possibility if we are to advance. Fourth, we stand outside and distant from that which possesses our future liberty, which introduces the late modern novelty of “work” – the project of ‘being’ in adequation (Aquinas) with them (external forms or ideals) to prove our adequacy (value). Voila, this is the sum of what it means to be human: reduce ourselves to a thetic, in syn/thesis with the ontic (in the sense Heidegger expressed it) outside of us. Work our way to promise, to there-being. All else between, by default, is unnatural or else trivial. As meaningfulness is in no sense inherent, but is constituted by a task and a destination, vocation must leave home (being); voice is left behind, forgotten.

What fails to be understood is that locating the human outside of ‘promise,’ presenting it as a thing to get, means prior value is not already ‘inherent’ in what it means to be. Liberalism therefore presents the ‘project of being’ as one of leaving ourselves: ex-stasis – moving toward a ‘form’ of there-being (two of Heidegger’s referents) because not until there is some/thing to be can we qualify for promise. It must be by a work, converting all of being into vocation without voice. “Only what becomes an object in this sense counts as being” (Carr, p. 20) and so the moral becomes the work of moving toward an idea(l). “Knowledge is now a grasping and determining of the object.” As “Being is now objectness” then the “essence of reality” (p. 25) is it realized (the driving ontological assumption). In effect, the “truth of being … becomes the certainty of representation” (p. 20), to ‘demonstrate ourselves’ proven for the given promise (Weber’s work-promise relation, p155ff). As Appelbaum (1996) puts it, “The idealist tendency … focuses attention on becoming manifest” (p. 111), which is to say that in this “proving thesis” preoccupation with life, World and Person are by means of work – working their way out of being – cast into opposition. Life becomes agon (Smith, 1999): the project of exploiting ‘things’ (the ontic) outside us to bring “into us” (Becker’s expansion thesis) a better condition. Actually that’s generous; it is rather, to make us ‘a better thing’ (thetic) relative to given principles, amidst which is felt our adulation (pride) in the mere social moment we do it in. As such, voice is
inane and vocation a mere tool, urging Levinas to introduce “the problem of ontology.” The way we’ve imagined what is real and what it is to be human in this way turn persons into a mere cipher – totalizing us in the Same, in what is an increasingly virtual (Appignanesi, pp. 226ff) and fantastical order (Elliot, pp.1-3).

After reflecting on his disturbance, I will through Taylor demonstrate how moral sourcing from this kind of person-hollowing construct for self-making is implicitly anti-human, in effect opposing possibilities for fulfilment right from the start. What to Levinas is the “problem of ontology” is to Taylor the “problem of naturalism,” or else naturalizing the moral order such that alternative ways of being construed are eliminated. Once it becomes clear how Levinas and Taylor dispute this narrowing – the central problem of this project being the narrowed possibilities for being human in the moral seduction of the Dream (our new providence) – I offer Weber’s palpable expression of the matter in what is deduced as the disenchanting of life (reducing life’s purpose and persons) through strict adherence to a work-promise relation. In short, as human fullness is conditioned by estimations of promise, being defaults to an “ascetic personality” – a self constructed “in terms of” a restrictive moral order – to parallel Taylor’s “moral identity” whereby a self is constituted by its strongest valuations (1989) derived from given social referents (2004). After it becomes clear how Levinas’ transcendence – which ‘the providence of dreams’ reduces – meets Taylor’s now diminished moral sources through Weber’s analytic inflected ascetic-ascendant, I offer a genealogy of salient moral moments in the West (Chapter 3) to demonstrate how the fullest rationalization of an immanent, disenchanted moral order is pejoratively expressed in what we can call a Dream Ontology (Chapter 4). As these three theorists have not, to my knowledge, been brought together in the way I attempt to link transcendence, moral sources and disenchantment (in what Taylor calls flourishing in immanence), I will first offer the finer background on each before bringing them together into the working framework, after which time the deleterious effects of such an order can be capably understood (Chapter 5) and then counter-posed for remediation (Chapter 6).

At the root of what is stated, and what remains for exploration in this project, is intention to rethink transcendence; that is, what is by nature the good, our fullness – or else the presumption at the heart of core motivation. If not already apparent, this opposes one philosophical tradition for another, putting the harder
realities of liberalism in contempt by appeal to the phenomenological. What so disturbs about modern life under its solitary dominion is the embraced premise that as a nation expands, its persons are better off; so we ‘embody a theory’ of mutual self-interest that not only makes advancement the theme of modern life, but one that specifically imposes on all ‘a duty’ to enlarge one way (what I am calling the ontology or story) – which in our case is to acquire all varieties of capital. Under this order, which we suspect is not one at all – and neither do we see its transcendent derivation – there can be no social cohesion unless each gives tacit consent to its primacy in advance (one decidedly against our own), locating the ethical (our fullness) in an ontology that sunders the human altogether, and in relation to abstract external commands alone.

The matter first struck me while teaching Comparative Civilizations a few years back in which case I marvelled at how educational programming celebrate early cultures as “great” and how packaged lessons invariably oriented students toward “the great” without considering what constituted “the good” of persons prior to the imposed order. Needless to say, the likes of Egypt and Rome wrought untold oppressions, so I took up the occasion to make this tension central in historical inquiry: to spot where “the great” leads our affections, for the sake of promise, and by so orienting us is against “the good” after all. What we fail to understand is that where we are located on this matter bears core assumptions about possibilities for human flourishing. Moreover, the moral order we allow ourselves to be coaxed by – the values we take up as the highest expressions for human meaningfulness – will govern not just what we do, but how we take regard of our very being. As it is, the best way to co-opt personal aspirations with empire promise is to kill pathos, says Brueggemann, and so it seems that ridding promise of people is a good start. Make people care for a kind of freedom non-contingent on the human Other and the march toward things can be unfettered by needless feelings that otherwise disrupt project (and person) realization. Never mind, too, that this already forsakes enchantment, even as the whole project of dreams is to insidiously will “enchantment recovered.”

What I intimate is a fabrication of freedom in a failed ontology if it does not already begin with the human. And more to that, if we do not admit in the first place to being transcendently disposed, we will by default take up a false version of promise, as immanent forms of promise carry no less a salvation mandate,
which Nietzsche, Ferry and Gauchet will later show. In short, the very program for being that we undertake in the modern frame, in dispossess of one’s *embedded* (Taylor, 2007; Bai, 2009) from epochs of old, is to secure transcendence by means of a Dream Ontology (a morality of dreams), even while supposing all the while that everything we *work for* is our own authentic expression, never minding at any point that everyone else is doing it the very “same” way. Whether to be ‘great’ differently or be different/ly ‘human’ suddenly opens up wider senses for who (or *what*) we are and what it means to most fully be alive.

Although I will speak to the fuller expressions of Levinas’ lament later, and further make *his* case for transcendent being (*for* summons to promise *otherwise*), I must first admit what he calls the problem of ontology, especially as he takes on transcendence made knowable in the thetic (the immanent or horizontal as Taylor will put it). In other words, our flourishing becomes a serious ontological issue – how we are to understand and take to what is real for optimal human experience. Transcendence and ontology are one: promise and its moral (fullness) presumption constitute who we are! In the beginning was knowing … the right thing to do. No! shrieks Levinas. In the beginning was speech and wonderment, and intrinsic to it all, the human Other. Or, says Butler (2005), “In the beginning, *I am my relation to you*” (p. 81). Therefore, Levinas challenges a *given* ontology: moral schemes wherein we *work* being absorb life in pre-*determined* versions of destiny, which as such can never realize our *own* fullness. In posing disruption, Levinas (1996) says “invocation is not preceded by comprehension” but rather “speech delineates an original relation” (p. 7); that is, the right thing to *do* is not given by knowledge but summoned (called) by the Other, which will not be *instrumental* at all! It rather makes our meaning entirely *intrinsic*; and our action too. So, to be clear, the “problem of ontology” is “to establish a fundamental knowledge” (p. 2) for determinate roles (p. 3) and vocations, one’s undoubtedly promise-oriented, to readily direct en masse to *given* ontic events/aims. In the language of Weber, Levinas protests *proving* (self-demonstration) other than by the human initiate.

“The ontological event … consists in suppressing or transmuting the alterity of all that is other in universalizing the immanence of the Same or of Freedom” (p. 11). If not apparent, there is *suppression* in *immanence*. Thus, what happens in renouncing one’s light (Bergo, 2005, p. 6) by “engaging in a political and
technical destiny” (Levinas, 1996, p. 15) “is to identify the I with morality” (p. 17), to be given over in our “commitment to a promotion” (p. 18) – that is, to draw our ‘moral sourcing’ from what is not for or of the human, but an expansive order of things; to take up promise not one’s own. So then, first for Levinas is that “transcendence remains essential” (p. 27); “the transcendent is a notion which seems to me primary.” But second, and here lies the problem, “the state” is “the fundamental contradiction to our situation,” set against what is our originary disposition to the sublime. As “transcendence is a movement by, or toward something that is not me,” which supposes “a movement of developing itself … surpassing itself” (Bergo, p. 1), Levinas therefore asks “To go where? To go into what region? To stand on what ontological plane?” (p. 29). In short, how “my own-most possibility” (Bergo, p. 26) is referenced is at stake, which Taylor will hereafter give dimension to when we look at moral sources for most authentic (fullest) being.

It is here, where being turns synthetic, that the moral and ascetic come fully into view, and which I will counter-pose later with the syn/aes/thetic to release being of such measuring, to enable assignation of pride or shame. In “the proposable, the thetic” (Levinas, p. 19), our being “takes aim and moves toward a theme,” which is “the Same’s coincidence” with ordered reality. But as he makes clear “consciousness of reality does not coincide with our habitation in the world” (p. 5), and so “to subject relations between beings to structures” is to be given to and absorbed by “knowledge of the universal,” to be a living category, programmable by a common plan in world affairs. Seen through Weber’s work and promise lens, “man thus confers a unique meaning to being, not by celebrating it, but by working it, for the sake of promise. In technical and scientific culture, the ambiguity of being, like the ambiguity of meaning, would be overcome” (p. 44); or so we think in the liberal tradition. In effect, if we work hard enough, we can overcome what we are (philosophy’s salvation counter-part). Ontologically such a program “reduces the Real to an ‘Object in general,’ and its interpretation of being ... destined for the laboratory and the factory” (p. 45) makes the ‘project of being’ strictly instrumental. With promise disposed only to ascetic cause, we are “borne by a spirit of sacrifice.” We are known by our work. “The person betrays his vocation of being … in getting absorbed in the law which situates and orients him” (p. 49). As Levinas concludes the matter, “the original ontological plane” is the “mark of our practical projects” (p. 40), “being as an instrument, a tool, that is to say, a
maintenance. It is an end also” (p. 9) so in the end, “ontology serves a political aim” (Appelbaum, 1996, p. ix). Being, unknown to us, becomes (is made into) a political and cultural servitude.

Briefly, we can anticipate the syn/aes/thetic as a counter- pose of being in adequation to the ontic, which in cultural space serves to thematize and render inauthentic who we are. Essentially, the starting point of the syn/aes/thetic is to dwell enchanted (Abram), ‘related otherwise’ than to salvation by work, or hope by way of an achievement. “Salvation is still a nostalgia, a longing to go back” (Levinas, 1996, p. 51) but like Valery, Levinas regards originary transcendent disposition a “faultless desire … an aspiration that is conditioned by no prior lack,” which David Loy (1996) will note, is the exploitive condition that makes consumer reality work as effectively as it does. Therefore, in this prior enchanted relation, what I will call syn/aes/thetic, “The relationship with the Other puts me into question, empties me of myself” (Levinas, 1996, p. 52). More than this, it “empties the I of its imperialism and egoism, even the egoism of salvation” (p. 55), so as “to act without entering into the Promised land” (p. 50). Instead, “The Other who provokes this ethical movement and consciousness … puts out of order good conscience,” (p. 56) and “forbids in advance any transcendent aim in meaning.” In sum, “transcendence refuses immanence” (p. 60); truest good cannot be known in advance for a fullness project to be realized. And so, “in light of this, bearing witness as a spectacle, or as pro-phetism” (p. 30), Levinas commissions living in “poetry,” in a “spirituality of sensation,” where “transcendence toward God is neither linear … nor teleological” (p. 36).

In fact, Levinas adds, our fullness is no longer religious, but in dynamic, intrinsic, enchanted human engagement. “The face-to-face can be read as an experience of affective and secular transcendence” (p. 28), or else a “non-metaphysical transcendence” that is “existential, not spiritual transcendence” (Bergo, p. 7). Here, the ethical is otherwise than salvation or dreams. “Here, ‘ethics’ amounts to a non-agonistic limitation of the ego’s appetites and a summons to responsibility” (p. 22) to dispose the other as vocation (Levinas, p. 106). Such is prophetic since it “devotes to the tension of the prophetic voice and an emergent monarchic … imperial politics” (p. 112). As such, ethics is “a work without remuneration” the “putting out of funds at a loss” (p. 50). Whereas transcendence in immanence is “enchainment” (p. 26), not unlike Weber’s “iron
cage,” enchantment is its disruption, our release in syn/aesthetic relation with the Other. Promise is thus a reversal, not to have ‘transcendent sense’ close being in with a project, but dis/closed in human encounter.

Reference Points, Part Two: Sourcing the Person ... in Phenomena

Levinas’ insight, the case where “height introduces a sense into being” that “leads human societies to raise up altars” (p. 57), raises profound concerns, whose more grave effects are admitted through Becker in Chapter 5. For now, I further develop the problem, leaving Levinas’ “Meaning and Sense” for Taylor’s (1992) ‘sense of the transcendent’ in The Ethics of Authenticity. Linking them is Heidegger (1988, p. xviii) who posed the problem of being as the relation between transcendence and authenticity. Moving to Taylor, the ascendant contrivance of modern identity is rooted in the mistaken way it thinks the authentic. Whereas Levinas established the veracity of the transcendent pulse – that “my own-most possibility” (Bergo, p. 26) is central in human affairs – Taylor helps us see how the referencing of transcendence (moral sourcing) will be determinative of how we take to being in general, stirring yet again the question of ontology in restrictive register. Taylor’s chief concern is the cunning of modern poses for transcendence, where the “problem of naturalism” (1989, p. 10) introduces referents for self-making in disenchanted moral frames. Therefore, like Levinas, he attributes failed transcendence to effectiveness in the work-promise horizon. Such an immanent (closed) way of imagining fullest possibility, he says, first denies transcendence as an intrinsic reality latent in human nature; and second, he offers how its per/version in the ascendant is declarative of “this sense” (of transcendence) gone awry. Effectively, its ‘subjective sense’ made ‘objective ambition’ admits an ascendant pretension – or a ‘purely material’ expression of the good.

What Levinas and Taylor indicate as the problem of moral sourcing in the immanent, disenchanted, or else enclosed ontology – in an order of things that mandates progressive self-formulation uncontested – Brueggemann (2008) decr...
unite all thinkers and lead us squarely to Weber’s foundational framework is Taylor’s demonstration of how the denial of transcendence makes being … “schooled in dreams” not just an illusion, but the outright failure of a truly authentic, full person (taken together, the ethical) that the liberal tradition portends in its clever quest ‘toward’ the authentic. Therefore, an important addition to Levinas’ problem of ontology is Taylor’s unravelling of how this quest when given primacy as moral source is fundamentally illusive since authenticity cannot be a quest per se (as being favourably in adequation to something idealized outside), but is in advance already a ‘moral sense’ (Taylor, 1992, p. 25) of belonging most originally. In short, he shows how the absolute materialist wants to realize the human in what it least is (an object) so it can be neatly arranged in idealized social forms. As it is, “to exist is to be identifiable” (Dejnozka, p. 1) and so if “human life is basically teleological” (Reckling, p. 156), what ensues in the social forms we’ve arranged, by way of dreams, is a vocation of ontological reduction (Dejnozka, p. 2); to demonstrate us in a most plausible form.

“The ontological questions concern what you recognize as the factors you will invoke to account for social life … they concern the terms you accept as ultimate” (Reckling, p. 159). So, “the problem of naturalism is not that there is no intersubjective framework in practice; rather, the framework has become debased, distorted and suppressed” (Taylor, 1989, p. 10). Our reference points are impoverished. “Where social phenomena are separated from their motivational moral sources” (Reckling, p. 167) action is not a “result of human self-interpretations … but impersonal social constraints.” So, “while naturalistic streams are inevitably based on certain moral motivations, they cannot renew or stimulate these sources” (Taylor, 1989, p. 516) because they are static and closed. Here, any quest for authenticity becomes a rather odd muse when at source the moral philosophy of modern liberalism must first deny fullness possibility. If we have no intrinsic meaning or value, authenticity is moot; echoing Hobbes’ that we must be ‘changed’ by a mono-arche. By presuming the good totally extrinsic to being, “this moral philosophy has tended to focus on what is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life” (p. 3). Moreover, the person left to himself is supposed incapable of having any sense of it. Cultural participants must therefore defer to the “privileged order” to identify [with] the good and condition their moral responses accordingly – only then can “we” enjoy its version of human fullness/promise.
Taylor’s intent, and my own overall, is for “enlarging our range of legitimate moral concerns,” so that our dignity is no longer bounded in rightly performing, but in being who we most originally are. “One or another ontology is in fact the only adequate basis for our moral responses, whether we recognize this or not” (p. 10). I am suggesting that if we can begin to recognize them, we may develop wider sight for what it can mean to be, even what it can mean to teach; thus to reunify our voice and vocation. If “our identities, as defined by whatever gives our fundamental orientation” (p. 32) acquiesce to any external order “we are all framed by what we see as universally valid commitments,” and action is disposed to the non-dynamic, to what is other than intrinsically human. In this sense, “a moral reaction is an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human” (p. 5). But take note, such does not belie a “transcendental condition.” Quite contrarily, a “modern aspiration for meaning and substance in one’s life has obvious affinities with longer standing aspirations to higher being, to immortality” (p. 43). Yet inasmuch as the way it is addressed fails the “phenomenological account of identity,” then empire/ical kinds will inevitably cut off our backgrounds. “Modernity has been intent on declaring in advance how things must be,” where “the subject’s normativity rests on the synthetic function” (Mensch, 1996, p. 1), meaning “knowledge as a teleological function” (pp. 107, 173) makes “the presence of a goal” (p. 173), our dreams, a being-reductive phenomenon (p. 180ff).

We will connect ourselves with the great. But when the great goes no further than the state, or what it can ‘name’ as the good, we are bereft of ways to know ‘who we are’ or ‘what to do’ beyond given limits. As we move closer to Weber’s work and promise, Taylor shows how economics is the “new understanding of Providence” (Taylor, 2002, p. 101) to take over the frame in which moral ordering (and thus identity) can occur. As “a strong economy eventually came to be seen as the collective goal of society” (p. 102) ontology (p. 5) would be worked out in the materially ascendant, in the possibilities of dreams rather than from any moral source prior. “Promotion of the economic to a central place” (p. 104) is self-promotion reciprocally, conferring meaningfulness in no ways beyond. To make the point, Taylor exposes the relative absurdity of today’s self-making, of becoming authentic without ground, realizing what Levinas (1996) strained to point out as the problem of ontology, or being-reduction in what Taylor has charted in narrowed moral sources. “Absurdity consists not in nonsense but in the isolation of innumerable meanings, in the absence of a sense
that orients them” (p. 47). Levinas’ transcendence has failed in that “the crisis of sense is thus experienced … as a crisis of monotheism.” Mensch (1996) says “we have to reverse this premise” (p. 7) “dissipating the notion of a normative ground” “for what is to count as real” (intrinsically valuable) beforehand.

*Ascendence as Authenticity ‘Achieved’ – The ‘Proving Ground’ for Highest Being?*

Taylor (1992) shares the first assumption (stated earlier) of most liberals – that the nature of life is to rise or flourish – but once introducing moral *sourcing*, they differ on all contingent fronts. In the liberal tradition “moral salvation” is simply “self-determining freedom” “without interference” (p. 27). But while “this gives us a new importance to being true to myself,” what is not transparent is that since this “powerful moral ideal … has come down to us” it newly burdens given its disinheriance of originality. What exactly is the moral ideal if “being true to my own originality” or “realizing a potentiality that is properly my own” has “no allegiance higher than [my] own development” yet occurs only in promotion schemes of *culture*?!!

Without suspecting transcendence at play, we reflect not on the matter; rather than the quest being moral at all, we imagine taking up *original* being as something to be worked at, unmediated. Taylor’s concern as such is that the burden of “trying to shape our lives in light of this ideal” (p. 32) puts us in conflict; one he believes makes inevitable a modern malaise since this quest to be original forfeits, unknowingly, *our own* references. As we are *not* dealing with mere preferences, but operative moral backgrounds, they will be dissonant with our inherency. Moral backgrounds will compete. Such as “identity … is the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense” (p. 34), more specifically, our “self-fulfilment” (p. 35), all authenticity is, in fact, at risk in this modern moral scheme.

Taylor notes, on this basis, how denial of the phenomenological appreciation of identity presents an absurdity. The way we take up modern ontology in the name of authenticity, in fact betrays it. Freedom and authenticity are illusive if aspired to. Most agree that “defining myself means finding what is significant in my difference from others” (p. 36), but Taylor is clear in noting that “we get to this [significance] by linking it to the sacred,” and not the divine as such, but a highest valuation. “Things take on importance against a
background of intelligibility,” contingent on or referenced by something valued in advance (an existential relation to meaningfulness). So what must be seen is that difference is most signified by relations prior to culture (heritage, communities, mythic associations) not currencies existing within cultural options, which Maalouf (2001) speaks to critically. Rather than identity being narrowed to an idea(l) realized, “identity is made up of a number of allegiances” (p. 24ff) – a “constellation of belongings” that makes one absolutely different, like no other in the world. Against this background – the dignity that we are, when solicited by speech – means we come forth like no other in the world possibly could. Clearly, whether one is already free and authentic (unique) or whether it is attained becomes a hugely ethical matter.

Such a project is captivity at the outset. If freedom’s possibility is to qualify in static conditions, persons effectively consent to being inert; as “institutions and structures of industrial technological society severely restrict our choices” (Taylor, 1992, p. 8-9) authenticity and freedom are moot. They “give a weight to instrumental reason that in serious moral deliberation we would never do, and which may even be highly destructive” (p. 8). Rather than giving us liberty, a “society structured around instrumental reason can be seen as imposing a great loss of freedom” (p. 9), but as we remove from inquiry its doctrines and omit from public space any counter-story referencing options, we incur “an extraordinary inarticulacy about one of the constitutive ideals of modern culture” (p. 18). To be on such high moral ground and yet be dismissive about being doctrinaire is perhaps the greatest propaganda of late modernity.

In following his logic, one can see that the authentic has nothing to do with choice, but who one is in advance, and neither is it brought out in the social, but by the personal. Accordingly, if the authentic life is to be chosen, then one is not authentic until they can become; and even then, until validated in the ever transient consensus (Bauman) that constitutes value in the modern. Here again, the Dream Ontology comes into view as a grave miscue on fullness if it is to be attained by means of ‘proving’ – if our authenticity is ‘a thing’ to be realized in the glories of possibilities pre-arranged. If “it is choice that confers our worth” then “all options are equally worthy” (p. 37); such “implicitly denies the existence of the pre-existing horizon of significance” (p. 38) to mean that “choice … loses any special significance.” Deductively, if choice is the
supreme value and all exercise choice, then ‘to’ choose is fullness. Accordingly, if it is true that ‘choices’ authenticate us then to-be is most certainly to-dream. Effectively, to live in a fiction forward and be a good perform/er abrogates innate uniqueness. “Difference so asserted becomes insignificant.” Choice (to think) is pre-eminent over voice (to be), and vocation (to do) is to be conscientiously aligned to the order so I can be realized later on, in which case I will be free. Even so, any “option for self-creation” still presupposes a value orientation in advance, so choice altogether fails as the good. Here lies the double blind of the matter.

In completing the argument, Taylor shows how self-choice in immanence, already implicated by Levinas as unjust, is replete with tautologies and contradictions. First, “the sense that the significance of my life comes from its being chosen … depends on the understanding that independent of my will there is something noble, courageous, and hence significant in giving shape to my own life” (p. 39). This means that “unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of self choice falls into triviality and hence incoherence. Self choice as an ideal makes sense only because some issues are more significant than others,” in which case the moral value is prior. “Which issues are significant, I do not determine. If I did, no issue would be significant. But then the very ideal of self-choosing as a moral ideal would be impossible.” Clearly, “the ideal of self choice supposes that there are other issues of significance beyond self choice.” If one does find fullness in such an ideal, however, then by virtue of the fact that choice has no inherent value and being is without prior value makes these forms for taking up personhood “shallow and trivialized; they are flattened and narrowed” (p. 40). In sum, “to shut out demands emanating beyond the self is precisely to suppress the conditions of significance, and hence to court trivialization,” as it “destroys the [very] condition in which the ideal can be realized.” The fact is, to Taylor, that “I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter” which means “authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands” (p. 41). Fullness presupposes that “some self-transcending issues are indispensable” so “there is something self-defeating in a mode of fulfilment that denies our ties to others” or to contingency. Else, “this purely personal understanding of fulfilment” means “the person [is] purely instrumental in their significance,” and “the panning of innumerable lives” (Levinas, 2003, p. 55) in today’s authenticity moral orientation renders them more desperate than intrinsically free.
Hopefully, we now have a grasp of transcendence being irrepressible, how the constitution of a self is infused with moral sense, and how denial of this conditioning aspect defaults to a trivializing ascendant disposition to the social with an inevitable ascetic undercurrent. Levinas helped us see that a transcendent presumption inevitably disposes us to fullness seeking (promise) and Taylor made the case that its forward sourcing newly burdens us since disinheriting originality demands rigorous calculation for a new kind of self-demonstration (proving). The symbiotic nature of these two realities – an ascetic-ascendant relation – is what I suggest forms the underground of dreams, or more entirely, our Dream Ontology. Levinas’ problem of ontology (ontic promise) and Taylor’s problem with self-sourcing in immanance (the purely natural) now meet Weber’s promise and work, whose insight on the ‘ascetic nature’ of modern self-formulation Levinas (1979) prefacing well for moving to his fuller analytic: “To be free is to sacrifice the … inner self and to fit into a rationally grounded system” (p. 17-18). Because in a Dream Ontology “men are judged by what they do, their works that are visible and remain” all ‘fitting activity’ (what becomes of our vocation) will relieve us of ourselves by means of extraordinary effort at all levels. The ethical implications are my concern.

Trujillo (2007) says Weber’s interest was in “the dynamic relation between the commonly opposing but never separate dimensions of existence, the ontic and the ontological” (p. 345). As I take to Weber’s insight, I suspect we will be closer to appreciating how the Dream Ontology as no less a rigid doctrine than ever, one kind of order, will correspondingly initiate profoundly ramifying limits on what it means to be human. But the ontic and the ontological relation Weber examines get worse than lost meaning. As “the meaning of individuals is derived from the totality” (Levinas, 1979, p. 21), in the governs of the “Said” and the “Same,” toward its “subjective and arbitrary divination of the future,” we are “incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to to bring forth its true meaning” (p. 22), thus making the dream not only unethical, but warring by nature; the modern agon. “Like an oracle … about the future by revealing the finality of being … the ontology of totality issued from war” achieves in us a schism, one whose “divide originates in the necessary way There-Being must embrace things to be” (Trujillo, p. 346). As it is now the case that our “ontological significance” is achieved in “an ontic causa sui” (a life project) what we do realize is not our own fullness, but our very schismatic end: being-against-itself. The agon incarnate! In splitting voice and
vocation absolutely, which is where this inquiry will lead (Chapter 5). Becker prophecies ‘the double’ – the construction of a perfectly syn/thetic self; ironically, in/authentic being immortalized. Weber now lays out what I believe is the most concrete foundations for how this arose, to conclude with perils no less stark.

*Introducing Weber and the Persisting Illogic of Rationalizing Promise*

Trujillo (2007) and Hall (1981) explicate Weber’s “phenomenological sociology” giving specific attention to relations he drew between “objective understanding and subjectively meaningful action” (Hall, p. 133). His inquiry focused on “explaining both individual action in its social context and the relatively more enduring ‘structural’ social phenomena” conditioning it. But instead of working in given methods of social analysis, Weber’s insights are unique for favouring “benchmarks” such as the “Protestant ethic” and “situational analysis” and the “interplay of various social phenomena” (p. 134). As “Weber often wanted to elucidate broad complexes of social action” and “treated these complexes as ‘averages’ of individual courses of action,” he unlike any “provides an analytic bridge between individual action and ‘society’” (p. 135), specifically doing so with a dominant interest in how the sociology of religion and sociology of work found a nexus in ritual practice (Seeman, 2004). As he witnessed the growing closure between what we can call the transcendent and ordinary needs in everyday life, he noted the increasing rationalization of promise and thus its eventual disenchantment. Presupposed is that the ability to *think* promise is to *disincarnate* it, to locate it in an idea(l). Significant is that as highest valuations can become *knowable*, they can be harnessed *instrumentally*, to intensify work. Weber’s sociological critique of idealism therefore offers a way to reflect on our peculiar salvation orientation in the West; namely how the proliferation of work in the presumption of discursive kinds (Bai, 2009) of promise initiates moral cause as being against the *natural*. “As the spell of the discursive gets thicker daily” says Bai (p. 142), ultimate values increasingly dispossess the human, or ironically, “the greater is our loss of … existential vivacity” when ontological sourcing is hardened (p. 144).

As “ritual practice and activity devoted to pragmatic concerns goes back to the linear progression Weber posits between” (Seeman, p. 57) “magic” and a more salvific evolution in life, he found that ritual
predicates did not disappear but *increasingly* “oriented to the fulfilment of pragmatic human interests.”

Transcendence and moral sources from Weber’s vantage, therefore, did not diminish but rather *lapse*; and so what we must note as a characteristic causal connection is how preoccupation with promise *shifted* to more banal (static, hardened) forms. “To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation … the fulfilment of quotidian human needs.” By positing salvation’s *greater* urgency over time, Weber demonstrates like no other the “substituting [of] one type of foundation for another, moving from a transcendent, magical-theological foundation to a rational, immanent one” (Bachofen, 2008, p.2). That is to say, transcendence *remains* but for enchanted ritual practices drifting toward work itself *as* ritual (promise’s guarantee): work *as* promise synchronously trailed the eclipse of heaven by what in immanence are dreams.

Weber began perplexed (Lough, 2006, p. 40-42) at why Protestants and Catholics from the same country were differently productive, concluding that a “constellation of social forms” accounted for the uniquely historical attitude, one that may “conceptually pull together these two historical configurations. The ‘spirit’ of capitalism, in other words, fulfilled the conditions” in the specific way work *came to relate to* promise, particularly for Protestants. The embrace of “hard work and parsimony as an ethically slanted maxim for the conduct of their lives” presupposed a “duty in terms of their pursuit as a calling, and not simply any calling, but, more specifically, a calling to a secular or worldly occupation” (p. 42). But as it was difficult for Weber to reconcile divine grace with what was now a more prolific *sacrifice*, he arrived at an additional insight on the matter: that a new kind of illogic entered self-regard in valuing work *as* “the ethical” which Gane (2002) captures well for us: “Western rationalism always remains vulnerable to its enchanted, symbolic other … to the active possibility of reversibility and re-enchantment” (p. 140). Every salvation initiates its own subjugation by working itself *into* the very other it opposes (pp. 5-6), or away from what it most holds dear. It is a complicated logic that “ultimate values succumb to a logic of self-disenchantment or devaluation” (p. 8), but what I will draw out is that as *working* toward the promise of heaven took sight disenchanted (took promise *out of* the equation), so too I am going to suspect that taking up dreams incurs the requisite demise of our ontology (taking the human out of promise). By externalizing the good and rationally apprehending aims, we illogically kill whatever good is already *with us* and *for* us.
Weber applied the method to arrive at salvation’s lapse into bondage (the iron cage, or what he called “the new serfdom”), just as the Enlightenment project, one may say, required the Romantics to rescue liberty from excessively sterile living. Effectively, every salvation first supposes something to be fervently ‘worked’ against (sin for Protestants or dis/traction for dreamers we may crudely say) before it champions a promise target, so in this pattern I offer ‘taking leave’ of being (fervency against human subjectivity) as the primary pre-occupation (vocation or calling) that is salvation’s predicate (what Levinas calls philosophy’s project of a better being). My first appropriation of Weber, therefore, is to draw an analogue between the logic of Protestants and the logic of moderns in the way heaven then and dreams now condition a human-opposing moral order. As the antagonism against our “detestable nature” (or limits), as Becker puts it, structurally enlists promise as the alleviation of such, then the real embodiment or experience of promise is the work we do against it. That is, the vocation against the disfavour achieves absorption of it, dislocating the aim rather than realizing it. But another logic rings true. With fierce resistance to enchantment, we initiated more intense ambition toward salvation (Ferry, 2005) in as fantastical a kind; whose reflex more fiercely encloses the achievement of our fullness in rationalizing schemes. Beyond this first utilization of Weber, my second is his findings, notably how this illogic produces a new asceticism beneath the dream, and counter-intuitively so; how our maturing promise programs produces an emergent ethics that remain salvation-laden throughout the modern epoch. From his analytic are significant inroads for how transcendence and moral sourcing not only condition and mobilize what we know as dreams, but do so more fervently when disguised as such.

Introducing Weber’s Analytic: Ascetic Instrumentality in the Quest for Ascent

What Weber (1958) notes in his well known text, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, is the escalating relation between persons and work in the context of promise, which offers insight into the progression and eventual insidiousness of the ascetic. Though the ascetic experience has roots in the Middle Ages, he says, “it was in the ethic of ascetic Protestantism that it first found a consistent ethical foundation” (p. 170). Here, “the powerful tendency toward uniformity of life, which today so immensely aids the
capitalistic interest in the standardization of production, had its ideal foundations in the repudiation of all idolatry of the flesh” (p. 169). In the next chapter, I explore the dynamics of this ethical lineage, beginning with the yeoman ethic – which Weber calls the ascetic prototype (p. 55; p. 173) – to highlight the evolved relations between outer performance and inner sanctity, the full extent of which would require a ‘rooting out’ of the mysteries of inner man to prove worth (salvation) in the social. In due time, “Puritan worldly asceticism, only without the religious basis … by Franklin’s time had died away” (p. 180). And so, “when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order” (p. 181).

So pervasively did the ascetic linger that it “today determine[s] the lives of all the individuals … directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force.” This “asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world,” so, to ask if “today, the spirit of religious asceticism – whether finally, who knows? – has escaped from the cage,” Weber says not! “Duty in one’s calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs” (p. 182), to prophecy a dark tale:

For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved. … The next task would be rather to show the significance of ascetic rationalism, which has only been touched in the foregoing sketch, for the content of practical social ethics. (p. 182)

For Weber, inquiry into the effect of disenchantment on ethics as “the next task” certainly has my interest, mostly because, Taylor (1992) demonstrates, we are doubtful of the moral inheritance Weber traces and that led to his dire prophecy. Failure to see lingering salvation predicates makes us vulnerable to illusions at best and the outright failure of human fullness at worst. Accordingly, Gauchet (1997) warns why Weber’s counter-voice is crucial. If “we have become unconscious of our ultimate assumptions; in the end confused about them” (p. ix), we have no basis for finding our way out of the cage. Have we any idea, for instance, that we enact at least to some extent daily ritual by means of work for the sake of promise, and by so doing
must be *against* something (the salvation assumption) intrinsic to who we are, to *natural* life? Likely not. As work en route to promise is the *only* story we know, in an order of things that is ubiquitous, implications will go wholly unseen, undisputed. For this reason, Bachofen (2008) registers grave concern that I certainly share: that “liberal democracy has become our only horizon, the only conceivable way to govern our fate; however, the fact remains that it is largely opaque to itself” (p. 2). If, for whatever reason, Weber’s insight does fail to compel, then a burden befalls any modern to account for why we are so earnestly driven by Weber’s *calling* – by an antecedent demand that conditions us to ‘proving’ for the sake of ‘promise,’ or else why a great deal of our action is predicated by ascendant ambition. What cannot be ignored is that we now stand precariously between “modern activism” and “ancient godliness” paralyzed about what to do in between.

My interest in Weber thus stands between two fundamental concerns with modern life, given to us by Lasch (1991): “The idea of progress according to a widely accepted interpretation, represents a secularized version of the Christian belief in providence” (p. 40), the endemic work-promise relation profiled in Weber’s ascetic personality whose urgency is to take up salvific cause; but second, against this position, there is no counter-story to contend with its basic assumptions, no other way to think about and be in the world (p. 31). There is no plausible trajectory in popular discourse other than ascent in this way. Deprived of alternatives, we are given to the *intensification* of ‘the one’ as Gauchet (1997) so hauntingly posits. Here then lay the basis to revisit antecedents, these scandalized moral sources, to anticipate higher senses of the good.

As we saw earlier, Weber not only asked of the relation between the ethical and the ambitious, but asked of the vocational: what to do about it. His *prophetic in/vocation* (for those who will see) is to speak *against* all pre-occupation that is not in the first voice-affirming, or that co-opts vocation outside native enchantment (of persons). In my counter-pose, *promise* is not to advance, but to have voice *back*.

To offer its sense from another, Nietzsche (1998) describes, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, “how such a paradoxical action as asceticism might serve the interests of life: through asceticism one can attain mastery over oneself.” One achieves freedom by denying it first. Asceticism is for the person the “means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence” (p. 120). Said differently, an agonistic disposition to life *secures*
life – being against it makes us for it, brought out masterfully in Brown’s (1966) *Life Against Death*. “The ascetic ideal” saved man (p. 163), says Nietzsche. It *became* salvation, his freedom from his limitations, his subjectivity. He even calls “transcendentalism … a triumph of the ascetic ideal.” In sum, “the ascetic ideal is paradoxical: it is anti-life in the service of life” (p. 117). While it is not my intent to dwell on analytical methods, I am interested in how the salvation effect endures, specifically through work, and how the parallel between early forms of *calling* and its later form, *proving* in the social, remain seamless, but for the object of highest affection that conditions the drive (*the divine or my dream*). Weber arrives, in the end, at how the ethical is an instrumental rationality to a higher state, in or beyond life. In short, all variants of ethics (to be shown in some detail in Chapter 3), serve a specific function: they host a proving ground or qualifying space for person valuation, to suppose one’s height (Levinas), *sense* of promise or cultural promotion (collectively, Becker’s *expansion thesis* detailed later). Each, in kind, in historic succession, will impose no less an ascetic command; perhaps more intensely so, to have us ask anew, what of this liberty (this promise) that we will *so* strive for, that we will *so* accept being turned *against* the natural; or else, *so for* naturalizing dreams?

Over time, it is argued, the nature of work changed as the social order oriented towards new kinds of promise. What did not change was the root idea *that* work would be the medium for achieving the gain. Effectively, this-worldly asceticism – *askēsis* (practice, training or exercise) – increased in proportion to new visions for here and now kinds of fulfilment. In fact, as the main ingredient for cultural coherence was evinced by work, it was only logical that this should be exploited for more effective promise *targets* – more cleverly intensive forms of social ordering. As Lough makes the case, “the principle difference” was simply that “social actors in traditional societies were liable to find a religious significance in everything they encountered” whereas “the new attitude was precisely that the religious duty … had nothing to do with the substance of this calling” (p. 42). Gradually, Protestants divorced themselves from “divine guidance” and so “what was therefore peculiar about the new discipline of labour was that social actors performed their work ‘as though it were an absolute *end in itself*’ – “pursuit of a calling for its own sake.” Result: “*ascetic self-discipline* displayed in too serious a devotion to one’s vocation.” Too serious an intent on *proving* made *it* vocation. In short, “emergence of this new understanding of vocation” (p. 43) though initially conceived as
“divine election to salvation” took on purely qualifying habit to fully dislocate promise’s source. Weber discovered a reversal from the original intent and for such reasons posed the question of ethics (p. 182) in the shadows of its disenchanted ontology.

It is one thing that work became for the Protestants an “obedience that brought glory to God’s name,” (p. 44), and evolved into a ‘social’ proving mechanism that conferred personal glory here and now (Karen Horney speaks to this in Chapter 5). But what is instructive as concerns vocation is how obedience re-centred whole relations to the cosmos by means of the ascetic, to effectively disjoin its antecedent. In other words, as “those whom God had elected would display signs of God’s grace in the ways that they conducted their lives,” “faith must prove itself in its objective effects.” Work’s centering and adaptation to glories social severely besieged existential relations. By becoming work (doing becomes our meaning) our intrinsic voice is sabotaged by the lure of extrinsic reward, by vocations earnestly conditioned through idea(l)s. Now concerned with qualifying for later privilege, the qualification ‘effort’ ironically becomes our ‘sum.’ The proving component is thus much more than the motivational (moral) centre; it is the sum of reality, one’s very ontology. In this way, the “state of grace” one reached for is analogous to any ‘cultural’ order with a ‘moral design’ to qualify being’s height. As noted, keeping busy became promise. Efficacy is our meaning fulfilled but why it occurs in reference to later and favours keeping disenchanted about ‘who we are’ leaves us with two mysteries left unasked about, neither of which is no small matter.

The Ascetic and the Social: Constructing the Illicit and a Solicitation for Recovery

Ellul’s (1965) Propaganda demonstrates that deception occurs best when the means to the end actually is the end. I draw from his insight that moderns are as effective at working as is proportional to the promise propaganda that orients them but is lost sight of over time. Correspondingly, I surmise that more choices of potential glory added to modern life exponentially burden us, further opposing who we are most originally – or with more reason to want to take leave of who we are, as we are. For such reasons, Taylor urges that it is in our existential interest to remain grounded in our anterior and subjective moral sources –
our transcendent *mythos* – and inter-subjectively nourish their possibilities lest we fall victim to the self-annulling vocations in an objectified cause. He adds that religious communities betray their own mythos when they objectify a duty or ideal, and urges such transcendental communities to preserve *living* stories. Brueggemann (2008) exemplifies the matter with the Israelites wanting to go back to Egypt’s tyranny because they did not know how to live without a project. As it is, *prophetic vocation* meets head on the allure of extrinsic promise that in fact betrays our voice: to keep the speech of the people (natural call or summons) as promise, as it alone remains the lexicon of renewal. In a word, sourcing hope in the inter-human will keep us from project/ing this loss of meaning. The lesson from Weber is that by objectifying the transcendent – anterior moral sources given to aspiration – we construct our very demise. In succumbing to a “possession of this status … guaranteed by proving oneself,” “the consequence for the individual was the drive to *keep a methodical check* on his state of grace,” and thus “ensure that his life was imbued with asceticism” (Lough, p. 44). To complete thoughts on Weber’s ascetic-ascendant frame, which I reference throughout my inquiry, Lough bridges ontological considerations between Weber’s historical insight and today.

Supporting the analogue for today’s western person, “this could only mean a *rational* shaping of one’s whole existence” or “rationalization of the conduct of life in the world with a view to the beyond.” As it “entered the marketplace of life … permeating precisely this secular everyday life with methodical approach,” it would “form a single whole” (p. 45). One ontology emerges! What Weber saw was how “the spirit of capitalism had in fact come to completely dominate the totality of social life,” so that as all of life entailed qualification for promise and “proving of oneself was *ascetic,*” our fundamental *mode* of existence would be disenchanted. Whereas man was given to more calculable activity, to exert ever more hold on his possibility, the ascetic effectively achieves its proof, or increasingly, the measure of his *value.* As promise becomes increasingly associated with ontic realities at play in our social location, a person that strives to so *realize* itself will thus ‘use ethics’ (the socially given good) as its proving ground for achieving its *stated* aim. “It only remained for Weber to draw this complex of configuration, the spirit of capitalism, forward to the present day,” whereby he projected, it was not that asceticism would end, but *escalate.* “As asceticism
began to change the world and endeavoured to exercise its influence over it, the outward goods of this world gained increasingly and finally inescapable power over men, as never before in history.”

I suspect Weber’s anxiety is not so much asceticism’s end, or the iron cage as a thing, but the nature and extent of ascetic coercion. Sharing Levinas’ angst, he laments “Today this mighty cosmos determines, with overwhelming coercion, the style of life not only of those directly involved in business but of every individual who is born into this mechanism” (Lough, p. 46). In the end, we remain distinctly religious, and therefore distinctly vulnerable to whatever can most effectively proliferate as promise in culture. As Lough recalls how “‘duty in a calling’ haunts our lives like the ghost of once-held religious beliefs,” he profiles Weber’s angst at today’s growing disparity between conduct in social space and in more natural habitats, between more fantastical kinds of promise and our leave taking. As schismatic being becomes palpable in this spirit, prophetic concern comes more urgently into view. Whereas asceticism’s function constructs us in a tight moral matrix, it is the case that our very spirit is overcome.

For although Weber did not specifically call attention to the spirit that fills the bourgeois interior … if we pause to consider the vantage point from which Weber composed his account, a vantage point which after all allowed him to appreciate the emptiness and meaninglessness of the ‘last men’ … a vantage point that he would elsewhere describe as religious. (p. 46)

In significant ways, Weber meets Levinas to enlist earlier insights that as being takes leave in new promise totalities to incur emptiness in objectified presumptions of fullness, we arrive at the problem of ontology. The cage that this rational order imposes on moderns is not only far from realized salvation, but it guts what it means to-be otherwise, and the ethical possibilities therein. “The bourgeois interior” or “spirit” that Weber says is endeared to this degradation is strikingly familiar to Levinas’ (2003) work On Escape where he calls the bourgeois spiritless when given to an ontic project. The shared conviction is that being betrays itself with an added feature that being is imagined sufficient to ontological completion. Here again, if no account is taken of how promise predicates condition an ascetic reflex (burden) we will entirely miss the enclosure implication, the limits to which we consign ourselves by so ironically striving.
This conception of the ‘I’ as self-sufficient is one of the essential marks of the bourgeois spirit and its philosophy. As sufficiency for the petit bourgeois, this conception of the ‘I’ nonetheless nourishes the audacious dreams of a restless and enterprising capitalism. This conception presides over capitalism’s work ethic … which aims less at reconciling man with himself than at securing for him the unknowns of time and things. (p. 50)

Most concerning is that “the bourgeois admits no inner division … [while] concerned about reality and the future” when the very exercise forges his absolute disunification with the world. At once rooting out the uncertain within, actively inclined to salvation certainties from without, we calculate (Weber) the very certification (proof) of who we are. As Levinas would put it, “He prefers the certainties of tomorrow to today’s enjoyments. He demands guarantees in the present against the future … insurance against risks” – “his future, thus tamed.” Certitudes and guarantees and the envisioning of life without risk would mean one thing: we must stop being human. The triumph over subjectivity is the annulment of our wonder.

Ironically, “western philosophy struggled for a better being” (p. 51) “and yet modern sensibility wrestles with problems that indicate, perhaps for the first time, the abandonment of this concern with transcendence.” With “the perfection of our own being” or “the transcendence of these limits” becoming “philosophy’s sole preoccupation,” Levinas notes no significant alteration between epochs: still “escape is the quest for the marvellous, which is liable to break up the somnolence of our bourgeois existence. However, it does not consist in freeing ourselves” (p. 53). “On the contrary, the need for escape is found to be absolutely identical at every juncture.” All striving toward what is outside being, throughout time, we might assume from Levinas, is to suffer the ultimate irrationality of the salvation quest when it takes leave of its own enchantment to secure one imagined. Whereas for Weber we inhabit a cage of iron, for Levinas we live in “enchainment.” The problem of ontology is at source contempt for being itself. “The propensity toward the future and the ‘out-ahead-of-oneself’ contained in the vital urge mark a being destined for a race course.” Under such a grave ontology “the fulfilment of a destiny is the stigma of being” (p. 54).
What I intend in the following two chapters is to show the intimate relation to which work belongs us – seen or unseen, in dreams – to more fully grasp what underlies our compulsion to succumb to a rational-instrumental life-world. At source, Weber and Taylor come up with an identity locus in moral constitution. Weber theorizes ‘modern personality’ through a proving orientation in the social. Similarly, Taylor’s (1989) work on ‘identity,’ mostly in Sources of Self, sees selfhood as an effect of promise orientation (the moral, expressed in terms of fullness), social or otherwise. Given that the moral constitutes, the extent to which its options are limited will implicate our experience of personhood. If sources are restricted, then identity will be narrowed; meaning enclosed. And truly, if our “ascetic personality” (Weber) or “moral identity” (Taylor) is a work-initiated construct (sourced in proving) – moreso when persons and morality are dichotomized (in the liberal tradition), and action is divorced from being’s valuations in advance – we experience asceticism as natural; entirely unnoticed. In short, Weber’s ascetic personality is expressed through Taylor’s moral ontology in the specific way a narrowed moral orientation – the proving life – disenchants all transcendent presumption and perverts every sense of fullness. So long as moral sourcing is not our own, we succumb to this dark fate.

When you are thirteen
The world is a small room.
A bedroom.
A locker at school.
A box.
Gym socks. Combination locks.
Four walls and a roof.
For every difficult problem: a proof.

(Harper, 2008, p. 13)

As we observe how work and personality become co-emergent (and what is beneath work as value sourcing to begin with), we get bearings on a new kind of personhood, a new way of relating to the world, wherein the particular nature of the moral construct introduces a stance of being-against-the-world. Thus, Weber’s final expression: we inhabit “an iron cage” – we make our own demise – as Heidegger’s ‘there-
being’ takes on a fight. From beginning insights (calling) to where we take up and direct our drive (cage), Weber raises suspicion concerning the abject spirit of modern life, where lies the counter-pose between rational call/ing and Levinas’ enchanted human variant. In the case of the prior, being acquiesces to the ontic to become a knowable thing. In the later, the human Other summons action to dis/close being for the wonder it is, prior to measures, to honour all that belongs most originally. Undoubtedly, “enchantment appears inherent to human consciousness” (Elkins, p. 12), but refusal to live with it has wide-ranging implications. Set against it for salvation, we will come to embody “increasing devaluation of the world” (Weber, 1958, p. 68), to realize an “ethically barren mode of being” (Chowers, 2004, p. 60).

Ascetics, Ascendance and the Agonies of a Progressive Ontology

Weber’s oeuvre is so all-encompassing that there appear limitless connections to modern dynamics. While the above introduces historical associations discussed in the next chapter and preface developments taken up in Chapter 4, the intent in this section is to demonstrate how Weber’s ascetic-ascendant analytic makes agonistic the modern order, which occupy Chapter 5. In this respect, Weber shares Ernest Becker’s enlargement thesis – alternatively called the Empire Imagination by Walter Brueggemman (2001b). What Weber (p. 17) calls “the impulse to acquisition,” Becker (1975) calls a “principle of immortality striving” (p. 64) or a “barter for more life” (p. 65). Weber offers in the frame of work its proliferation in capitalism while Becker recognizes it in rituals vis-à-vis heroic symbols in culture. Both effectively offer a ‘proving path’ whereby moderns achieve their sense of proof; glory in the here and now. Though I will later profile Becker’s scathing critique of how dominions divide persons from themselves – offering what I believe to be one of the most potent expressions of Weber’s agonism – the intent here is to unite Becker and Weber on a very important principle that galvanizes the social and mobilizes it toward empire aims. The sequence goes as follows: culture is marked by “promotion systems” says Becker (1975); they subsist by exploiting transcendence for perfunctory purposes, with the effect rendering life utterly agonistic.
For Weber “duty in worldly affairs … whose object is to transcend the demands of mundane existence” (p. xii) is to Becker (1975) participation in symbolic cultural ritual “to transcend the limitations of the human condition and achieve victory over impotence and finitude” (p. 31). Both view modern life in the register of transcendent disposition, observing that our highest valuations are conditioned by the most venerable forms of social, symbolic action. Whether it is work (Weber) or an identity project (Becker), our practice in either presumes ascendance, and the moral sources we appropriate are conceived from a static reality that confine response options to pride enhancing or shame avoidance instrumentation. As such, our habituation in modern life casts us into an ascetic contest – Becker’s causa sui (life cause), or else Weber’s calling (destiny) to be against, by means of salvation, our human and earthly mystery; our valuation in both is demonstrated (proven) by how well we act vis-à-vis static trajectories. For Weber and Becker alike, there is a repressive and agonistic insinuation for how we go about orienting in such a cultural order. To achieve promise, we repress some significant aspects of who we are. “We fritter away our lives enslaved to the phantom of glory for reasons unknown to ourselves” (p. 30).

In the proving orientation that consumes us in modern affairs, “the individual wants to – or, rather, is driven to – express himself. And this now means he wants to express his idealized self, to prove it in action” (p. 24). Furious obsession to prove in action intensifies “the fundamental problem of morality – that of man’s desire, drive or religious obligation to attain perfection” (p. 14) which being so oriented, turns him against life. Such that it “infiltrates his aspirations, his goals, his conduct of life, and his relations to others” (p. 24), he is unaware of what his ambition is really doing. At once he is both expiating and expanding says Becker (1975), first insulating from failure and misfortune (shame) by rooting out “his detestable insides” and on the other hand, projecting his largesse to achieve the height modern ascendant pressures demand of him. In other words, all senses of transcendence congeal into a rigid ascendancy contest (agon).

That such a limit-formation of persons is unethical, Weber only implies. But as I take to a fuller understanding of the inherent agonism in Weber’s insight, separation becomes unmistakable as its theme. Agonism first emerges in being separated from our own nature – the Puritan urge to root out all mystery in
his world (seen in some detail in the next chapter). Agonism emerges as well in “the separation of business from the household” (p. 21), taking persons by means of vocation into a new kind of centrism. In fact “the birth-act of modern capitalism was the separation of business from the household” (Bauman, 2008, p. 74), indicating that late modern agonism occurs by the centrification of practice outside native habitats; that is, modern culture has produced in the interest of its own expansive scheme an ambition-centric ethics, to achieve for us “a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness” (p. 104).

With “Self-identity hounded by an absence of meaning constructs proofs and demonstrations of meaningfulness” (Appelbaum, 2001, p. 62), it is unmistakable that “the doctrine of predestination” (p. xiii) never went away. What alarms when connecting Weber to such cultural axioms today is that over time all that has changed is the reification of religious transcendence into increasingly mundane kinds of ascendant cause. Thus concludes Weber (1958), are “correlations between forms of religious belief and practical ethics” (p. 91), “between the old Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” (p. 89). All we need is a ‘productive’ context for the potent form ula, and “it no longer needs the support of any religious forces” (p. 71). “When the imagination of a whole people has once been turned toward purely quantitative bigness, as in the United States, this romanticism of numbers exercises an irresistible appeal to the poets among businessmen.” Yet, even when so seduced, “he gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well.” To be sure, “whoever does not adapt his manner of life to the conditions of capitalistic success must go under, or at least cannot rise.” But if there is no other way to do so, no other reality by which to reference or engage the world, no counter-story as such, then rise we must. It appears only natural.

Where Weber goes from here is dramatic in the least. “The influence of those psychological sanctions … which gave a direction to practical conduct and held the individual to it” (p. 97) he calls “an extreme inhumanity” (p. 104). With “the elimination of magic from the world” and persons cut off from “the sensuous and emotional elements in culture and religion because they are of no use toward salvation,” it is the case that the wonderment of persons is no more. We must there too shut-up abundant expressions of who we are – waging a rift between voice (being) and vocation (action) – censuring anything that interferes with
getting the job done well. When “thinking only of his own salvation” (p. 107) through what are now the cold calculated promise possibilities in a competitive social arena, each is presented with only one way to be, with a lonely asceticism that meets up with a “restless and systematic struggle with life” (p. 108). As this is the case, we are consigned, by means of work(s), to a “deep spiritual isolation” while we chase our wholeness.

It was clear that this “powerful tendency toward uniformity of life” (p. 169) offered a fine tool for working out a secular version of providence to come. “What the great religious epoch of the seventeenth century bequeathed to its utilitarian successor was, however, above all an amazingly good, we may even say a pharisaically good, conscience in the acquisition of money, so long as it took place legally” (p. 176). Such as the “specifically bourgeois economic ethic had grown up” what had however occurred “with the dying out of the religious root” is that a “utilitarian interpretation crept in unnoticed” (p. 177) – an interpretation of transcendence, that is. Whereas “rational conduct on the basis of an idea of calling, was born … from the spirit of Christian asceticism” (p. 180), as a fertile handmaiden to its secular counter-part, it “did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order” (p. 181). With the escalation of favour that tracked the positive “external” effects of this ascetic-ascendant drivenness (taken up in the next chapter), it is easy to see how a dream-based transcendent variant would in time come to claim and constitute all aspects of worldly action. As it goes, avers Becker, to be human is to expand, and to work at the matter is the essential component. “The logic of sacrifice” (1975, p. 20) is to possess “the power of eternity” (p. 21). But with eternity no more, sacrifice is our heroism, our proven reward.

Eyal Chowers (2004) closes the frame laid out by Weber by presenting valuable sub-texts for our transition to the ontological entrapment characteristic of today’s work-promise themes. Fundamentally, “the Western ideal is of an engaged self, a ‘busily active personality relating his activity to a center, be it other-worldly and religious or be it this worldly. In order to facilitate such conduct, it is necessary that the totality of a person’s endeavours gain ethical significance” (p. 73). So stated, what we call a dream in almost any sense of the term, Chowers calls “values and meanings which are forged into purposes and thereby translate into rational-teleological action” (p. 69). The essence of Weber’s ascetic personality says Chowers, is when a
person “creates a ‘center’ of normative evaluations from which other beliefs and actions proceed,” where its dignity is given by the fact that “there exist values about which it organizes its life” in action. Again, in referring a closed ontology, “the field of the ethically relevant is extended to encompass a person’s entire existence” (p. 71), as it “strives constantly for cohesiveness reflected in all departments of life.”

The “impoverishment in the inner lives of modern selves” arising from these endeavours resides in the fact that “individuals must adapt themselves to the impersonal demands of their given functions” (p. 76) which are “determined by the goals of the mass-organizations, not by the needs of those embedded within.” So it is that the driving ethic and value acquisition of modern selves is not conferred by the self at all, just as Taylor suspects. The travesty of modern self-making lies in the fact that persons take up valuations from outside themselves and thereafter, by exercising the associated ascetic drive, incur their own repression. “Only by devotion to a particular sphere of activity, and by accepting that sphere’s binding norms and practices, may the individual forge a life of enduring significance, if not of true happiness” (p. 83). But “what makes this predicament especially tragic is that the modern order is diametrically opposed to the deepest spiritual and existential needs of the self” (p. 92) when there is no affirmation of intrinsic hope.

Overall, “the ascetic personality,” is a “cause-oriented and principle-motivated self” (p. 60), and so given, will tackle the problems and absorb the needs that appear natural in its value-location. “The greatest danger for this personality, in Weber’s view, is the advent of modern techniques of discipline and the disappearance of ethical import,” or one’s irrelation to its own moral sources, in which case, a split self is ever being mobilized by recovery of its unity, but at risk of not being able to reference them on its own terms. Under such conditions “the disciplined self serves in his writings as the ‘double’ (or Doppelganger) of the personality” (p. 61), taken up in Chapter 5. As such, “the objectified and impersonal intelligence of the officials creates the reality that curtails the space open for individuals to live as ‘personalities.’” Reality so inscribed defines a limit frame from which being can take up its call. Ontology, so given, is the composite of what is offered below as the ‘manager’s dream,’ or the managing of our lives in another’s project after all. That is why, Chowers says, to close Weber’s part in framing the Dream Ontology, the “imagination of this
self is essentially tragic” (p. 8). As it is “capable of being fabricated” with “no ontological ground” from which to otherwise orient itself in the world, its cultural imperative is to manage itself into extradition.

*The Modern Asceticism: Managing Our Dreams*

Richard Valantasis, perhaps the leading scholar on asceticism in the post-modern context, offers an unexpected thesis on modern asceticism to present an important intersection between Weber’s insights and where the phenomenon persists today in popular dynamics. Valantasis (2008) says some variant of asceticism is likely if two conditions are met. As long as a person is actively involved in a self-creating project, and so long as they aspire to a highest valuation, they may very well be given to asceticism. A third element, which I add to make the enclosure argument is that so long as self-making draws upon cultural predicates, the ascetic project will occur in a morally closed meaning frame, presenting the subject’s aspirations sacrificial to culture; ironically, one’s sourcing of promise not being their own. Margaret Miles says “in the context of [our] belligerently hedonistic Western society, Richard Valantasis’ *The Making of the Self* has never been more relevant,” muddying how we think about ascetic relations in the modern mood. In other words, if we miss asceticism in today’s ascendant register, or even *that* a hedonistic intent can itself incur moral preoccupation, we miss a great deal about modern identity by failing to see its conditioning.

Where formerly, the ascetic was understood in a denunciative (negative) posture, it can in today’s context be given in the positive, as a/spir(e)ational. In this milieu, asceticism is defined: “to practice, exercise and train so as to make oneself fine or beautiful in a specific way” (Wimbush & Valantasis, 2002, p. 376). As a barter for more life “asceticism occurs either in the search for or in response to a believed-in sacred reality – whether found ‘above’ us or in the depths of our own being – in relation to which, or in unity with which, is thought to be our highest good” (p. ix). Elsewhere, perhaps more germane today, “the definition of asceticism is given as ‘performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe’” (Valantasis, 2008, p. 38). No matter the way, it remains a proving ground. In transition from Weber’s ascetic stance to one more modern, I
now turn to Bauman’s insights to uncover how in liquid-modern time self-making finds as zealous an exercise of asceticism for achieving highest good as any time prior. Along the way, we come closer to the more recent accent of the ascetic-ascendant relation realized in dreams.

Bauman (2008) agrees with Miles’ hedonistic asceticism, even as it does appear as an oxymoron. “We want every moment to be pleasurable. Indeed: every moment. An unpleasurable moment is a moment wasted” (p. 125). This relates to asceticism? Isn’t that counter-intuitive? It is one thing to aim, but another to make urgent, and when considered against what is already most truly hedonistic (the human), we may see where this is going – i.e. why would we take leave of ourselves? To consider the wasted incurs the same old problem of evading the enchanted we are. With a need to prove to ourselves and others by maximal uses of time that we are living the good life, fulfilling a highest symbolic good, gratification is turned into a work. Ultimacy, as a job to do, is a strange meditation, but shows again just how vulnerable is our need to manage life toward ultimate referents, even if now socially given. In this regard, “the course of life and the meaning of its every successive episode, as well as life’s ‘overall purpose’ or ‘ultimate destination,’ are nowadays presumed to be do-it-yourself jobs.” Along the way, “each and any practitioner of life is expected … to bear full responsibility for the outcome of the job, and to be praised or blamed for its results.” People “need to ‘assist fate’ by ceding to the endless little tasks that fate decreed they will perform” en route to a panacea. “So whatever else they believe, they all agree that … doing nothing, or doing something slowly or lackadaisically, is a grave mistake” (p. 126). We must not only work harder but faster, ever to realize the more glamorized and immediate kinds of self-glory formation that constantly shift.

Effectively, “the dream of escaping from one’s own self, complemented by a conviction that making such a dream a reality is within reach” (p. 178), demands greater faith than ever, and greater too is its burden than ever before. “If happiness is permanently within reach … then obviously a self that stopped short of reaching happiness can’t be real” (p. 180). To incur such shame (a non-self, in this scheme) would be deafening, alluding to Taylor’s earlier mockery that “such a fraudulent self needs to be discarded on the grounds of its ‘inauthenticity,’ while the search for the real one should go on.” The reason we fail to see the
ascetic connection, however, is because in a “society of consumers” the pressure that befalls our effort to keep up with destiny “has ceased to be associated with external (and thus offensive and annoying) coercion; the urge tends to be perceived, on the contrary, as another manifestation and proof of personal freedom” (p. 137). Whereas “a command – ‘You must do it (or you mustn’t do it), or else …’ – prompts resentment and breeds rebellion. In comparison, a suggestion – ‘you want it, you can get it, so go for it’ – panders to the amour de soi constantly hungry for complements, nourishes self-esteem, and encourages one to try – according to one’s own will and for one’s own pleasure” (p. 137).

This means pursuit of the “happy life” is dreamed (p. 167) in an “economics of deception” (p. 171). In as much as “the promise of satisfaction remains seductive only so long as the desire stays ungratified” (p. 169), pursuit will be ceaseless and the actual reward ever in question. Not only does such a life presume fervent faith, but a “life guided by trust invested in this kind of escape” is surely monotheistic. In seemingly abundant versions of self-making and limitless forms of glorious identity one can take up, there is but “one story – about the ways in which one can remake one’s personality, starting from diets, surroundings, homes, and … rebuilding of psychical structure, often code-named as a proposition to be yourself” (p. 179). Never mind “that the real self will never be found.” In this allege of freedom is an underside unseen. “In short, the life of the identity seekers / constructors / reformers is anything but short of troubles; their particular art of life demands much money, unremitting effort, and, on many occasions, nerves of steel” (p. 138). In effect, “the frailty of all and any identities (even their insufficiently trustworthy solidity) burdens the identity seekers with the duty of attending to the job daily and intensely.” In its salvation, a new truth is revealed:

What might have started as a conscious undertaking can turn, in the course of time, into a no-longer-reflected-upon routine, whereby the endless and ubiquitously repeated assertion that ‘you can make yourself into someone other than you are’ is rephrased as ‘you must make yourself into someone other than you are. (p. 138)

The new duty can be terrifyingly onerous given that boundaries are at once explicit and infinite; concrete, but innumerable. “Choice is yours, but making choices is obligatory, and the limits on what you are
allowed to choose are non-negotiable” (p. 145). Sure, “beginnings full of promise lie ahead, along with new risks full of threats” (p. 146). But promise in our day demands a most severe form of human toil.

The secret of every durable – that is, successfully self-reproducing – social system is the recasting of ‘functional prerequisites’ into behavioural motives for actors. To put it a different way: the secret of all successful ‘socialization’ is making the individuals wish to do what the system needs them to do for it to reproduce itself. (p. 149)

To understand Bauman’s point, we have to look at the relation between culture and what is now an invisible management; in particular, to note how mobilizing persons was inverted from external control to one that now inculcates the new ascetic spirit within us – to manage our own disgust and derogation, to self-regulate in accord with the good life given. Formerly, “the postulate or tacit (but axiomatic) presumption of management … had been from the beginning and throughout history endemic to the concept of culture” (p. 196). By definition, “culture – no matter what form it takes – is to be measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but rather with some type of abstract standards imposed from without,” each producing “an unwarranted and uncalled for repression” (p. 197). Incidentally, “the term ‘culture’ was conceived within the semantic family of concepts that included terms like cultivation, husbandry, breeding, grooming – all denoting improvement, prevention of impairment, arresting deterioration” (p. 195). Today, the force remains, with the exception that managers of culture are needed no more; we now impose repression upon ourselves. As “‘Culture’ stands for the manager’s dream come true: an affective resistance to change” (p. 202), it is now the case that “the dream is to make every man its own bureaucrat.” We cut off our own possibility for renewal in advancement schemes pre-arranged. And with the “managerial revolution … conducted surreptitiously under the banner of ‘neoliberalism (p. 203),’” the dream of self-imposed asceticism is fully realized.

The cultural managers switched from ‘normative regulation’ to ‘seduction,’ from day-to-day surveillance and policing to PR, and from the stolid overregulated, routine-based panoptical, all surveilling and all-monitoring model of power to domination through casting the
dominated into a state of diffuse uncertainty, *précarité*, and a continuous though haphazard disruption of routine. (p. 203)

In yet another salvific lapse, *former* bureaucratic models may be no more, but still imperceptible are impositions sourced from dominating interests. “In this new setting, there is little demand for bridling and taming the transgressive urge.” All cultural leaders need do is offer their members “a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better and worse, who they are and what they can do” (p. 204). What “the state managers” do best in this milieu is “assume the role of ‘honest brokers’ of the markets needs” (p. 205) with the execution as such made fully obscure. “What are truly novel are the criteria that the present-day managers, in their new role as agents of market forces rather than of nation-building state powers, deploy to assess, audit, monitor, judge, censure, reward and punish their wards” (p. 206).

The point I believe Bauman is making is that managers and dreamers have become one where work and promise are most effectively joined, meaning that the dream will in no sense be perceptible as a moral order under such conditions. “At stake” is “the very meaning of being-in-charge” … of our jobs and the infinite number of totalized ways we take up promise tasks, more daunting and restlessly than ever. The peculiarity in our time is that as each takes up a promise project (p. 213), managers, persons and dreams become insidiously coterminous. “Perfection is forever ‘not-yet.’ Only people who have a lot to improve may dream of a state of affairs in which no further improvement would be desirable.” Therefore, “so long as the dream remains unfulfilled … there is a purpose and there is an unfinished job to do.” Ahead but ever out of reach, the *ascetic-ascendant* function thrives so long as there is a culturally defined promise to keep pace with. “The condition of unfinished business has many charms,” but as toil no longer incurs ruthless repression as much as a restless self-monitoring, there is tyranny from beneath – too many gages to watch and ever new and shifting chores to be performed. The distinctly late modern ascetic drive is not unlike those given by managers of old, except that what *lies* unseen is not simply the ubiquity of *self*-discipline en route to providence, but that there is no *other* way to be charmed than to be in charge over what are, so they seem, our *own* fantastic projects.
Ontology, the Managed Life, and Complicit Vocations: Arriving at the Ethical Juncture

Between the historical and the immediate, in the frame of ontology, Canadian sociologist Ian Hacking (2002) offers an extended insight into how we constitute ourselves in modes given – how we take to self-knowing through the way we understand our basis for acting in the world. As I look to Hacking, I am anticipating the transition for how we as educators can rethink vocation, aided first by the need to reflect on ontological parameters (moral sources), then to do so especially in view of the genealogical (from whence they came). By taking as his starting point Foucault’s (1984) essay What is Enlightenment, Hacking, similar to Weber, wants to discover “a philosophical ethos consisting of a critique of what we are saying, thinking and doing through a historical ontology of ourselves,” to account for what “may be characterized as a limit-attitude” (p. 46) we have assimilated and thereby impose on others. Clearly, he juxtaposes ontology with the ethical as it bears on personal vocation (self-management), and so from his juxtaposition, in contexts so far seen, we may begin at this juncture to anticipate questions for our own vocations as this project begins to unravel possibilities for self-sourcing that are otherwise than the limits of dreams.

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (p. 48)

“For Foucault, a critical and historical ontology of the present entails a genealogy of what constituted us and made us recognisable as subjects of what we say, do and think” (Bove, 2007, para 8). Bove also says, “an ontology of the present cannot avoid questioning how not to be governed like this and at this price” (para 6). Thus the whole purpose of philosophy she says is to perform transcendental inquiry and critique, to get beneath the modes by which we realize our being, which we must do genealogically.

Hacking reminds that Christian Wolff put ontology into use in 1730. “He thought of ontology as the study of being in general” (p. 1), with specific concern for relationships between personhood and “ultimate
entities such as the soul, the world, and God.” Inasmuch as relations between world and God have shifted, and ultimate concerns with them, we can imagine that today’s ontology, generally, is characterized by fundamentally different concepts of what is ultimately real, such that taking up being draws from culturally-defined promise space. Yet still it remains that between being and ultimacy is the unequivocally ethical. Where we take up flourishing, whether it be daily or a long term project, the duty for any age Hacking says is to ask: “what makes it possible for [persons] to come into being.” What calls and in what way is worth conferred? In view of Sartre we may ask what are the limits of being’s possibility and with Levinas in mind add that if possibilities dispensed are infinite, they meet the ethical criteria. The burden ontology faces is that “we are concerned, in the end, with possible ways to be a person” (p. 2). As it is a question of ethical limit, and this larger inquiry into ontology is to wonder at sources for height, I am asking how we limit as cultural leaders in our vocations. To get at limit, says Foucault (1984), three “interconnections have to be analyzed: the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics” (p. 46). On these, “the historical ontology of ourselves has to answer an open series of questions.” In other words, to inquire concerning how our moral sourcing is complicit in advance and where we can trace the location of such ambition.

Limits on how persons self-constitute was dear to Foucault but he implicated individuals as much as ‘powers that be’ for having want of power when asking how ethics meets vocation in ontological space. In other words, as members of any society mutually constitute themselves in promise possibilities available, each must ask of their part in moral constitution, where lay our answerability.

When Foucault wrote of power, he did not usually have in mind the power exerted upon us by a discernible agent or authority, or a system. It is rather we who participate in anonymous, unowned arrangements that he called power. It is as much our own power as that of anyone else that preoccupied him: ‘power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others,’ not ourselves as passive victim. (Hacking, p. 3)

Therefore, as well as complicity in power relations, at issue is our very desire to be a subject. Latent for a cultural being is to long for a category, a name (Oliver, 2001). In the aggregate of Levinas’ work, this is
precisely being’s failure: to know and have certitude of self (ultimate proof of being) is power, where lay the angst of Foucault. Parallel to Becker (1973) is desire to be a ‘kind of self’ in heroic symbols of culture (a power assumption again); we serve power to get it, to feel our \textit{effect}. This is why to Foucault freedom is under suspicion. What does freedom really want but to overpower – here lay our greatest limit. Possibilities of being are \textit{already} limited when morally bent to the urgencies to proof, to what Derrida calls \textit{presence} of the self. Such as we bear an impulse to expansive drivenness, we ‘subject ourselves’ to morally constructed orders, and so \textit{embodied}, act them out unknowingly upon others. On this basis, Foucault draws the relation between our ontology and our \textit{profession} – how our vocalis (speech and vocation) entertains power.

The keen question Foucault draws from Kant is “how we constitute ourselves as moral agents.” He estimates that “we constitute ourselves at a place and time, using materials that have a distinctive and historically formed organization” (Hacking, p. 3), confirming the sourcing of Weber and Taylor, which is to say what we draw from constitutes who we \textit{are} – our \textit{limit}. From such ‘materials’ it was Foucault’s project to explore ontology genealogically, especially to mitigate subtractions \textit{from} history when asking vital questions about subjectivity as morally constituted. Therefore, “the genealogy to be unraveled is how we, as people’s in civilizations with histories, have become moral agents, through constituting ourselves as moral agents in quite specific, local, historical ways.” As I close this chapter and look to the next, I do so with Foucault’s genealogy in mind. My hope is that by posing the ethical question for our vocations as educators, we might be compelled to see just how our emergent moral constitution has disposed us to such encoded and enclosing inhabitations. If so recognized, then posing the prophetic may be more than a call to open spaces for who we are, but by drawing attention to the ontology we embody may allow us to grapple more fully with how in the constituting spaces of school we inflect what it is to be most free and fully human.

According to Hacking, “‘Historical ontology’ helps us think of these diverse inquiries” (pp. 4-5), where “the comings, in comings into being, are historical. That beings become, in terms of \textit{being ‘that,’} – things, classifications, ideas, kinds of people” (p. 5) – is the question of ontology. How we do so in the modern moment is the inquiry at hand, particularly as it impacts upon education. Curiously, Hacking says
that we put “dreams in places, or places in dreams” (p. 227). That is, in between the spaces of the ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ (questions of the real) sits a ‘who we are.’ The challenge for those summoned to divest power and uphold fullest subjectivity is to re-imagine sites of being in places enchanted, in the essentially unlocatable space of being “for the human other,” which will mysteriously lead us to that no-place called wonder. Overall, cautions Hacking (p. 9), “those who do not understand the history of their own central organizing ideas … are condemned not to understand how they use them,” or else, how they are used by them. As concerns ontology more generally (as an enclosure of being), they may be “trapped in the same frame as those who embrace the ideologies that they oppose.” I offer his summary on the matter:

I have been giving examples of organizing concepts that come into being through quite specific historical processes. They lead us to historical ontology proper. We are directed to what it is possible to be or to do. There is, not surprisingly, a certain vestigial existentialism in this way of thinking. Existence comes before essence; we are constituted by what we do. But our free choices can only be from among the actions that are open to us, the possible actions. And our ways of being, chosen freely or not, are from possible ways of being. (p. 23)

Important to see is that “historical ontology is not so much about the formation of character as about the space of possibilities for character formation that surround a person and create the potentials for ‘individual experience.’” As we move into the lineage of character ethics in the west, we must question in advance why the idea of character even matters at all, before even thinking about how it was acquired in the various dispensations. There we meet Hacking’s care head on, to inquire “how our philosophical problems became possible, because I hold that we need to understand that in order to grapple with the problems” (p. 24) traced above or at hand. Such is to inquire of the “histories of the present,” because “concepts have their being in historical sites” (p. 25), as do the ontologies they condition, and which in turn condition us.
CHAPTER 3 – DREAM GENEALOGY IN MORAL CONTEXT: FROM VIRTUE TO VIRILITY

With the problem of ontology now made concrete in the ascetic-ascendant frame, I will in this chapter explore their symbiotic genealogy, first observing their intensification in the modern era, and then offering the emergent ethics that sediment in late modern vocations. I hope to demonstrate how this radicalized transcendence in immanence – ‘disenchantment realized’ – not only makes real a self in dreams, but so doing naturalizes ethics in terms of ‘achievement’ to render our life-world fundamentally agonistic, fully opposing our fullness.

The Distinctly Western Idea of Newfound Transcendence

The American Dream is to be understood as an ethical doctrine that is symptomatic of a crisis in national identity during the thirties. The newly invented dream calls out for a supplement to the outmoded narrative of individual uplift, which had lost its moral capacity to guide the nation during the Depression. (Adams, 1931, p. 92)

Adams makes it abundantly clear that the Dream is essentially a moral order with the capacity to orient persons to a higher state. It is an ethical doctrine and a valuation narrative – incorporating both the good as well as one’s duty to realize it for their fullness – but denotes an all out drift for self-realizing in a specifically horizontal here and now enclosure. As such, sources of self (Taylor, 1989) have by the 1930’s parted with the mystical, so rather than drawing meaning from elusive (enchanted) folk stories, validation now comes by command of strict socio-political horizons – objective measures observed to move us ever closer to philosophy’s project of a ‘better’ self. What we cannot miss is that as high/est valuations remain, cultures will be doctrinaire, which means metaphysics will be retained. But as ‘truth’ is sourced socially, newer versions of the worthwhile become ontologically narrowed, imposing clear limit horizons on what is real and what it can mean “to be.” As that is the case, action suffers associated limits and disposes us to life in a consciousness of contest (getting ahead). What I suggest in demonstrating this below is that when anticipations of promise shift immanent (ascendant) and conform response-ability to “promoting systems” of culture alone, increasingly affixed to the discourses of dreams, we work against our fuller possibility.
In this chapter I explore the genealogy of this narrowed uplift to demonstrate that as valuations shift toward symbolic productions of culture, formerly virtuous (communal and relations-oriented) dispositions convert virile (individual and success-oriented). Emergent forms of promise (promotion in the social) pull proving attentions toward ‘productive personhood’ to absorb ethics in strictly acquisitive or capitalistic aims. In order to achieve personal effectiveness (height in social terms), persons will need to value and be constituted by hard work, good character and productive citizenship. As such imperatives condition the ‘limits’ of reality it follows that self-knowing will be reflexive to more agonistic “getting ahead” (contest) moral referencing – how we regard who we are (voice) and what is meaningful in life (vocation) will be conditioned by ever more virile sensibility. In other words, as aspiration orients toward promise (where we locate our valuation and validation) in more fiercely ascetic ways, world relations become one of increasing contest (agon(y), working us further away from the open and orginary valuations we most naturally inhabit. The successions of (moral) stages that place increasing burden on self-demonstration correspondingly reduce vocational valuations (ethical options) to diminish who we are in all senses prior. Whether proving our worth to others, testing our own limits, or competing in places of work, the reality is that we come to experience the purpose of living as being-against-life. Vocations taken up in moral sourcing so devised position us offensively and defensively in the world.

Before getting into the particulars of the work-promise genealogy that bears this out, it is helpful to grasp the ascendant disposition that expounds this human drive in the first place. For a keen insight on the matter, I look to Pulitzer Prize winning author of The Denial of Death, Ernest Becker (1973). This text explores the ritual-promise relation in somewhat parallel fashion to Weber’s proving-providence. In other words, as prescribed procedures are prudently observed, persons achieve a rite of passage. The addition I make is that as ritual practices of work displace those of worship (first affect/ions) all relations to promise become disenchanted – sterile, calculated, perfunctory, ultimately exploitative. Life confined to promise in the empir(ec)ical, conforming action to expansive ambitions of culture itself, beget patently performative prerequisites, with person-hollowing implications. Becker’s expansion thesis (ascendance via culture) pans several disciplines to demonstrate that as transcendent principle becomes explicitly cultural, ethics digresses
to the heroic, initiating into human relations intensifying *agonism*. Whereas the shift in ethical horizons may not be troubling in itself, insofar as new valuations implore moderns to take up projects to exceed their nature, action will be *against* nature: defensive, limit-defying, reactive and thus intrinsically aggressive. For this reason, Becker (1973/1975) charges that this effectively ‘heroic’ moral order (*beating our own* human nature and nature itself) is the initiate of evil.

Ever since pre-modern times, there has been a “principle of immortality striving” that orients persons “toward heights” (Becker, 1975, p. 63-64), but in modern times, this phenomenon has undergone immensely ramifying alteration. Drawn from this thesis in his posthumously published work, *Escape from Evil*, Becker (1975) demonstrates that as cultures are unable to survive without a project of expansion, they must likewise peddle promotion programs for members, but by so doing construct a violent ontology. Inversely, he says, until we are able to make peace with our animality – ridding the need to abstract better being – we are at war with everything; most of all, who we are. As it is, modern promotion systems not only plunder the mysteries of nature (the enchanted) but enforce the taming of our very subjectivity (mystery). So long as the ethical imposes this need to extrude us from native being – and positing advancement as *necessary* in ever new and more taxing interpretations of higher being – there is to be alleged a spiritual restlessness. Such a drive for “limitless self-extension” or “cosmic significance” says Becker (1973, p. 3) not only demands more from us, but so long as we fail to address such salvation schemas in scholarship and schooling, we are wages Becker (1973, pp. 1-8) fortifying illusions just as damaging as superstitions left behind. My intention is not to disavow strictly materialistic theories and scholarly commitments, but to weaken them: to show through movements of our late cultural history and its *still* mythic center, that there is an ethical responsibility to regard the good (identity’s possibility) with wider sight.

Principally, it is not enough to *attain* something favoured in the plain *material* sense, but we have to *feel its good* – it must confer ‘a sense’ of enduring (seemingly eternal) value. This transcendent aspect of personhood we cannot ignore, says Taylor (2007), where the transcendent is no less than the felt *more-of-being*. Thus, at the heart of this ambition toward height, under the auspices of a moral program at hand, is a
play for power that can enable our projects to succeed. To feel empowered as more than what we are, we must act in ways that confer heroism (exceeding a nature-state), which in the aegis of cultural morality translates into pride: “right” action. What becomes apparent is that as moral ordering shifts horizontal to social contexts alone, more natural (communal mythic) value backgrounds for feeling worth are severely compromised. The ‘feeling of more’ once realized by belonging oneself to a greater reality is transposed into realizing one’s own greatness as the real, which Bauman calls the lonely burden of modern life. At issue is the initiation of efficacy into human relations and its urgency to connect who we are with what we take up and race toward as the promise of glory. In this new moral dispensation, promotion systems aimed at “exceeding being” not only supplant more originary, antecedent relations to life, but enact agonizing preoccupations against life itself. Grounding this inquiry are the specific enlargement programs that have been progressively heaped on moderns to arrive at such narrowed ambitions for human significance.

From earliest ritual to the Pythian Games in Delphi to the recent Olympic gold by Canada’s hockey teams, Becker (1975) says power is brought down from the heavens for a community to feel enlarged. But if this phenomenon endures when communities are a thing of the past, or life itself is turned into contest, then where do heroics find new vocation? It is to be found in the strictly horizontal proving ground; in the frame of the ‘social’ agon. Here, Becker (1975) draws relation between our need “to transcend the limitations of the human condition and achieve victory over impotence and finitude” (p. 31) on one hand, and “I need to achieve distinction to earn social honour” on the other. In the later case – in late modern context – “each organism is in a struggle for more life and tries to expand and aggrandize itself as much as possible. The most immediate way to do this is in one’s social situation” (p. 49). That is to say, as the social is now the dominant setting for self worth to be conferred, we no longer steal fire from the gods (Prometheus), but we steal life from each other as gods. Recalling French ressentiment, Bauman (2008) marks life today as one of enmity, where “free agents strive to lift themselves up and push the others down” (p. 37). In other words, “my freedom manifests itself, and is measured by, the degree to which I manage to limit the liberty of others.” As today’s signature ethos, “ressentiment results in competition, in an ongoing struggle for the redistribution of power and prestige, social reverence and socially recognized dignity.”
Ted Peters (1994) calls the modern expansive drive ‘diminishment avoidance.’ To avoid death in the living, in the arrangement we are given, one must kill the other first (symbolically), which is more or less to absorb some balance of power in the fierce interplay of acquiring social capital. Bourdieu (1984, p. 187) depicts the acquisitive act as a cultural game whereby directly or symbolically we re-direct the affect of others to achieve self-favouring effect – not unlike the way a corporation out-markets another to attract more capital to itself. Expressed another way, the game expresses the conversion of transcendent yearning into symbolic possibilities for experiencing more-of-being. But what the enlargement does not account for ironically is how the effect sourced in symbols means greater being as such is purely ideal, not real at all if not grounded in the more naturally relational. Mensch (2005) shows in an advanced logic how the modern quest for self-demonstration enacts identity reductions if a person self-affects (achieves ontic synthesis in the fashion depicted by Kant and Heidegger) from merely symbolic reference points. The inference is that as culture demands enlargement and yet we can only do so in these symbolic limits, we inevitably practice consumption of the social under what is effectively a scarcity economics. In such a case says Bourdieu, life is reduced to acquiring “social capital” in a zero sum game – more for me means less for others.

Becker (1975) brings together the potent interface between the expansive urge of persons in terms of the promotion programs of culture to platform the troubling trajectory of ethics I shortly take up. “As soon as you have symbols, you have artificial self transcendence via culture” (p. 4). With the goal being “to raise man above nature,” “culture is in this sense supernatural.” But as it can only offer transcendence in the symbolic, its people will be “living a fantasy for which there is no scientific evidence” (p. 5). His point is that “this would be alright if the fantasy were a harmless one.” But “the fact is that self transcendence via culture does not give man a simple and straightforward solution.” Instead “it gives us a new problem.” In short, “man’s impossible hopes and desires have heaped evil in the world.” And in spite of science’s scepticism – here observing Pinker, that we are “kinder and gentler” – Berlinski (2009) notes of Pinker’s “shockingly happy picture” (p. 22) that the 20th century has amassed 190 million deaths in the cause of being “elevated to new states of being” (Becker, 1975, p. 7), which issues “an almost constant struggle not to be diminished” (p.
Each case we may imagine “sets up society as a continuing contest for the forcing of self feeling” (p. 13), which “provides ready-made props for self-aggrandizement.”

In late modern times “people try to come out of social encounters a little bigger than they went in” but it is culture that “provides codes for such self-aggrandizement, for the ability to boast, to humiliate, or just simply to outshine in quiet ways.” This, echoing Weber, is the work culture gives us to do, hosting the proving ground wherein we carry out its pretensions of promise to feel more valid or else make headway toward our symbolic destiny. “There is really hardly any way to get a sense of value” (p. 16) otherwise, indicating that our inability to imagine agency differently means we suffer the most acute kind of moral order. “All morality is fundamentally a matter of power, the power of organisms to continue existing by reaching for a superhuman purity” (p. 22). As it is, the expansive programs of culture mark the reaches by which inhabitants can be endeared to self-promotion in kind, with our immediate task being to locate the symbiotic power arrangements in our own emergent western story. In one sense, “the unfolding of history is precisely the saga of the succession of new and different ideologies of organismic self-perpetuation” (p. 25). But Brown goes even further. Such acquisitive or “economic activity itself from the dawn of human society to the present time is sacred to the core,” which is to say not only are we acquisitive, but such as we are, it can be said that moderns retain the sacred but by dreams. Here lies the irony of modern life. Whereas the “consolations of religion” are a thing of the past to Richard Dawkins (Berlinski, 2009, p. 11), Becker (1973) says “a consoling illusion” (p. 37) endures, but “in a world of symbols and dreams” (p. 3).

Our enlargement by means of conferred favour in a symbolic social field means we can never keep up or do enough; neither can all enjoy favour equally or at once. Bauman (2008) says by incessantly relocating the moral compass – characteristic of liquid modern life – the social game effectively consumes us; by keeping us ruthlessly jockeying for greater position, we get played! Clearly, the limit of such an outlook attests to why the modern visage for ‘successful personage’ generates the unique kinds of self-affecting phenomenon we know today, priming an ontological disposition that Sandywell (2000) infers is a tragic “method of self-reflection” (p. 108). To be “constituted within and directed by a particular complex of
cultural values, rooted in the ‘spirit of contest and conflict’ … I will call the *agonistic ethic*” (p. 94). We do not customarily think of ethics in terms of contest; it sounds odd and is certain to raise suspicion. But if we can trace genealogically how ethics lapsed into self-serving rules of engagement more generally, we’ll have a clearer sense for how the erosion of pathos from ethics was able to be achieved; and not only that, how it became the essential precondition that would allow our kind of moral order to flourish which keeps hidden its inherent violence. Brueggemann and Levinas note that as pathos has been bastardized, hijacked and self-samed for the good of dominions and totalities, culture has enforced outright a disenchantment of affectivity – or else *affect in forms* (objectified and perverted), producing nothing less than the end of ethics. In response to this particular deprivation of transcendence, they respectively source self-valuations in an “economics of abundance” (community as abundance) and “the infinity of the human other” to anticipate fullness otherwise. I will speak more on their insights later.

Our task here is to explore how the dream, as a late comer in the west, has as a *self-promotion* “*system*” ordered new valuations for being to produce new (limited and intrinsically polarizing) forms of self-understanding. Crudely, the move from communal-ritual to rationally-apprised notions of personhood initiates grossly limited world habitation and engagement. What I speculate is that as power has shifted from the collective to the personal – or more widely, from intimate cosmic relation to gloried self-relation in cultural symbols *alone* (Decker, 1997, p. xxiii) – we incur with our shifting world identification greater forms of antagonism (violence) towards life: most alarmingly, even to be against our very own being in the waged divisions between self-sourcing (voice) and the moral mandates of state (vocation)! But as the modern consumer is pacified concerning that which most truly constitutes violence, referencing it in the strictly visible, we fail to recognize newer forms of tyranny; that by “psychic numbing” (Bai, 2009, p. 135) that initiates and enforces a “spiritual autism,” we are being killed from *within*.

The *real* cunning of violence is to murder the unknowable in us, to fix cares on the progressive order alone, and to be against all that is otherwise than rational performative progression. It may be true that we are no longer *embedded* in the cosmos (Taylor, 2007) but to be embedded no less, in such a fierce moral frame,
is to encounter Weber’s stated irrationality at its height. As Bauman (2008) registers it, the great reciprocal to enlargement by consumerism is that we are consumed (p. 59). We are taught to love an idea of what we can be and to purchase its possibility at all costs; the reciprocal of course is that we must hate what we already are. “What we love when we love ourselves is a self fit to be loved. What we love is the state, or the hope, of being loved – of being an object worthy of love, being recognized as such, and being given proof of that recognition” (p. 34). It would seem, therefore, we are bowed to a new host of idols, ascetically given to proving our reverence in the prosaic, and in all other senses (or lack of them) symbolically disposed to promise projects that must make everything else less … real. Meanwhile, all we do realize in this ontological wonder/less land is “the disposability of humans” (p. 56), in a materialized love (p. 59) that has as its mission and mantra that we are to “trust no one.” This is our modern ethics: in promise without trust – life without relation – and faith in the purely symbolic, action must necessarily be antagonistic.

**Tracing Foundations of Ascendance in the West**

Kearney (1998) points out that the west is founded on the most elaborate organization of heroic myths in the global canon of literature, and Luc Ferry will show that we have not escaped a yearning for ultimate things (idealism), whether in Platonic (eidos) or Aristotelian (telos) taste. Therefore, in the escape we do seek, in the boastful separation that marks modern orientation, we’ve only shifted what we ascribe ultimate. The Greeks did more than lead us out of a distinctly ritualistic world occupation to one more rationalistically apprised– leaving behind the old cosmos in definite ways – but by so doing, says Ferry, they gave us most definitely a secularization of religion. In fact, what Taylor calls a shift, Ferry calls an all out intensification. So, if promotion has only intensified, what becomes of persons under its more severe moral effects? Being more religiously zealous, as Ferry posits, we must be wielding more earnest moral force. This is the case I wish to explore in what follows, even as it would, in the language of the dream, appear ironic. Aiming here at the level of sensibility, if we take offence to religious narrowing of human vocation (and
rightly so), then we must, at the very least, be equally concerned at ways modern ontologies do no less. I would hope this registers some alarm for the revisiting of a more humane ethical orientation.

The Greeks did not initiate a movement away from the religious outlook but took idealism into an innovative and more “immediate” extreme to intensify the religious effect upon the human. In this chapter, we find glimpses of its late evolution to demonstrate how growing intensification away from one salvific form toward its opposite (but still salvific) has by consequence distributed new and more severe kinds of tyranny. The problem with salvation, as controlled by man – intensifying at the moral turn, Taylor (1991) notes – is its exertion of an unseen but elaborate network of pride and shame validation systems (i.e. the moral sourcing that gives proving its raison d’être). Therefore, the modern self says Taylor (1989), alike to Weber’s ascetic personality, is the resultant idea of a succession of “strongest evaluations” of strictly cultural derivation. As such valuation occurs in the confines of cultural orders, they are, notes Chowers (2004), highly determinative. When culture constitutes what will come to be understood as character, its moral outworking will reside in an ambiguous interplay between what is good (socially acceptable) on one hand and a mysterious relation with what is made ultimate (worth our affections – our wor(th)ship) on the other. Whether one subscribes to a materialist (secular thesis) or a spiritualist paradigm, persons will seek to flourish and they cannot do so outside a transcendent (moral) frame, one innovatively ascetic in the west.

Luc Ferry essentially offers the story of this unique proliferation in the west, offering first a fitting foundation convergent with Weber’s thesis upon which we can trace some of the intricacies of the ethical shift in our social milieu. “For thousands of years, philosophy had done little but pursue religious ends by other means – those of reason rather than faith.” This “enables us to understand how and why philosophy, albeit in a manner different from and opposed to that of religion, has retained a relation to wisdom, even to salvation, as its ultimate question” (Ferry, 2005, p. 139). What the Greeks birthed, Renaissance intellectuals refined, and German Idealists (Kant’s Würde) thereafter cast their own long shadow upon: the variation on a theme of transcendence that we still can’t do without. It is the sameing and thematic structure of the western world, says Levinas (1999), which philosophy incarnated into a self-sufficient deification program for an
otherwise troublesome bourgeoisie (p. 248). “Idealism reached its highest expression in the ideology of the late bourgeoisie,” and survived as a middle class salvation scheme in the particularly ‘American context’ as the opening quote suggests. Therefore, the road from Greece, though philosophy, by a gradual uncoupling with orthodox religion, has by a sustained ‘will to meaning’ reached Main Street in a newly idealized man. As “all the great examples of philosophical thought were indelibly marked by a very special relationship with the religion of their times,” says Ferry (2005), “it is that continuity ... that enables us to understand how philosophy deals with the question of the good life in terms of salvation” (p. 140). Only now the original question posed by the Greeks “what is the good,” is fully secreted by the irrepressible modern variant of the Oracle. The dream, from early philosophy to its lived out idealism in contemporary day to day variations is nothing other than “the secularization of religion” says Ferry. Religion was first to systematize life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 58); philosophy, the first to secularize it.

The process that inaugurated the ‘disenchantment of the world’ is two-sided: on the one hand, the earliest philosophers took over a part of the religious heritage, in particular the themes preserved in the great poetic narratives about the birth of the gods and the origins of the world; on the other hand, the very heritage was translated into a new form of thinking – rational thinking – which gave it a new meaning and a new status. (Ferry, 2005, p. 140)

Even for Kant, “religion ‘preforms’ the fundamental metaphysical questions that philosophy inherits, rearranges, puts in new terms, turns around, or even deconstructs” (Ferry, p. 141). The dream is then in my estimation the incarnation of all idealism, philosophical and religious. In no sense therefore does it indicate a breach with religion, but its affirmation (or daringly, its fullest rationalization) albeit in a new order: the making common of a fertile doctrine rooted in new ‘productive’ moral codes – their codification being among my immediate concerns. So bothersome was this to the likes of “Spinoza and Nietzsche, for example, [that] each in his own way and while declaring a radical break with constituted religions, continued to take an interest in the problematics of salvation and eternity” (p. 142). Whereas “Greek philosophy had the genius to develop powerful doctrines of salvation without God, thus offering us the first model of a ‘lay spirituality’ in
the west” (p. 185), Christianity itself ironically fortified it through its own “conversion to Aristotelianism under the influence of Thomas Aquinas” (p. 214). As Weber surmised, “paradoxically, it was precisely from within Christianity that philosophy was to draw the nucleus of its future emancipation from religion” (p. 216), but in continuing the irrationality, philosophy like religion prior was turned upside down no less. Instead of being an “apprenticeship to wisdom,” it “instrumentalized” a new kind of salvation, one that birthed a moral order of even greater idealistic force, achieving perhaps an even far greater servitude.

The matter deserves a moment’s attention, because it involves philosophy’s independence of theology, thus the origins of the secularization of thought in the modern era. If philosophy, in its purely autonomous and rational exercise, should ever rise to encompass truths that are no longer those of revelation, it follows that the latter, and with it all of theology, would no longer enjoy an evident monopoly of the legitimate definition of the good life. This opens the way to new doctrines of salvation. (Ferry, 2005, p. 221)

As former doctrine-weaving institutions – church and philosophy – were absorbed by a state who could more expediently court enduring transcendent urges, it would take little time before our lineage of seductive futures would fully realize Weber’s daring disenchantment thesis once and for all. To make the point and add dimension to this foundation, I attempt a genealogy of ethical (proving) programs in the American tradition to observe how the ascetic gone horizontal initiates a life-world gone virile; one ironically against the good after all. If not already counter-intuitive that the ascetic advances the agonistic (yes, even in hues hedonistic), it should become clearer below. Once it is demonstrated that ‘progressive promise’ in the social demands increasingly fierce forms of agency, we can verify its final dispensation in the Dream, and its fullest rationalization in our own abstraction from life, from our very selves. In so doing, programs of ascent will prove one thing well after all, that what we very well may realize more than our fulfilment after all is our own demise, to confirm yet again the sage wisdom of Weber, except that this time irrationality realized is man ‘made’ real in the virtual, in disembodied, disincarnate life. Becker takes up the
illusion in some detail in Chapter 5, to demonstrate that heaven re-invented in the absence of heavenly referents is the supreme mark of modern absurdity.

*Man Made Horizontal: From Worship to Work*

From the Stoics to the Enlightenment, “an acceptance of destiny was justified ... by the intimate conviction that providence was good, the cosmos was just, and the role to which we were assigned within it, like that of the organs or the members of a living being, was necessarily fitting” but “the modern revolution gradually put an end to that sort of reasoning” (Ferry, p. 233). Witnessed in this great epoch is new urgency to take up glory vistas with the cessation of heaven’s moral capacity to orient us to promise. Now manifest is that we could not part with a compulsion to rise, and so with heaven’s demise comes the coronation of the dream, variously viewed here toward its emerging culmination and consolidation in the human imagination. What is not so clear in the experiment though is the kind of moral response that must necessarily attend its great orations of promise. It would have to be worked out over time, and to be sure, over time, we worked ourselves right out of natural habitation. From this eventual outpost, it would be the case that “the world becomes indifferent ... there is no reason to think that natural events are the result of any sort of providence. Henceforth, they occur by chance.” Goethe’s inference, “For nature / Is unfeeling: The sun’s light shines / On the wicked and the good” suggests that “the world is seen as a neutral space,” and rather than taking one’s place, up for grabs are the places we can take up by favourably exercising moral forms manifestly ascendant. What our new salvation will most signify is an exit from harmonious, enchanted relationality to one grounded in atomistic rational opposition:

Acting morally would no longer be following the teaching of nature, but rather opposing nature in all its respects, both outside ourselves, in combating its maleficent effects on human existence, and within ourselves, where nature now appears in the form of the rule of special interests and ineluctable tendencies to egocentrism. (p. 234)
Within the new sense of heroic person and purpose is “the radical rupture, induced by the collapse of the great cosmologies that marks the emergence of new relations between nature and virtue.” A former integration in the world is utterly disjoined; man made ‘separate from’ is now ‘stood against’ the cosmos with an inescapably heroic mood urging him to exert ferocious moral force to tame the uncertain. Cut off from enchanted and sensual relation to the cosmos (one David Abram says will cut off all prior meaning) and disposed to ultimacy in purely pragmatic frames, we now get our sense for how the competitive ethos eventually consumes the modern individual, with its deleterious effects taken up in Chapter 5. In this new dispensation that legitimizes our right to be against nature for self-promotion, it would become a growing occupation to assert oneself over the affairs of life, thus fulfilling a habitation that turns the vital into surv/vival, to render vocation against native voice. Such fierce rationality, posited by Weber, comes to mean one thing: by enacting a formidably instrumental exercise to lift us out of the world (nature) and up in status (the social), all senses of world relation become inverted; all sense is made numb. Whereas it was once virtuous to imitate nature in intimate relation, the newly detached rational agent struggles against nature (human and otherwise) since the moral has succumbed to this aggressive pose. With no reverence for anything but our immanent heroic project – as the sum of life’s fullness – everything else must be slain.

Recalling strokes of Hobbes, such acts would make us equally against the ill effects of the natural in ourselves. “We need only contemplate our Western juridical systems to measure the degree to which they display a deep-rooted conviction that the moral world is constructed against an egotistic and rebellious nature rather than in accord with nature” (Ferry, p. 235). The fact of our parting with the natural for a civilizing morality needs to be seen here for its siding with ambition alone, one aimed specifically at inducing people to find a worthy exchange from stories known for fictions imaginable – needless to say, they would need to be accomplished by work and with targets made standard in advance. Pertinent then is not only that we could choose what we want to become our good but “that we need to use our free will to control the self-centeredness inherent to our nature” The ascetic exercise undeniably casts choice and the good into a symbiotic, strategic relation, and with freewill’s innovation for promise prospecting, a possible worlds consciousness would enforce the separation of mind from the body it would will to a higher state; an
essential precondition to the Dream’s escalation and flourishing. What lies beneath the matter, then, is that the ‘best’ among us could now be calculated and paraded insidiously to control moral motivation, following Becker’s heroic cultural system for the advance of most favoured cultural idea(l)s, to initiate the free-willed separation by means of contest. Truly, the foundation of our modern pride and shame moral scheme is the tyranny of the best: he who chooses most wisely against what is ‘by nature’ erroneous acts heroically and deserves social honour. “This is also why ‘labor,’ a notion not highly valued in the ancient world, took on a new and positive significance in the modern universe” (p. 235). Increasingly “Man, as a race, slowly emancipates himself from mother nature through the process of work” (Fromm, 1962, p. 36), and it is by this order that we adopt “an unbroken faith in man’s perfectability and progress” (p. 37). That’ll keep him busy, and more the case as fanciful futures whimsically manipulate the rules.

Marx himself, critiquing the radical effects of capitalism as a new exploitive force against the unsuspecting masses puts it well in the dream context. “It makes the wish to ‘have’ ... the most dominant desire in man” (Fromm, 1962, p. 41). We are, says Becker (1975), ingesting by nature, and since regimes of promise orient us to lack, says Loy, we are vulnerable to newly exploitative promise thresholds. It is for such reasons that consumptive panaceas will be the final footing in the dream’s solidifying foundation: as materialistic promise is our final basis for incline, increasingly calculable methods underlie getting ahead. As longing for heaven is ever more unquenchable and seemingly within reach are new versions of promise to pursue, a more fervent spirit of conquest by means of “work” will undoubtedly and most unexpectedly position our relation to the good in a mode of slavery. Is it really any wonder that, in time, personhood constructed in such transient and elusive moral programs would produce the modern spirit of exile? (Bauman, 2008; Chalier, 2004). The truth is that we have no idea what we’re really doing.

Weber, of course, brings out brilliantly how success ethics in the West would galvanize ‘within’ a new industrial imaginary to disenchant common persons. The rise of the hard working industrious citizen responsive to a new language of promise is itself from a time that was ripe for the merging of secular and religious ideals. “When the meaning of virtue changes, when it is no longer defined as the actualization of a
wellborn nature, but rather as a struggle of liberty against the natural in us, labour changes in meaning as well as status and acquires a value previously unknown” (Ferry, p. 235). Taylor (2007, p. 69) points out that the hard work ethic was augmented by newfound social orders, which at one level eclipsed fidelities to the communal, and on another level, the newly envisaged mechanized world mirrored for human action the aims of industry and efficiency. With our separation surely comes more urgency to prove – this is a critical factor in the dream identity today given that along with an ambition comes the hard work one must do to achieve social worth in surrogate belonging, something Bauman takes up extensively in his analysis of liquid modern relations. In moral terms alone, such affairs have no greater catalyst for extreme forms of cultural propaganda (Ellul, 1965 p. 200-209), or else the naturalizing of moral programs more generally.

From what Burns (1976) will introduce next as the dream’s founding temperament for commoners, we can see that the yeoman dream – an early variant of the good life achieved by honourably tending one’s designated occupation – was at first fully unmediated by the social. But as filling one’s endowment was for the yeoman a work-intensive activity nonetheless, vocation as work would in time factor into social mores in a remarkably all encompassing way. “The person who does no work runs the risk of being not only a poor man but a poor sort of man, given that work is identified with ... what is proper to man, of liberty as a faculty for transforming the world, and in so doing, transforming and educating himself” (Ferry, p. 235). Shame is the poor man’s reward, but not just any shame: the man who is not hard at work or productive to glamorous goals in the new heroism of Industry/alism is not a man deserving of gain at all. This is no small point, especially as we note in this radical ‘moral departure’ a shift from the foundational message of mercy in the Christian gospels to one of productive action. As the moral creeps ever toward the singularly self-enlarging, by means of heroic tasks performed, it is clearly in breach of the humbler, relational themes of its founding story. Honour seeking by appeal to work(s) is entirely disavowed and constitutes the essence of what is meant by sin; that is, to turn toward one’s own gain in spite of his neighbour is to fail the ethical. Morality in terms of contest is biblically anathema.
Philosophically speaking, “the primacy of theoria has given way to that of praxis” (p. 235). The virtuous in the modern moral stance consists of a range of “acts aimed at modifying reality and changing ourselves” in an ever more virile disposition of conquest in nature and the commandeering of the alien and undesired within. In terms of moral flourishing, our new providence is led by heroic obsession to battle constraint, improve conditions and otherwise mature from lower forms of habituation. As a result, in the spirit of industry and work, one is always moving away from, “out of” what one is, restless, never far enough, and always with the so-called end in sight. In the end (or at it), the highest form of maturity is effectively to dis-embed from the social altogether, to ‘imagine forward’ what it may be to transcend the despised limits of relational life and ordinary personhood – to dispossess what it means to be human at all.

Unlike the ancient cosmos, the order that humanity is henceforth called upon to construct and put in place no longer pre-exists humankind; it no longer possesses the transcendence of anteriority. Now humanity must not only invent order but engender it. We have entered into the reign of humanism, where values are no longer in the domain of being. They belong not in nature but in the sphere of the must-be, of the hoped-for ideal. (p. 235)

Hampson (1968) indicates that earlier people had no real sense of being separate, whether from the community or the cosmos, and Taylor (1991) adds that since identity as an idea was non-existent to our pre-modern ancestors, alienation from self would have been absurd. “The individual, in the sense in which we understand the term – that is to say, someone presumed free to live, at least in private, as he or she chooses – does not exist in the traditional society” (Ferry, p. 244). By correlation, neither was there a ‘moral project’ to make for oneself a more valid personhood, or work at its possibility. Therefore, The Dream, we surmise, is something that accelerated in a complex constellation of increasingly sophisticated and symbiotic cultural and self-promoting realities, whose constructs, Ferry admits, followed a calculated promise presumption in departure from anterior relations. As it was, “the birth of the modern world – and a convenient milestone is the French Revolution – occurred in rupture with the old visions of the world. It was a move to counter religious heteronomy by aspiring to make one’s own laws,” and in particular, laws that will protect for
societies and persons their highest abstracted values. In this sense, a self in drift from formerly storied world belonging, needing a replacement story to coax its lingering sense of providence forward, would now be positioned *forward* and in productive constructs, with a newly added dimension called hard work. In order to flourish in this newest testament of the good we would entirely *rewrite* what it meant to be a self and measure it good, meaningful and fulfilled.

With the hope of a better future that would gradually lead to valuing the young, henceforth to embody the march of progress, over the old; to denying the natural basis of inequalities and affirming equal rights for all; to declaring an end to the superiority of the whole over the individuals; and to insisting on the pre-eminence of the individual over the collective. (p. 245)

Ironically enough, it is by separating persons from the world that steals promise from persons and the universe at large and makes its strictly *symbolic* replacement so potent as a moral strategy for culture. Ferry makes the case. Since “the reactionary or progressive utopia posits values superior to individual life,” entirely outside persons, on the one hand, it must be the case that “values in the name of which will demand its tribute of human sacrifice.” For such values to be reached, they must be worked toward. To be sure, what the new dream taskmaster demands in the present, says Bauman, surely changes without notice. The rules of service are as whimsical as the fanciful promise itself. And the past? I now take up the temperament of its ascetic demands before settling into the hues we see and know today in the next chapter. And tomorrow? If Bauman is right – and he is certainly among the most venerated forecasters – fictions forward in ‘liquid modern’ *styles* he says are emerging will have us running ever faster from home toward our outright exile.

*Variations on a Theme of Success/ion*

My interest now is to explore this progression of moral (ascetic-ascendant) personhood in vivid description and to witness in recent history how the moral has evolved, especially in intimate relation with the dream, to achieve ramifying human dislocation. The very fact that there is no documented beginning of
the dream is already a testament to the mystery of its cultural genesis, occurring more or less unseen, and gathering momentum in subtle gradations that over time culminate in an all out self-aggressing and culture consolidating promotion scheme. Therefore, all we can do is harness loose historical associations or grasp at forces that have shifted vistas of promise, and therein speculate how people have differently arranged who they are (the identity question) by means of this slowly swelling imaginal of ascendance. As heaven’s perfunctory replacement, dreams would make us ever more religious in reverse, ever more ascetic in ascent.

We’ve so far discovered that the initiation of the self in new vagaries of promise introduced a newly ascetic disposition, and what I now attempt are unique associations of the identity-morality relation in the ascendancy programs they co-evolve. Although there are complex realities surrounding its philosophical program, Burns (1976) identifies a new kind of person as the dream prototype that Taylor (2007) says was predisposed by such events as the Thirty Years’ War and Reformation. Given the disorder of the times, the consequent need to re-order society and the innovation of individuals having to find their own way in terms of promise and security (and story) following a collapse of former confidences, it was the case that a hearty kind of individual arose in the American context, positing what Burns calls the Yeoman Dream. “Beginning with the Puritans and modified by the Enlightenment” (p. 1), the yeoman was “a figure of middling income who worked his own fee-simple farm” to enjoy a success of “competence, independence, and morality.” Thus begins our moral genealogy, the antecedent of the ascetic-ascendant matrix we dwell within today.

The first emblem of a morally independent person with any discernible self-advancing quality, says Burns, was the yeoman: one who had association to the land, but of an independent occupation. As an intermediary between old world morality and later forms, the yeoman was committed to a kind of action, but one of ‘fruitfully fulfilling’ his place than having any particular stature. The yeoman’s pride, that is, was to enjoy a reciprocal relation to the land, which gave him both title and fullness; his work was to realize this honourably, by competence and to enjoy relative freedom from oppressive social burdens. To be a yeoman was, therefore, to be more or less free from subservience – a theme having greater force on the imagination following ideological and religious struggles between persons and nation states. But as a moral intermediary
between worlds – no longer defined by a communal relation on one hand, yet well before the need to be defined by competence in a social field – the yeoman’s good name came from a hard-working relation to his land, and what it/he could produce. As his attentions were to his possession and not an identity as such, his so-called dream is not yet associated with particularly visible moral signs. It is however hinting at more virile kinds of world occupation to come as what one proves himself for shifts visible and horizontal.

Instead of being possessed by “culturally based” moral commitments, it is likely that a defensive posture drove the dream of the yeoman without any deliberate ambition in an expressly positive direction (or what we would call life-transforming ambition). “Without a title, without the land, without a profitable skill, the failed yeoman became a tenant farmer or even a labourer ... dependent on someone else” (p, 2). Therefore, it would appear from Burns that the chief axiom of the initial dream stance was preservation – of one’s independence – as opposed to being proactive, which clearly signifies contemporary dream affinities. Insofar as this aim was neither to ‘maintain a story’ (old world motivation) or ‘build a new one’ (dreamed futures), the simple yeoman had a characteristically independent moral ambition to be fruitful but free from others. In that his desires were simple – he did not seek social or financial eminence – his independence is uncharacteristic of modern self-made man; though some latency is to be noted. “Despite the assumptions ... success has not always equated with great wealth; indeed, it was not until the mid nineteenth century that such a definition became a sanctioned code” (p. 1). The catalyst therefore was his indifference to greater relations, to focused attentions on interests distinctly his own.

Some significant change from an older order, therefore, seems to be at play. For one, there is an independent spirit that appears rather hearty; and second, an evident valuing of hard work, notably with some piety. Undoubtedly, it was from such a mindset that ‘industry’ would easily syncretise Christian and secular morality into an unusual ethic of hard work; as promise predicates became more tangible, proving programs would become more zealous. The Puritans themselves were an odd mix of old and new world attitudes – firmly committed to a religious piety, but also radical counter-cultural people who embodied an independent spirit – and so it is fitting that they are the portrait of the early American. Baxter (1838) attests, “It is God
that called thee to labour: And wilt thou stand still or be doing other things, when God expecteth duty from thee” (Vol. 1, p. 230). This austere approach to labour was to dominate agrarian activities in the 1700’s alongside the privilege (proving) one could take in being able to own a stake of land, as if to render it (a yield) back to the Lord. Burns’ text is just one of an abundance of “evidence[s] cited … to show how widespread was that dream and its defense in our culture during the first half of the nineteenth century,” where the transition between one dominant cultural form (agrarian) to another (industrial) was facilitated by a “hard work” moral order. In this milieu, “the American yeoman was the basis of an ideal society” (Burns, p. 6), a foundation on which a new moral order could be imaginable and exploited.

Although there is some mystery surrounding the movement from moral piety – including the defensive stance against change or lost privilege – to an exultant morality, what is clear is that the American story was quite unique in developing, and one that Americans were proud to call their own. “For many Britons, their end and aim was no longer fruitfulness for God but happiness for man” (p. 5), whereas here, the traditional forms endured. “The gentleman farmer and the yeoman tended to merge” (p. 6) in favouring a modest competence, unlike what “urbanization and trade were seen as dooming of this agrarian paragon across the seas.” As Burns notes, “By the end of the eighteenth century in America, there was little distinction between yeoman and the country gentleman since the virtues of the American country gentleman were identical with those of the American yeoman” (p. 7). Where the yeoman’s hard work was one’s proof of faith, for the gentleman “an individual’s behaviour, too, was a symbol of his spiritual state; any yeoman or gentleman who violated the code of fruitfulness raised serious questions about his fitness to be numbered among the saints.” Pious individual resistance, with some residual antagonism toward Britain, preserved this cornerstone attitude and accompanied the lingering sense that “the Puritan was duty-bound to prove his election.” In short, attachments to the land in this way would facilitate “virtues which will enable the elect to obey: industry, thrift, perseverance, charity, piety, patience, sobriety, honesty, marriage” to the extent that “reward will be in the form of wealth enough for self-sufficiency” (p. 4). Work’s results would equal promotion in this life, as well as the next, with the addition of one’s sufficiency (at being effective) being a
wholly new variable. Affective relations toward the enchanted (transcendent) now gone horizontal and stoic favour an effective rationality aimed at the ascendant.

“Modified by Puritan predispositions and the demands of an emergent nation, the idea of gentlemanly retirement came in America to mean a change in activity.” All that was needed to push ‘independence’ “to a more earthly perspective” “was a social environment conducive to virtuous industry” (p. 7). It is here where the inert comes into view says Taylor (2004) as social exchange uprooted the locally storied for mutually expansive interests. Virtuous character now meant “to act in accordance with the laws governing societies and universes. Since these laws were discoverable by anyone with common sense, the acts would meet the approbation of all reasonable men” (p. 9). Aided by the likes of Ben Franklin and other nationalistic personalities, this pliable virtuosity – over time becoming a ‘thing-in-itself,’ detached from any specific heavenly or earthly authority – would adapt toward fully immediate ambitions. The vagaries of “well-being is the reward” (Burns, pp. 10, 13) where emphasis on character, initiated for a time, a fusion of religious and secular interests. “Independence and competence became more secular and more important for traditional success, and Godliness became Goodliness.” Religious virtue had passed the baton to a heartier code of productive virtues a la Ben Franklin, which meant in the growing currencies of a now socially sedimented order the lapse of the good into “being good” as the moral achievement itself.

From here, Burns’ text turns toward the greater American experience of sought largesse by moral means, which DeVitis and Rich (1996), Morey-Gaines (1982) and Decker (1997) each confirm, to render the unique ensuing dimensions that this moral genealogy of self-making entails. With the collapse of former authorities who could offer a moral compass, people were burdened to draw moral sources from the social scene alone (Brantlinger & Thesing, 2002). For obvious reasons then, literature burgeoned in the late 18th century to fill the vacuum, to give the newly ‘interiorized’ commoner his navigational apparatus; and in particular, a highly regulative kind of introspective (self-examining) literature was born. “The 1820’s saw a burgeoning number of youth’s periodicals” where “the aim was to prepare youth to be successful in life, and both practical information and ‘moral philosophy’ were offered in attempts to define that success and its
pursuit” (Burns, p. 18). Training held forth was distinctly individual within a strongly principled tone. “The meaning this epistemology held for traditional success lay not only in its philosophical materialism, but also in its strong emphasis on individual effort and the self-responsibility for the condition of one’s own soul and body” (p. 20). This singular appeal for one’s own flourishing, notably directed by ‘activity,’ produced a distinct cause and effect relationship between hard work, right behaviour and impending ‘social’ reward. “The major categorizing of humanity in the magazine was not along economic lines but into the virtues and the unvirtuous” (DeVitis & Rich, p. 23). Therefore, less than class, “the most important division between men was the result of behaviour” (p. 25). Success in the early nineteenth century remained more yeoman until mid-century, when virtue lapsed into more virile forms, as Morey-Gaines will soon show. “Thus, the great majority of virtuous Americans could truly be called successful” but only for a time.

The gradual shift from more virtuous to virile forms of social re/cognition was not so much the effect of money as it was first envisioned by opportunity; one could say newly found autonomy was still finding its moral target. “Traditional success for the man who toiled with his hands ... was increasingly a mere convention, while for non-manual occupations – where men toiled with their brains in their own firm – success meant both greater wealth and greater respect. Implied in this shift is a usurpation of the yeoman dream” (p. 31). Forces of industry would overwhelm attractions to mere virtue to now emphasize strategy, incrementally breaking down rectitude and nurturing higher social qualification at the same time. Moral order was still very much the occasion, but found stunning attachment to new reward immediacies given the abundance of opportunities that were calling upon “fit” (provable) men. Eventually, “success in life depends not on the vocation, but on the manner in which we pursue it” (p. 32), and so what the moral came to mean, more avowedly, was to promote oneself in more enterprising (creative) ways.

The ‘language’ surrounding success turned visible, toward ‘gotten things’ and through hard work, the most emblematic expression of which was to have one’s own land. From a religious perspective, this was another monumental departure, since in biblical times not only was The Land God’s to give, but security was never to be in physical form or be sourced as one’s hope. Thus, the terra firma reward marked profound
symbolic shifts from old world habits of thought and practice, in effect moving allegiances from heavenly to earthly masters and matters. “All things we see around us belong to somebody; and these things have been got by labor and working. Since such ownership is morally earned,” one should “work to have things for his own use” (p. 33) and “be rewarded by wealth.” The right to have property ensured moral ‘attainment’ (proof by things), with such themes more unashamedly proliferating in cliché doctrines: “Freedom is to amass property,” “Man is made to possess things and call them his.” Clearly, the slipperiness of ‘virtue and reward’ language, not even so distant from the lexicon of the pulpit, would allow “the social utility of religion” to initiate sweeping obsession with increased opportunity for ascendance, where having more was becoming a moral right.

By 1860, after significant economic change, the simplistic views “no longer seemed to fit society, the related concept of success seemed anachronistic,” says Burns (p. 35). “The old success, the yeoman dream, had to change in order to accommodate this complexity and its urban environment; but while changing, it had to somehow maintain its goodness.” The message, now departed from religious language altogether, “was that the individual could elevate himself” toward a “gradual movement to perfection” (p. 36). Although traditional success would find many pockets of support that intended to slow the runaway move from more traditional forms of authority, “a gradual change from the concept of traditional success to the celebration of competition” (p. 37) was too relentless to set back; this-worldly reward was now far too seductive. “As long as there was a reiteration of moral individualism” (p. 38), there could be an ethical rationalization for personal gain. Progress itself was now defined in moral terms: “the greatest amount of prosperous happiness for the greatest number of virtuous people” (p. 41), “transforming the condition of the people ... multiplying their comforts” (p. 42). In an odd blend of old and still changing sensibility “the impelling force behind this progress was obedience to the traditional virtues,” otherwise called “moral elevation.” The ascetic-ascendant immanent frame perfected! Wholly new imaginal fields bloomed a “‘life’s race’ imagery” to “depict man struggling” and working to his limit “for a goal” (p. 45).
Prudence could no longer match the demands of a more aggressive public life as “such religious dedication to self-interest on life’s crowded highway enabled” one “to conquer others” and feel the thrill of social advantage. Added to the dis-embedding from nature and the corresponding naturalization of hard work was a fervent new in-world toughening to the task, readying more virile moral sense to follow. In periodicals of the time, for example, “parents are warned ‘the boy who cannot take care of himself ... must be pitiably deficient in ... all the qualities of manhood.’” Self-care, or improve/ment was an odd composite of character and composure, of competence in productive life. Even the old Enlightenment concept of “The Great Chain was replaced by the belief that every one was forced to race against the rest of mankind for a limited quantity of success,” as “only those most fit to survive would finish.” With social Darwinism finally crushing Puritan norms by the late half of the 19th century, the yeoman dream would meet its end. The Ethic of Success was far too seductive to co-exist with whatever religious residue was left. “The struggle for riches became almost Darwinian and the morality almost forgotten” (p. 46). And if the bastardization of the religious spirit was not enough, there arose “an increasingly widespread belief in the natural law of competitive self interest as opposed to enlightened self interest” (p. 47). With theological and philosophical handmaiden’s releasing their dream suckling, it would know no other schooling than “a competitive scramble for greater riches.” Ethics released to an entirely new self-advancing ontology was surely absorbing all human vocation into its unabashedly ascetic drivenness for an attained enlargement.

What late modern asceticism came to prove overall is that ethics (self-im/prove/ment) is ascendant! DeVitis and Rich trace its emergence towards the “goal of the various success ethics” (p. xi), each of which “follows the blandishments of self-improvement formulas,” each inflecting “self-fulfilment as the ultimate life goal” (Becker & Marecek, 2008, p. 1767) and each centering “individual flourishing as the primary object” with “its promotion of self-improvement via personal effort, and its narrow sense of the social.” Ironically though, “a dream of social order in which each man and woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable” (DeVitis & Rich, p. 4) presents to Becker and Maracek more conformity than freedom. If individual rising presumes our liberty and yet determinations are socially sourced, what exactly is it to be a self, full? We already noted that freedom is at some level betrayed by the
rigidly ascetic. Here again, authenticity too is no less implicated. If ascendance to our highest ‘distinction’ is socially sourced, what exactly is our proving authenticating? What we find, in search of the ultimate ethic over time, turned to next, is a trial and error ethical lineage that migrates from Character to Mind Power to Personality to Image and finally, an outright Success Ethic that stages the Dream’s fullest realization today. To put the exclamation point on what the journey to self-promoting identity-making most truly realizes though, Morey-Gaines will, after I profile the succession, demonstrate how progressive moral movements from the virtuous to the virile sediment into an ethical frontier whose heart and soul is laden with intrinsic violence.

In Search of the Ultimate Ethic

The first mark of the dream orientation, according to DeVitis and Rich, was the innovation of the “Character Ethic,” which “represented a group of traits and a way of life considered to have significance and moral quality” (p. 11). Key terms, drawn from 18th century literature, point to good character constituting: “citizenship, duty, democracy, work, outdoor life, conquest, honour, morals, manners, integrity, and manhood.” The variety of “desirable character traits included perseverance, industry, frugality, sobriety, punctuality, reliability, thoroughness and initiative.” As a novel extension of proving, “performable” moral categories was now spread universal for the common in a new age. In addition to performing as “one ought,” there was a component to the character ethic, investigated earlier, that demanded an aggressive stance against the errors of nature. One was to “struggle against and overcome” (p. 15) to rid we might say what does not rightly belong to cultural consensus. “Such success could demonstrate that man might conquer his own base nature and overcome the limitations” (p. 16) of his environment. By so doing, one could expect to advance personally, spiritually and culturally. Assent to good character provided a complete program for promotion (Brantlinger and Thesing, 2002, p. 367). Most significant during its emergence was that moral incline as a basis for social advancement was now being infused into the curriculum of schools (p. 363-64).
“Another feature of the character ethic is that one must continue to develop one’s attitudes and abilities in order to reach the top” (p. 27). At this indication, it appears that yet another kind of agonism was gaining force, one that in addition to the riddance of personal and natural error, made it implicit to mind others in a competitive field to get ahead, to get the reward. This is a remarkable shift, especially when cast in ethical terms or given its radical departure from the shared communal ethos a mere century prior. However strenuously this would be observed would likely vary, but in a closed world order with definite aims laid out, it was certain that the drive toward character was newly given warrant by purely social referents.

At the outset, the Character Ethic was suspicious of higher and classical education and “instead, a ‘practical education’ was urged” (Devitis & Rich, p. 83). Character and action are symbiotic but more than this, character, says Becker (1973), was to become the first mark of the commonly symbolic in the modern scheme, indicating that character was proof of a person’s quality ‘in terms of’ dominant cultural forms. Crudely, character is the person! In this sense, the Character Ethic was foundational in taking people from themselves, and it exploited reward to do so. It is then, in this period historically that ‘the moral’ took on the force of extorting good character from personhood for the good of some greater social cause. Just who’s good would remain mysterious Eyal Chowers (2004) points out, his contention being that the era of character installed the rift between a self and the social institutions that governed its practical life. As the task was to become increasingly complex and codified, deciding what to ‘put on’ after solving the cryptic for realizing self advancement began to necessitate strategy, suspect Devitis and Rich, to surely set the tone for a later neighbouring ethical innovations.

Morality’s culmination as a cultural tool had now fully dawned, and the played out variations of character would only foreshadow later strategic versions to come. Whereas Chowers calls character an entrapment device, Becker calls it spin: illusive categorical self-making aimed to proliferate in the cultural order as a defence against shame (its irony). “Characterology is the study of the efforts made to do so” (1971, p. 73), “efforts [that] become our ‘mode of being’ in the world.” Only, “characters vary because people choose different ways to relieve themselves of this [same] existential paradox” (p. 145).
Character types are on one level conceived positively – one’s unique being in the world, though preferably not as categorically known – but are most often the identifications people make with the world whereupon “people derive their sense of value” (Becker, 1971, p. 36). As such, character is a program of exchanging a natural primordial sense of being for one contrived and symbolic in a cultural valuation (p. 71). Brown (1959) adds “character is rooted in character structure – that is to say, is autonomous from the body” (p. 204). As it is therefore derived from an ideology (p. 205), we may say it is an ideal/ism of self-valuation that begins to complement well the dream. Overall, “the great variation in character is one of the fascinations and plagues of life: it makes our world infinitely rich, and yet we rarely understand” its vulnerability to being brought into a chaste-laden frame.

At its core, character is a taming mechanism of persons, a civilizing construct. This way of grasping character sounds odd in relation to the way we understand the term today (that being the sum of a person’s nature or their finest qualities). But as it accords “polite society” and the normative themes of human interaction there, it is primarily an ethical drive of good repute for a corresponding conferral of benefit. “‘Polite’ society had a new kind of self-consciousness” (Taylor, 2007, p. 225). Even “religion was narrowed to moralism” under its appropriation. And just as Taylor speaks of moral sources constituting identity, Becker (1971, p. 82) says culture, by means of character, “structures a world of action,” as a “source for validating identity.” As he sees it, “First we discover who society says we are: then we build our identity on performance in that part,” “rewarded with social affirmation of our identity” “if we uphold our part in the performance.” In this sense, character as “identity is simply the measure of power and participation of the individual in the joint cultural staging of self-enhancing ceremony” (p. 100).

The Mind Power Ethic follows the Character Ethic mobilized by “social thinkers and movements that emphasized the power of mind and will as the fulcrum for success and self-improvement at a time when Americans began to turn inward in their search for the assumed realities of the American Dream” (DeVitis & Rich, p. 33). A “myriad of intellectual and practical [and pragmatic; i.e. William James] movements ... enabled Americans to mold this new world of flux and transition.” The dynamics of new thought and
possibility “extolled the new language of scientism” (p. 34) and “linked ancient idealistic platitudes of the Stoics with the modern paradigms of the intra-psychic.” This spirit of improvement, which Foucault calls “le grand renfermement,” and which Taylor (2007, p. 105) refers to as “the ethic of neo-stoicism” instigates whole new attitudes and programme’s which intensify the derision toward less productive, disorderly members of society. It was clear to see by the kinds of topics and seminars, or even the titles of books arising out of the late nineteenth century, that personal power was the term of newly felt force and its magic was to be earnestly sought held. Emphasis on rational power to “change one’s own course” would influence philosophical paradigms, business models and personal agendas in ways that were vastly different than any earlier emphasis on a flourishing moral life. Even the religious were caught up in the new drive, suggests Berger (1967), now trading the old orders of explicit dependence on God’s Providence for the improvement of their own conditions by the clever uses of reason. By means of the Mind Power Ethic and the social honour it conferred, one was seemingly a step closer to ultimate control over their own destiny.

The next wave of success ethics’ would not occur sequentially per se, but would discernibly gather up a nuclear force, sanctified from earlier times. For example, the Personality Ethic had some latency in the late nineteenth century, though by and large, it would settle most notably on American soil in the early 1900’s. “Exponents of the Personality Ethic focused on developing a charming presence and an attractive physical appearance. They tended to show less concern for manners as an expression of morals and more concern for the impression that manners make on other people. The singular objective was to get others to do what they wanted” (DeVitis & Rich, p. 49). Much of this ethic was directed at salesmen, though its influence would have great reach in “trading off old and new brands of individualism” as a whole. The master of the personality ethic is none other than the still reputed Dale Carnegie. “In 1912, he initiated a course in public speaking that by 1985 ... had graduated three million people” (p. 50). His well known How to Win Friends and Influence People, was published in 1936, and was “on the New York Times bestseller list for ten years.”

Although not yet avowedly competitive, what can be gathered from the Personality Ethic is not only that it validated the growing emphasis on achieving a better life, but that it was founded on doing so by
bettering the ‘next guy’. It was a subtle antagonism insofar as it still managed to maintain a distinctly moral flavour in its appeal to success. In its genesis, it was closer to the character ethic, but when fully matured effaced character altogether (Decker, p. xxiii). According to Decker, who sees ethical migration moving from character to personality to image (p. xxii), “the word ‘personality’ is tied to an emerging culture of consumption” and he “distinguishes between the new psychoanalytic idea of competitive personality and the older quasi-religious concept of moral character” (p. xxiii). Eventually, personhood would be fully accounted for “based on image making rather than inner calling” (p. xxv), as Weber’s theorized. The idealized visage of the impressive outer man was more becoming normative for constituted identity. Christopher Lasch (1979, p. 116) says “today, men seek the kind of approval that applauds not their actions but their personal attributes. They wish to be not as much esteemed as admired. They crave not fame but the glamour and excitement of celebrity.”

Taylor (2007) adds some sense to the otherwise murky milieu of this century of moral shift, noting the distinct religious pliability of the times. In one respect, “attempts to discipline a population, and reduce it to order, almost always had a religious component.” Yet, he notes, “at the same time, religious reforms had a public order component” (p. 104). As a result, “religion, morality and good public order were lumped together” and in their diffusion, attachments to greater moral duty would diminish. “In other words, the good order of civility, and the good order of piety ... merged and inflected each other” (p. 105).

As most observers of the time sound intensification, but at the specifically symbolic, they draw the double line beneath today’s version of what Decker calls the Ethic of Image, one that supplants character for the strategic or hollowed; and its momentum, he notes, is disturbing. Intrinsically, it was the most ardent in its commitment to the instrumental in its presumption of economic gain; that is, it sat squarely in the context of consumptive self-enlargement. So given, this later ethical play seemed the most venerable predicate of the increasing vigour en route to the fully symbolic that would later characterize a life aspired to dreams. Of such a ploy, Becker (1971) prophesy’s “if you strip away the fiction man is reduced to his basic physical existence ... like every other animal” (pp. 140-41). Therefore, in this milieu, if man stops dreaming, man loses what he
needs to justify himself as an object instrumentally *deserving* glorification (Karen Horney, 1950). Without that, he is just another animal with no cause, no reason, and no merit in anything called “the good.” Morality has no cause, and every other sense for how to live divested of ideals, has no coercive capability. Promise and personhood cease to be complicit; ontology ceases to inhabit its fierce ascetic drivenness.

Of course, since the onset of the Personality Ethic, there were great disruptions found in history, and albeit, interruptions to the dream aspiration itself. The likes of World War I and the Great Depression are noteworthy occasions, but the fact that the dream endured, and that associated dream *doctrines* – a more effective term than morality – would again flourish, underscores yet again the undying human commitment to transcendence. It was, therefore, during the 1930’s and 40’s, difficult to find a discernible ethic. In fact, as Decker (1997) and Kerr (1996) point out, there was little evidence of anything from the time that would incite people toward promise or abundance. It is a fascinating muse how in times of epistemological crisis (Ricouer, 1978), abstraction is clarified by the real, with implications on identity being fully at risk, such as we learn during 9/11 and the most recent economic downturn. Strange as it is, though the dream quest fell into disrepute in the 1930’s, it would revive and wind itself back up with an even greater self-interested zeal come the 50’s, after the “moral victory” of World War II, says Decker. In other words, when promise is reborn, moral force finds renewed traction to reconvene us in its ascetic life-orientation.

Strikingly, later versions of the American Dream part significantly from nationalistic associations (barring presidential speeches and highly seasonal national celebrations) to take on increased personal and pluralistic definitions, or what we might call plausible identities, or identities of design (Ruitenberg, 2003; Bauman, 2004, 2008). Not only then are there greater avenues for persons to take up success orientations on piles of old, but the message becomes one of increasing self-selection; for persons to value what they want to value, to become what they want to become. In this regard, it appears that the ethical programs of the past have, if nothing else, not only consolidated us in dreams, but culminated us in them; that is, not merely in reified form, but in exponential fashion they have pulled us further from the enchanted of which Weber speaks. As Blackmore (1999) reveals in *The Meme Machine*, and Ruitenberg (2003) in “designer identities,”
we ‘by reflex’ adapt to the culturally triumphant to get our own pride newly injected with applause. Surely, proving for the sake of promise still keeps us captive, but in newer and ever more intensified moral forms. By now “anyone and everyone is the hero” (Kerr, p. 11), and they can execute it in any number of culturally supplied symbolic ways. Since the entrenchment of the positivist movement, especially in the 1950’s (dream it, become it), and the increasing dominion of celebrity life (even “reality” shows) making its way into the average home since the 70’s, the field of choice and requisite moral associations are too numerous to name.

It may even be fitting, at this conspicuous point in western dream lore, to say that we have entered the age of the Protean Ethic (Lifton): the purely symbolic triumphant man who can adapt to the moment’s greatest possible favour. Inasmuch as this “self is not physical, it is symbolic,” Becker (1975, p. 31) laments where we have come in our western journey of self-devising in the abstract. It is troubling not only for what we cannot sustain of its fiction, but for the greater reason that we take little toll of the injustice it exerts on persons, now so invisible that our thickly self-aspiring cultural infection seems normal. More, the symbols we assert and lay hold of with greatest enthusiasm are less the classically virtuous variety and increasingly power-projecting alone. This is not to say that classical virtue is favourable, but to say the ‘value’ we ascribe to one another is not virtue-based at all, but an effect of how much life we can suck into our collective selves to appear enlarged. So disposed to late modern life, the good is shaped more by the virile than the virtuous, which Morey-Gaines will hereafter take up.

Summing up this broad assessment of historical narrowing in these varieties of ascetic-ascendant normativity, Negri (2003) speaks of what becomes “The Ontological Definition of the Multitude” (p. 114) to show how the idea of order is already given to violation. In an organized culture, “the multitude is the name of an immanence” for “an ontological definition of the reality that remains once the concept of ‘people’ has been freed from transcendence,” or located in a fixed moral orientation. Thus “in the hegemonic tradition of modernity, the concept of people was created” so that “a mass of individuals” mobilized to do work could make “the multitude … a class concept,” – i.e. to supply manipulations of moral sense in the interest of the order. “The multitude is in fact always productive and always in movement” and thus “exploited in
production.” In such a case, “the multitude is the concept of a potenza” and “this potenza not only seeks to expand itself, but above all it seeks to conquer a body” and “transform itself into the body of general intellect.” The ‘will of the people,’ as it were, when constrained by such forces, is effectively betrayed by Enlightenment ideals, devaluing the dignity of a person. In this way, the multitude’s absorption into an ontological schema is the erasure of persons. As a result, here is what I am waging after having traced this genealogy: “If one defines our historical transition as epochal (ontologically so), this means that the criteria and the mechanisms of measure [can be] brought into question.”


From the Virtuous to the Virile

Although the above writers effectively laid out the successive stages of promise in the American context, another way to comprehend the momentum of the dream orientation is through a direct appeal to the fiction of the times. As well as offering fresh insight into the dream through literature, Morey-Gaines (1982) offers palpable support for how our identity-morality lapsed from a heaven-shaped transcendence to more immanent varieties of ascent in the late nineteenth century. Through studies in period fiction, she captures how earlier ascendance based on virtuous living acquiesced to an increasingly ‘virile’ agency that culture demanded for realizing identity. But in addition to pinpointing the shift, her framework also brings out the growing antagonism (even violence) that gets formulated into the dream orientation to offer something of a prophetic look at the increasing violence that will culminate in this enduring fascination with transcendence.

In A Companion to the Victorian Novel (Brantlinger & Thesing, 2002), there is widespread support that the old cosmic order of embedded personhood became a thing of the past, and these two observe its occurrence being synchronous with the rise of the novel in the early 1800’s. The innovation signified several things really. Rose says “there had been, around 1800, a reading revolution, the literary counterpart of the Industrial Revolution” (p. 31) presenting “a general shift from religious to secular reading; from collective to individual reading; from intensive and repeated reading of a small cannon of texts to extensive and rapid reading of an ever increasing flow of ephemeral literature, particularly newspapers and magazines.”
Furthermore, the novel takes on an authority for guidance in everyday life for its ability to sort out complex realities of personhood in the newer social milieu. “Victorian novels … tended to be of an improving nature with a central moral lesson at heart” (Patel, 1981), where “virtue would be rewarded and wrongdoers are suitably punished.” Here, Morey-Gaines develops her study on the themes of American ascendancy from shifting backgrounds in 19th century novels, which Said (1993) saw as a background disposed to violence given the thick empire hold on popular imagination. In his chapter “Consolidated Vision” he speaks of Narrative and Social Space as, “a structure of attitude and reference” (p. 62) that deferred all social action to a controlling imaginary. The empire function, he admits, was to promote alliance with its aims, by aligning social action to imperial interests. As persons become empire, in fashions resembling its haughty ontology, he insists, life was unscrupulously structured in the violent.

Morey-Gaines draws a fitting close to these historical successions to demonstrate a moral order gone wrong. In fact, the antagonism in our dream orientation is quickly apparent, she says, if we look at the very language of frontier, both culturally and personally – where destiny is symbolized as moving forward in a way that “clears the land” and marks out one’s way. To begin her sketch, she recounts the failed optimism of a John Gardner (1976) character in October Light, “Eden’s bright apple had turned in his mouth to dust and blowing ashes / life had turned trivial minded and bitchy” (p. 95) to foreshadow the dream’s malevolent escalation. The materialistic turn – she calls ‘virile’ – toward ascendant aspiration hollows the soul and community, and as such cuts off all possibility for retreat. Moreover, because of the vagaries of its mythic complex, bound up in an indefatigably alluring language, there is no way to suspect that the dream is the derogation or nucleus of one’s demise; it is fully counter-intuitive to charge promise (without a face) for one’s descent. It is a vicious cycle at that, since remediating lost senses of belonging, ancestral and aspirational, sends us right back to yet another promise vista, only to incur once again, the same tragic fate. Whereas it was once as American to be religious as it was to breathe, she suspects of our orientation – as the lineage of this project repeats – “a birthright never entirely relinquished by the dream” (p. 5).
For Morey-Gaines, “three topics emerge as key issues for the American dream: religion, individualism, and the frontier land” (p. 5). In starting her argument, she announces irrevocably that religion gave birth to the dream, indicating that even as materialist forces took over and subdued all aspects of public life, it is not clear that it ever left, but for the nebulous shifts in language. And so, at some level, she “discusses the practical aspect of American religion as it slides into the American dream version,” observing that presidential speeches and nationalistic holidays make unmistakeable the distinct religious core in the American dream mythos. Moreover, as “religion is the quality of concern that produces an implicit dominant ontology” (p. 24), she invokes Tillich’s “ultimate concern” to regard religion and the dream inseparably, one otherwise called, in the American context, a civil religion (Linder, 1978). Whatever gives meaning and significance to a culture is its ultimate concern, its religion, says Morey-Gaines, and in the American experience the religious quality of the dream is transparent and luminous, “infusing all of culture, spilling over the confines of institutional expression, entering new language in remembrance of the old” (p. 24). Even when “the specificities of language may be lost,” metaphor takes over, and though it may transform earlier recollections, it never loses its zeal. The dream is the mythic urgency for ultimate concerns, still so fervently avowed in most all aspects of our lives. As religion once touched all of life, today’s dreaming has filled the void. But the dream is not only distinctly religious, American religion itself is now irrevocably shaped by materialist reifications of promise.

While linking the force of religion with the dream, Morey-Gaines calls attention to the spirit of individualism that founded and sustains the dream’s aura, and like Burns above, she traces beginnings to Puritan cultural resistance and pious hard work. Though it is not my intent in this inquiry to examine the specifics of rising individualism, except to pinpoint its intimate relation to the dream, it is significant that the individual she posits is foundational to the success of the new transcendent experiment in American life. Specifically, its cultural story appealed most to individual personhood and its possibility to produce wholly new ways of conceiving itself in forward vistas, like manifest destiny itself; doing so in much the same way religion informed persons early on. In short, the dream has not left religion behind, where self-referencing
once thrived in *spiritual* symbols. Religion was rather replaced by an equally mythic, but more *efficient* self-referencing reward structure, and certainly more *immediately* unifying.

The first way Morrey-Gaines brings out the parallel (and shift) is by drawing attention to attitudes surrounding land; one that in the American context is curiously associated with individuals rather than with communities. Notably, the very opportunity for a commoner to own land in the new world was unlike any other in history (Hampson, 1968). Whereas land was once for communal necessity, it sprung into discourse as personal *opportunity*. Since the beginning, land has been the persisting metaphor of opportunity driving America, and its unyielding allure relentlessly factors in *unifying social aspiration*. The promise of land is the *promised land* in new light, and in early as well as recent times, its acquisition has contained a significant moral relation: earlier, virtuous fulfilment of duty toward heavenly interests would guarantee God’s favour upon ‘the land,’ the community; and now, virile conquest by means of explicit self-interest would evoke social admiration for amassing land – favour upon ‘the person.’ What this highlights is that changing notions of personhood (identity) flow in the flux of being the most highly favoured by means of acquisition, as promise is now bound up in an increasingly ‘possessive attitude’ towards earthly things (imminent and immanent reward).

The point to be observed is that the *self* has tended to locate its place in the world relative to the most highly charged symbols of *frontier*. As the pursuit of frontier turned from fulfilment (*completing* one’s calling), to conquest (*achieving* what one conspires), ethics shifted from the virtuous to the virile, and all self-regard in-kind – since Taylor (1989) makes it intrinsic to the ethical – *follows*. Morey-Gaines reveals through a chronological sampling of American literature (Appendix, sections A/B) how identity tends toward increasingly self-interested advancement following a succession of moral-reward relations similar to these; that is, in robust ascetic-ascendant aspiration. Through a contrast of earliest (*adamic*) and later (*materialist*) forms of individualism she references two kinds of dream, two source paradigms for ontological constitution. In her undertaking, we recognize the indispensable historical relationship between the rise of the individual and this curious emergent term that has come to ubiquitously inform self-world relations in a now infinite
array of ascendant hues. And so she concludes, “The concept of individualism in the American dream may very well be one of the most crucial determinants of our future” (p. 61). But lest we misplace the emphasis, it is essentially that “the dream accounts for individualism” (p. 62) or else, what it very well means to be an individual is to exist in this particular thematic of ontology. The terms are inseparable: before dreams, there was no ‘common’ sense of self; before the self, there was no general sense of the dream. There thus appears in this ontology no other way to be than to dream.

In the frontier imagination of the great Western experiment, there have been but two players: the virtuous farmer and the virile cowboy. “In sharp contrast to an idealized image which suggests strength and domination, the farmer is consistently doomed to be a small figure” (p. 112). The unfolding story of two frontiers has left us with but one hero; and the rest? They are fated to being storyless! Our home and native land now tells a different story, one in perfect parallel to the ethical themes we’ve come to cherish. Strength has won, and the yeoman has been ‘forced’ to cede ever greater portions of his home. He has lost his title; he has, as Burns had not anticipated, lost his name. There is in the end no story left in our land. Under the new ethical vision, land is ‘left’ to us a dead thing, a hollow trophy of heroic possibility, to excite the memory of just one thing: those who are without land are without a story; those who’ve wrested it away in ‘virtues of conquest’ are entitled to write their own. By cultivating the land, we harvested a story, but now in virile ascent we till away at cultivating for ourselves a name in culture’s lexicon alone. Meanwhile, the ground beneath us lingers meaningless, and we too, its story killers, eluded of our belonging.

And Still We Dream ...

In September 2008, the world was rocked by economic shock proportional to the bludgeoning of the Great Depression. Yet a mere month later, presidential hopefuls were peddling the dream as our token way out. In fact, since the 1930’s, when the American Dream was introduced, we have in most all political campaigns been unable to escape the stale orthodoxy of its triumphant, if not utterly vacuous, national doctrine, to present the exclamation point on the long moral genealogy of this chapter. Even if prudence and
character – the original marks of individual morality – were suspect for the array of social categories they primed for person shaming, and even if mind power, personality, success and image have each in their ‘moral seasons’ left behind irrevocable debris, what is to be said of the high brow moral ‘language’ we are now given, even as material and virile ethics have utterly failed us? “Language” says a character in John Gardner’s October Light “is the last frontier” (p. 157), but as this land needs to hear restoration, even redemptive re-storying, in the midst of economic and spiritual devastation, it seems we only re-circulate words of abstraction in the hopes of an imaginary better new day. So it is that I am compelled to invoke another way of speaking (a sub-version), to voice another way of being (the living sub-text) that is otherwise than being homeless in dreams. As the prophet came to announce the ‘kingdom of God is near,’ it is ever to be said, against reigning sensibility, that promise is already “with us” … now. It is “to be” with my neighbour, speaking, summoning, evoking from the midst of the storied personage we most intimately indwell, and as truest basis for our initiation. No wonder we so desperately seek to acquire: we’ve lost all relation. Yet to keep dreaming is to sabotage the harvest; to live for fictions yet to be realized is to squander seeds already given us – in some significant manner, betraying the enchanted story we already are; and truly, the most inherent possibility for experiencing whole world relations. In the coaxing promises of culture, taught to envisage a better habitation called a self, we can by toiling for a voice more valid take up vocation anew. Here, no seeds and no land are necessary. Just work hard on an idea! Value and validation will fall from thin air. Or will it? Just maybe, it’s too good to be true after all. Or just maybe it is neither good, nor true. Have we rather purchased another deception, another zealous mysticism, except this time its violence lies unseen. If it is the case that it remains and we turn a blind eye, or mumble in acquiescence that it’s the best we can do – people really don’t matter, just the projects they ‘really’ do – we have not only accommodated war, but have altogether destroyed the human spirit; our ethos, our pathos anaesthetized. Subjectivity made strange and nullified to achieve what is strangest than who we are … what a strange allure this really is. And still … we dream!
Charles Taylor’s phenomenological identity has an intrinsically moral relation. One lives for highest things (the moral), and this in turn constitutes self-regard. We are what we value most (promise), since it most orients self-demonstration (proving) in the world. While Taylor calls this a Moral Ontology, I suggest given the evidence that late modern moral constitution is narrowly ‘ascendant,’ that Weber’s ‘ascetic personality’ and Taylor’s ‘modern identity’ meet well in what can be specifically called a Dream Ontology. Moral sources abstract of mythic-communal relations become fantastic as uplift imaginaries. By way of a syllogism, to-be becomes to-achieve, and to-achieve is conditioned by and contingent upon to-dream.

What was once the source of the most enduring and powerful human emotion, immobility, now exorts us to strive incessantly.
-- Gauchet (1997, p. 74)

Adventures in Sub-modernity: Transcendent Mythos in Modern Subjectivity

I began the last chapter reflecting on early idealism in the west, first observing obsessions with eternal promise and then tracing the genealogy of promotion themes, which Luc Ferry argues flow from religious pre-texts. With reference to Becker’s anthropology – that man is by nature self-expanding and abstracts his enlargement from culturally heroic promotion systems – and to Luc Ferry’s ontology – that the transcendent urge from the Greeks forward is salvific by nature, even intensifying over the duration of western history – I suggest that our present aspirational drives, rather than being thought disenchanted (in Weber’s sense), are more apt to be called neo-enchanted, because we are oriented in much the same way, but by purely ascendant (immanent) rather than transcendent (enchanted) means. And for this reason, just as looking beneath transcendence saw human agency animated by moral sources promoting and proving, we may ask if a look under ‘the modern’ (as ‘we’ are theorized) may yield in its sub-spaces vital considerations for further understanding self-regard in its increasingly strange relation to ethics – the good, our fullness.

Once again, it appears from what we have just read that we have not parted with old ways but advanced new forms of transcendence to confer new ideas of personhood in new moral orders but on piles of old. In short, we have found a different way to flourish in the world – by way of dreams – which I take up more theoretically in this chapter. But with this intensification of salvific urge, Morey-Gaines laments the
arrival of materialist individualism, and I accordingly, the limits of materialist theory; or what now has hegemony over the academy as a kind of secularization thesis alone for how we may know and animate what it means to be. If, as the last chapter showed, there is no way out of materialist drives to flourishing, and as I speculate here reciprocally, no way out of theorizing but in frames of materialist vision, then there is no hope for self-understanding (by means of its particular moral sourcing) apart from totalizing schemes. This is to me an intolerable border around both self-understanding and scholarly inquiry. Not only is it narrow, but utterly unethical. By extension, as it is unethical, it represses generative options for ethical possibility to move forward as it does the self it in like ways restrains.

Ethics is personhood (self-regard, or ontology), fully coterminous and indissoluble! That is to say, there are more “ways of being” and stories by which to know ourselves, in view of source valuations; and certainly, more than by dreams (sourcing reversed in forward scales). Even too in the post-modern quest for (re)identification there remains a closed ontological frame. But failing to see the subtexts of our later enchantment that modern theory cuts off, it has no language orientation (mode for speaking) other than protest and defaults no less to the ascetics of dreams, but with its own crippling (re)activations of promise. As Weber predicted, the growing value spheres, in this ascetic spirit, would only intensify agonism and alienation (exile). But as I counter-pose, we are, in the enchanted land of one another – in the singular wonderment of inter-humanity from whence moral source presumes radically other ways to be human – otherwise than dreams: ever so much more than a Dream Ontology can capably demonstrate who we are.

At the root of this inquiry is an interrogation of personhood as most commonly theorized, where my suspicion most directly contends with a failure to regard “whole personhood” as a relation between what it means to be and what it means to aspire – or larger, the question of meaningfulness as it is drawn from more than culturally available fictions. Said differently I hope to open a “wider space” for realizing what is and what moves a self; one that has come to close off meaningfulness in the strictly aspirational, without factoring the anterior story or meaning-center (myth) one more naturally inhabits. It is not enough when theorizing persons to trace the history of individualism (as a category) and posit from the outside the make up
of so called identity; that simply confers a story of objective measures, which is no story, but a false confidence. This does little to reckon with existential challenges that now emerge under the rubric of post-modern identity politics. If new identity is itself a reaction to an ‘already’ misapprehended notion of self, then we have what amounts to an ontological tautology; a misplaced redemptive ambition, if not only furthering the malaise of failed subjectivity Morey-Gaines noted. As I see it, we have ended up with nothing but a sibling rivalry built upon a faulty (and fantastically) structured notion of identity in the first place; that is, a highly localized brooding between disparate children of the same parentage – both still captured by the imagination of an entire western “progressive” order that makes a self in the advancing of its material possibilities. I suggest a truer redemption for our ‘common’ ancestral ontology is a renewing counter-voice that is fully otherwise than an ascetic-ascendant orientation altogether.

To find merit for this position, I turn to Charles Taylor’s most recent text, *The Secular Age*, and of course, his larger corpus of work, wherein he asserts that too narrow a definition of western personhood is drawn within a convenient binary (secular thesis subtraction story) which offers no fuller account of who we are; or worse, that we describe the self abstract of value structures which dispense its most native fulfilment in the world. Millard and Forsey (2006) say this of Taylor’s work in moral theory to ground this insight and set the direction for this chapter:

> We can characterize Taylor’s theory of the self in part by its opposition to mainstream philosophical, sociological, and psychological theories of identity whose reductive methodologies lead to a view of the self in substantive terms, as one object among other objects in the world. Against these views, Taylor adopts a ‘hermeneutic standpoint’ that focuses on the roles of meaning and interpretation in human understanding and self-understanding. Taylor begins instead with a notion of inescapable frameworks or ‘horizons of significance.’ (p. 184)

We need, says Taylor, to understand the whole trajectory (larger system that governs engagement) that makes the self the striving and thriving phenomenon it is – and to realize that this is locked up in the
intricacies of the *mythic*, which is much more than just observing a moral shift over time or that morality is a closed off thing in itself. Two things emerge. Our morality is not based on new *goals* (inert as they are) per se, but on new *promises* (assumed meaning). Our *version* of individualism, he confirms, is not a change, but the “result” of a story in which our most recent states of being are “a late play” in which “the” dominant text is one of a reconfigured and differently willed “self-transcendence” (Taylor, 2007, p. 530).

In Taylor’s estimation, the newest meanings for selfhood and life aspiration occur in a spirit of *immanent flourishing*, but because the self is *still* given to flourishing at all, it bears not only *a dimension* of transcendence, but “a transcendent presumption.” In other words, since the eclipse of the *spiritual age* by the *secular age* – one that posits a different concept of self – there remains a lingering drive toward promise and fulfilment, just differently conceived. Taylor (1991) draws this out by positing a Moral Ontology (pp. 9, 41, and 72; also see Millard & Forsey), and because morality and flourishing are, in his theorizing, one in the same, I inflect his theory to put at play the Dream Ontology – a transcendence-inclined sub-text that ascetically orients persons toward promise here and now, in a closed-world (immanent), self-empowered fashion – which if understood for its magnitude, might dispose creative vision for transforming cultural modalities that by totalizing personhood mitigate ethical subjectivity. For reasons stated in the earlier sections, but to enlarge the inquiry, I invoke *dream language* to pose suspicion for this lofty lexicon that otherwise eludes and conceals what dreams really are and mean in the moral sense.

Fundamentally, I rest on and bring out some of Taylor’s core themes, yet add layers to affirm and in some cases extend the chokehold he suspects. Some justification for the *term* Dream include: its elusive and mischievous relation between old world enchantment and new world success (*uplift* and *proving*); and though customary usage regards dreams as incidental, the fact of the Dream’s prolific and pervasive (even ubiquitous) influence in the everyday suggests it is more extensive and effective for understanding wider panoramas of cultural reality that impinge on identity; and finally, as usage of the dream is a distinctively modern phenomenon, and while that is already ramifying, what is more striking is that its usage correlates with the onset of individualism itself, to signify transcendent story replace/ment – that is, in the vacuum is a
residual need ‘to produce’ a newly storied future. In short, the late west signifies the demise of *mythic* stories for communal people in exchange for *fictions forward* of aspiring selves. As the replacement of religion in the west – and without, says Neitzsche, our being able to replace the god we killed – dreams take up the glory urge that religion could no longer fill. It appears that a self *needs* a dream; that is, unless it can hold onto and be morally guided by an “original” story that grounds its personhood and agency, or its larger senses of meaningful world relations.

For these reasons, and others that will begin to resonate later, offering the Dream Ontology as the orienting phenomenon of our culture frames a reflective grid that may offer new insight into the dynamics and problems of modern personhood – especially as persons increasingly self-reflect in attempt to “know” who they are. By employing this wide-ranging (or not so wide) ontological construct, we must keep in mind that we are working with an “imaginary vehicle” for reckoning with the *ascent* of the self – one that embodies a variety of elusive reflections on a changing idea of self, mostly conceived in the mid 1800’s – than attempting to ‘theorize’ the self, or to *better know* what a self is as a thing. In fact, this inquiry works against such objectification, instead trying to unearth *sources* for world relations, to learn from potential contingency how ethical fullness may be thought anew. Again, the intent is to look at *forces beneath* (mythic sub-texts) that motivate and mobilize this ascendancy, rather than to name under any favoured guise what a self *is* (as if an enclosure), or how it should be ‘thought about’ as a new category for self-reflection. That would only give it a new vehicle for a pride/shame referencing in the *posterior* (moral programs or principles), which is exactly the *spell* (cast on us, or written of us) I attempt to disturb.

Rollo May affirms the tone, citing that therapy itself is concerned with “the problems of the individuals search for myths” (p. 9). *That* the West “lost its myths was the main reason for the birth and development of psychoanalysis in the first place.” Thus, at the first level, there appears to be some crucial link between selfhood and underlying story, and a corresponding predicament due to the emission of selves from transcendent sourcing. So, it seems that between selfhood and its need for meaning, there is both a gap in understanding and application (our *arche* and *telos* made small, or else voice and vocation disjoined). To
miss this is to obscure a greater part of what it means to be a person says Taylor. May’s view is that we “cry for myths” (our existential disposition to rootedness) because there is urgency for transcendent meaning; a need to be caught up in belonging and enjoy the fullness it confers. Much of the malaise of youth today arises from a lack of belonging, and with only dreams to fill the gap, we wonder why the spirit of youth is so cold, so disenchanted. Consequently, says Bauman (2008), youth rush to identity-seeking of highly favoured, achievable, objectified kinds, suspecting it will fulfill the mythic urge. But if schooling only augments the dislodging of mythic antecedents to reproduce mere cultural conventions, the malaise can only deepen. So it is: “Here we have our present age ... bent on the extermination of myth” (Nietzsche, 2000, xxiii). Merton adds: “the discovery of America galvanized and inebriated the Western World,” and “revolutionized the thought of Western man. He was now convinced that human society was getting off to an entirely new start” (May, p. 91).

With these things in mind, we are pressed to ask if it is enough to explore the modern concept of identity in the context of more discrete social and personal realities, as if “topical” accounts of a “thing in itself” can adequately reveal this uniquely aspiring being. In contrast to the abundance of research that sets as a target this-or-that theory for a better self-knowing or agentic aim, Taylor’s unifying explanatory framework (for self-action) opens up truly deeper spaces for addressing more subjective kinds of research inquiries, which I believe opens wider spaces for ethics in general. At hand then is the fact that, in spite of a more objective idealism that boasts otherwise (what we may want a person to be, or how we may want to theorize a self and its relationships to agency), personhood is deeply tied to a mythic relation that uniquely orients it. Chris Hedges says “The modern world, religious and secular, suffers from a deep rift in its self-understanding, an ideological blindness of massive proportions” (Taylor, p. 689). And Rank (1958) is the most insistent: “The need to detach ourselves from our past while we are still living on its spiritual value creates all the human problems and social difficulties which the humanistic sciences cannot solve because they themselves are victims of this ‘historization’” (p. 65).
The Dream is the unequivocal modern term for associating our newly charted way of being to a mythical orientation – ascendance, but immanently so – as spiritually embedded beings once did. What I call the dream orientation, Taylor most formally calls “maximal demand” (p. 640), or human flourishing; in short, the will to the ultimate good, morally and experientially, to fulfil a sense of personhood by what confers the feeling of attaining ultimate value. The relation to god has waned, indeed, but the self does not stand outside a prime relation (neutral) in the world. We still move ahead, attached to some higher sense of purpose, ideal, or promise that makes life work for our good. This valuation reflects back upon the agent for their sense of personhood, their proven worth. In effect, “a dream come true” is a self having achieved its moral (self-valuing and life flourishing) demand. The mythos of the Dream Ontology is the provenness (fulfilling) of being in the most alluring (highest) cultural valuations. I now take to looking at related aspects to give a fuller sense of its function and its failure for modern self-understanding.

The Self and its Changing Moral Relation

In Sources of Self (1989), Taylor makes the case that who we are is constituted by what we value and strive toward (the good – moral – and fulfilling), and when drawing the intrinsic relationship between our highest valuations and how we regard the self, the process (irrespective of the sources) is not much different through time. We still presuppose a background moral framework “when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile” (p. 26), on which we stage our personhood. As Taylor says, “this is not grounded in the nature of being, but rather with changeable human interpretations.” To be “living within strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency” (p. 27). That is, a “qualified horizon” is not a part of, but fully underlies, our drive forward, from which we experience our sense of person. In terms of identity then, “Who am I” is equal to “what [has] crucial importance to us,” as we are “defined by the commitments” of “what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done.” Thus, “to know who you are is to be oriented in moral space ... what is good or bad, what is worth doing and not doing” (p. 28). The reason we surmise the great rupture though is because “talk about identity ... would have been incomprehensible to our forebears.” Moral
backgrounds were shared – personhood was embedded in nature, not abstracted from it – confirming that this thing called dreams (and the broader question of ontology) paralleled rising individual personhood and its need for a different kind of proving formula is a less intimate cosmos. New sources for person valuations abstract of embedded natural relations come to be symbolized in the social. But they would retain their promotional orientation, or as the above writers wage, even more fiercely so.

By extension, we see some relation between identity and identity crisis today, which is precisely a question of whether one’s life has a felt meaning orientation at all. “We are all framed by what we see as universally valid commitments” (p. 29), which is to say “we are only selves insofar as ... we seek and find an orientation to the good” (p. 34). From the referent of a moral background then, the phenomenological self will by nature try to embody the valued (ideal), and not only temporally, but as enduring occupation. “Now we see that this sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story” (p. 47). Therefore, as concerns human responsibility, as “the full definition of someone’s identity involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community” (p. 36), communities (and here I have educational ones in mind) must take serious regard of what they propose as moral goods for their members. They are in the business of making selves and for this, they have a moral responsibility. Not only then is theory mistaken to treat persons as singular beings in isolation from “valuations,” but the “moral charge” is equally applied to educational spaces: we must earnestly note that mythic valuations exceed practical ones, and that the stories we speak are the lives we embody; or else the stories we breach is the violence we wield against the sacred space of being.

Again, the aim of this chapter is twofold: one, to draw attention to the reality that theorizing the self has been insufficient because it fails to recognize the fuller ontological components that constitute personhood; and two, as a consequence, theorizing morality (optimal agency) has not only been reductive, but by excluding the ascendancy presumption (methodology) will further dichotomize the constitution of selfhood. More plainly “moral philosophy is most commonly understood to focus on the topic of right and wrong action, and the duties and obligations that follow from it” (Millard & Forsey, p. 184). But in the
expanding field of ethical subjectivity, the moral is “much more than normative claims about right and wrong acts” or merely imbuing into social fields a more creative way to be fair and just. Underlying the moral is to “also seek to understand human good and human flourishing, or the good life, as it is so often called.” Our moral frame tells us what “we ought to will” and that, as a call within being itself – one that is inclined to some sense of transcendence – is “constitutive of who and what you are.” That one has want of fullness is already an ontological predisposition.

Moral theorizing therefore fails to see that “evaluative considerations” are “crucial in the forging of our identities. Our lives are always informed by some ‘vocabulary of worth’ ... and it is fundamental to defining who we are” (Millard & Forsey, p. 187). Taylor’s leap, that I attempt to capture more fully, is that we go about this by way of poesis, or, some form self-creating, especially as the process is hidden or illusive. “Poesis, or expressivity, is for Taylor irrational, an ungovernable urge in the subject for rampant creation and fantasy” (p. 186). At root, it is as an “unbridled experimentation,” a “best account ... we can arrive at ... of who I really am” (Taylor, 1989, p. 72). As “our identities are made up of our commitments about who we think we should be or how we ought to live our lives,” we are disposed to living in a story that will generate for us a highest sense of a meaningful self. That is, this account of what it means to be a person is formidably tied to the good, to the sense of being most fully alive. But insofar as it is no longer storied, but absorbing of the social-symbolic, self-reflection will reflexively lay hold of those mobilized symbols of the good to achieve its meaning structure (identity). In The Malaise of Modernity, Taylor (1991) moves from his theory of moral sources to thoughts on modern life, insisting that as a result of the shift from identity being sourced in a transcendent story to being coaxed in more immediate forms, “we now misunderstand ourselves.” We’ve come to understand ourselves in variations of fullness that are detached from relationality and therefore falsely triumphant. Vocation has been co-opted into fantastic aspiration.

“The aspiration to fullness can be met by building something into one’s life, some pattern of higher action, or some meaning; or it can be met by connecting one’s life up with some greater reality or story.” Such “are alternative favoured descriptions, not necessarily mutually exclusive features,” and so “it would be
a mistake to think that this kind of formulation has disappeared even for unbelievers in our world.” The moral necessity (basis for agency) may be seen in this way: “for those who espouse the honour ethic ... the aspiration is to glory, or at least to avoid shame and dishonour” (p. 44). Therefore, a fundamental drive for what we come to value in more intensified social fields – and on which we build and fortify our identity – is that “we have to be rightly placed in relation to the good.” Once again, if an underlying transcendent disposition is not appreciated as fundamental in our identity constructs, then understanding the self as an idea – without its moral and transcendent sourcing – will be entirely misled. If we do not understand our source valuations, we do not know the self; so too, as source valuations are removed from the relational, we know ourselves abstract of what sources us. “There are people whose lives are torn apart by this,” says Taylor, and so the healing intent of this research is to draw attention to the fuller ways of disclosing subjectivity, so our own sense of the good and self-regard can be freed from cultural modalities of shame. There is an ‘existential effect’ when on one hand pressure is exerted in our culture to change our self-valuations, or on the other, when it derides existing ones, leading respectively to alienation or shame. The overtones are hugely ethical.

To pose a counter-moment, Mechling (2007) offers prophetic insight from Musil’s novel, The Man Without Qualities which he takes up to highlight self-understanding in the categories of culture. He speaks of another condition which stirs awareness, “another reality that haunts the reality of everyday life,” attending in particular to how Musil informed Peter Berger’s forays in narrative after he struggled with social constructions of our hardened ways of knowing. Mechling (2007) says the “other condition” is “glimpsed as it were, through the opening of this reality’s crumbling structures” (p. 359-360). What fascinated Berger is how the “other condition” can be rendered “as a plausible enclave of reality” – a new portal – for seeing “society as a fiction.” His novels seek “phenomenological suspensions of the ‘natural attitude’” (p. 361), so that we can behold anew the “sense that society is both fictitious and oppressive” (p. 362). Having done as much as any sociologist to bring “an existential sense of the precariousness of social reality” to our attention, Berger looks to ways we cut off understanding “using knowledge” to impose limits on agency. Society as a stage develops “moral alibis” to “prevent authentic existence” (p. 363). As we look to theory itself, and to ways a new secular man wants to think (or dream) existence, we have licence for suspicion and more the case
if what we conceal is a “more ethically fulfilling” way of flourishing in the world on account of strategic ‘cultural’ ambitions.

Berger’s sociological and literary brilliance, dedicated to deconstructing the errors of the dream of naturalism, offers plausibility for contesting what is more often constitutive of our agency than what we are told is mere biological noise. As Taylor himself says at the end of his most recent book, this does not mean we have to become religious, but we must at a minimum come to terms with the pulse that makes the urge to transcendence endure. There are many ways to regard the transcendent urge, but the fact that one is most dominant in modern life should become disturbing at some level. Whether we ourselves have self-interest in a promoting scheme is not mine to reproach, but as much as we impose it as the vocational orientation is highly unethical if Taylor is even partly right. If for other reasons it is our commitment to deny it, then we are not “good” theorists at all, and this has ethical implications on another level. Either way, we cannot miss the point that if we do espouse ontologies in the ascendant, which incur at some level the complications issued above, it is our ethical duty to understand our own moral sourcing before taking our assumptions into the spaces of the vulnerable life-worlds we teach.

The Secular Age: A New Kind of Flourishing

For children ardent for some desperate glory, The old lie.  
-- Wilfred Owen (1921)

What I hope to have done above is offer a background rationale for the Dream Ontology, which as a multi-layered force or imaginary vehicle has come to regulate the identity and agency of persons in the modern age. In order to further the point, it was necessary to bring under suspicion, or offer warrant for, three key elements that place us in the moment we stand: one, that theory has not succeeded at offering wide enough insight into what constitutes modern personhood – by rigid objectification and dichotomy, or by often hiding salient realities; two, that identity is inextricably related to “the good” (notions of value and fullness) and we cannot think of personhood outside of an ontology of fullness seeking, at least not at this
stage of modern life; and three, that in the secular age, the notion of fullness (sources wherein selves locate their sense of being) has shifted from cosmic concern to concerns in the immediate. Here I will, in light of these insights, reflect on the contemporary expressions of flourishing to further develop urgency for its narrowing self-regard. Again, if we fail to have a deeper understanding of what constitutes persons in their everyday relations, then we fail to achieve more hopeful solutions to ethical problems that are consonant with working out identity in daily life. I am compelled to think that poorly thought ontology will lead to poorly practiced science. David Berlinski (2009) takes this up in The Devil’s Delusion, as Michael Polanyi (1981) did with his ground-breaking work in The Logic of Liberty.

The best place to begin, when looking at the implications of strict secularity on identity – its force upon furthering the Dream Ontology – is at secularity itself. “A secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable” (Taylor, 2007, p. 18), and as a rule gives all power to persons to produce their own advancement formulas in the highest they can conceive. Effectively, it rigidifies the proving plane, deepening the problem of ontology, by achieving the “comprehension of being” (Levinas, 1996, p. 2) through “a destiny that reigns in essence” (p. 29) in what Levinas calls “secular transcendence” (p. 27) through what Reckling calls a “secular righteousness” (p. 153), and Brueggemann (2008) notes no less religiously: “the dream is a salvation oracle.” Appelbaum (1996) succinctly brings together the religious nature of self-demonstration (proving) vis-à-vis transcendence in immanence (the dream) which Taylor will in this section bring out. “To disclose corresponds essence” (p. 111) and “as the idealist tendency … focuses attention on becoming manifest,” with what Derrida calls “self-presence,” “preoccupation with ontological disclosure” (p. xiii) not only renders “disclosure as a form of promise” (p. 111) but by so doing locks us in an “ontological trance.” It shuts down “somatic initiation” that would otherwise have us beholden to the more wondrous enchanted space of life. What I believe Taylor is staging is the case whereby true “transcendence refuses immanence” (Levinas, 1996, p. 60). The problem with secular transcendence, by way of dreams, is that what it makes most real, by making us work and think so hard, is our all out “ontological deficiency” (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 55). As we therefore note human flourishing to so pervasively undergird secular life – never minding for a moment that to have higher purpose for what is merely biological is absurd – let’s spend
a little time exploring how this notion of flourishing still manifests in secular life. Getting a sense for what grounds our ontology in its final manifestation is called for if we hope to reflect on identity more ethically.

Although many in the secular age are sceptical of the urge to transcend, specifically because it carries with it a distinctly spiritual connotation, the idea of flourishing may more poignantly capture the will-to-transcend, which is more the urgency at hand. Transcendence here is not used as a destination but as a compulsion, and so it is important to note the underlying force or phenomenon that we are beholden to in taking regard of promise in the first place. Therefore, flourishing as an idea may best accord the idea of the dream, because it takes up, at some level, transcendent orientation. We experience moments that are bigger than what we can talk about, wherein a sense of fullness surpasses ordinary expression. Experienced in the negative, we feel deprived of the larger wonder and ‘know’ there is more than the moment in which we stand. “The sense of fullness comes in an experience which unsettles and breaks through our ordinary sense of being in the world, with its familiar objects, activities and reference points” (Taylor, 2007, p. 5). We have experiences which “help us to situate a place of fullness, to which we orient ourselves morally and spiritually,” and “they are often unsettling and enigmatic ... unclear, confused, lacunary.” These, says Taylor, “define a direction to our lives” much more than we are aware, which cannot be ignored if it does in some fundamental way give us ‘senses’ of possibility and meaningfulness. To say otherwise is to make it noise.

We want a fully satisfying life, and the common person expresses it as if a “whole sense of fullness can find an adequate object” (p. 7), much like it once did in a deific figure. “In other words, there is something he aspires to beyond where he is at.” As such, we’ve not “yet fully conquered the nostalgia for something transcendent” and in fact know these as “lived conditions, not just as theories” (p. 8), but feel them in ways knowledge cannot bear. Because that is the case, we cannot theorize the transcendent, but neither should we silence it simply because it fails conventional knowing methods. Any attempt to access it or discount it by way of theory is suspect. We just know it is there! And so long as we are human but still imagine there is more, it will always just be there. A secular age has not proven to muzzle its voice, but merely to shift the attentions. “Every person and every society lives with or by some conception(s) of what
human flourishing is: what constitutes a fulfilled life? What makes life really worth living? What would we most admire people for?” (p. 16). To prove its reach, views on a fulfilling life “are codified, sometimes in philosophical theories, sometimes in moral codes, sometimes in religious practices and devotion.” Beyond the power of the known – which our scientific hubris cannot tolerate – is a more powerful force to be known.

No matter the case, whether “thy will be done” or “let humans flourish” (p. 17), says Taylor, they are in their constitutive force one in the same. There is then a certain absurdity about modern life. What will become apparent is that we are mis-dreaming when we miss out on a relation to more enchanted human and world engagement, even with religious injunctions aside. What we see through Taylor is that dreaming in irrelation is the great absurdity (and failure) of modern life. The dream is at the start declarative of a grand syn/thesis.

What then separates the old from the new is that flourishing once occurred in intimate relations and does so now in immediacies of everyday life. Flourishing and enchantment were coterminous when tied to a relational center, and so it “becomes abstract” (and an abstract preoccupation) in a world now disenchanted, separate and ascendant. Taylor says the key difference is “a shift in the understanding of what I call ‘fullness,’ between a condition in which our highest spiritual and moral aspirations point us inescapably to God, one might say, make no sense without God, to one in which they can be related to a host of different sources” (p. 26). He is more generous than I am though, for I do not see the fact of dreaming in the limits of cultural symbols differentiating at all. It is rather the case that to dream is to be modern. Thus, following a reconceived sense of being in the modern world, in what Markus and Kitiyama (1991) call “independent self construal,” transcendence in our new age occurs in “alternative construals of fullness” (Taylor, 2007, p. 27), which is to say, transcendence simply longs for new objects of belonging; new object/ifications that trade in social currencies. Because we are interpretive beings, says Taylor, in Modern Social Imaginaries, we draw meaning from the varieties available in daily social exchanges, but the ones that reside in our culture are particularly immediate, short of reference to the beyond we in fact seek; and sadly, are referenced by what is increasingly virtual, abstract and inane (Bauman, 2008).
Simply stated, “a crucial condition for this [shift] was a new sense of the self and its place in the cosmos: not open and porous and vulnerable ... but what I want to call ‘buffered.’” Taylor says though “it took more than disenchantment to produce the buffered self; it was also necessary to have confidence in our own powers of moral ordering” (p. 27). Increasingly, western culture found “power to create moral order in one’s life ... the active capacity to shape and fashion our world, natural and social,” by appealing to idea(l)s. Now, we choose our ideal: all “meanings ... are ‘within’ us, in the sense that they depend on the way we have been ‘programmed’ or ‘wired up’ inside” (p. 31); to become what we want. In a sarcastic moment, Taylor calls them “convincing thoughts ... produced by generating the right brain states,” at least as the materialist might view it. “But in the enchanted world, meanings are not in the mind.” As such “the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not at all clearly drawn.” Rather, “the enchanted world, in contrast to our own universe of buffered selves and ‘minds,’ shows a perplexing absence of certain boundaries which seem to us essential” (p. 33). Still today, if openly admitted, we have trouble separating the boundary of a dream from a reality, so too a fictitious self from real personhood. The line between the real and the abstract, as well as the heart and the head is something we want to believe is discernible, but clearly we are conflicted, as the majority of people admit to Gallup every year about belief in some higher power. This is a problem.

At this point, we need to ensure that the many terms at play are not getting lost on the larger theme that individuals in the modern age still orient to fullness, but that the source of fullness has shifted from a transcendent relation to an ascendant drive; a move that has taken us from an ontology that is deity-centred to one that is dream-centred. Instead of drawing from a stor(i)ed past to comprehend fullness in its dynamic, we make a story forward and achieve for ourselves a destiny that holds static possibility (certitude once and for all). Both ontologies are rooted in transcendence, signifying desire to flourish beyond the natural and biological. One is completed relationally – whereby persons are ‘embedded’ in an enchanted (spirit charged) cosmos – while the other, extruded from nature, without any contingent relation to matter itself, so it appears, is entirely self-directing. Because the former self is embedded in a spirit world, it is porous, as Taylor calls it; and whereas the later is extracted from and separate from nature (in a disenchanted world), it is buffered,
closed off. What I hope to compel is that a more relational, enchanted ontological disposition can anticipate the recuperation of an ethics that holds wider (than dreams) and more meaningful (than morals) possibility.

Flourishing in Immanence: The Agonies of Promise in the Enclosures of Instrumental Agency

Let me sum up what I am attempting to bring together for a theoretical frame. Taylor starts with a Moral Ontology (1989) being foundational to what it means to be human. He ends with transcendence being indispensible to modern life (2007). Linking the two, we arrive at an ontological variant that is conditioned by an irrepressible yearning to rise (Weber’s proving for providence; Becker’s cultural promotion systems), a Dream Ontology when the moral gravity is most irrepressibly constitutive of dreams. With the moral made clear in the earlier sections, what we witness in this chapter is what centers it for moderns – to see if there is a cluster motivation, a galvanizing of sensibility that characterizes daily life, which can exert enough force to cause people to significantly concede who they are and what they allow to be their ambitions. As such, I am speculating that in as much as the life we have waged as moderns has been somewhat universally given to a consumptive (Bauman), expansive (Becker), acquisitive (Weber), empire (Brueggemann) orientation, each casting a long shadow upon most as both a short term and long term pre-occupation, we could call the drive any number of things, but the most honest attribution for what it means to be modern in this sense is brought together by the Dream. All bear a transcendence presumption. All aspire to variable kinds of glory (Horney). All are instrumental (moral) in so doing. Let me, therefore, pull together some of its final expressions from Taylor before turning to a sceptical word; and should we still find agreement with at least some of this order of things, then the next chapter offers some alarming insights on the agonies of what it means to be modern in this narrow ontological frame.

The great gap between the moral and the dream – an infinite gap if there ever was one – that makes the moral aspect of the dream so imperceptible is given by Taylor in this way: because we have in modern life “turned to the new philosophies of self-affirmation” but have done so “without having to identify their ontic commitments” (p. 400), we have no “historical ontology” (Hacking) by which to account for where we
stand (and neither to dispel the forces that make this order proliferate). Levinas (1996) adds that, “absurdity consists … in the isolation of innumerable meanings, in an absence of a sense that orients them” (p. 45). As we are split in the first sense – between what conditions our action (transcendence) and the action we take up habitually in our vocations (promise) – so too then will we be split in all senses of being! Is this why we cannot see, we may surmise. Who, for example, knows where dreams come from, and if not that, how a self began to be fashioned by them. Perhaps that is why this inquiry may itself seem odd. After all, who on earth would care to deride dreams? But the fact remains, we do not “see” them as morally constituting.

By way of example, Taylor lays out in his *Modern Social Imaginaries* that as “a” value amasses increasing social capital (finds growing favour for its ability to confer promise), it not only eclipses the boundary that formerly made it ‘one among many,’ but by working its way into and eventually absorbing all others – by becoming “the value” – it is over time no longer distinguishable as “a” value at all, but is thought to be natural. As such, it functions increasingly beneath consciousness (when there is less, and eventually no, resistance to it), to become the controlling social imaginary. Accordingly, the triumphant value becomes ubiquitous such that all other values it trumped fade into irrelevance and no longer have the ability to affect sensibility or inform social practice. The stronger the value and the greater its currency becomes, the less likely or potent will be any counter-story, any “other/wise” by which people can source fullness possibility.

In our unique western world, it is likely – as we learned in Chapter 2 and 3 – that the success of the naturalized social order we know today in dreams is the consolidation of earliest shared affinities between Christian and cultural ideals of the good, which closely aligned in objectified behaviour (proving), or else a kind of self-demonstration that went increasingly external. Still, promise remains. But increasingly, it is given form. As a form of promise makes more ‘concrete’ the possibilities for moderns, it will increasingly secrete loyalties that take us from the substantial promise we already are; that is, to make us less. Here, precariously, “the value” that now fully constitutes our social imaginary is so pervasive an objectification of dreams that even when the sub-text we are – the first words that reside in us – speaks, we’ve no recourse to heed its lexicon. As Bai (2009) says it, “we’ve lost the ability to hear nature” (p. 135), in this case our own,
even as all of nature irrevocably calls to us. Taylor effectively brings together the vast space between that still small voice within that we know but cannot pronounce and the ontological stricture that keeps it shut out; and while so doing registers some of the strongest words in his vast scholarship.

“We can feel this emptiness in the everyday, but it also comes out with particular force in what should be the crucial moments of life: birth, marriage, death” (p. 309). We want to mark these points in our lives and we, unknowingly, “have always done this by linking these moments up with the transcedent, the highest, the holy, the sacred. But enclosure in the immanent leaves a hole here,” presenting the “malaise of immanence,” making out of thin air, if you will, higher senses of purpose, to assure ourselves that we are somehow flourishing in the rigid monotonies of our closed mechanistic world. “If we fail to sense this, it is because we are cut off, divided from ourselves,” because we have been made, offers Bai (2009), perceptually bankrupt in the moral literacies that govern our world engagement. We hear it in music, see it in art and feel it in dramas that we ineffably relate to in recurring ways. “Is that all there is?” (p. 311) echoes from age to gender to ethnicity in great varieties: a silent universal plea from a people feeling cut off from more. But where “‘transcendence’ is, once again in an important sense and paradoxically, immanent,” this cry will never be understood as such, and therefore never be satiated, so long as the yearning for dreams intensifies, and requisitely, the moral order only thickens. “Whether in a given individual case this functions more as a rationalization or as an animating ideal is neither here nor there; the ideal itself becomes a crucial facilitating factor” (p. 474). It becomes us, ontologically speaking. Such an ontological trajectory can only mean one thing. Either we lose ourselves entirely – a fate that Bauman predicts – or we protest most naturally (we cry out) from the truest places that summon, but without attempt to replace the promise vacuum. Our voice is disenchantment’s sub-text, this being the pre-text to prophetic urgency.

Immanent transcendence is all about what David Brooks (2000) calls “higher selfishness,” “about making sure you get the most out of yourself” (Taylor, 2007, p. 477). Taylor’s concern with transcendence in immanence, therefore, approximates my own: that the driving force of the Dream Ontology is ‘a possible world of identity’ that too easily turns into misappropriation of a more ‘inter-connected’ good. First, because
the currency is so strong – as forceful as in earlier religious times – “fragments of the ideal, selectively acted on, remain powerful” (p. 478), but so much so that “in holding on to our now reduced goals, we will hide from ourselves the dilemmas involved.” Instead, “choice as a prime value” “trades on the favourable resonances” “to invoke the sense that there are no barriers to my desires,” and so it is tempting “to see the aspiration to self-expression exclusively in the light of consumer choice” (p. 480). That one can locate the source and even choose their own way out of whatever encloses them sounds compelling – as compelling as the quest for authenticity did before Taylor (in Chapter 2) exposed the absurdity insofar as it commissioned the taking leave of being itself – but as it is a moral order that we in the first place never chose to be in, then the very prospect of choice as our best means for escaping the maladies of the dream’s moral modality does not inspire much confidence. In this sense, and most unexpectedly, Bernstein (2001) says of Adorno’s thoughts on this moral drift in the modern age: dreams are but “shadows” of a “reductive naturalism” (p. 138) and because they are elusive and the substance that initiates the shadow remains hidden, we best take cue from what comes most out of nature.

The transcendence of immanence (if you’ll forgive the paradox) reduces us (and our moral height) to a cultural obsession with expressivism, and so morally, incurs its associated ascetic demand. “I am displaying my style to all of you, and in this, I am responding to your self-display, even as you will respond to mine” (Taylor, 2007, p. 481). Henceforth, “the space of fashion is one in which we sustain a language together of signs and meanings, which is constantly changing” (see Ruitenbergen, 2003; Bauman, 2004). That is to say, with the Dream Ontology, there is less and less a ground or anchor for this form of self-manifesting, and so, exponential are the fictions that remove us from any sense of good at all. “It matters to each one of us as we act that the others are there, as witness of what we are doing, and thus as co-determiners of the meaning of our actions.” The moral force or good, as horrific as it sounds, is only that I maintain the pride of face, avoid shame at all costs, and keep my face, as it were, in the shallows of Greek apatheia, “a face to the world that announces: ‘I am not ephemeral, look at what went into me, what represents me, what justifies me.’” (Becker, 1971, p. 150) never minding its “twist[ing] the world in some way to try to accord it with [our] fantasies, wishes, fears” (p. 151).
“Self-authorization is ... an axiomatic feature of modernity” (p. 588) but its coherence, says Taylor, “verges on fantasy” (p. 589). Such “narratives of self-authorization, when examined more closely, are far from self-evident; and yet their assuming axiomatic status in the thinking of many people, is one facet of a powerful and widespread “Closed World System,” as he calls it, imposing a closed spin on the immanent frame we all share.” “How can one account for the specific force of creative agency, or ethical demands, or for the power of artistic experience, without speaking in terms of some transcendent being or force which interpellates us” (p. 597)? One is tempted to answer satirically, as Dostoyevsky’s Solovyov: “Man descends from the apes, therefore we must love each other.” There are too many gaps between what is and what we sense to be, too many gaps we cannot in our closed rationality fill. At the end, the burden is too strong. We must ask: “can ... experience be made sense of in an ontology excluding the transcendent” (p. 606)? “The crucial debate in modern culture turns not just on rival notions of fullness, but on conceptions of our ethical predicament” (p. 604).

If we doubt that the immanent still bears transcendent presumption, we need only look to an obituary Richard Dawkins (2003) wrote for a friend who requested “to be interred by burying beetles as food for their larvae” (p. 173-174). One can ask, is there not a tone of transcendence in Dawkins’ own ‘atheistic appeal’ on behalf of his friend? “I will escape. No worm for me, or sordid fly ... I will at last buzz from the soil like bees out of a nest – indeed, buzz louder than bees, almost like a swarm of motor bikes. I shall be borne, beetle by flying beetle, out into the Brazilian wilderness beneath the stars.” Sounds like triumph in death to me, even a spirit of coy against what life took? Self-verification and its exuberance confirm a Dream Ontology even at death. Such an expression epitomizes “Immanent Ontology” in the key of an ignored transcendence as Taylor refers it, but when juxtaposed with one more devoutly spiritual does not appear all that different except for source attributions. As this is the case, it seems from his account that “the challenge ... to find a non-theistic register in which to respond to them, without impoverishment” (p. 607) is as urgent as any explanatory burden that falls on all spiritual communities to authenticate their daring claims. In raising the matter, I impose no favour for one or malice against another. My point is rather to seek a partnership for greater senses
of being, for the disturbance of narrowed ontology, for a more honourable way to “re-enchant” the ethical, for inter-human possibility.

“The question arises here of what ontology can underpin our moral commitments, which for most of us constitute a crucial ‘fulfilment’ ... that is a mode of the higher, of fullness which we are called on to realize” (p. 607). Whatever it is, “the complaint is that our rational, formal power of abstract thinking, and of positing moral rules, has dominated and suppressed feeling, the demands of bodily existence, the concrete form and the beautiful” (p. 609). And either we fail to reckon with the costs or we answer it in a therapeutic register: “what was supposed to enhance our dignity has reduced it.” (p. 620). As “exclusive humanism tends toward a rejection of the aspiration to transcendence; and yet it has trouble setting it aside altogether [it creates] the problematic attempt to find an ‘internal transcendence’” (p. 656) – a way to give hope without ground, myth or story. Sounds like a dream to me. In the meantime it exerts the cruel force of empire while earnestly seeking to maintain its chokehold over deepest human sensibilities.

“The tragic irony is that the higher the sense of potential, the more grievously real people fall short” (p. 697). As “a lofty humanism posits high standards of self-worth, and a magnificent goal to strive towards,” what is often the more inexcusable truth is that “the higher the flight, the greater the potential fall” (p. 699). We now live in imagined societies, not real, says Benedict Anderson (1983), where “peculiar to the modern world is the rise of an outlook where the single reality giving meaning ... is a narrative of human self-realization” (quoted in Taylor, p. 716). A self realized in what? In dreams! In the end, “the yearning for eternity reflects an ethical insight” making the matter profusely ontological. Such as that is obscured, “the cost is a denial of the issue of meaning itself” (p. 723). As “something more presses in” we push further against our subjectivity only to magnify and live out imaginary appropriations. Sure, we can remain rational, disambiguated, and stoic towards the wonder of life, keeping ourselves deluded in the composures of dreams, or we can find alternate ways to approach who we are in life’s fuller, all too compelling, natural wooing.
A Humanist Critique of Transcendence

To round out the argument above, which posits a highly spiritual relation to the Dream Ontology, it is only courteous to spend a moment on the matter from a specifically secular humanist lens. Ferry (2005) begins with the observation that “our imagination sometimes constructs to compensate for the frustrations inflicted on us by real life,” (p. 1) and “to have a need to fantasize is to concede ... unhappiness in a real world that characteristically resists our desires” (p. 3). In fact, Ferry’s text offers a much more penetrating look into the failed ways we’ve answered the question, ‘what is the good life,’ which I correspond with failed ways we’ve thought personhood and agency. He wants to distinguish the good life and wisdom (ancients) from social success and recognition, or the “culture of performance” (p. 4). In short, Ferry is concerned that the good life today has bogged down into reaction, and is a mere reflex to a competitive society. “We bathe in the compensations of the daydream” because we clamour for recognition in a sea of competition, to affirm the salvific ‘proving thesis’ at some level. That is, he confirms transcendent predisposition.

As well as substantiating the earlier dialogues on the late virtues of character and success (DeVitis & Rich, Burns, Gaines and Decker), his take on transcendence as compensatory re-iterates Taylor’s sense that we have an urge to top-up meaning due to some of the complexities of the modern age. The link he makes between the good life and the dream isn’t much different: Success is “the ultimate goal of our thoughts and aspirations” (p. 5); in the process, “we must not underestimate the formidable meanders of our unconscious.” Caustically, he says “Let us admit it: the contemporary world, for reasons that should not be eluded, incites us to daydreams at every turn,” even to “present daydreams as a model for life.” The dream for Ferry too is pervasive. Quite consumingly, “everything combines today to make success – success for its own sake – an absolute ideal in all imaginable domains.” If anything, Ferry widens the relation between identity, morality, and transcendence, and their practical manifestation in a success ethic, each of which I am suggesting can be knitted into a specifically modern ontology that is increasingly universal and uncontested, less and less real, and yet refuses to be fully understood as such.
He asks with similar concern, is “it not inadequate, even fallacious, as a standard for evaluating an existence as a whole?” Can this drive, as it appears on the outside alone, or as it seems objective as a thing in itself, be enough of a container for measuring the circumference of our personhood and purpose? Especially so if success considerations are not a once in awhile event, but in fact our magnum opus, the full measure of who we are. To this, he most sceptically asks,

Is it not both naive and mistaken to insist on thinking about life in terms of a category better suited for a year-end exam than for the development of a good life? Isn’t it enormously pretentious to think that we can make a success of our lives ... especially when we consider all the things in our existence that do not depend upon us, but rather on the hazards of birth, the pure contingency of events, or the blind strokes of fortune and misfortune? (p. 5)

We “grant too much of a starring role to our unhappy ego. Or to a free will that plays only a bit part in the drama?” “The fact remains, though, that illusions of social ‘success’ and the fantasies surrounding the myth of the self-made man ... are so forceful today that they seem to occupy all available space, to the point of obscuring the horizon” (p. 6). Dreams as moral force are ubiquitous! In some measure of ethical urgency, he says “under cover of inviting us freely to action and to self-fulfilment, is not the ideal of ‘success,’ to which both our daydreams and the contemporary cult of performance give so much weight and set at such a high price, fast taking shape as a new tyranny.”

What Ferry wants to put in tension is whether success is transcendence in a modern register or whether there is another ‘more honest kind’ of flourishing. In earlier time, “the question of the good life has been primarily a search for a transcendent principle ... that would permit human beings to appreciate the value of their singular existence.” The transcendent principle gave shape to life based on some “suprahuman criterion.” More lately “man has become the alpha and omega of human existence, and the transcendences of times gone by seem illusory” (p. 7). But, as such, “it is a change worth taking the time to comprehend” (p. 8), to learn what it means for our lives. His concern is as much for the narrowing as it is about pretensions. “For a materialist, who values consistency, the figures of transcendence … in the name of which anyone claims to
give meaning to life, remain *religious by their very nature;* “a ‘beyond’ that secretly continues to animate a
desperate aspiration for meaning and a desire for the absolute” (p. 54). For Ferry, like Nietzsche “the enemy
is transcendence” (p. 55), that is, “the notion of the ideal, not its particular contents, that raises problems.” He
wants to break out of this poverty of content/edness. “To be sure, they killed God, but their audacity stopped
halfway. They retreated before the frightening consequences.” If we went all the way, “a deconstruction
taken to the limit that would ultimately have made clear ‘the absurdity of everything that happens’” (p. 58).
And for this project, there is an equally absurd approach to life. Freedom to dream becomes an oxymoron:

The desire for ‘freedom of the will’ in the superlative metaphysical sense, which still holds
sway, unfortunately, in the minds of the half-educated; the desire to bear the entire and
ultimate responsibility for one’s actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors,
chance, and society, involves nothing less than to be precisely this *causa sui.*

And so, in a broad stroke that underscores the agonistic nature of this ascetic enterprising, we come
full circle. “On the reactive side, then, we find the will to truth in all its forms, a purpose hostile to the
impulses at play in the world of the senses” (p. 63). But, “aesthetic conflicts are never decided in terms of
‘wrong’ and ‘right;’ they always leave open.” Effectively, unless we regard the real *as* wonder, we are stuck
disenchanted in the moral, where *being* and its flourishing are limited to *imagining* and *managing* a way out,
respectively dreaming a promise and doing a work to try to attain it.

*Summary Thoughts on this Persisting Transcendent Orientation*

*Defeat is heaven’s success . . . I am my destiny.*  
— Thoreau (1958)

By now, I hope it has become quite apparent that we still live with a deeply mythic sense of “the
good” – with a relentlessly salvific drive – except it has shifted from the communal to the individual and into
a wholly immanent way of experiencing fullest meaningfulness (transcendence). The result is an *ascendant*
stance, with retention of an *ascetic* apparatus from a prior epoch; I have even suggested they are intensified.
To make the case and cast it into a lexicon that speaks to its ubiquity in everyday life, I am suggesting that we retained metaphysics, but absorbed it in the strictly anthropologic. In other words, the transcendent yearning that remains and the ascendant exercises that exploit its energy occasion what I surmise is a Dream Ontology. The infusion of mystery (enchanted) that still conditions our valuations yet gets dispensed in the immanent ( disenchanting) constitutes a unique kind of flourishing in the western world. I’m suggesting we live in two worlds, divided ( transcendently disposed; disenchanting in apprehending life); and all the while it is unknown to us. It is not just that we are caught between a public or a private life, but a mythic life and a mediated one, whose implications need to be more closely understood if we are to more ethically reconcile our voice and vocation, especially as we entertain the matter in educational spaces.

My speculation is that the dream splits us into two “senses” of being, but with the imperious pathos of culture overshadowing and shaming the more subjective, thus derogating the fully ethical. As we are on one hand idealist and on the other fully immanent, the dream leaves us dichotomized without managing to answer the full dimensionality of our human predicaments. We pretend rather to maintain a seamless life trajectory toward ultimate goodness and fulfilment, and we take no heed of the ways enchantment informs the matter or how the human other we’ve cast aside nourishes a richer life and a greater possibility for our human fullness. Instead, in such limits as we’re given, we carve a fictitious forward trajectory, a fantastical creation of who we are (and must be) to meet its demands. Or, says Ferry (2005) “Taking this view we may better understand in what sense the illusions of transcendence constitute the ultimate form of human error” (p. 66). Fromm (1962) adds reinforcement. Of this fictitious character, “the demand to give up the illusions ... is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions” (p. 17). Are we prepared to go there?

From Nietzsche, Ferry adds, “all evaluation is made from a definite perspective; that of the preservation of the individual, a community, a race, a state, a church, a faith, a culture” (p. 72). As that is the case, “what is needed is to move back from the conscious to the unconscious, from the determined to the determinant, from an illusory autonomy to a real heteronomy, from the reified ‘product’ to the ‘mode of production,’ from the final result that, like our glass bubble, believes itself ‘independent’ to the process of
which it is merely the induced effect” (p. 73). We need “historical ontology” (Hacking) to do “away with the illusions of a humanity that strives to transcend the ‘material reality’ (history, life, impulses) within which it is wholly immersed.” Though I do not hereafter follow the redress given by anti-humanists customarily given by the likes of Ferry and Chowers, I do find Nietzsche’s demarcation of the problem prudent in terms of what must be honestly unravelled to disclose how our urges to power take the shape they do. Indeed, as Nietzsche laments, “God is dead ... How shall we comfort ourselves.” In dreams, we say, where we become god.

One of the important contributions in Ferry’s work is to show how Nietzsche was after all, not inclined against life itself, but how we interpret life as a transcendence project; a salvation scheme. The only way to see this possibility in Nietzsche, however, is to get out of the stance of idealism from within which his philosophy is often thought. Despite his intent to destroy “the theoria that aims at truth, the praxis that tends to moral rectitude, the soteriology that promises us that we will be saved one day” (Ferry, 2005, p. 78), he sought an “authentic knowledge” and “a higher truth” than idolatrous kinds settled for. No consolation exists, though, in the way he wants to know, just as for Levinas the truly free is found only in a life at risk. Likely then, our a/version to efface dreams lies here: “error (faith in the ideal) is not blindness, error is cowardice.”

There is a good to life, if that is what we wish to call it, but it lives in “a more joyous and higher form of knowledge,” a fuller relation to knowing, perhaps even by an exposure to what is by nature risky all along – offering one insight, perhaps, into why we’ve worked so hard to tame the world we occupy. We’ve simply made heroism small. At this founding, my inquiry comes to fruition, to posit disconsolation, and to challenge “the false only in the name of higher verities, and that true morality [makes] fun of morality only in order to arrive at a way of thinking differently about the value and meaning of existence, not to do away with such questions.” I registered at the outset an urgency to press toward “a truth that is even ‘higher’ than the one with which philosophers and savants had been satisfied.” Such implores “an ethical demand for courage ... and intellectual honesty” (Ferry, p. 79) about such matters as have herein been discussed. More still, “this ethical demand [is] the ultimate criterion, not just one criterion among others.” There is therefore, no ground or natural source for idealism, only “a more profound truth than that of ideas” (p. 81); a truth that eludes and
can never be re/presented, a truth that lives deep in originary being and inter-relationality with one another, a truth of being that is “human enough” to live in first dispositions, in the latencies of care, call and cry – those given comports in which reside the true sub-verse to the pre-texts and pretentions of dreams.
CHAPTER 5 – NEW TRANSCENDENCE AND ITS FAILING GRADE FOR SELF-KNOWING

Ernest Becker brings the matter of a self realized in dreams to its logical end. By living in forward abstractions of personhood, we real-ize ourselves in a self-double (an outside-of-itself narrowed self-construct to imagine our lives more glorious). But as the self by aspiring to fictive possibility synthetic with ontic panaceas is more likely to realize agony more than ascent, I for the sake of the ethical counter-pose ‘the double’ with Levinas’ ‘substitution.’ Whereas the human is most truly enchanted and the inter-human, thus, the most latent source of promise (trust/truth), human fullness is most realized in syn/aesthetic relation to the Other, or as Abram posits, in dreaming from behind (anteri or), mutually storied.

Deprive the average human being of his life-lie, and you rob him of his happiness.

-- Ibsen (1918, p. 103)

Knowing Ourselves in Fashions Grand

Once again, this work explores self-knowing in the confines of Being-in-Dreams, to address in particular how sourcing moral uplift in its ontological limit fails the fuller height of subjectivity. In earlier chapters, I explored the relation between cultural promotion systems and self-regard historically, noting how the continuing though evolved urge to transcend the ordinary will influence, for the most part, how we take up our agency in the world. Significantly, self-knowing (identity) invariably follows the morally preset, and such as it derives from the controlling master narratives of culture, persons are boxed into its ascetic schemes alone to achieve their ascendancy. My concern in this chapter is to put the matter to the practical test; to explore how well this version of reality has held up the ethical demand – or else, is our height encumbered by the imperative of dreams. After Nietzsche, we might ask what our cultural theoria, praxis and soteriology are really up to these days. In places of schooling, in particular, are they passing or failing ... the subject. This is a big question, and so it needs approaching from many sides. To be seen in the account that follows, from the many sides viewed, is that knowing ourselves in grand fashion has not only failed our height, but reflexively, what it means to be ... responsible, relative to ethical criteria admitted all along: the human Other. Rather than achieving more height, it seems we’ve inherited a new problem, a new religiously enslaved subject, in moral orders no less liberating after all. Here is a sober look at what this alluring yet stifling ontology costs:
the betrayal, repression and disenchanting of our fuller subjectivity. In the most dramatic expression, we have not only taken leave of who we are, we have murdered the gift of being.

**Becker on Transcendence Today: The Manufacture of Evil**

Modern “cultures are fundamentally and basically styles of heroic death denial,” promoting “different types of transcendence” to “absorb human fears” (Becker, 1975, p. 125). In this sense, “the study of society becomes the revelation of the lie.” Becker speaks strongly about this reality because as an anthropologist who studied so called barbaric people he was confounded by how modern life was really much more savage. His project: “the assessment of how high are the costs of this lie,” attributing to modern transcendence an intrinsic quality of evil. My take from Becker, through the lens of Taylor above, is that the Dream’s continuation of the human uplift phenomenon is a stylized transcendence scheme, shaped by more alluring and advanced heroic vistas. In this respect, stylized schemes merely produce new appearances of empowerment consistent with what Ruitenber (2003) calls “stylized identities,” and that Bauman (2008) adds are “perpetually in statu nascendi” (p. 18) – ever in rebirth – following the “liminal drift” (p. 39) of our “frontier spirit” virtual culture (p. 66), which he says in the end, only produces “internal exile.” The so called great achievement of the modern age, to be shown in this chapter, is how the new empire of dreams produces the definitive exile of its members.

Following Ferry’s inquisition in the earlier chapter, Becker (1975) regards our transcendence projects as “alternative ideals” which absorb wholly new kinds of life and death fears into whole new orders for life engagement. New fears – now more social than cosmic – mean new ways to surmount problems, new ways to order life against death. “The continuity since the Enlightenment ... is all there as plain as day” (pp. 123-24), he says, to emit “precisely those secular forms which the traditional religious dogmas of redemption now take.” To put it boldly, “Secular societies are lies.” By ignoring what are beneath motivations of ascent (gaining the good) and expiation (ridding the undesirable), and converting their tensile energies into new kinds of ascetic burden, modern societies mobilize grand deceptions that pitch triumph over felt limitation,
altogether denying its transcendent generativity. Instead, we naturalize the situation, and thus, the associated moral order. We might say, after David Loy’s insight below, that we have naturalized *lack*, thereby initiating a moral program for its eradication. In a different frame, Bauman makes the same attribution in his most recent book *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* If life and persons are seen intrinsically lacking, then the consumptive drive to eradicate only intensifies. Worse, as Weber has shown and Levinas will later revile against, ethics views the human person as *low* — why our height programs so burden. Their *project* is to rid us of our *nature*, to eradicate or extradite who we are. At the start, dreams pit us against life.

Especially in the Western context, lack encourages us to live in the future. Lack makes us live in time. We are preoccupied with the future because we think that’s when our lack is going to be resolved. We think our projects in the present are so important because it is only by acting on them now that they can be fulfilled, and it is only by fulfilling them that we can resolve our sense of lack. (Loy, 2005)

Curiously, identity referenced in the *future* departs little if at all from identity referenced by a future *heavenly* hope. Both, in fact, have thick associated doctrines. The difference lies in what mediates the stylized and selfized (if you’ll forgive the neologism) versions. Where we may have once transferred hope onto a deity, we now transfer it into an idealized person or vista; from our natural animality into an abstraction of glory (which Karen Horney’s insight will later reveal). “Transference is the only ideality that man has” (Becker, 1975, p. 157), and as such, any future vision in any sense of promise is *still* a spiritual reflex — a yearning for more — that Nietzsche insists is our peril. “Transference to a powerful other takes care of the overwhelmingness of the universe” (p. 132). So, to make the dream immediate and assuring, something other-than-self but viewed grand-in-itself will be objectified as a hope to be attained. Bauman (2008) adds even more weight to the point. It is not simply that we are made future minded in obsessive fashion, but the “uglification of yesterday’s needs” (p. 148) produces “playing down, derogation, [and] ridicule” of the past. We must “push the memory off the stage and clear the site for ‘new beginnings.’” In what he assures us is a new ascetic formula “*Being* ahead is the sole trustworthy recipe for the style pack’s
acceptance, while *staying* ahead is the only way to make the supply of respect … comfortably ample and continuous” (p. 144). The implication: all that is behind and all that is within is useless and deplorable. Our inheritance, our stories, our being, are entirely suspect. We haven’t the slightest misgivings on the other that our faith in forward fictions is replete with its own kinds of tyranny, danger and disappointment.

“What counts is to give the people the self-expansion in righteousness that they need” (Becker, 1975, p. 132). It does not matter if it is real or fictional, good or bad. What matters is that it works, that it produces the advance of practical reality and its projects of calculated hope. As long as we still need salvation – as this endeavour is utterly progressive – the cultural agent that maintains himself in his given story is repugnant. He must, to be morally prudent, elevate himself in kind, at the same speed as others, or else be left behind to suffer human uglification. What the scheme of modern transcendence does more than anything else is commit a man to progressive action, to be ceaselessly busy, to have the *feeling* he is moving forward – the narcotic of ortho-praxy, says Ellul (1965) and which Bauman (2008) in other lexicon calls the *single* modern ethic. And so, from the array of dreams given, one must “find a meaning for his life, some kind of larger scheme into which he fits” (Becker, 1975, p. 3), in defiance of the story already existentially and ancestrally begotten to. Vocation and voice must cease to be his own.

In our newly stylized transcendent schemes we hold out before the commoner “the various types of things that the person can expand into” (p. 120). Lifton (1970) calls this “‘experiential transcendence’ – the intense experience of a feeling or state which, for a little while anyway, eliminates the problem of time and death.” Such felt “heroic victory over human limitation” Furrow and Wagener (2003) wage, and Bauman (2008) like them, is especially enforced in the vulnerable locations of youth. Where else is the future so self immortalizing than in youth culture, in the fantastical representations of possibility dealt by its media, and the particular “consumption of cool” that ceaselessly captures the imagination of its would be heroes? It would not be unfair to say that today’s youth are the quintessential dreamers, placing all hope in the right action scheme that will guarantee for them a dream-laden path to glory. It is no less a stretch to speculate that
In short, Becker’s take on our modern obsession with styles of transcendence stems from the fact that “human drivenness is religious” (p. 3), and that “culture is in this sense ‘supernatural’” (p. 4). Culture benefits by giving its subjects opportunities to create “the immortal self,” “an alter-organism which is more durable and powerful than the one nature endowed [them] with.” Of course “everything cultural is fabricated … not given by physical nature” in the first place. So it follows “that the symbolic denial of mortality is a figment of the imagination for flesh and blood organisms.” Man “is a living fantasy for which there is no scientific evidence so far.” But here’s the rub: “seeking to avoid evil” – which is what the dream pre-occupation imagines its progress will achieve – it is in fact “responsible for bringing more evil into the world than organisms could ever do merely exercising their digestive tracts” (p. 5). In being what we aren’t by nature, we neither live content to life’s immediacies. “Men seek to preserve their immortality rather than their lives” (p. 65), thus spending their whole lives as willing slaves to cultural fictions that tell them they can be more. We have designed the modern ‘social’ world in such a [moral] way that “the dread of insignificance” is the only definable evil – never minding that all others are derivative of our drivenness to exhaust it.

Although there has always been with us the “principle of immortality striving” (p. 64), today’s “ideologies of immortality” are “unashamedly secular” (p. 71). We have “a new Faustian pursuit of immortality through one’s own acts, his own works, his own discovery of truth … a kind of secular-humanist immortality based on the gifts of the individual. Instead of having one’s hero chieftain … society would now become the breeding ground for the development of as many heroes as possible.” As this new reality fortifies contemporary dreamscape, it invokes a new cosmic problem: “All power is in essence power to deny mortality.” Heaved into ascetic overdrive, we reach for whatever efficacy we can exploit to fulfil the morality project that endears us. “Power means power to increase oneself, to change one’s natural situation from smallness, helplessness, finitude, to one of bigness, control, durability, importance. It is power to manipulate
physical and social reality” (p. 81). The burden is monstrous, and its illusion certainly no less daunting, as “one imagines that he does indeed have full control over his destiny” (p. 84). Through it all, we stand at the crossroads of paradox, the nexus of a profound curiosity – between faith and the fantastical – and in the breeding ground of masterful deceptions. Overall, how can this kind of self-regard be anything but fictional when “man’s desire is to become other than what he is” (p. 15). These are the greater realities we are required to take up in confronting the ethical, when the phantom reality that has been made for us fails to have us realize our fullest humanity otherwise.

*The Necessity of Illusion in Self Advancement*

For life is at the start a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened at finding himself face to face with this terrible reality, and tries to cover it over with a certain fantasy, where everything is clear. It does not worry him that his ideas are not true. (Ortega y Gasset, p. 156-157)

In 1988, psychologists Taylor and Brown introduced an incredulous idea that “positive well being requires a good dose of illusion,” opposing “decades of psychological wisdom” that “having established contact with reality was a hallmark of mental health” (p. 193). In our intellectual tradition “accurate reality testing” has been the sole measure of sound human perception, yet deciphering what constitutes reality is increasingly under suspicion, leaving us to wonder at what soundness is all. Their work came under severe attack, even dividing the profession, especially since its very art had best claimed to know the human. But their conclusion, that “a substantial amount of research was testifying to the prevalence of illusion in normal human cognition,” has unsettled the possibilities that self-knowing can even be achieved. The suggestion: that the “dreaming human” may be the archetype of what it means to be after all. The presence of illusion in our perception was nothing new to early moderns (Vattimo, 1991).
Nietzsche for one called self confidence an illusion, a cover, designed to mislead people for the sake of personal gain (Thiselton, 1995); William James (1902) called “healthy-mindedness” mere “ignoring and forgetting,” and an abundance of research attests to the everyday practices of “self-enhancement” (Swann et. al., 1989), “cognitive narrowing” (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991), “narcissism” and other illusion-based strategies to cope in an increasingly complex social world. My interest is not to deride the function of illusion in human experience, but to steal some of its confidence for the life it takes from us under pretences that we can achieve more-of-being in its lofty facade. That is, we cannot strip the moral from being, as material theories suspect we can. In short, if personal worth is guaranteed by personal projects derived from a life-denying collective vision, then aren’t dreams themselves just as well-suited to the tradition of anxiety reducing mechanisms? Or, our whole lives, by imputation? A good case for study by mental health experts, I would suspect, but that no one takes it on is disturbing to say the least – that we haven’t any alternative cultural stories only adds to the perplexity. David Loy hints that the dream, while promising freedom from anxiety, is its very production. It is thus both assurance and loss: “an endless chase after a mirage that recedes as we approach.”

Twenty years after Taylor and Brown (1988), Becker and Marecek (2008) pose no differently the trouble with the rampant illusion that we factor into self-regard to manage everyday living. Their concern, quite similar to the departures in philosophic theory mentioned in an earlier chapter, is that psychology as a field has “given in” to this predilection for grandness. Taking their cue from a textbook written by Seligman (2000) that called for “a revolutionary reorientation of the field, one that would make individual flourishing the primary object” (p. 1767), they cite the far-fetchedness of this new fascination with happiness at any cost. Is it any nobler than Logical Atomism was in philosophy during the 1920’s – if all atoms can be quantified for calculating the sum of existence, then surely positivist psychologist’s can similarly imagine life perfection in a happiness code. Case in point: Frederickson and Losada (2005) sought “a set of ‘mathematical equations’ that provide precise formulas for the relationship between positive emotion and human flourishing” (p. 1768). Even Time Magazine (Wallis, 2005) devoted forty pages to the ‘Science of Happiness’ with the bottom line being a set of therapies and technologies that can transport our simple
humanity into ecstatic bliss. But what Becker and Marecek believe is that in this scientific quest, other things ‘costly’ and ‘latent of power-interests’ are seriously overlooked. In other words, they pose a counter-story to dreams.

First, “American individualism is a core but unacknowledged ideology that pervades ... ideas about persons, experience and human action” (p. 1768). In this sense, it is an ontology that “infuses the conceptions of the self and the notions of self-improvement.” But second, the individual is not in control of this happiness field that psychologists are so optimistic can be ‘attained.’ The person simply “inflects the knowledge-producing processes [social institutions] espouse and authorize ... influencing which interpretations are privileged.” And so, all along, happiness is not really intended to be laid hold of, but is a convenient and elusive force-field controlled by public institutions to keep specific cultural (moral) orientations activated with its own self-advancing aims concealed. Happiness, therefore, is not a right of the many, but a reward for the well-deserving, for those who fulfill their cultural role more admirably.

The concern of Becker and Marecek is that psychologists doing this kind of theory are naive to the realities of other forces at play in the happiness/dream saga. Furthermore, “positive psychologists frequently fail to take note of their disguised ideology” (p. 1770), or that in the surrounds of their own speculations, pre-interested cultural realities “reproduce and strengthen cultural ideologies and societal structures of domination” (p. 1769). Research is already in the interest of, and serving, a greater cultural cause of oppression. It therefore follows that theory does not pre-exist other intentions, so what can it really tell us except what it wants to make present. To Berlinski (2009), “theory determines the evidence and not the other way around” (p. 50). Theories and selves are no different; they are both stuck in a monologic, salvific reality, including and excluding at will, being conditioned only by facts they want to take as real. Similar to theory,

The self does not pre-exist the forms of its social recognition; it is a heterogeneous and shifting resultant of the social expectations targeted upon it, the social duties accorded it, the norms according to which it is judged ... the forms of self-inspection inculcated in it, the
languages according to which it is spoken about and about which it learns to account for itself in thought and speech. (Rose, 1990, p. 218)

The idea of self-grandeur is of course more farcical given MacIntyre’s (1999) charge that “human identity is primarily bodily, and therefore only animal” (p. 8) and so any grand identity objectified only heightens the irony. Eagleton (2003) adds how base is our so called high mindedness when our coping amid a sea of change is as adaptive as animals: “human identities are shucked off, reshuffled, tried on for size, tilted at a roguish angle and flamboyantly paraded along the catwalks of social life” (p. 164). We run wild toward “tricks of reason” that will sustain us, all the while forgetting who we are, unmindful of our source motivations for doing so. Boethius, the daring Roman, offers us the classically prophetic: “In other living creatures ignorance of self is nature; in man it is vice.” Indeed, the mentally ill challenge our own idea of sanity given their “inability to accept the standardized cultural denials” (p. 63). To Foucault mental health is cultural after all, and he might if he were alive, have much to say if he crossed into the domain of dreams. In the extreme sense, Dreams thus drive us to madness in styles of sane pretension. As Kierkegaard said, the normal cultural man is sick; “there is such a thing as fictitious health” (p. 156). I now take the Dream Ontology to its fullest expression – the self-made double. The point is that the glory object we estimate will host our highest hope and freedom will in the end be our disembodiment realized.

Glory Promised: Freedom Failed

What is truth but to live for an idea?
-- Kierkegaard (2002, p. 48)

The Western problem of ontology entails “a break between an intelligible and an empirical subject, resulting in a problematic doubling of the self-relating subject,” says Habermas (1987, p. 265). In the conditions elaborated on earlier, Taylor alleged “the subject sets out on a search for new foundations of its identity” (p. 123) which Natasha Levinson (1997) adds is fully elusive; the truth about ourselves cannot be prefigured, or embodied in a static form of identity. Bauman certainly makes that clear in today’s ever
changing identity chase. All the ambition does, says Levinson is “disclose a deep cultural desire to escape rather than confront contingency.” And so now, having a rough understanding that we are faced with an immortal quest to *escape*, or “the need to get out of oneself,” says Levinas (2003, p. 55), we turn to some sense of its method, or ‘how’ we take on the *symbolic* to imagine we are more *real* – with the space between the two being highlighted by Becker as the modern illusion. My concern is not to mock the matter – although that would certainly be deserved – but rather to show how taking leave of who we are in the cultural fabrications given produces an unmistakeable violence against what it means to be human. So long as it is aided and abetted in the higher commands of culture, I dare say that we are promoting a form of evil in the world.

Between insufficiency and grandness is no small gap, and so I pose that between Being and the Dream, there is reason to interrogate ‘how’ we cover up the space in seemingly good *practice*. It is here where some who deal with illusion and denial point to a transfer of consciousness into a tolerable double (as Habermas’ quote anticipates), a second culturally extolled symbolic self to *stand in the place* of what we are *taught* is intolerable inside who we are. This double becomes, as it were, our moral source, and this section speak directly to that occasion. Whereas Weber identified the practice of *social proving* as taking a stance of defiance against the world, which initiates as well a taking leave of undesirable personhood (both intrinsically violent), Peters – whose book on *Sin* rings alarm at how we justify modern behaviours in the name of progress – gives some sense of how the matters transacts.

We embark on a path of self-delusion, painting a picture of ourselves as immortal. In this delusionary state, beset by rising frustration and rage, we may seek to create our own immortality by stealing life from others. Whether through such trivial habits as harboring resentments and gossiping about our boss or through more dramatic acts of aggression … we steal the lifeblood of others in a misguided attempt to escape the anxiety caused by the prospect of our own non-being. (p. 32)
To poke fun at this irony between glory estimated and freedom failed, Levinas (1979) says “Ontology, which reduces the Other to the same, promotes freedom – the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other” (p. 42). Reciprocally, ‘social proving’ is the proving of my unbearableness such that I need to be one with the order. Ontology in the limits of a double – however dreamed up or whatever extent we practice symbolic personhood – is to not only limit freedom and height then, it is to kill the Other that we are – our wonder under suspicion. Levinas’ concern is that the very exercise – of knowing being in any limit – is the ethical betrayal of being itself. So, what does it mean to be reduced to the same? The suggestion is that in a world of symbolic limit, dreaming in either a greater senses (supposedly making us insane) or minor (what is considered a normal amount of illusion) will limit personhood in the promise of being more. In quest of “innumerable lives” where being “wants to get out of itself” (Levinas, 2003, p. 55) in terms of culture’s “numerous possibilities [that] will never be realized,” we produce our very own ultimate forgetting.

Otto Rank (1958) discovered after studying Freud “the appreciation of the influence ideologies exert upon human behaviour in determining destinies of people” (p. 11). To invoke the ascetic, “Ideologies … determined the individual’s efforts to develop beyond himself or to create something beyond his natural given self” (italics added). Brown (1959) offers the implication: “The essence of society is repression of the individual, and the essence of the individual is repression of himself” (p. 3). To render ourselves known, “the conscious self is the organ of adaptation to the environment and to the culture” (p. 9) and governs toward the most esteemed social currencies. The psychoanalytic tradition tells us “there are in a human being purposes of which he knows nothing, involuntary purposes” (p. 4). Since “the dynamic relation between the conscious and the unconscious life is one of conflict,” persons will value the settling of these dilemmas or felt disharmonies in ways that are socially venerated. Sources of self now culturally dispensed confine existence to demonstration, even to make one’s own recognition equivalent in all senses to the Same – that is, to lose oneself in the proving forces most venerable.
Ironically and tragically, man is “most ‘dignified’ when he shows a certain obliviousness to his fate,” and “is most ‘free’ when he lives in secure dependency on power around him, when he is least in possession of himself” (Becker, 1973, p. 24). Subjectivity and ethics become a nuisance, even a threat. Otherness must be killed! As “all our meanings are built into us from the outside” (p. 48), “autonomous from the body” (Brown, p. 204), from who we are by nature, “our whole world of right and wrong, good and bad, our name, precisely who we are, is grafted into us” (Becker, 1973, p. 48). The act functions as a “great defense,” or a “vital lie” so the cultural agent can “feel that he controls his life and his death, that he really does live and act as a willful and free individual, that he has a unique and self-fashioned identity” (p. 55). It is “ironic the lie … dooms us to a life that is never really ours” (p. 56). We rather take up a double, in the cloning devices of culture (Chowers, 2004, p. 1-3), to play at an imaginary game of grandeur in a made up reality.

“This basic dishonesty about oneself and one’s whole situation” (p. 55) confines us to life in a “self-forgetful way, ignorant of what energies we really draw on, of the kind of life we have fashioned in order to live securely” (italics added). That our source valuations are not our own does not matter to us, presumably because ethics in this milieu is itself confined to expansive causes – and as much as the act of expansion appears natural in culture, it seems only … natural that we should rise or take leave of who we are. And so the man of culture is “driven away from himself, from self-knowledge, self-reflection. He is driven toward things that support the lie” (p. 56). In such a contest, “Life sucks us up into standardized activities,” marking out “paths to which we conform, to which we shape ourselves” (p. 82). As concerns the natural appearance and effect of it all “fantasy … is built into his world too solidly” (p. 78), in which case “man forgets himself” (p. 79). In conformity to this barrage of ascetic drives “the fantastical carries him away from himself and therewith prevents him from returning to himself” (Kierkegaard, 1989, p. 163). Only the God-relation can achieve the infinity of subjectivity reminds Kierkegaard, and to Levinas, only the Other can bear the traces of the divine. But in the Dream-relation we favour, man subsists on “the symbols of his society” in which case he “lives on borrowed powers” unmindful that while doing so he is “using the cultural morality as the vehicle for his own immortality” (p. 120). And in turn, he is being ab/used.
As Becker wants a science to engage cultural heroism, and I petition for counter-stories, Horney (1991) advocates that the social sciences pay more attention to the human search for glory if they are to better serve human understanding. In her compelling chapter *The Search for Glory*, she alleges a basic formulation for human growth in the modern age. In the drive to enlarge, there is unseen risk: to “lose one’s soul and somehow not miss its absence” (p. 5). Rubin and Steinfeld, who write the *Forward*, wage that “she makes us question ‘the search for glory’” (p. 2), and our greater reliance on fullness illusions they suspect bear stringently on moral issues (p. 8). In fact, in the distinctly moral, Horney says “if we fritter away our lives enslaved to the phantom of glory for reasons unknown to ourselves” (p. 30), such a “need for indiscriminate supremacy makes [us] indifferent to truth, whether concerning self, others, or facts.”

The search for glory is fundamentally ascetic. As Horney renders it, the individual spends “the major part of his energies on the task of moulding himself, by a rigid system of inner dictates, into a being of absolute perfection. For nothing short of godlike perfection can fulfill his idealized image of himself and satisfy his pride in the exalted attributes” (p. 13). Once again, we run into “the fundamental problem of morality – that of man’s desire, drive or religious obligation to attain perfection” (p. 14). By the effect of living for the purely objective, whose tyranny of shame is otherwise dealt for non-attained self objectification, “the individual alienated from himself needs something that will give him a hold, a feeling of identity … a feeling of power and significance” (p. 21). “Gradually and unconsciously, the imagination sets to work and creates in his mind an *idealized* image of himself. In this process, he endows himself with unlimited powers and with exalted faculties; he becomes a hero, a genius, a supreme lover, a saint, a god” (p. 22). If there are any “shortcomings or flaws” they “are always dimmed out or retouched,” or to Rank, who I turn to momentarily, they are, by the very project of making our self-double, altogether slain.

The search for glory is not a harmless private world fiction; it is a mass cultural phenomenon, suggest Bauman (2008) and Ruitenberg (2003). In fact, since the rise of “expressive individualism,” which Taylor attributes is only 200 years old, our experiment with project still seems to be working itself out. Horney insists this ideal is precisely *for* action in the world – essentially ascetic – making its moral fabric
once again salient. “The individual wants to – or, rather, is driven to – express himself. And this now means he wants to express his idealized self, to prove it in action” (p. 24). Beneath the search for glory then, in the sub/modern staging of the dream, whose silent ambition “infiltrates his aspirations, his goals, his conduct of life, and his relations to others.” “Self-idealization inevitably grows into a more comprehensive drive which I suggest calling by a name appropriate to its nature and its dimension: the search for glory” (p. 25). As “it becomes the barely disguised mainspring of life” (p. 28), its implications for moral inquiry should become obvious.

First, “the most striking characteristic in the search for glory” (p. 34) is that the actor is “loath to recognize limitations.” And so, “there is no limit to the heights to which his imagination can soar.” “Through his mental capacities, man has the faculty to reach beyond himself” (p. 37), but here is the rub: “Because the main goal is the attainment of glory, he becomes uninterested in the process of learning.” It is a strictly strategic matter. “He loses in the process his interest in truth.” “His emphasis shifts from being to appearing,” and being so given to this fashion of living – strategically insulated from seeing otherwise – he is at some level exposed to being the Faustian character, “losing his soul – his real self” (p. 39). Where Horney spends most of her energies in the ambition, Rank goes beneath to implicate how idealizing converts the subject into an all out self-double. Segue from Horney: “The last element in the search for glory, more destructive than the others, is the drive toward vindictive triumph. Its chief aim is to put others to shame” (p. 27). As with the tricks alluded to above, “much more frequently the drive toward a vindictive triumph is hidden. Indeed, because of its destructive nature, it is the most hidden element in the search for glory” (p. 28). The result: “Chronic is the need to defeat and humiliate others by rising above them.” Rank sounds a more emphatic tone: the ideal of glory is to stage a death of the subject, to wipe out once and for all any self-world engagement that contains residues of Other, of what is fundamentally unknowable, deprived of being known in glorious objective frame of reference.

As persons “become intelligible only from their supernatural meaning” (Rank, p. 62), it is by the fact that we dream where “we ourselves are just as superstitious as the primitive; in fact, are still primitive
beneath the surface” (p. 63). “What we really have in common with our remote ancestors is a spiritual, not a primitive self, and this we cannot afford to admit because we pride ourselves on living on a purely rational plane.” We can use “culture” as a substitutionary word because the supernatural is “basically identical with what we call ‘culture,’ which is after all made up of things non-existent in nature.” Culture is relentlessly transcendent, says Taylor, and so the Dream is the way it keeps its inhabitants enchanted with heaven being no more. It is “built up to maintain man’s supernatural plan of living … to guarantee his self-perpetuation.” In this way, culture offers us “a consoling illusion” (p. 64) ascetic and ascendant “concrete symbols of his need for immortalization.” Only, “man creates culture by changing natural conditions in order to maintain his spiritual self.” To this end, Rank offers a fitting insight that brings together the reaches of this project, of history, of man’s heroic quest in the transcendently grand.

The need to detach ourselves from our past while we are still living on its spiritual value creates all the human problems and social difficulties which the humanistic sciences cannot solve because they themselves are victims of this historicization. (p. 65)

Now informed on the split modes of being that Habermas led with last section, it is beneficial to note how psychoanalysis sees the modern schismatic self managing these two senses of personhood which the Dream Ontology most assuredly initiates in its stringent moral order. “Of all the prostheses that mark the history of the body, the double is doubtless the oldest,” says Baudrillard, (1994). “Everyone can dream, and must have dreamed his whole life, of a perfect duplication or multiplication of his being, but such copies only have the power of dreams” (p 95). In the studies of Rank, “originally, the double was an identical self … promising personal survival in the future” (p. 81) but “ultimately, he became an opposing self.” “The theme of the double as a symbol of modern man’s split personality found expression in the tragic fate of the hero” (p. 85). Rank’s solution is instructive on two levels. First, “The psychology of the Self is to be found in the Other” (p. 290). The relational is endemic to self formation. Second, we have to get past rational ideologies and accept “the fundamental irrationality of the human being and life in general with allowance for its dynamic functioning in human behaviour” (p. 290-291). So long as “the two opposing personalities … assert
their difference … it is bound to produce violent reactions.” Such as we can make peace with these matters, as I attempt in the following chapter, there exists for Rank, “personal and social capacity for betterment” (p. 291). It is not a curse to have to live with the Other; but rather we make it one when the collective is conditioned to national and mutual advancement: ontology given in/for advance.

Insofar as our Western conception of Being is ontological, we are not so disposed to exploring reality as we are to appropriating it from an already crafted strongly evaluated (Taylor) or even glory seeking (Horney) identity. It is with this ascetic cause “in mind” that a self bound by ontology in dreams has need to take up a self-double, to prove itself in favoured form. As the preeminent social construct for relinquishing subjective anxiety in the obsession to-become, its function is to absorb all self-knowing into a master objectified image. The double represents the achievement of the self’s ontological ideal, condensing existence into a foundation and a goal, an ascetic plan and a glorious destiny. It may be true that we are disturbed by narrow-mindedness, by zealots who camp out on and pitch life-narrowing themes, yet little do we suspect that being so given to reality, we in our daily lives are fundamentalists no less rigidifying the task of living and boiling life down to a basic equation. The farce is almost unbearable when viewed under the boast that we moderns are free. The notion of the double offers a keen expression for how the dream operates in the thick dominions of the social agon to wage some level of control over the uncertain and disfavoured within. Understood mostly as a technique in 19th century literature, it portrayed a character as acting against his dreaded condition to maintain in the external world composure and control. What we can also draw upon from chapter three is the increasing pressure exerted upon single persons to take up a cause in social life, and to do so in a socially approved fashion. For a short background on the insight, see Appendix 1, Section C.

The Double Life: Exchanging Life for Death by Killing Who we Are

I turn from novels in early modern experience to movies of a more recent social orienting to note the continuation of our struggle to reconcile axial orders of everyday social exchange with our own felt insufficiency, and to highlight troubling effects of our relative disregard. In The Fight Club (Ziskin &
Fincher, 1999), we are able to witness some approximation of how cultural attentions directed heroic wage death against the natural personality in the corridors of everyday life. Tyler represents the form that Jack is to be at par with: Jack’s double, or what Giesen (p. 17) calls the triumphant embodiment of identity; our personal heroic stance! He is, for all intents and purposes, Jack’s idealized controlling personae who throughout the film antagonizes Jack’s loathed “otherness.” With one hand, Tyler gestures care with a symbol of affection, and with the other, he signifies murder with a pistol to the mouth of Jack. In the midst, Jack has no voice. He is caught between self love and hate, the hero and the insufficient. His existence is muted by the force that has command over him, the alluring and indomitable Tyler, the projection of Jack’s imagined fullness not yet realized. At the very beginning is implied a question: Does Jack know Tyler; or, does he only know what afflicts him and wants a way out of; to be different? Arguably, the film reckons with what we know, how we know and to what end we know … and want to be known, in triumph. Implied is the question whether we aware of what commands our response, the sources we draw upon in the sea of influence that evokes our affections.

Fight Club represents the private waging of war against the part of ourselves that is silenced under the gun (command) of everyday affairs; a gun that tells us our civil and predictable actions are for our good, with a smile on its face. In what occurs through the movie as a dream sequence, of which Jack is unaware, there lies an overriding urge to redeem an unadventurous life, to have worth and meaning in an otherwise dull and pointless existence. Villainous authorities in Jack’s life (job, boss, father, culture, capitalism, love) intersect with dream moments to reflect Jack’s own feelings of ineptitude in their gaze. His powerlessness through it all is symbolized by fear of testicular cancer: manhood lost! The insidious progression from being impotent, undesirable and overtly controlled by life at work to the passionate and heroic visage that trumps former self-loathing is cast as a heroic pilgrimage to destiny. To be a self in this scheme means that the double must live, and certainly not the other within, which from the vantage of the triumphant second self a stultified, unknowable, unpredictable, and messy thing. It is here where the gun gets turned: the Other (felt insufficiency) within turns on itself for its very demise. The double has “taught us” to hate who we are by nature. In effect, I have killed my other, and in turn, the other beyond. In the contemporary agon, you the
other, who remind of otherness under the command of the Same (tyranny), are to be scapegoated and charged as my deprivation, and so you must die.

In *The Culture of Narcissism*, Lasch (1978) interprets the underlying drive of the present age as one of “annihilating boredom” (p. 11), “to cultivate a more vivid experience,” “to feel alive.” But where exactly do we pinpoint our boredom and where do we feel dead if something has been killed to live? The term *vivid* brings color to mind, but its origin from the French *vive* (meaning life) draws an ironic relation with Lasch observes and what the Fight Club posits about sur/vival! Do we love life after all, or have we, so disposed to the *agon* in our midst, fallen in love with killing? In fact, Mensch will shortly make the case that the process of modern self-making is a self-affecting phenomenon, but is initiated on account of first hating itself (the other within). How is it we can be full of self-affection and self-loathing at once? Here lies the mystery not of nature, but of modern culture. While the experience of the everyday pretends to nourish the *vivial*, confusing where we place our *cares* in the living, it comes back as death, sur/vivial. What occurs in the interplay is that through the projection of a self that is mysteriously inscribed from the outside, contemporary life gets off the hook and we become our *own* target of accusation, lest we become the failed player on life’s all too visible stage. In all “this tempestuous relationship leads to the destruction of oneself by the other through violence” (Slotkin, p. 564). Otto Rank calls this pathological self love: hand on the shoulder, gun in the mouth. We are divided, yet self-interested; disaffected but attached. Driven by the urge to preserve of our most *alive* self (the version we imagine will flourish), we strike out at the other within, and in the composite denial of life and who we are by nature, our most sacred flourishing is undeniably compromised.

The sur/vivial pose just may be, I suspect, the final manifestation of Max Weber’s *disenchanted* personality. In one sense, he is completely immanent and heroic – it is entirely up to him to give promise to his future by means of a most strategic, and unmistakeably heroic, execution of his life – and in the other sense, he is the culmination of *agonistic* personhood, having set himself against “life” in every form (including all inter-human relations), in order that he can “make it.” In no sense does the survivor live *with* life, in a relational wonder. By utter contrast, the presumption of his being is that everything is against him,
and his counter-reflex is to be against all that is, unless of course its suits him strategically to make peace with his counter. To Bauman (2008), the ultimate indictment against the ironic (negative) freedom achieved in the Enlightenment’s disenchantment program was “the disposability of humans” (p. 56), and he finds in the survivor lexicon its greatest champion. It is already a hint that the hit television show Survivor bears the subtitle, “trust no one,” says Bauman. “Each player in every moment is playing for herself, and to progress, not to mention to reach the top, one must cooperate first in excluding those many others eager to survive and succeed who are blocking the way” (p. 57). As the basic mode of being, our fundamental disposition, all valuation must take a crudely hostile tone. “The others are first and foremost competitors; they are always scheming.” In the end, “surviving for longer than others do is the ultimate proof of fitness,” the ultimate ‘social proving.’ In the arena of life, the agon of the everyday, this becomes the mode, as it were, by which we assess our value in social spaces. We must look tight, tough, composed, to imbue another Greek ideal, apatheia: free of emotional disturbance, devoid of any affectivity, closed off to valuation any other way.

Why the passionate concern? Because we have produced a collective fallacy that wounds instead of heals our very human composition. In our schools, our churches, our social structures, our relations at all levels, we enforce a self-knowing in the limits of culturally expressed sufficiency. In no other way can a culture of attainment, acquisition, expansion (a culture of idealism) allow its members to arrive full and good, or else they are no/thing, worth/less. Our sense of self, that draws up valuations of fullness in such narrow frames must lose all sense of who it is; to lose sensuality altogether, except for kinds implored in perverse life escapes. We long to be a thing, to matter, to have a name, or so we are taught; and to get one, we must work hard to earn such a promise. Cixous (1994) said, “We dislike matter, that is ourselves, because we are destined to matter, because anonymous matter is called death. Perhaps it isn’t matter we dislike, perhaps its anonymity. The anonymity to which we are destined – the loss of a name – is what we repress at any price” (p. 130).

A colleague recently told me that the leading reason for people seeking counselling was the result of a perceived invisibility. They feel absent from themselves, from their lives, from real connection to others
and the world. If this doesn’t seem to indict the way we have gone about being present (in the Derridian sense), or the ontology we’ve come to favour – especially in a time and place where we have every opportunity and privilege to show ourselves grand and glorious – then the escalation in numbers of those undergoing counselling just may tip the scales; or less mildly stated, Simon Wessely (1996) calls it “an explosion of counselling” (p. 158) because of the “return of alienation.” Bauman (2008, p. 136) offers some sense of the reason, as I close discussion on the self-double that appears to function as an elusive master in our modern self-ordering, at least to some appreciable extent. “Becoming someone else amounts to ceasing to be what one has been, to breaking and shaking off one’s old form.” Maybe we feel invisible, after all, because we haven’t been who we are in the first place. Maybe we have in fact murdered our very own being in the cultural projects we wage, by means of the ontological monism we created for modern self flourishing. The urge in every social space that surrounds us certainly seems to indicate the matter, as Bauman’s (2008) word’s once again reveal.

To put on a new self on public display and to admire it in front of a mirror and in the eyes of others, one needs to remove the old self from one’s own and the other’s sight and possibly also from one’s own and their memory. When ‘self-defining’ and ‘self-asserting,’ we practice creative destruction. Daily. (p. 136)

Levinas (1996) offers the matter in different terms. “The same, or the I, surmounts diversity and the non-I, which stands against it, by engaging in a political and technical destiny” (pp. 15, 80) succeeds in replacing altogether what was, as an originary, infinite and good. My efforts here, by means of these contemporary illustrations, have intended to show just how double sided is our care in the present; how tenuous is the locating of our ambitions and our affections toward promise, how slippery is what we take up as value, the associated self-knowing, and the requisite response-ability that follows. Such a manner of living may not wield physical guns or exert wounds against the flesh – and so we may think we have accomplished the order of a peaceful society – but where there is no flesh left to kill, no Other to be summoned for action, and no other way to live in the world, why would we need a gun anyways. We have a much better weapon in
this panoptical modern labyrinth of self-plundering. Bauman (2008) says, commenting on the matter of re-categorizing personhood, that “what sets the genocide apart, however, from even the most violent and gory conflicts is not the number of its victims but its *monological* nature” (p. 82). Of “the thoroughness of the destruction” (p. 83), or this totalizing violence, as Levinas (1979) regards it,

Real violence does not so much consist in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. (p. 21)

On this fitting note, after having explored what *soteriology* and *theoria* are up to, and taking up Nietzsche’s earlier invocation, we can now ask, what about our *praxis*? What kind of voice and vocation are we executing in the very places at which this project aims its prophetic counter-pose?

*Pedagogies of Pride and Shame*

I’ve often struggled with how to talk to students about the violence in video games and movies, wondering why they choose to participate in such extreme forms of human behavior. Of course, if they are around such aggressive images, they will act them out vicariously, right? But what *are* they around most of the day, such that they are drawn to these gratifications in the first place, that they have aptitude for violence to begin with? Maybe we need to start by asking what instructors are organized around, since we have gathered them in specific fashion for specific tasks to perform. This observation hit me (forgive the pun) quite by accident when an insightful student callously remarked, “where else can we express the rage you guys put inside us?” The sober word first put me on the defensive, but then rang true as I recounted my own experience in schooling. I can attest that as a teacher I have been *present* (Derrida) to *proving* mechanisms as though they were *good* for the students, taking no account of what is *absent* … the very human I am teaching. That would mean the human person is not *the* good, *as* they are; not yet good enough until they
become the good we hold before them. As cultural beings hired to perform a culturally reproductive duty, we are hidden from the places we stand in, the structures we live out of – unaware of consequent effects on our expectations and actions – precisely because we live in the monism of dreams. So our actions, insofar as they are for ‘the good,’ are against the child. We are affixed everpresent to the ideals of what could be human, with mere images and appearances marking most cherished significations. We are in the business of perfecting children, stealing their childlikeness and demanding they take fashion of the heroic likenesses we culturally laud. To love its mirror we are commanded, lest we find no-thing to love in the mirror every morning, no substance to make us feel real and most celebrated.

Accordingly, if what is present to us is that we are doing good for the child, we certainly would not anticipate that violence might begin with us, that we may be the ones driving the child to killing, imaginary or otherwise. But if we have mandatory schooling and the school system is about attainment, the agonistic model in the extreme, then we have been handed a mandate to murder. No, we do not kill flesh and blood, only hearts and souls (Block, 1997). They are much less messy, easy to clean up, quick to be disposed of. Better, we have an excellent alibi. We are in the business of defeating ... the other, the unknown, the insufficient in us, to produce the micro-machinery of a great and noble system that benefits all. And lest we suspect the best implements of this great empire building are pens and pencils, books and binders, its real mortar is its moral persuasion, the force of conscience invisibly inscribed within acts of consciousness raising. Consciousness creates conscience and conscience needs a moral cause. It is true! Schooling’s greatest secret is the continuum of pride and shame, the Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau offspring of moral community.

Schooling is a trenchantly moral order, one designed to govern the in/finite child into de/finite external validation. But first, the child must be outfitted with an exhaustive lexicon of binary behaviours. Schooling is, quite reductively, about adequating who we are to kinds of knowing and being in the world. It is a rigorous process of bringing the child to par with doctrines already designated true and right. Back yet again to a former age, Giesen (2004) defines moral community as one that constructs heroes to create
approximation of the divine: fusing into the profane center of public life “a robust idealization of human triumph” that “stands in the place of” the sacred. “Societies that emphasize impersonal principles and virtues are, therefore, less fertile grounds for the creation of heroes than societies that put a high premium on a distinctive personal aura of public appearance” (p. 17). A truly heroic society must not only have lofty panaceas to hold before its members, but must keep these idealizations fertile, employing a method of hero-villain conflict, and to do so, “requires constant mediation and remembering” (p. 16). Is there a better recipe than to institute formal schooling for such an occasion? If we are in the business of heroification – passing on dreams and glory stories and embedding them in the discourses and moral implements of learning – then by deduction, we must be in the business of creating villains and victims. More than that, we need “great” enemies to provide strong enough persuasions for the child to desire most noble goods: one we might call in this warfare our ascetic weaponry. The fact is we need pride and shame. We need them in fierce supply. There is nothing else so effective and efficient, so cheap and tidy – and apparently so seductive to the young human who has been conditioned to yearn for his cultural promotion – than to infuse the little ones with grandiose imaginings by which to source the sum of their certification in life.

In order to find an answer to the question of why modern societies construct victims, we have to turn to the moral basis of modern communities. In the definition of victimhood, the center of a moral community not only distinguishes itself from the periphery, it also reveals the tension between the moral ideal and the imperfect realization of this ideal. The moral community evidently needs the difference between the normative ideal and the factual behaviour in order to construct its basic motive of integration: the moral community needs deviance and perpetrators in order to construct the boundary between good and evil because the community of reason and enlightenment requires the tension of truth and reason on one hand and error and insanity on the other. In moral communities, there is an unavoidable tendency to define and detect transgression, to identify and condemn perpetrators, and even to scapegoat others ... to justify their death. (Geisen, pp. 51-52)
In school, there is no room for human insufficiency, and so we issue hunting licenses, certificates that privilege teachers to root out and dispose of all that is other than what we favor for the child’s specific kinds of self-reflective, self-referential world engagement. Here, selves and knowledge each come to be seen for what they really are: tools ... of adequation, made re/presentations en route to a dream, a fictive illusion, in support of an idolatrous drive to be worthy, idealized, complete for the good … of the state. If the self was a being, it might be dangerous; and so it must be managed, turned into a method, for imperial aims.

Sandywell (p. 96) calls this contemporary vision, “an idealized image of identity and selfhood” based on “positive valuation of this-worldly action as both a means and an end in itself,” employing a “zero-sum concept of ... complete defeat or subordination of the antagonist.” So, as long as there is a self, there must also exist its opposition, that which would dilute or dissolve its illusion of being a substantial good in itself. As a result, all “social, political, and cultural relations are framed in agonistic imagery.” The self is educated to slay otherness, starting with its own errant and discrepant impulses, and thereafter, in self-referential panoptical responsibility, to deride and shame the ‘natural’ pulse of the human other.

To close out the problem taken up in my larger inquiry and its deleterious effects now understood, David Appelbaum (2001) and others will, with shifted attentions from self and other to the head and heart, direct us to a tension between two kinds of care. As Taylor laboured to show us, we do care, by avowedly taking up moral sources (in the ontic or by the Other) that presume us most full. Something will seduce! The question is which affection has us most captive? This section may help us sort that out. Once we can grasp the affective ground for what it means to be human, and come to recognize that moral sources can be drawn otherwise, I will at the close of this chapter explore a ‘retrieval of affections’ for a ‘remediation of dreams.’ Only then, will we have a directional sense for the ends (or, more accurately beginnings) that prophetic speech will take up in the final chapter.

Appelbaum, in protest of the spirit of the age, captures in poetic reflection how command of the moral good excites a mind’s possibilities for self-adequation, the success of which must kill “interference” from the heart. His imagery regards the mind as anxious to get there, even as it is unsure of where it is called
to go, while the heart on the other hand has no capacity for understanding progressive incantation. The intent is not to dichotomize the human, but to employ the dichotomy already learned, to expose how human action often exceeds a self without regard for what is leading, for what calls it forth into action, in its attempt to experience a fullest expression of being. The impatient mind is, according to Appelbaum, a cultural methodology that regards as generative the interplay between emotions of pride on one hand, and those that are terrified of experiencing shame. It is abuse of the natural somatic field, he earnestly wages, our most native affections. So embedded is the particularly Western constitution of the self in this binary sentiment though, that aspirants have no option other than to adequate recognition to pre-identified ideals or regard themselves damned. Emotion loses its e/vocation and simply becomes motion. As I am writing this very section, I am struck by the cover of a multicultural educational publication on the coffee table boldly emblazoned with “Education: The way ahead.” “Ahead of what?” my inner voice asks ... “ahead of the human” came my reflex. The modern ethic, as Bauman (2008) boil it down, is to always be ahead, and it doesn’t take a genius to realize that in school hallways between classes that are themselves taking us ever more forward, the greatest shame is to be “behind the times.” Or, says a dear friend, “that’s just so 2009!”

Yes, even as our aspirations may be positive, we are often unaware of the structures that condition where we expect to be going, what of us is to be left behind, or that something allegedly lags. Appelbaum says the “underlying tempo of thought,” is delay, respectively pitting mind and heart against one another in what is respectively certitude of the inherent self against gappishness that is inherently human. Thus, to be human comes to mean being caught up in a fight between impatience (to become ... what calls us from beyond) and passivity (being ... that awaits the anterior call from what we are already with). At conflict are two kinds of command, both producing an affect, but discharge opposing affections: 1) self-affection – the need to be adequated to a project derived from plausible cultural goods; and 2) the affect of the Other – without need to be adequate to a theme beforehand, bears witness to human insufficiency.

In the agonistic model, delay is the rearview [cultural] mirror of the mind noting ‘lag’ when it feels the tension between not arriving and what lies in reach. When mind and fact are coincident, there is no delay,
no discrepancy, says Appelbaum. The gap is resolved: the goal of modern being; fundamental aim of educational aspiration. Where one stands in the point of view, the race if you will, comes to decide how one relates to progress and regress, pride and shame. What I’m indicating is that delay is metaphoric insufficiency within, restless under the gaze of the aspiration to be adequated to the norms of schooling, the outcomes of culture. Thus, delay represents our essential humanness, space unknown to us, of neither being complete nor non-being, but ever existing under duress to be something substantial under governs of mind. Delay symbolizes waiting on what will call us to act. The call from ahead of us, demanding us to be ... good; or from behind, lagging with us, calling us otherwise. Delay mitigated can be cause for pride; delay relegated can be cause for shame. What I hope to urge for educational vocation in the key of the prophetic is the cultivation and nourishment of delay for the many ways its generative possibility can re-appropriate the good. That is, to recognize the gaps as the wonder and enchantment that holds possibility for ethics and the consequent fuller anticipation of being.

The spirit of delay is best understood as the modern self’s demand for continuity, absorbing all of time (in Kant’s sense) into a unified and seamless self-projection. This becomes our basis for pride, for a coherency between past and future that is demanded if we are to be found worthy. And so it “forever leads itself forward out of itself, which is to say, its past” (Appelbaum, p. 3), its story. By introducing gaps is to feel the lack of selfness, of certitude, or to have any given trajectory of substantiality. To feel the gaps is to feel ungrounded, unselfed, un/found/ated, in/complete. Henceforth, Mensch says “selfhood functions as the ground of time” (p. 31) and Appelbaum says it “reproduces the conditions of its own production” to be able “to grasp onto itself.” The self as a process in this way “is one of reproduction” “retrieving what came before and projecting it onto an afterward” so that it “attains to a kind of immortality” (p. 3). “The conditions that it projects are the same” which means that the self cannot be out of adequation with its own pre-existing projection, the knowledge it uses to bring itself forth as a thing ... that counts. “Being pregnant with itself, thought gives birth to more of the same.” What we have in the process is the formula for pride, for what Mensch calls auto-affection: the cohering of self and its action, in adequation with its most heroic ideal, in fundamentally ascetic drivenness, in the spirit of the agon – to keep this self striving “in time” with its ideal.
Being-in-advance-of-itself is taken in terms of self-advancement. The origin of self-interest may be found here. Self-advancement is the fundamental form of achievement. Planning and preplanning, prioritizing and strategizing, goal seeking and deliberating, choosing and selecting, are ways in which thought, in advance of itself, exercises specific powers of achievement. Each means promotes thought, makes thought and its product – results – indispensable to the subjects enterprise of life; ... its basic tempo remains unperceived and imperceptible. (Appelbaum, p. 3)

Pride is to be in advance of ourselves, to be a double, to not be ourselves, but striving to be what is avowedly our potentia. Mensch (2005) puts it as self-affection, to be affected by a self’s ambition alone, under the call of the height that assures completion, shutting out all else that ‘hinders.’ “This self-affection is, then, the mind’s being affected by its activity of positing the presentation of something” (p. 34) to “reproduce the results of my activity.” This presence of Pride is not just to absorb time (past and future for one’s continuity, as Appelbaum offers it); it is outright self-absorption, spreading itself over all and throughout that which is discontinuous and gappy. To cohere with my projection and produce this ongoing continuity of self means “my being affected by these reproductions is, then, my being affected by this activity. It is a self-affection. I experience this in the co-presence of the reproduced moments that make up the ‘complete presentation’ of what I am representing” (p. 35). Finally, says Mensch, “a transcendental affection is required,” an ascendant project, a dream, or as a self-processing, Narcissism. But if the waters of continuous reflection (the mirror reflecting back) be disturbed, and the care/fully orchestrated self meet its demise, then I am pressed to ask ... how does this incredulously fragile undertaking really serve us? More boldly, who is really psychically sick: the proud or the one who is shamed for not buying into the project?

If to be self-affected is to be good, then what it means to love ourselves is grossly confused now that we can see more clearly. So too, have we in our confusion witnessed killing the other as love. Pride is the appeal of self-justification, of being right, adequated with a given good. But what is pride really except to be on the defensive against being human, only because though, pride has first misunderstood what it means to
be whole. If to truly be human, in the first order, is our good, then pride would have no face, no mirrors, nothing to re/cognize – no ‘knowing referent’ by which to reflect its continuity, its continuation toward a telos most esteemed. And so I come to a place of restless rest. Having now admitted in this vast contemplation of disenchanted personality the effectual construction of being’s inversion by hijacking the transcendent pulse for ascendant dreams, I repose in conversion: the very possibility of being set free from pursuit of the self-double, self-affection, and toward what Levinas will call its reciprocal. Substitution! In the inter/face that follows, in reversions of this troubling exploitation of affection, we reconsider home. Alan Block (2010) fittingly provides the hinge that realizes the urgency of the hinterland’s call in this transition, this transformation of deformed being. “In the dream I cannot find my way home, or for some reason, I am incapable of moving towards it; I become agitated and alarmed, and despite all of my efforts and longing, I realize no progress and remain, alas, frustratingly in a form of exile” (p. 9, italics added for emphasis).

Here, we consider not an intellectual turn, but our very re/turn. Instead of: 1) “taking the place” of a double: a ‘category of glory’ cast in and sourced by the totality of the ascetic-ascendant Same, I can in Levinas’ Substitution, 2) “take the place” of the human other, wherein gap to gap, sense to sense, face to face, I am affected by pathos more originary, and summoned to an action more original than any ontic referent can ‘know me.’ Whereas the double is possibility of pride, in self-affection, made full; the Other is its breach, through enchanted summons, emptied of my given essence. In this sense, identity is my utter irreplaceability, and my response-ability always beyond imagining. I fulfill the ethical and the infinity of being at once – or else, true transcendence – to realize voice and vocation in chorus. For Block, this is the realization of “homecoming dreams” (p. 9), or in the ethical, “the transcendent category toward which all behaviour aspires but can never be fully achieved” (p. 13). “Real is the formlessness that is Desire, and this Desire is the foundation of being.” The affective reclaimed: the love/ly as the Other we are.

Under the spell of its unspoken command, the call of the Other, to the unknown within, being is re/membered, living is at home, re-enchanted. The act of remembrance “rejoins the infinite in the human face” to region-less being, which Levinas (1996, p. 8) calls truest religion, the first order of ethics. It is the
recuperative gesture, *from* “to bind” (etymology of religion) for a being that is unbounded in dis/position *to* the wholly other, even to the divine itself, borne in the human face. In the “here I am,” which betrays an action forward, “vocation seizes” *me*! “its discourse is prayer” (p. 7) one we may begin to *sense again* in a spirit of confession, if not prophetic possibility. Against the continuities of culture or the self-affection of dreams, “Moi voici precedes the self-conscious, and god is immemorial past ... a trace in which the other rises as primary command” (p. xi). This is what it means to pray. “Prayer is the testimony, confession, humility” (p. 109) ... a sacred discourse that breaks down, roots out, and condemns all that by ascetic empowerment aspires to promise by means or moral composition. We are written anew in our infinity.

*Subjectivity in Substitution: The Self-Double Con/verted*

*Substitution is signification!*

-- Levinas (1981, p. 13)

To this point, we have witnessed that the quest in the west is to know in the whole: to know who we are through a total/ality that sources all meaning from ‘a’ moral theme, one ascetically expansive to ends more or less self-glorifying. That is, our vocation is to be absorbed in an identity (a whole world *in* itself) and ‘recur’ in self-referential progressive substantiation. But rather than incarnating the *good*, the self, in this way, becomes incarcerated in *validation*, in thick unmitigated social doctrines in its cultural location that *thinks* its way into *realizing* its inhumanity. We have made a self and its *sense* of promise identify (identity) with rationality that mirrors back possibilities for value in recurrences of the social, in the currencies of the Same. As such, we have to go otherwise *than* a self in such moral formation if we are to get out of this inhumanity, as Levinas charges. Ethics cannot begin in knowledge for this reason. It does not serve the *human*! Knowledge cannot know me enough! To *use* knowledge to imagine our height has become absurd – because it takes on everyone else’s dream currencies. The inert of the known mirrors back an inert being. Here, we cannot be authentic! We are an instrumental thing.
We saw too that because subjectivity originates in exteriority – is cultural – we are affected by a social referent to confer flourishing. We are desire awaiting a call, as Block has indicated and Appelbaum before him, and defined by our response-ability to it. How it is taken up decides how we will know who we are – infinite, enchanted, dynamic, in the human inter-relation, or else following a static order. Levinas interrupts our self-satisfaction in the later and says that rather than sourcing our valuations in knowledge (and then doubling or self-saming with it), the source of self (using Taylor’s moniker), for its fullest and authentic transcendence is sourced in a living relation that cannot be closed in on by knowing in advance. It is my intent here to give some shape to that phenomenon in anticipation of prophetic possibilities which I muse upon for remediation of identity (voice and vocation) to close. Therefore, rather than being hostage to a fixed self-controlled theme that draws from the limits of the cultural Said (its dominant texts) and select my flourishing in advance, I counter-pose fuller valuation as being hostage to a dynamic relation unthematized, by the summons of the human Other (enchant call) to have disclosed utter irreplaceability, for a valuation that is limitless. There lies true flourishing – the good and the glory beyond knowing. It is a forsaking of the double (incarnating the Ontic in disenchantment), for a substitution (incarnating the enchanted Other). Dis/located and re/located by means of the call of the Other, knowing occurs in the first order, higher than knowing for a transcendence beyond dreams.

Released from the in-itself and found/ated for a relation that is for-the-other (justice), subjectivity re/members its uniqueness by this utter irreplaceability; when called forth unmediated, action is most free (limitless) – unstopped by the ceilings of the known, the defined, or the cold command. Here, know…ing arises (in the affective) in the saying; it is not decided (in the cognitive) by the said. There is no longer any confidence in knowledge for human validation – proving or promise. It has no relation to ethics. As being happens, in this dynamic union with the Other, knowing is nonetheless accomplished. Speech is vocation!

The unknowable utters, in ‘traces,’ in the inter-witness of the infinite in the “memory of the immemorial” (Appelbaum, 2001, p. 16). We know by sense, in the sensual, the beforehand than words. In our common cry, homeless and ever seeking home, we feel a knowing anew; we are affected otherwise. Here, in our suffering, in our more natural insufficiency, resides the “yes” in each, the first word of being, originary desire, whose
residual is taken up as a response-ability to achieve our vocation otherwise, to found/ate our fullest voice (promise in the living). Freedom is to know the truth by its living (phenomenologically) in substitution, neither being witnessed by knowledge or valuation frames stood still. To live most ethically is to be in wit(h)ness of the enchanted.

Truth comes to those who wait … to be named, by a call that is heard before definition, even prior to the a priori, a passivity that is more passive still than passivity, offers Levinas; where we get more than a name. In the “Here I am,” a/wait/ing the encounter, we are seized by the ‘inescapable’ (our truly unique vocation). Here, all valuation exceeds norming, and correspondingly, all self knowing transcends time and location. The Other discloses who I am, being’s burden (latent promise) come forth, spoken, witnessed. This occasion of inter-human witness, of co-arising in insufficiency, is grasped by the encounter between Hancock and Davis in “Aesthetics of Surrender” (Chinnery, 2003, p. 239). When a wrong note was struck by Hancock, Davis entered it, took it up as his own and was called forth a/new. From the occasion, is an insight. First, to live in somatic passivity (to put affect in ‘delay’ in the lexicon of Appelbaum) is to “always be on the brink.” The “here I am” never really knows where “it” is; the objective field does not appear long enough (as truth) to affix its gaze; and so, we never know which note is to come next in the muse; we simply take it up, as our own: substitution!

Yet, still, this true relation does give us “ground” for being, a rest that no longer needs to know, where rest/less/ness in vain search for ultimate destination on which to lean our weight is violated. This knowing is tied to all things former, all things prior to the made and possess-able, to the memory of the living story, the inter-voiced, the vocalis: our home and native land. Being comes forth from its anterior infinity, from its immemorial, to re/member, in fellow travelling. I close this section with an interlude of tales in flesh, to land back home at the enchanted, where in more playful vivial hues a prior call silences dreams in fictions forward, in agencies fantastic, to summon in the sensorial – the full of who we are: Being realized (not ontologized) in the syn/aes/thetic.
**Substituting Realities: Dreaming Back to Re-stor(e)ied Relations**

There is another way to dream, where imagination and longing still collide, but which in a non-progressive spirit is not about making oneself great, or about possessing a future, but is rather akin to being possessed by a story; one that is enough for the vastness of being already. It is about relation with the truth: our co-incidental origins. An exemplar of such a dream is given by the Hopi, who at all times reconnect with ancestral spirit, with the home that they know within as from behind; it only sounds odd or paradoxical because we are accustomed to its alter/native, reinforcing just how entrenched is the monism we inhabit for world engagement. Promise is not a destination. Reliance is on the life that comes through the storied, and in no sense from plans dispensed by the static word. Living is in the middle … of our human situation, in dynamic mediation between root and its mysterious fruition. The ancestor, in substitution, speaks through the land an affective “call” to where the communicant lay awaiting its summons (its path to take up and follow). What the Hopi regard as the ancestor, Levinas calls traces of the divine, the first call. Whether one is a naturalist or imagines back to a divine being, both share a recuperation of being through the anterior, sourcing valuation and vocation in re-union with the voice eternal. Whether it is the face that speaks or the animate world – Benso’s *Face of Things*, given by the enchanted, which constitute “a different side of ethics” – home is behind, where being is never forgotten.

The dream of the Hopi is to dream from behind. It is a life-affirming relationship with the cosmos, unlike our affirmation of a ‘dead cultural objectification’ and as such does not become from in advance of itself (or to advance), but to have kinship with the earth who bears those having passed, but yet speak. To indigenous culture, where future is not everything, the aged and deceased are as important as the children who suppose a future; if not, moreso. For, to lose memory is to lose a story; to lose a story is to lose voice and vocation (future) of a people. The Piro, an Amazon people, are no differently disposed to the earth.

“‘Their landscape is one of implication. It is mediated not by representations, but by social processes. Kinship is perceived directly in the land because it is there’” (Crapanzano, 2004, p. 29). Levinas expresses this primal relation as the meeting between the “here I am” and the “there it is,” both of which are eternal and enchanted at once – neither is future privileged, nor a self running ahead. And for the Piro, all space between is sacred
and reverent, therefore utterly relevant (real). “It is a deeply temporalized landscape … evoking ‘lethal nostalgia’. The land is feared and worshipped, but is most of all heard. The dream comes forth through the voices in the land,” from what is prior to the people by timeless speech (never out of fashion). In these hints of the prophetic, all speaking from behind disrupts all presence, all proving, and all promise; it is radical orientation to ‘what comes before’ the morally emission.

To first peoples of Australia, there is compassion (co-pathos) with the land, even as the living are subordinate. The earth speaks in its “pains and movements” and the people move by its affective call. Its enchanted voice is compass, expressed in “Dreamtime … a prominent part in the mythology of Aboriginal Australia” (Abram, 1996, p. 164). The ancestors, seeking food and comfort sweep across the land singing, and “while chanting his or her way across the land during Dreamtime, also deposited a trail of ‘spirit children’” that evokes in the present “dreaming from whence his life comes” (p. 167). “It is a kind of time out of time, a time hidden beyond or even within the present, manifest presence of the land, a magical temporality” (p. 164). It gives a “storied earth,” “that place on the earth where one most belongs, and his essence, his deepest self, is indistinguishable from that terrain” (p. 167). By nature, he knows his future is “a responsibility to the land” (to the past) and it comes to pass by means of story.

Perhaps what this shows more than anything is that those without a story – who live detached and disenchanted – find it absolutely necessary to grasp in the forward, in the abstract, in what are other kinds of dreams (fictions forward) because all prior moral sources cease to generate any meaning. Perhaps too we may realize that what the great modern project did to us is take away ‘everything we are’ as storied … for a story we will never even be able to achieve. Oh yes! We sure do dream promise, but with ‘no idea’ (ironically enough) how hard we work for what dreams may … not come. The former presents a counter-story, which has strangely enough evoked new fascination in the west. The lesser voice, the voice of the other, the sub-text of history we cannot seem to elude, has begun to hold some enchantment for the spaces of education. In this way, a dream is a “calling from behind,” a vocation from below (where voice lives) which ‘the people’ are responsible to hear if they are to be in harmonious relation to the cosmos. They are one with
the land, with the past and with each other, and being so disposed, they bear, in substitution, its commands for the good, the highest valuation/vocation of all.

Abram says “the dreamtime is not, like the Western … a finished event” or a place to get to, but “an ongoing process – the perpetual emergence of the world from an incipient, indeterminate state into full waking reality” (p. 169). “The aboriginal man walks along his ancestors Dreaming track, singing the country into visibility, he virtually becomes the journeying ancestor, and thus the storied earth is born afresh” (p. 170). Ritual is to keep alive the dreaming powers entrapped within the land says Helen Payne (1989, p. 56), far from the ascetic undertakings of our anticipated promise. An unsung land is a dead land (Chatwin, p. 52), without relationality to the living, suggesting that the grounds for valuation we take up, in derision of mythos, hold no real promise for life after all. The perpetuity of lineage (voice relation) that retains one’s immersion with the land, his collective relations immemorial, is observed in suspense and mystery for an ad/venture that in fact mocks calculated advance/ment. Ritual too, is gathering the people in affective trance, courted by enchantment, with no sense for synthetic relation to condition responses. And yet there is a sense: “The song structure carries the memory of how to orient in the land” (Abram, p. 174). Its features activate memory; its movements spontaneously in/form people when to move. Far from a virile conquest or spirit of antagonism that our dreaming takes up, there is in this space renewal even in the midst of death (an eternal aspect to being without making a name); there is no need to be against life, or death itself. Time past and beyond are as harmonious as being and doing. Between the song of old and the sensual, in general, is an intimate reverence: what becomes self-recognition in the story that has hold.

The indication is that the anterior evokes a call to action in a syn/aesthetic condition of ‘people meeting place,’ where the people “embodied in the ancestral dreamings – are inseparable” (p. 177). The dream is joint yet sinuous with all elements of the Other at play, unlike the posture of the double, where the self in agonistic division by way of dreams disposes us an/aesthetic – fully realized separation, free from dependency and inter-connection, cut off from the affective register, and numbed of most intimate and natural relation. In the otherwise, dreaming from behind is “the experiential present” in which “the visible
landscape continually comes into presence” (p. 193), altogether denuding ontological presence (by proving) that characterizes western self-making. Evoked by the song, the aboriginal realizes his station.

To be present, says Abram, is to be united with the ongoing “sensuous presence of the world” (p. 201). “Eternity is now” (p. 202) so presence (our idea of proving) is always renewed. Life, unlocked from immanent imaginaries that confine self-knowing in symbolic glory alone, now summons a counter-story: an invocation to live otherwise than dreams. To Levinas (1996), this eternity is the “transcendental apperception” (p. 140) that allows us to know otherwise – to anticipate counter-story. Its ethical summons is to break down the ontology of ego-logy: being … self-written, whose re/cognition predicate – being oneself in recurrence – is to lose freedom, to in fact forfeit true disclosure altogether; where “being-given ... the promise of satisfaction made to a greedy and hegemonic ego” (p. 152). Contrarily, eternity rushes in to bequeath distinct vocation: being as counter-story to disenchantment, disrupting pretensions that pose for us height in the immanent, the thematized. As such, the to-be is the substitution of historical ontology and it begins by “putting in question” all we have answered, projected, themed and samed in the name of the “I”. Putting in question relegates the self and its moral system to synthetic disjuncture, and re-opens the question of being anew. “In this substitution where identity is inverted, a passivity ... the self is freed from itself” (Levinas, 1996, p. 90).

In defiance of the ascetic-ascendant constitution that we have been systematically oriented to in the west, Levinas posits its ethical substitute, its en/counter, to altogether counter-pose expansion thetics (Becker) and the acquisition of Weber’s ascetic, socially proving, personality. Here, transcendence knows otherwise, “putting into question is ipso facto an election, the promotion to a privileged place” (p. 18). And yet this place is “elevation. Consciousness finds in itself more than it can contain, the commitment is a promotion. This is the height that opens within being ... to confirm the Other in its substantiality, situating it above the I” (p. 18-19). As the counter-story to what has totalized and plundered the good, it is the ezer: to run to the aid of, to meet with help, to be a help-meet, “coming through for you desperately” (p. 79) when all else takes away from us. It becomes the ethical “Here I am in the name of god without directly referring
myself to a presence.” It is so much higher than words that it “cannot be expressed ‘I believe in god’” (p. 105). Bearing such witness, yielded in passivity to the cry, is to be born ... again. “The good has chosen me before I have chosen it” (p. 117). God has spoken and I am as Moses in receipt of command.

Freedom is not only inverted, it is imperilled: our whole order of knowing is turned upside down. To be free is to be chosen, not to choose a path that presumes liberty hereafter. In substitution, we are free from constructs and projects, released from narrowed ontology of being found by means of ascetic incline. “Substitution ... is the very fact of finding oneself while losing oneself” (p. 118). “It inverses relationships and principles, reverses the order of interestedness.” Here, in the here-I-am, “The rupture of essence is the ethical.” That is, “the rupture of identity ... into substitution is the subject’s subjectivity, or its subjection to everything, its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is, its sensibility” (p. 121). Always vulnerable, invested differently to liberty, never to-be in defence, “the other is contestation of my appropriation of the world,” which altogether sunders the other as self’s “disturbance ... a break in its cohesion” (Levinas, 1981, p. 5), its self-affection.

Taking up Levinas’ counter-pose in terms of the affectivity we favour, Kearney (1998) says, “the dream is a unique expression of one’s corporeal ontology. As imaginary, it signifies a mode of being without a real and perceiving body; or, if one prefers, a mode of being ‘with an imaginary body without weight’” (p. 122). It is, in the end, without height. “Ethical transcendence thus is the beginning of true self-knowledge” (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 201). In contrast to the hollow symbolic in the social, “the face has the power to disrupt my self-complacency.” It is at “this ethical juncture that meaning begins,” where the human Other is my invocation to the good. “Substitution is signification,” my sign/ificance: self-knowing in its truest manifestation and fullest freedom ... by the call of the cry of the Other. In this repose from the ascetic, the world becomes wonderful again, and we its children, rejoined with natality, know vocation in justice (being-for-the-Other).
CHAPTER 6 – PROMISE REJOINS VOCALIS: A COUNTER-POSE TO BEING-IN-DREAMS

After tracking schooling’s cultural reproduction of ontology by way of dreams (splitting voice and vocation in ascetic-ascendant posture) I counter-pose with the Prophetic – whereas to-be is the living sub-text to ‘being thematized’ in dreams and storied speech is sub-version against its version of the real, speech from behind re/vokes the empirical to re-enchant the ethical. Upon tracing the vocation of prophetic speech and imagining it in sites of learning, I offer an ethical dis/position for the classroom in comports of Care-Call-Cry. Affectively, to face the human Other as the ‘aura’ of our most truly enchanted basis for flourishing, it is by such in/vocation that portends our ethical hope: re-relation restor(i)ed, re/membering revitalized.

It is the Child that sees the primordial Secret in Nature
The child within us is simple and daring enough to live the Secret.
-- Chuang Tzu (cited in Dyer, 2007, p. 393)

Ruminations on the Enchanted: Justice as Voice, the “Living” Counter-Story to Dreams

Human beings are neither good nor bad as an organism. They are wonderful! We are – prior to knowing, prior to an order of things heaped upon us, prior to the ontological reduction that envelopes self-understanding in frontiers of promise to appropriate the forces of pride and shame – fundamentally enchanting. It has been my labour to make this case. It is my interest here to summon whose vocation is education to take up the ‘sources of self’ in this counter-pose/ability. Whether persons are good or bad has been a deceptive hang-up since the modern ascetic order of things, infers Weber. Proving it in the living has dispensed far-reaching agonies. Becker modulates Weber to show that culture (religious and scientific) has con/verted persons to moral objects (into second selves) so promise can be realized in the said. The presumption is that if vocalis (voice and vocation – self-knowing and its meaningful action) can be commonly inscribed from the outside, we can collectively identify and inherit great things; that is, if we will first take up the associated ascetic scheme, to take leave of who we are. This remains the horrible religious burden we can’t depart: we still need a moral project to confer our ascendancy, our worth.

In countering this unjust monism, Levinas insists we are most originally, enchanted. We are already beholden to promise, to our transcendence, in the human encounter. So realized, ‘to be’ “is” already a relation to wonderment, and therefore to act is to enchant, to call into fullest presence the unmediated utter
irreplaceability of my neighbour – to realize promise in neighbourly relations. Here lay possibilities for ethics anew, where to wonder is no longer to dream, a thing to do toward a telos of the sensational. Sensation is already with us. How we are to think being and action, therefore, is to transgress disenchantment’s dependency on the inherited schismatic relations of the Greeks, between heaven and earth, the abstract and the phenomenal, which initiates the outright separation of being from world. We inhabit in the first a world relation, which I put forth here to be re-realized, revitalized – to most fully come back to dwellings of voice. So given, the human, as starting point, disrupts distrust that founded disenchantment and conditioned our obsession with promise and promotion.

In The Ethical Demand (1997), Løgstrup says, “only because of some special circumstance do we ever distrust a stranger in advance” (p. 8). As he sees it, trust is among the “supreme manifestations of life” (p. 152). It is somehow there before all we’ve made of the world. Bauman (2008) takes the ‘special circumstance’ of today’s pervasive distrust as misappropriation of ethics; lives of mistaken adventure in the promises of consumerism. His contention: nothing marks our times more than mistrust. On the flip side, nothing marks human yearning more than promise. Is there a relation? It seems that increasingly, promise is located outside the relational. As both distrust and the promise of ‘being more’ intensify at parallel pace, ethical thinkers converge on how ascendance in our monological texts for self-expansion dispense a ruthless separation. Weber, Becker, Brueggemann and Bauman each agree that the fruit of modern self-making in totalizing expansion projects is alienation – a tragic turning from what it means to be human. On this basis, originary voice and vocation are shut-up! The past is made fictive, action is made real, and the future is made fantastical. Under its imperial command stories are plundered, neighbourliness is inconvenient, and personal advancement is axiomatic. The tragedy of modern ethics is that as we keep belief in the singularity of dreams to rescue us from the perils of modern distrust and irrelation, we only wage more of the problem. It incurs perilous tautology. Now is an urgent time to raise the question of ethics anew for those whose future’s we have a stake in shaping.
Imagine! Dream! Believe! These are the irrepressible buzz words in today’s schooling, but lying beneath them are two functioning illusions. One, we still hold fast to wonder and enchantment, but since modern schooling has ironically denied admission to its larger realities in the classroom, we must surmise that at source these are expedients for galvanizing a morality of action. In other words, they ironically bog down in ascetics. Second, we don’t really ‘believe’ in these terms after all, or what they indicate for single persons, even in the strictly immanent usage. If we did, would we not have a more truly diverse classroom – innumerable voices coalescing in discourses of wonder. In truth, we only let them go so far: to ‘get’ kids busy. They are ironically instrumentalized, dis/enchanted. How abusive! Gane (2002), a Weber scholar, ties well “this tragic and distinctly modern process” (p. 8) of the “de-differentiation” of our “life-orders.” In it, we are “seduced by the force of instrumental reason,” and “ruled by rational purpose,” “leading in turn to the constriction of the types (and perhaps even range) of values it is possible to pursue.” Disenchantment and dreams simply do not cohere. One must elude the other.

Through the lens of Taylor, the type and range of persons that we can be is not only abstracted but subtracted; we end up with subtractions of being in a subtraction story. Our transaction in the world is severely compromised by consolidations of vision. We have no less than the de-storying of persons by de-valuing who they are in the deprivation of meaning sources. In the given value-sphere, Gane notes, ends elude starting points, even the questions we might ask. In response, he appeals to Weber’s plea: “vocation calls for the overcoming of this formal opposition” (p. 9), for “the aporetic resuscitation of forms of difference or otherness which are repressed by, or concealed within, this order” (p. 10). To re-enchant is to “work within the aesthetic sphere,” to return the aesthetic to processes of schooling (p. 53), and “to generate new forms of community” (p. 30), which “domination through knowledge” has, by giving “rise to an impersonal order of social relations or ‘external life’” (p. 24) cut off. By giving rise to such things, we do no less, says Brueggemann (1999), than commit “false witness” (p. ix) the very failure of every relationality with the world. Is it any wonder that disenchantment and distrust share a common theme?
What even appears to elude the rhetoric of the positive among us, whose moral conviction is that human things are basically good, is that the very ‘purposes of instruction’ already falsify the charge. In other words, what we admit to the classroom is a living receptacle that will absorb the rhetoric of promise as given; to be told that it needs a promise; with no idea, even, that we are proffering the moral order – or what Weber calls a given value-sphere. So, what is really denied admission to the classroom is the voice of the student, the enchantment of being, the story or vocation that is prior to promise in cultural texts. We presume that vocalis is uncivilized and needs to be uni-vocalized for the child’s good. They are not good … enough; or, already. This is the ‘one’ story on which western education is predicated, by which western personhood is formulated. In short, that we are to imagine, dream and believe is already decided as our good … because we are not. We always need something better than what we have or are!

Even so, fights waged over what we can dream and imagine, whether from old school or new, will not change anything until we overcome ‘distrust,’ says Lynda Stone (1995, p. 184), until we stop fighting about values and fight for the narrative of the child. Models remain the problem: “the midwife model is often a cornerstone both for progressive and critical approaches to education” (Todd, 2003, p. 38), but, says Reitman (1992), the instrumentality of the teacher is already too much like instrumental knowledge itself: it suffers from a messiah complex that remains obsessed with versions of promise (p. 29, 31). Versions without voice are what we have: Dead things, cultural dominions that obscure the human sub-verse, says Brueggemann. Sharing concern, Patti Lather (2007) says we need to get out of the way of this missionary zeal of colonizing children; so too do values need to get out of the way of vocalis. That which is the wonder already – the initiate of enchantment – needs to speak, to come forth, unvaluated in advance of taking to spaces of learning.

Disruptions and Discrepancies: Asking the Question from Behind

As can be expected with any charge that is made against the present order of things, this final chapter concludes with questions, to put in question the order that confines learning – the values that confine being.
However, I hope not to take up the problem-solution schema – and certainly not to enlist a host of solutions in value frames my own. Rather, I pose for concern disenchantment, and I hope for its redress by means of what is not soluble: being itself. Not a pro/gram (forward write) for being – that would be a solution – but to draw attention to the re-enchantment, the primordial that is us. In fact, to pose being as wonder is to create a problem. This is a good thing. To arrest solutions is for knowledge to come as surprise (Felman, 1997, p. 28), to disrupt processes of learning and living (Appelbaum, 1996), to live in the generative tension of neighbourliness, the “discrepant” mode. This, for the sake of the human, is the historical vision of the prophet, when the modus of empire (fixed ontology) fails the person. It means to ask, in “what manner does difference speak?” Appelbaum (2001, p. 53). Answerability does not take us to definition (containment), but to infinity (disclosure), says Levinas. A difficult answer to be sure.

To bear the burden of my neighbour is impractical; it interrupts promise programs of the imperial. Isn’t that unethical? It depends on the controlling narrative. Surely, the aporetic space between two modes of promise is difficult to reconcile, and I am not here to be trite about it. I am here to pose murkiness to discourses of promise altogether; to put progress in suspension so long as it continues to have a difficult time with justice, with making persons a sub-text of the real under the “dis” of all enchantment. That progress is not the sub-story of history is already a curious thing. I wish it more curious. Berlinski (2009, p. 17) offers this wisely. When science takes leave of its initial curiosity, it becomes dangerous. But when the space between theory and life remembers love (Palmer, 1993, p. 69) and the sensuous (Crpanzano, 2003, p. 57), then science may serve us well. In the meantime, so long as its questions go forward and its answers become the dominant narratives – the iron cage of modern life, wages Weber – humans remain the sub-verse that prophetic inquiry needs to subversively take up (Brueggemann, 2000b, pp. 1-19). To raise the questions that call back to neighbourliness, says Brueggemann (2001) is prophetic vocation. It is a question of a kind of care that will hear its call in the human cry. To hear the question (cry) as the starting point of being (our first valuations), and be summoned (even charmed) into action by the associated wonder, is to be ethically disposed in spaces of learning. As school is a place of questions – or dare I even say the place of questions – we must take regard of their source and our aims thereafter.
Gelvin (2000), in his wonderfully insightful *The Asking Mystery*, indicates that questions already misguide by leading sight and language forward. Questions, following modern life itself, seduce toward disenchantedment (Gane, 2002, p. 8) and in their eagerness omit the sensuous, the first impulse, the *affective register* that began it all, effectively leaving behind the question’s very *matter* (the real). Such as answers typically render the *sourcing* of a question irrelevant, Gelvin wishes to redirect knowing to the mystery of a question’s asking, a task he hopes will exhume *being* from the altogether quickened words that hijack its mystery as a penalty for speaking up. In making the application, I suspect that if the missions of learning (including its first [mission] statements on ‘what is the good’) paid closer attention to the e/mission of the child, the ethical might be less remissive. Maybe then we’d have nothing left to write about, at least in the world of theory. Maybe that’s why we write too much to begin with, in this genre, and why by correlation less of who we are gets expressed in *real* life. A world of pure narrative and poetry certainly entices; so does the question of their being the lesser literacy in learning and living (poetically) tempt disturbance.

In this discrepant space between admissions and omissions, we need to contemplate confession in our profession – to go hither from ‘what we do’ in the forward, to interrogate the dominions we bring to learning in advance of learners to smother their wonderment. Questions in the mode of Appelbaum’s *discrepant* take us back to the self-world nexus that any speech act signifies. How we bear the child in neighbourliness is a messy matter. But to wrestle with this ethically is ethical vocation: to recover the relationality between learners and their world, in the voices they most originally bear, and *not* mediate valuation on their behalf. My intent is to leave us in wonder – to leave knowing in suspense; if not delay – to create possibilities for remembering voice as the source of first promise. As Jeremiah painstakingly ‘asked’ of first things – where is the good – for the remembrance of justice, says Brueggemann (2000a, p. 2), we might in our own vocations ask in view of the totalizing value orientations that similarly engulf children, “where is the enchanter in our midst.” I begin by laying a foundation for ethics on what is yet without ground but known through apperception; that is, to lay claim to *affectivity* and *enchantment* for ethics to first be possible. Such an ambition is fittingly laid out by Heesoon Bai (2006): “to enact for education” (p. 11) a “world-making” that would produce a sufficient “ontological ‘shape-shifting,’” to open valuations anew so
that consciousness might be released from the narrow totalities of promise that are now so patently paraded. Just maybe, presumes Bai, we may herein find some *personal* knowledge.

Bauman (2008) situates for our failed practical-world ethical relations a “struggle to find the new and adequate ways of thinking of, about, and for the world we live in” (p. 1). Todd (2003) adds, for an education-world relation “ethics, insofar as it potentially offers us a discourse for rethinking our relations to other people, is central to any education that takes seriously issues of social justice” (p. 1). To pull the two together, Feng (2003) offers a fitting exemplar: “enchantment as counter-thesis” (p. 214). As a first step in playing mischievously with our ontological monism and its proliferation in learning, I would like to partner with his phrase to imagine the syn/aes/thetic for recovering relationality to the world – to admit the person-person en/counter as the sourcing space for self-realization. In view of Todd’s (p. 37) referent that we bring more than knowledge can contain ‘of us’ to pedagogical practice – which means knowledge can’t be *the* adequacy Bauman seeks – I invoke Feng’s starting point as the initiate for ethical thinking. As being *is* the force that usurps valuation made low, voice unmediated by categories must be its agency, to summon recovery *from* dominant texts. In short, to part with promise in the practicalities and relocate it *as* covenant inter-witness (syn/aes/thetic, or natural first trust between persons that Løgstrup suspects), we come to know in alterity; we come into *presence* by means of a response-ability to the human enchanter, we betray promise as proving. The first step to ‘remembering the real’ in learning (as well as for valuing and everyday living) is to know that *being* is the first call of promise. Voice as the summoner privileges story (belonging) over a/scribed personhood. It alone has ethical supremacy for dispelling disenchantment that otherwise beholds being to ascendancy, wherein my neighbour ‘becomes’ an obstacle to promise (and they *know* it).

At its heart, I take leave of effectiveness as the educational goal and head back to the *affective*: to who we are, to valuations prior and greater. Shortly, Brueggemann will give texture to the challenges associated with thinking about affectivity by contextualizing it in covenant inter-witness. After making a case for the renewal of trust (and promise) in this way, I will introduce The Prophetic Mode as the basis by which affectivity can be remembered and re-prioritized, living re-poeticized. Thereafter, by putting the prophetic
mode at play, we will en/counter how counter-storying can be practiced in the reverences of enchantment and affectivity to revive our storied nature in schooling. Finally, I will offer what I call the dis/positions of an ethical pedagogy – proposing care-call-cry – to keep source valuations (ontology) answerable in practice. Still, throughout the reflection, I must keep the promises of language at bay and grasp at things from below, where the heart lives, and which knowing in dis/unity or by binary wants to take over. For as Appelbaum (2001) reminds, if “school is [to be a] bulwark against deterioration and degeneracy of the heart’s word” (p. 90) then it “requires a sensitivity to the very impossibility, which is to say, to the interval of delay during which the word of the heart manifests itself” (p. 77). The text, as with the human, for justice to occur, must remain open even as this project comes to a close.

*Teaching from Behind: Voice as the Initiate of Promise – Speaking as Vocation*

At the root of the matter lay different dispositions toward instruction, which in one sense or another desire to *inspire* the learner’s transformation (transmission, by now, being a dirty word) for the advancement of their good. I suspect few would disagree. But at issue is whether this is epistemological or existential by nature. For example, Socket (2006) has developed a handbook for “candid dispositions” to break down student distrust that I spoke of at the chapter’s outset. Yet can these venture far enough to arrest the manifestations of promise still rooted in knowledge, even if cloaked in tolerance; a term already unsettling for signifying the chore of having to ‘put up with’ others. For application, Farr-Darling (1999) quoted, upon receiving a Killam Trust Teaching Scholarship that “an educated person [being] transformed by what she knows; it changes her outlook, her horizons, and her habits of mind. To teach someone is to participate consciously, and carefully, in that transformation.” But again, is the ‘knowing’ *enough;* are the *sensitive* dispositions to and dispensing of knowing capable of disclosing the fullness of the child in their most original *voice* and *valuation?* Murphy (2004) thinks not. At the root of transformational aim is presumption of worship – intimate connection to the most cherished, or that which we consider most valuable for our flourishing, whether we agree or not.
As transformation is promise-laden to begin with, learning is by nature enchanted. But how teachers are disposed to promise – whether they are given to it as being or as knowing, as enchantment or as disenchanted – will to some extent condition ontology: how the child takes up their valuations for personhood. Dare I say, in the ways we are disposed to promise may lurk a hidden curriculum for kinds of promise to be taken up, kinds of children being made. The human-to-human connection is transcendent relation, says Levinas, and if we suspect there is no transcendent play going on in school – or its ascendant variety, as Taylor posited – we are naively ‘disposed’ to what it means to learn, violating Farr-Darling’s concern that we be conscious of what we pass on. Clearly, that is the paramount pre-occupation of this project. To be ethical in vocations of teaching, in the esprit of Levinas, is to take up the child’s voice as the initiate of promise and bring it forth in the dynamic processes of instruction. Such a practice would constitute the ethical transformation, the foundation for all other valuations to be added.

Here I might ask of our vocations as teachers if we are corresponding persons to concepts – which must first make of persons a (dead) thing – to achieve synthesis with dreams. Or else, do we uphold being as highest valuation, to summon a syn/aes/thetic relation as basis for promise. There is much response-ability in the asking, even to disclose, reciprocally, where we locate our very own sense of promise in the vocation of teaching, which I am just as eager to offer for recovery – as our very own voices are so often repressed. The litmus test, I suspect, for where our promise is found may be to ask if the child transforms our own adventures in educational life: whether they reflect affectivity, or generate anxiety. Considering the storied as found/ational, as initiate of personal value and keeper of justice, I make the case for voice. By “remembering the need to be remembered” (Appelbaum, 2001, p. 80), taking up the call affectively, keeping the enchantment of being at play in the ethical classroom, there must be for each child, for there to be justice her innate “participation in speaking the arche-word I.”

The first word of value and transformation is the ‘to be’ in learning. How we are disposed to voice is a question of our kind of care in our vocations, offers Wineberg (2007) in Professional Care and Vocation; Cultivating Ethical Sensibilities in Teaching. Indeed, our sensibility and disposition need some serious
 reconsideration as we think promise and trust. To Wineberg, “vocation concerns loved work” (p. 1).

Reciprocally, it tells us what we love, where we are placing our promise. My ambition is to make voice and vocation one again. This presumes to confer on our valuations more infinite dimension. To find our own voice in the classroom and summon others to find their own is to truly love … teaching, to effectively be co-transformed (Palmer, 1993, p. 106). “If we can do that, with ourselves and with each other, the words of truth will continue to be given, and we will be given the power to live them more fully.”

Power is a question of action, which learning most certainly intends, but to Palmer, power is not achieved; it is. It continues to be given as voice is empowered (regarded by) the teacher. That is why all learning transformations ‘beyond’ must keep being at the center lest dominant texts of culture return us to the empiric where thick moral texts condition action in ascetics. Tactically, this necessitates a zealous strategy of counter-voice – of re-minding and re-membering – which is why I suspect the prophetic can keep voice the entry point for ethics, to keep sourcing all inter-valuation in the storied. Given its deep commitment to the storied, its guardianship can interrupt the ascetic prescripts of dreams that would otherwise qualify our value, determine our recognition, and repress our fullest vocation and voice. Bai (2006), unites voice with personal knowledge and autonomy to profile the severity of the situation.

I believe that the call for autonomy as the sine qua non of human agency is urgent today in a world besieged by the global forces of corporatization, fundamentalism, consumerism, and other ideological and structural malaises and inertia that render human beings increasingly powerless to act and reduced to only behave. (p. 7)

To be sure, such ethical failure would in significant ways condition collective separation, distrust, and agonistic action. Krishnamurti (1953, p. 34) names its violence, even though not waged by weapons. “When human beings are regimented in any way, keen awareness and intelligence are destroyed” (Sharma, 2008, p. 196). Further, “without respect for human life, knowledge only leads to destruction and misery” (p. 195). I might add, when valuations and voice are repressed, so too is possibility for meaningful action. David Smith (1999) adds a cautionary word on the relation between dreams and agonism in schooling. “We can no
longer confidently proceed … with the building of Utopias through shaping the lives of children in desired
directions, because we now recognize the epistemological problematics inherent in most of our child-
development knowledge” (p. 131). Bai’s (2006) advice is thus fitting for con/version in education: from its
being a place of behaviour to creating spaces for action. From Bai, I take license to supplant the ascetic
instrumental programming that grounds valuation as ideals realized, for a world relation that re-centers
neighbourliness as our source valuation: to initiate action enchanted.

Considering Vocality: Repressions, Reifications and the Re-enchanting of Speech

In many ways, we are back to square one, contending with the narrowed ontology that sources self-
knowing and acting that is in one sense disembodied (Smith, 1999, p. 132), but will in the greater sense
render the self absent (Derrida) and abject (Kristeva) in valuations not its own. Kelly Oliver (2001) calls this
mis/recognition, and at its source is the taking up of stories – thus a speech – not one’s own. This troubling,
in many respects, characterizes the cause of social justice education today, but for reasons that its agenda
often bogs down, at times, in lofty dreams of its own, social critic Walter Brueggemann urges and explicates
a more sweeping ministry that involves nothing less than outright sabotage of the empire imaginaries that
totalize modern citizens. To Brueggemann, the royal consciousness produces confined ontology: the
dominant texts (interests) of culture inscribe the voice (and valuation) a self is to take up.

One of the problems with contemporary reality, wages Brueggemann (2001), is that it is so thick
with symbolism and abstraction that we struggle to discern the affective register. Worse, each is offered in
the deceptive allure of one’s own self-expansive possibility, such that source affections are conditioned to
self-servicing ambitions as the good. What we fail to realize, insists Brueggemann is that anything posed as
goodness, yet goes against the inter-human (what he calls neighbourliness), is already illusive. For this
reason, he wages, we need re/minders (prophets). Culture needs counter-story! We need to nourish and
revitalize at all times the necessity of the human as the good, and that counter-story is the primacy of the
human speech act in a neighbourly relation. The only story we have today, says Brueggemann, is the
rehearsing of empirical voice in triumphant self-succession. “What takes place when symbols are inadequate and things may not be brought to public expression is that the experience will not be experienced” (p. 43). We will know no other reality than those symbolized on our behalf, for our good. In a similar way to Bachelard (1957), who lamented cultural drift on account of taking the image as real, Brueggemann says “we do not have symbols that are deep or strong enough,” and so long as we don’t, and we continue to dwell in the abstraction of dreamed up glory, we will be as impoverished.

Although Taylor spoke of the imaginal drift that has characterized the modern becoming – and that constitutes and insulates our modern ontology – his sense of what a social imaginary is holds for us who educate an instructive moment. Taylor (2004) says that modern institutions have so pervasively conditioned how we think about reality that we’ve no other way to see what is real. In other words, we have no counter-story. He, like Angus (2008) infers that the empire has left “no place untouched,” which is to say, in the voice of Angus that the space between the periphery and the center is annihilated. Thus, the modern condition is one of being samed – made in (by) the image. Worse, we are samed in a single expansive imaginary, to effect, what he suspects is outright malaise. What many fail to see and which Taylor is eager to point out is that the social imaginary of which we are a part is a moral order. In other words, it conditions all valuation from which each is to draw theirs, as basis for action. As this order has narrowed shrunk promise, and thus action’s possibilities, the foundation of the malaise resides in what Brueggemann calls the numbing of pathos; the inability to feel, to be enchanted, to wonder at life in our very lived experience. Life pre/dicted numbs sense. As Brueggemann calls for radical counter-sabotage, Meyer (2009) too urges us to “re-imagine academic community” even to “transgress academic borders” in order to re-instate (speak) the living, for the re-enchantment (relation) of learning spaces altogether.

In view of what Taylor calls imaginary and Weber calls the geist of the age, Canadian educational theorist James Olthuis (1997) urges education to take up a counter-geist. He, like Murphy (2004) agrees that all of life is transcendent. How we locate the spiritual is the matter of concern, if not to already be concerned at the naivety surrounding what is spiritual given preoccupation with human ascent. He calls closure – to
render life purely immanent—“a pipe dream” and an irony our desire to become small in its scale of possibility. But in a more serious tone, he lays forth a “knowing-otherwise” that, like Meyer too, insists must re-imagine possibility for enlivenment. “Ontology and epistemology without ethics are deadly” (Olthuis, p. 1), deadening, and oppressive. “What is hopefully adumbrated here— is, in the words of Jacques Derrida, a ‘thinking of Geist which would be other and more originary.’” If I can take license, we need a counter-story, a counter-geist in what is more original to being. Indeed, to Olthuis, “the ‘wordless word,’ a ‘yes’ that calls forth and interrupts every context” (p. 2) is the facticity of being. And therefore, “promise has already taken place” (p. 3).

Why we are trying to re/place promise remains under suspicion. But I suspect, as does Smith (1999), that it has much to do with the empirical possibility that plays too strongly on our imagination. I offer his insightful muse before taking to a fuller exploration of Brueggemann’s potent disturbance at the state of things under empire imperatives for self-knowing, life ordering, all valuing and of course the resultant human action that this stultifying matrix produces.

If the ascendance of empirical science to epistemological guardianship has been at the cost of speech itself, that is, of thinking, as educators we are charged with a special question. That is, given that the language which dominates (us) allows us to speak but also prevents us from saying what cannot be said in it (any discourse is at the same time a violence against discourse), how we should conduct ourselves. (p. 127)

Smith, in my view, is wise to comment that we will have fidelities. We cannot be neutral to valuation. As Becker has already shown, and many in the surrounds of his insights, all of life is immortality striving; all human action will bear a presumption of promise. Smith asks for a “fidelity to that which calls out to us from within the heart of what we do not understand and for which we may not at present have words.” In this way, he says, the limits of language are to paradoxically open its possibilities. Language comes forth anew, in action renewing.
Empires are marked historically as not only being preservational but expansive by nature. In order to expand (Hardt & Negri, 2000), they need to consolidate the imagination of members toward its *same* interests. As subjects of empire, we are co-opted into moral forms that compromise valuations otherwise. “Every imagination of a community becomes overcoded as a nation, and hence our conception of community is severely impoverished” (p. 107). Singularity is “negated in the straightjacket of the identity and homogeneity of the people,” such that the “ontological axis” (p. 21) that conditions action imposes by default the empirical interests panoptically. “The neutralization of the transcendental imagination is thus the first sense in which the political in the imperial domain is ontological” (p. 354). Thereafter, “empire constitutes the ontological fabric in which all the relations of power are woven together” (p. 354). As Zimmerman (2004) says “the question of epistemology is … that of anthropology” and “reflexive to ontology more broadly” (p. 143). Bai (2009) add, “ontology depends crucially on epistemology” (p. 140); “change the ways of knowing, and we have changed both what is real and what is valuable” (moral). Brueggemann (2001, p. 8) agrees: sociological description is theological first. Now that theology is culture-ology (Becker), we have a new axial epoch (Eisenstadt) in empire/ical conditioning.

As humans have need to inhabit a story – this being the existential reality that Kierkegaard draws attention to and Becker enriches – we are vulnerable to cultural versions given. But there is more than the story given, a greater reality than what we are allowed to *see*, says Brueggemann. He charges that those who have the burden of being its *seers*, and speaking it, carry an ominous responsibility. Brueggemann takes up Weber’s call for prophetic leadership to disrupt, by *interruptive speech*, the false and illusive dominions of promise that condition action to ascetic servitude of the now extra-territorial demands of the state. His *sense* of the tyranny is instructive before I take up the counter voice he advocates for justice to meet education. To Brueggemann (2001), the hidden goal of empire – even unbeknownst to those who lead – is to *separate* people from their story, to re/place moral (fulfilment) backgrounds and thus “make human community impossible, to eliminate any chance of human dissent or alternative, and so to assure the absolutism of the state” (p. xviii). Without them, we have no basis from which to *imagine* otherwise.
Although the ways people are co-opted into dominant imagination can vary – whether it be fear or pleasure based (respectively Orwellian and Huxleyian oppression, point out Collins and Skover, 1996, in *Death of Discourse*) – Brueggemann (2001) points out their equal violence when depriving voice: “Torture and consumer satiation perform the same negative function: to deny a lively, communal imagination that resists a mindless humanity of despairing conformity” (p. xx). Eradicating pathos “does not hurt like torture, but in a quite parallel way, numbness robs us of our capability for humanity.” As it is “the aim of every totalitarian effort to stop the language of newness, and we are now learning that where such language stops we find our humanness diminished” (xxiii), counter voice will inevitably fall away. If reality begins with language (Butler, Arendt), and it is ‘humans’ that speak, what are we speaking and where is it leading ethical imagination? In the new ontological field that empire conditions, where our “consciousness has been claimed by false fields of perception and idolatrous systems of language and rhetoric” (p. 1) I offer an example from a recent radio ad, subtle but ramifying. “Roots: Serving Canada’s best.” Say no more; speech from ‘above’ injures. I know what I’m not and must be to be valid. ‘Tyranny of best’ in my cultural location conditions at once self-loathing and empire re-orienting: the dysfunctional nature of modern personhood; the disjunctive reality for voice and vocation.

Brueggemann situates hope in what is altogether different than ascendance. In contrast to glory for an entity, he offers a *kind* of community, a way of being in relation to one’s neighbour, within inter-*human* speech. “A community of peculiar discourse [has] practices of memory, hope, and pain that keep healthy human life available in the face of all the ‘virtual reality’ now on offer in dominant culture” (xvii). Such communities throughout history were made resilient by “gestures of resistance and acts of deep hope.” Resistance and hope are symbiotic when the nexus is communal. But peculiarity is a dangerous word in locations where empire imaginary lurks strong, even in a so-called free society where each is being ‘themselves.’ “A community rooted in energizing memories and summoned by radical hopes is a curiosity and a threat in such a culture” (p. 1) and leads to an obvious question. Are we *really* ourselves? In fact, we are terrified of being peculiar, and that is why *this* rhetoric of freedom, in lexicon of consumer choice, needs to be severely taken to task. Where we are numb, we are not free! Under such horizons of promised futures,
we are in fact narrowed. And so I posit Brueggemann’s (p. 3) premise for the necessity of counter-story, whose basis for hope in the inter-human is a neighbourly *inter*-action.

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, to nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.

*Neighbourliness and Schooling: The Other ‘as’ Promise and a Re-iteration for Trust*

Since true and *lasting* rebellion against empire cannot occur without a relation to an alternative source for life and valuation, it would be premature to speak of ‘the prophetic mode’ – what I will pose more avowedly as the *basis* for counter-story – without first considering the contingency of the self in community (promise otherwise being presumed self-falsifying). It is only in community that trust is possible, thus promise too. Promise and trust are one! So the irony of modern culture is that promise in the very midst of profound distrust is absurd. Thus, true *hope*, in the reflections of Brueggemann, only occurs in covenant relation; that is, in a thriving story. Where there is absence of story, there is absence of voice, or voice only in fictions forward. It is somewhat ironic too that Brueggemann’s insight is offered in a text where he theorizes what it means to be a self. In *The Covenanted Self* (1999), he not only offers “a challenge to various kinds of certitude” (p. ix) but relates certitude to the un/certain. In this text he is concerned with bearing false witness (a relic of language that once meant telling a lie) as a whole contrivance of how we live. To bear false witness is not to be present for the other’s good, but present to one’s own proving, or now, one’s *own* promise project. It initiates a breach of trust. Of course, his starting point is empirical. “Consumer autonomy … is the governing ideology of our society” (p. 1), which “invades the life” of a community, and presumably, the selves that occupy it. To prove in this way is promotion … of distrust.

Of course Bauman’s (2008) exploration of ethics in terms of liquid consumerism has much to say in agreement. But most striking is that as community has been lost and living occurs in separation, there is for promise sought otherwise a severe problematic. One of the most wrenching illustrations he offers is given by
Nan Ellis, who points out that at one time “protection from danger was a principal incentive for building cities whose borders were often defined by vast walls or fences” (p. 65). But it is the case now that far “from being a relatively safe place ... the city has become associated more with danger than with safety,” more loneliness and separation than community and familiarity. “The sources of danger have now moved almost wholly into the urban areas and settled there.” In view of such living arrangements, “the war against insecurity, and particularly against dangers and risks to personal safety, is now waged inside the city.” In the very places that we live “separation and keeping distance has become the most common strategy in the urban struggle for survival,” where “internal exile is achieved through, manifested in, and sustained by means of virtual connectedness” (p. 66). It is not that we no longer require community. We require it as fictitiously as we dream. “The attraction of the community of sameness is that of an insurance policy against the risks with which daily life” plays out its new kinds of agony. “In each case the striking feature of conduct is the self-deception designed to disguise the genuine springs of action” (p. 69).

There is a lesson here for the classroom, which as a microcosm of the poly-vocal city can mount up defence against larger outside forces that imperil its organic union. I am reminded of the fine work of Donald (2009) who confounds our western sense of communal relations by demonstrating how ‘the Canadian Fort’ once functioned to build community (shut-out intrusions) and destroy it at once. In the later case, whenever an empiric root took hold of the imaginary of the people, it incrementally forged into relations falsity of promise. The expansion thesis, in the case of the British, was already presumed against life by the very act of the fort, built in the midst of shared land and resources. False promise and requisite agonies of action were built around a theory of the earth’s scarcity. Accordingly, “the myth of scarcity both produces and justified violence against the neighbour” (Brueggemann, 1999, p. 113). So positioned, in betrayal of neighbourliness and sacred relation to the earth on which all equally depend, the earth and her inhabitants were made aliens. Such a virile posture toward a ‘scarce earth’ justified a prerogative of othering and exploiting an earth that was as much the other’s. The reflex (and new inheritance) of such a placement of promise all too quickly came to pass against which folk wisdom happily plays its card: you reap what you sow; if you live by the sword, so shall you die by it, and a divided house cannot stand.
As we are summoned toward enchantment in human-nature relations, we are given a gift. It is a gift of realization. No one is above the earth they depend on; we are called back to what we commonly share – to the utterly contingent (and fragile) nature of promise. Commonality appears more important than ever, it seems, as globalization closes in to mount its own kind of empire, which Bauman (2008) takes up in the later part of his book. It too necessitates counter speech. Environmentalism gone global means yet another common dependency to realize, another basis for re-considering global community that issues its own kind of prophetic summons for taking up promise in the key of enchantment. I personally believe that the recent attraction to native studies has much to do with the fact that westerns have been deprived of enchantment. This truly wondrous diverse and storied people, in the variations by which they have struggled against empire across the vast Canadian landscape, has become a living testimony of the vitality of counter-speech, even a paradigm for how the sub-verse functions to re-imagine human vitality. Promise as community, shown by Slepy (2002) through explorations in Indigenous Métissage, reveals a most insightful ethical truth, that by way of the Other “promise has already taken place” (Olthuis, 1997, p. 3). As promise without trust is impossible, how is it that the promise of dreams holds us so captive?

In the spirit of Levinas’ ‘substitution,’ there is a sense that taking the place of the other, and what it demands of my care, means one’s own promise is betrayed. Here is the deception, the burden of proof by which westerns are conditioned to think possibility, at least since Sartre. And Rank offers its rebuke. “To empty oneself is demeaning?” Apparently not. “It represents on the contrary the furthest reach of the self, the highest idealization man can achieve. It represents the fulfilment of the Agape-love expansion” (Becker, 1973, p. 174). Brueggemann (1999, p. ix) would certainly agree. But as this kind of expansion lives in the gap, “between promise and covenant ... where good neighbourliness is worked out,” it does not come with a program (seemingly counter-intuitive). It requires a different posture toward action, a different expectation of fulfilment. To be for the other is to be for the good of the collective story, which is for one’s own good. So we must ask, without being a stakeholder in a collective – in our modern liquid relations – and without some sense of promise’s immediacies – conditioned by the ‘sensations’ of media – we have difficulty ‘believing’ that promise so conferred is in fact for our good. We are afraid of being … left behind. Here again is the
urgency for counter-story, wages Brueggemann, especially to see the false witness this incurs. In schemes of promise Bauman well portrays, to meet my neighbour in “euphemism, advertising and propaganda [are] primary examples of oppressive false witness against the neighbour” (Brueggemann, 1999, p. viii-ix), whose reward for such a witness will always be my own alienation.

In Brueggemann’s (1999) theory of covenant, which directly opposes ontological incline, we must learn what it means to live with “this restless, unsettled relation [that] is the irreducible core of what it means to be human” (p. 1). But as this poses “the awesome truth of our lives,” and contains for us the greater capacities of promise, it deserves the labours that go into its learning (hardly ascetic when delight returned renews hope). Drawing from his own storied prophetic tradition, Brueggemann offers a vocation for those involved in places of teaching. “Israel’s true vocation is indeed to get its mind off itself” (p. 7), re/minding of Lather’s (2007) pedagogy for teachers themselves to get lost, or at least out of the way. Yet it goes a step further still. “Covenanting means self-abandonment, giving self up for the other, and requires the healthy capacity to move beyond self-concern to the unutterable graciousness and awesomeness of God.” Here, trust does not incline to an idea(l), a location of promise, and thereafter something to do. As relations are sacred, and the good is shared, vocation is to re/member, to re-speak and co-seek one another’s communal provision.

So the question for those who are privileged to teach: How can we imagine trust with our students to begin covenanting (promise) in relation to the Other? The very first step is to build trust with ourselves, which Becker earnestly waged is the first stipulation for modern healing: to recover from separation that has been waged between ourselves and the cosmos at large. So noted, it “invites us to view the otherness of self as a friend to be welcomed, and not a threat to be resisted or denied” (p. 15). In this view, covenant is holism which brings all aspects of enchantment together in neighbourly concern. Relation is the reward, which Bauman (2008) says is the belonging presumption of consumerism itself; perhaps too our dreams, maybe even why we dream or dream so much harder given our ever more hollowed relations. With such a different kind of promise imaginable, Brueggemann assures a different kind of abundance. In covenant relation, “the theme that recurs is generosity and abundance. There is enough” (p. 108)! In the register of the existential,
having enough means to be content, and to be … content means one has no *need* to pursue acquisition, to expand on one’s own, or to prove anything as a condition for realizing fullness.

*Fictive Ad/ventures: Into the Land of Promise ... or the Promise of Land?*

The Jewish scriptures offer a metaphor for existential choice (where one locates promise) in terms of land – what is belonged to tangibly and how relation will be had with it. Land offered in the two ways presupposes for Israel how she will choose to live with trust, how (ontologically) she will be entrusted to promise. It is where we encounter forgetting (in visions of advancement) and re/membering (committed to communal story) that promise and exile take on their potent force. Will Israel remember who she is when she enters the Promised Land (Canaan), or will she take up the promise of land in Canaan’s imaginaries of promise? Will she remain in exile existentially and physically or re/member promise communally. The force of Canaan in this narrative positions possibility between two kinds of faith: in one another or in the empire order. Canaan would symbolize promise in the historic ‘expansive order’ and challenge Israel’s innate trust in the communal, and an emergent faith in the empire order would prove faith against one another, against life itself, as the text goes to show.

Scholars show that ‘Caananite’ “is a pejorative code word used to refer to modes of public power and social relationships that are exploitative and oppressive” (Brueggemann, 1999, p. 99). The challenge of the Canaanite imaginary therefore is its ‘anti-covenantal’ or ‘anti-neighbourly’ approach to promise. They pose a threat to the order of life in Israel’s long tradition. Although the Canaanite way of life was organized in terms of have and have-nots, its character as a place posed two specific challenges. First, “modes of social order are so effective and attractive that they constitute a threat to Israel” (p. 100). Power is so arranged around land “that Israel will forget that the land is a gift demanding faith,” a sacred space for communal equality. Second, this land as it is occupied by “new vision driven inhabitants, holds for its people ‘an alternative destiny.’” In this new relationship to land, people are “‘managed’ … by convenience or by conventional common sense or by the enactment of vested interest” (p. 101). Land controlled by vested
interests controls imaginations in kind. It does not nourish relations. Thus, convictions between good neighbourliness and practical intentions are split apart and ordered into concrete arrangements.

As go relations to land, “social institutions and practices” respectively deal with their inhabitants – reality now defined in distrustful relation. Suddenly, a new person emerges in scripture; they are called orphan and widow, and the weak begin to constitute for the assimilated Israelites a pariah. Promise has long been forgotten! Now, expediencies of empire dominate sensibilities of action. Israel is co-opted into self-concern. The secular seduction has won. But “the ‘Canaanite’ temptation to self-sufficiency and self-aggrandizement, whereby one is free to do whatever one wants to do” (p. 105), necessitates warning, “you will utterly perish from the land.” By accepting this promise of life, you will lose life – yourself and your story. Israel is caught between remembering and forgetting: the kind of promise (covenant) it was made for, the kind of being it was to be (p. 106). Here, we sit square with the primacy of this inquiry, at cross-roads of sorts with what these terms and this tension inflect for us who live with and teach in community.

Remembering concerns the palpable awareness that God gives power to get wealth and that power and wealth are covenantal operations. Forgetting is the scuttling of the awareness of God, the disregard of covenanting, and the perverted imagination of self-sufficiency that ‘my power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.

As a result, “this latter deception of autonomy will lead to placelessness,” the absence of a home (rest), and an abundance of security (obsession with security consciousness and its aspirations in kind). Israel knew it stood between two affections: “either the neighbour is honoured, respected, and cared for ... or deep human losses and pathologies arise that threaten us all.” In their case, “the community chose death.” Brueggemann makes stark its significance: “Thus the classic account of Israel’s life under monarchy is a narrative interpretation of the way in which disregard of command led to exile” (p. 107). In this space thereafter, the call-giver, “the prophet must employ a most daring and radical image in order to speak about a return to the land and a new possibility for life in the land” after such consequences.
In the prophetic tradition, any possibility of arresting the dominant ontology relied on “to speak.” But how the prophetic mode takes up voice and vocation, and from whence it draws value will manifest in ways quite different than we expect. Already, we have a sense from Brueggemann as to why the prophet had need to speak. The imperial order threatened the possibility of community, destroying all possibility for human renewal. So it may not surprise that the first word on the prophetic mode is Brueggemann’s (2001) *Prophetic Imagination*. He suggests that the ethical summons, or the very basis for the prophetic call, is sourced by the human cry. “The cry is the primal criticism” (p. 12). The ability to grieve marks the prophet’s intimate connection with everything he is related to in the flesh. He feels tension; the profound space between justice and oppression. “The grieving of Israel ... is the beginning of criticism;” the recognition for how far from home was the native human condition.

On this basis, the occasion for speech arises from two convictions. First, “real criticism begins in the capacity to grieve because that is the most visceral announcement that things are not right” (p. 11). What must be clear here, as we consider the present, is that criticism first takes up tears, not ideals. More, it draws attention to them. In this way, “the task of prophecy is ... evoking cries that expect answers” (p. 13). The second conviction for speaking is based on the need “to bring to expression the new realities against the more visible ones of the old order. Energizing is closely linked to hope” (p. 14). But here lies another caution here. The prophet is not concerned “with social betterment ... but rather with totally dismantling it in order to permit a new reality to appear” (p. 21). He has a fundamentally different vision for what constitutes promise. In this sense, “prophetic purpose is much more radical than social change.” It is at its very core “the struggle with a new self understanding” (p. 27), absolutely alternative ontology. Even so, there are real differences from polemics we often witness today. “The prophet does not scold or reprimand. The prophet brings to public expression the dread of endings, the collapse of our self-madness, the barriers and pecking orders that secure us at each other’s expense” (p. 46). Brueggemann underscores “what the community had to deny in order to continue the self-deception of achievable satiation. He affirmed that all the satiation was a quick eating of self to death” (p. 47). As well, rather than dealing with circumstantial, fleeting matters, he takes to
“addressing … the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated” (p. 3).

What is quite clear by now is that the prophet is remarkably rooted in an ontology that is itself absolutely alternative to the order of things in which he is situated. “The key word is alternative” and to be faithful to the call of justice, every “prophetic community must engage in a struggle with that notion” (p. 4). To be so rooted means “the prophet is called to be a child of the tradition... so at home in the memory that the point of contact and incongruity with the situation ... in culture can be discerned and articulated with proper urgency” (p. 2). The urgency is initiated by “the inability to care” (p. 41) about what the expansive enterprises are costing the realm of personhood. “The Royal consciousness leads people to numbness, especially to numbness about death” (p. 41), and so it must deny the first order of being altogether, the za’ak (cry) of being, life’s first summons, right from the moment we are born. By taking up such a care, about the most visceral and mortal things “the task of prophetic imagination is to cut through the numbness, to penetrate the self-deception” (p. 45). The “alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to energize persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community ... may move,” that it may “live in fervent anticipation of the newness.”

Once again, the alternative here is radically different than simply being alternative, whose origins arise from discontent with “aspects” of mainstream life. This alternative community has a fundamentally other imaginary about what it means to be human, and where one goes to draw life in abundance (sense of promise, hope).

We need to ask not whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is imaginable.

We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the Royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought. (p. 39)

At this point, we can look at the wider context of the situation from which this historical model is derived, which may strengthen our recognition of the violence when one order of reality is set against
another. “Our understanding of prophecy comes out of the covenantal tradition of Moses” (p. 5), and effectively “represents a radical break with the social reality of Pharaohs Egypt. The newness and radical innovations of Moses and Israel in this period can hardly be overstated,” as “the appearance of a new social reality is unprecedented” (p. 6). It is here, notes Walzer (1996, p. 23), where Pharaoh is to make ‘task’ the mastering center of life – the condition of promise, or as Weber notes (1952), “the demagogue appears for the first time in the records of history” (p. 268). Brueggemann (2008) points out that Pharaoh’s control of grain (bread) means he has royal right to impose conditions for its acquisition, and today, for all manner of ascent. The prophetic counter, in Isaiah 55, is an invocation for all who have no money to eat, and labour differently. It is the radical interruption to the Pharaonic order. The Christian Eucharist, thereafter, is a call to engage life otherwise: to participate in promise embodied, by taking up the call of my neighbour as my own za’ak has been taken up by God. Bread without doing! (John 6)

In effect, “Moses dismantled the religion of static triumphalism,” and “the mythical legitimacy of Pharaohs social world is destroyed.” His counter-speech invoked a “new social reality, which is utterly discontinuous with Egypt” (p. 7), imposing a radical relation to one another in communal care. The distinction between the two ontologies could hardly be greater. “The gods of Egypt are the immovable Lords of order. They call for, sanction, and legitimate a society of order, which is precisely what Egypt had,” but “inevitably it served the interests of the people in charge, presiding over the order and benefiting from the order.” For Israel, there was no basis for social stratification, no imaginary for how to live in the world according to human dominions at all, except that the prophetic tradition had to continue speaking as Israel kept wanting to “go back” to Egypt’s imaginary. Hardt and Negri (2000, p. 21), committing a whole volume to Empire, offer the vast gap between two realities that the likes of Brueggemann and Reimer take up in drawing the vast tension between Israel and Egypt, or shared versus single visions of promise.

This new subjectivity offered an absolute alternative to the spirit of imperial right – a new ontological basis. From this perspective, Empire was accepted as ‘maturity of the times,’ and
the unity of the entire known civilization, but it was challenged in its totality by a completely different ethical and ontological axis.

Reimer (1996) has edited and contributed to a compilation of essays which explores prophetic ministry in the context of Israel’s captivity and exile. He seeks “the possibility of reviving the prophetic mode as a credible and perhaps even critically important perspective on today’s affairs” (p. 2). Though I will in a moment profile its elements, what is curious to note right away is how the first broad scale social justice event in history was initiated by Israel’s prophets. Walzer (1996) says “the prophets were social critics, the first social critics in the West, and we can learn from reading them ... something of the conditions that make criticism possible and of the place and standing of the critic in the society he criticizes” (p. 24). Hanson (1996) adds that we find in the Hebrew tradition “that the prophetic tradition was different from the prevailing one” (p. 4). To understand the difference, “it is necessary that we describe the relationship between prophecy on the one hand, and its host system, the monarchy, on the other.” Though prophets existed in other societies, their preoccupation was “to support and defend [the] monarchy and temple in all things” (p. 6), with their initial charge conferred by the king himself or his servants. This kind of prophecy Hanson calls “central prophecy; it is supportive of the interests of the institutions” (p. 2). Its contrast is “referral prophecy [which] stands outside the mainstream and exercises criticism over and against it.” It refers back … to the good prior, to the necessity of personhood. “The office of critical prophecy seems to be unique to Israel.” More exhaustively, Hanson says,

Though it is true that in a historical sense prophecy originated with the monarchy, on a deeper, more critical level, its origins must be located in the founding experiences of the Hebrew people, what we can call metonymically, ‘The Exodus.’ This tradition furnished a critical perspective from which monarchy could be evaluated.

The important thing to note is that the orator stood in radical contra-distinction from the system in which he lived, and he was seized by an entirely alternative ideology, one that Hanson regards as “an open-ended and dynamic ontology” (p. 14). Contrasting two orders of promise, and two views on human agency,
Hanson distinguishes between the “prophetic mode” and the “ideology of kingship.” “What the court prophets proclaimed is of little interest to us” (p. 3). Instead, we look to the “biblical tradition [which] preserved not the words of the political supporters or the powers that were, but the words of the reformers,” those whose vocation was to take up memory (story). Herein lay the difference between the prophet and the King: one takes up a defence for the person, while the other’s entire preoccupation is the fortification and defence of his empire, even his own deification.

The condition that makes criticism possible (Walzer) is the injustice waged by the host system (Hanson), to platform no less than a showdown of speech (flesh) against iron (the immovable and static as Weber’s iron cage would signify; the disenchantment of life and one other). At the heart of the prophetic call was an appeal to community, embedded within the concept of shalom, or what it signifies as good neighbourliness. “On the basis of this ontology socio-political structures emerged within … shalom.” Shalom “gave expression to the soul of the community. It described that community’s essential nature and offered the possibility of constant renewal of that nature through memory, through recitation, through re-creation of an open, dynamic, and radically egalitarian/inclusive ontology” (p. 9). Key here is the “referring back … from bondage to freedom,” with the presumption of freedom not being enclosed in a machinery of promise, but to behold promise in a rooted and dynamic co-emerging. Both promise and program were assumed in the ordinariness of interaction. “We see this vital function of the epic, this function of calling Israel back through memory to its essential nature and motivational center” against “monarchical structures that promised political salvation [which] threatened the very soul of this nation” (p. 11). Such encroachment demanded a constant vigilance of speech, a constant appeal to return, to the re-enchanted kind of promise they were ‘historically’ privileged with.

The tragic case of Israel is that she wanted a kingship ideology – to be like the other nations. In 1 Samuel 8, “Samuel warns the people concerning their request for a king: this King will take your sons and make them charioteers, your daughter’s and make them bakers and perfumers, a tenth of your land and the best of your fields, and then – and here’s the bottom line – you shall become slaves” (p. 10). In effect, the
asceticism of the royal consciousness was implicated at the very moment it was issued. “The King began ... defining righteousness on the basis of the Kings rule of the land and by limiting the showing of compassion.” As Samuel admonishes “you will reverse your whole epic and end up where you came from.” Though Israel was released from Egypt’s tyranny, she lost her memory. Grimsrud (2000) adds interesting insight on the occasion. It meant “the social transformation of Israel decisively moved away from covenant faithfulness” (p. 68). As this became the case “Poverty and distress were widespread,” in a stratified economic system and a legal system of privilege replaced the inheritance system to relegate the social order to promise on the basis of impersonal servitude. As Bauman (2008) made plain earlier, the erasure of memory and the hyper speed of participation in promise means more than the lost memory, and more than the associated loss of trust. What it means in the end is “the disposability of humans” (p. 56). To this, the prophet says enough!

Lost memory was so severe and the resulting injustice so pervasive, that Israel faces God’s wrath. “Amos preaches a transcendent ethic – God is not identified with Israel per se. God is identified with justice and righteousness” (neighbourliness). Accordingly, “When Israel itself is unjust, it also is judged.” Even for God’s people, God’s ethic was supreme. Amos demonstrates just how profound was the nature of captivity under these illusions of promise that the judgment had to be severe. This is the misunderstood aspect of Israel’s judgment, though she is, of course, later restored, given chances yet again to re/member. Because a shared ethic is absurd today and promise is all about acquisition, such severity appears cruel. What goes entirely unseen though is the intended re-relation at its root. It should not take long if we took honest account of what we deny of poverty and human abuses everyday for us to rethink this derogation. Perhaps we despise this biblical occasion because it deprives us of promise our way, but with no account of what promise on my own terms costs the rest of the human race.

Justice is about the human, not the empire; about the promise being drawn from neighbourliness, not self promotion in a stratified system. The ontology of prophetic vision and the ideology of kings are not to be thought in binary though (contrasting ideals, per se). Instead, they represent contrasting stories: a dominant text (of empire) and its counter-story (covenant) that more truly honours the sub-text of reality, being itself.
“The model of the stratified Egyptian pyramid” which enticed the Israelites (Reimer, 1996, p. 7) was “a dominion of Imperial order, the socioeconomic order of monarchy, an order appealing to mythic warrants, predicated on an ideology of special privilege … against all change and challenge.” An ideology as such, shapes our ontology in state imperatives. The intrinsic nature of its injustice demanded a counter-imaginary, to produce a “social revolution, supported by the dynamic and open ended Yahwistic ontology [that] was ongoing” (p. 19).

The counter-story is not waged by aggression or by any other instrument, and certainly not motivated by anything hierarchical in the first. The counter-story is waged by speech, for speech – by humans, for humans – to achieve the revitalization of language, the occasion of an open and dynamic ontology, as Hanson put it earlier. Brueggemann says (2001) “The prophet is engaged in a battle for language, in an effort to create a different epistemology out of which another community might emerge. The prophet is not addressing behavioural problems … only the hope that the ache of God could penetrate the numbness of history” (p. 55). Even here, in the poetic utterance, “the language permits the words of Jeremiah to transcend the person of the prophet” (p. 54). The prophet can never rise above his words, or ever create a fixed ambition. The insistence is that when justice is spoken, by God or the prophet, it is for no one in particular. It is for the good of all. Speech must always therefore, in the first, be for the neighbour.

Profiles of Prophetic Mode and Ministry: Anticipating the Face as Justice in Education

For Reimer and Brueggemann respectively, speech comes by way of the “prophetic mode” and by “prophetic ministry.” Both writers re-centralize speech as the means for recovering the fullness of single human persons. To them, ethics starts with voice and ends at giving voice. The instrument for achieving justice is unitary with its destination. There is no abstraction, no delusion. In other words, there is for this program for justice no instrumental rationality, no theory. As there is no moral program per se, there is no power, no interestedness. There is only the rising of humans by raising one’s voice against what would otherwise render them low. Speech is from below (beneath the texts of royal culture) and from behind
(recuperating the memory of one’s originary belonging). Its aim is hope, which is not to be thought as a
destination, or an abstract thing at all. It is rather a condition of vitality – of inter-freedom, to-be who one is
as they-are in their humanity: to bequeath fullest voice and vocation. Against any other kinds of being, any
other kinds of promise, and any other ascetic instrumentality in between, which would, by default, condition
the outright breakdown of speech, the prophetic wields the ultimate disjunction by speaking.

The prophetic mode is Reimer’s (1996, p. x) template for taking action against the dictates that
imperil human neighbourliness when it is co-opted by a royal imaginary, as outlined above. He offers first
the foundation, or the prophetic disposition:

The characteristics of the prophet, as it becomes a part of our secular as well as our religious
understanding, are (1) a passionate commitment to such values as love, justice, freedom,
peace, well-being and moral excellence for all; (2) a dedicated commitment to criticism of
existing societies in light of their fulfillment or non-fulfillment of those prophetic values; (3) a
strong commitment to action, both covenantal and constitutional, to fulfill those values, to
honor the Commandments, and to narrow the gap between prophetic values and existential
reality; and (4) a thoroughgoing commitment to continuous prophetic scrutiny and futuristic
projection in order to anticipate problems and ensure our long-range societal health.

In a present application, Paul Hansen “sees in the prophetic mode a reliable basis for exposing the
weaknesses of Machiavellian, utopian, and liberal Democratic politics,” to offer “a promising means for
moving ‘to a higher level of politics that can more effectively ensure vital civilized life, healthy growth and
creative human fulfillment’” (p. 1). As such “the paradigmatic task of prophets” in this orientation, is “that of
judging ‘the People’s relations with one another’” on one hand, and “the internal character of their society,”
on the other: “the task of social criticism,” but in “a context of hope.” It always aims at renewal, and is not
therefore a mere nihilistic polemic. Whereas in the contemporary sense the “easy disposability of individual
identities and inter-human bonds that are represented in contemporary culture [are] the substance of
individual freedom” (Bauman, 2008, p. 160-161), in the prophetic mode, freedom is renewal that comes by means of human inter-action, even to resist the illusion of a static self-sufficient utopia.

The prophetic mode consists of four dominant characteristics. “First, we can recognize a visionary modality” whose “messages and their activities were predicated on a vision of a harmonious socio-political order” (p. 13) guided by the concept of grace. “This vision was born historically of the liberation experience and thus was radically egalitarian in thrust.” As Hanson puts it, “this is the transcendent side of prophecy.”

“Second, there is a pragmatic or practical or realistic dimension. The prophets’ lives were dedicated to translating that vision into the concrete realities of their society. This worldly side of prophecy is an important corrective to those who would use biblical prophecy to justify ... a world disdaining spirituality.”

Clearly, this reminds of Weber’s own prophetic troubling that modern religious impulse moved toward the ascetic to ‘get out’ of the world as it was experienced. “Third, we recognize a revisionist dimension or facet. Dedication to translating the vision into everyday realities disallowed the prophets from formulating a final version of the vision” into “socio political program.” The “appreciation of the revisionist impulse” (p. 14) means engagement with “an open ended, dynamic ontology of events.” In fact, “the ontological open-endedness of propheticism” (p. 15) altogether forsakes fundamentalism as it is in breach with the historical particularity of the dynamic counter-story.

The last feature of the prophetic mode is that “the inevitable result of this dynamic ontology, courageously applied to changing conditions by the prophets, was diversity.” The prophetic mode upholds the radical alterity of the human and knows that it’s speaking up will ‘enrich the larger body’ and remind of aspects not otherwise remembered. At its heart, it presents from its storied location speech, speech and more speech against an ontology (p. 19) that forgets (p. 20) and thus abets social decline and moral decay. The vocational implication is an ambitious one, but one that is for us, for all, in the end. By remembering story, and bearing it forth by speech “enables us to be agents of reconciliation and healing in our society and world” (p. 20).
What Reimer and his colleagues take up as the prophetic mode, Brueggemann initiates as the *ministry* (or more formally, vocation) of the prophet. Of course, since this occupies the larger corpus of his vast field of scholarship, it seems most sensible to highlight his call for prophetic *vocalis* by way of a summative statement. Given contexts already admitted, this offers, more fittingly a meditation than a conceptual program, which is what speech hopes for in the first place. Once again, we recall the premise for this aspiration, especially for possibilities of speech in schooling. Baumann (2008) offers it well: “the ethical challenge to which humans are exposed by the very presence of others, by the ‘silent appeal of the face’ – a challenge that precedes all socially created and socially run ontological settings” (p. 48). The prophetic mode is our hope for a new ontology of renewal and justice. So given, attempts to bring it into the educational imagination becomes for us the deliberation at hand.

What becomes immediately ironic in Brueggemann’s poetic is that prophetic ministry is a task. But that should not unsettle. Given the sub-versive nature of his collective insights, what becomes clear is that the very term is gradually eclipsed by the language of vocation. As Chinnery (2003) points out, we need a renewing speech more than ever in education, for the very reasons that ethics has failed; the very subjectivity of the child (and its speech) is disenchanted. The urgency is one of language, and it even “requires a suspension of almost everything that term has come to mean” (p. 15) – i.e. the broad background by which we refer to ‘the moral’ – and which “requires nothing less than a new ethical language.” The west has an impoverishment of language for the moral agencies of the self in terms of heteronomy, she wages. For an ethics in education that begins in the aesthetic of the inter-human, there is urgency to enlist counter speech to enable counter-vocational possibility against the thicker canons of contemporary schooling and its static lexicons of shame. Enter the poetics of the prophet! To Brueggemann (2001), with new possibilities for language and for speaking, we can “struggle with a new self-understanding” (p. 27). Who will offer that language, and by it posit new imaginaries – to recast promise in the ethical – makes for the vocation of teaching (Palmer, 1993) the chief aim liberation of “the voice of the subject” (p. 98).
In faithfulness to his own poetics, Brueggemann first gesture social criticism against the empire order of our very day, after which time he invokes and offers in/vocation to those who will offer hope in its place. He begins, “it takes little imagination to see ourselves in this same royal tradition” (p. 36) – of the Pharaonic order – and to note its fundamental condition. Brueggemann places …

- “Ourselves in an economics of affluence in which we are so well off that pain is not noticed and we can eat our way around it.”
- “Ourselves in a politics of oppression in which the cries of the marginal are not heard or are dismissed as the noises of kooks and traitors.”
- “Ourselves in a religion of immanence and accessibility, in which God is so present to us that his abrasiveness, his absence, his banishment are not noticed, and the problem is reduced to psychology.”

He goes on, “perhaps you are like me, so enmeshed in this reality that any other way is nearly unthinkable.” Hereafter, Brueggemann speaks about the confinement of action it produces. “The royal program of achievable satiation” (p. 37) …

- “Is fed by a management mentality that believes there are no mysteries to honour, only problems to be solved.”
- “Is legitimized by an ‗official religion of optimism,’ which believes God has no business other than to maintain our standard of living, ensuring his own place in his palace.”
- “Requires the annulment of the neighbour as a life-giver in our history; it imagines that we can live outside history as self-made men and women.”

In short, the royal consciousness presumes to be the only story for man, the only voice that has license to speak and corral human action. Such that it does, it promotes an expansive ideology for all its members in the patterns and values of: an economics of affluence that directly assaults an economics of equality, a politics of oppression that directly assaults the politics of justice; and a religion of disenchanted immanence that directly assaults the dignity and natural liberty of the human spirit. Under its daunting
command, Becker (1973) agrees. “We bring the lewd promise of immortality everywhere, which is not a promise but only a denial of what history brings and what we are indeed experiencing” (p. 44). Against such vilification, is demand for a radical sub-version (Brueggemann, 2000b, p.3) to re-render reality.

At is deepest level, “The task of prophetic imagination is to cut through the numbness [and] to penetrate the self-deception” (p. 45) that Becker so earnestly elaborated is infused within the projects of modern self-making. “That task has three parts:” “1. to offer symbols” that offer “the wider view of the human experience,” “2. to bring to public expression” what has “been denied so long and suppressed so deeply” but that we fail to recognize is the greater possibility for being human, and “3. to speak metaphorically but concretely” about the greater life realities that can inform responsible action and create a fuller expression about what it means to be human. In the end, this task points to “what the community had to deny in order to continue the self-deception of achievable satiation” (p. 47). If we were to have to wake in this way though, it would mean having to face the “‗harbingers of ill tidings,‘” (Bertolt Brecht) who Amos “remind[s] us, on whose doors they knock, just how insecure our security is, how feeble and vulnerable our comfort, how poorly safeguarded our peace and quiet” (Bauman, 2008, p. 39). But the prophet, grieved too often by these shadowed realities, can do no less than take up the ministry of speech.

- “It is the task of prophetic ministry to bring the claims of the tradition and the situation of enculturation into an effective interface. That is, the prophet is called to be a child of the tradition ... so at home in the memory that the point of contact and incongruity with the situation ... in culture can be discerned and articulated with proper urgency” (p. 2).
- “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, to nourish, and even folk a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us” (p. 3).
- “Prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing … the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated.”
- “The task of prophetic ministry is to hold together criticism and energizing” (p. 4).
“It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the King wants to urge as the only thinkable one” (p. 40).

“The prophetic task needs to be done wherever there are men and women who will yield to the managed prose future offered them by the king” (p. 40-41).

In the end, prophetic task takes up a ministry about life and death, and what are ultimate freedoms in between. “He grieves the grief of Judah because he knows what the king refuses to know” (p. 47). He sees what has been there all along. “The royal folk had for so long lived in a protective, fake world that their perceptual field was skewed” (p. 48). If one was to really take note of what is just not right in today’s neatly arranged cities, prophetic vocation offers not just a good idea, but a “concrete practice.” More than an offering, it becomes for those who are moved, an ethical command, for vocation of renewal.

Contemporary Applications for Educators

If life is too uniform in our social locations, such that we have no occasion to speak – although I suspect we are not looking very far, or deep, if we are not finding occasion – it would not take long to pan the globe and find a convincing exemplar of this possibility. Desmond Tutu (2004) offers such an account of a direct and more visible collision between the managed educational programs of empire and the prophetic will to deny its hold over the imagination of a community.

I wanted to become a doctor, a physician, and I was admitted to medical school, but my family did not have the money for fees. So I ended up becoming a teacher. I stopped being a teacher when the South African Government introduced a deliberately inferior education for blacks called Bantu education, and I felt I wasn’t ready to collaborate with this apology for an educational system. Our children, the 1976 kids who revolted against apartheid in Soweto, called it ‘gutter education,’ and it was gutter education. I left teaching. (p. 4).
Tutu goes on to share details about the order of the times and recalls the ‘storied hope’ that became the possibility for vocalizing an alternative imaginary and course for human (communal) action.

See, Bantu education had hoped that it was going to turn them into docile creatures, kowtowing to the white person … these school kids came out and said they were refusing to be taught in the medium of Afrikaans. That was -- that was really symbolic of all of the oppression. Afrikaans was the language they felt of the oppressor, and protesting against Afrikaans was really protesting against the whole system of injustice and oppression where black people’s dignity was rubbed in the dust and trodden underfoot callously, and South Africa never became the same … these young people were amazing.

To these youth, with such a rich heritage, what was remarkable was their awareness and commitment to the storied possibility, for its retrieval being the very source of their hope. Tutu is as shrewd as he is humorous in his resolve. “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.” It was clear the something was just not right and needed more than a tool or political strategy. It needed the power of story and the galvanizing of a people around its voice. An African friend I know marvels at how we defer to static promise, even to betray a greater shared reality. I wonder if Tutu’s people seem odd to us, because we are so comfortable.

As we think about the power of voice – the freedom to speak that we only seem to manifest and be preoccupied with in negative fashions today, says Bauman – it seems a fitting last word is occasioned from the stirring horrors of Hitler’s Germany, from the voice of Martin Niemöller (1946). He attests that voice is the essential witness against the harsh realities of empirical ambition.

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist; Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist; Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew; Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out for me.
We can also call to mind another highly respected educator, whose sufferings with a people under the totalizing dictates in Latin America pronounces prophetic invocation against the invasions at work in the terrifying spread of western consumerism. Henry Giroux (2003), citing a Fast and Co. (1997) journal whose theme was “The Brand Called You,” speaks on how the procuring of promise narratives not our own can dismantle an entire generation. “This sad and tragic narrative suggests that citizens lose their public voice as market liberties replace civic freedoms and society increasingly depends on consumers to do the work of citizens” (p. 427). He adds that the dominant text of “neo-liberalism has become the most dangerous ideology of the current historical moment” (p. 428) because “it assaulted all things public … by offering no language capable of connecting private consideration to public issues.” ‘We the people,’ says Negri (2003), is not for the people after all, but a static and confused ‘collective idea’ of how we are to think freedom and democracy. Giroux goes on, “what becomes troubling under such circumstances is not simply that ideas associated with freedom and agency are defined through the prevailing ideology and principles of the market, but that neo-liberalism wraps itself in what appears to be an unassailable appeal to common sense.” Being that it has naturalized a consumptive reality, “the underlying metaphysics of consumerism has in the process become a kind of default philosophy for all modern life” (Bauman, 2008, p. 59), whose production of “a homogenous, territorially isolated environment” (p. 69), has no differently ‘consumed’ and conditioned our acts of speech, our whole ontological constitution with it.

What makes this narrative so disturbing “is precisely the absence of questioning; its surrender to what is seen as the implacable and irreversible logic of social reality.” It fully usurps possibility of speech, of counter-storying, by denying legitimacy to any other version of reality. What this says about voice and one’s ability to find it otherwise, is impossible, when the empirical order is “the arbiter of social destiny” (p. 430). It is already the case that corporate culture will for students whose minds are on the future “intractably reduce their career choices” (p. 445), presuming consent to the poverty of choice, if not outright poverty altogether. But the poverty that is not accounted for is our speech, and if we do not as educators nurture wider possibilities for language – for speaking itself and speaking contexts too – we are complicit in allowing the sabotage of entire options for future vocation. Giroux calls this a troubled gospel (p. 445), and promise is
certainly at stake. Here, freedom means freedom to brand, to stylize voice in the intonations of culture. It is a freedom to choose your slavishness, as Becker offered it earlier. Giroux appeals to Roy, who says we need, especially in education, to “uncool” (p. 452) being, to take it out of its pretentious pose. To ‘uncool’ is to counter speak. But risk remains even there, tempting a re-coolization in other ways (The Rebel Sell; see Heath & Potter, 2005); to ‘unempire’ language, we need not re-cool, but re/clect.

“Pedagogy in this instance not only works to shift how students think about the issues affecting their lives and the world at large, but potentially energizes them to seize such moments as possibilities for acting on and engaging in the world” (p. 453). As this is a call to action, it is as much to what grounds it. “The appeal here is not merely ethical; it is also an appeal that addresses the materiality of resources, access, and politics … to any viable notion of individual and social agency.” Giroux puts the counter in a spirit of “organizing against.” For this he cites “Derrida’s recent provocation that ‘we must do and think the impossible. If only the possible happened, nothing more would happen. If I only did what I can do, I wouldn’t do anything’” (p. 457). In the fashion of Niemöller, speaking is to act (Butler, 2005), but I suspect that creative action is not the mere matter to enlist. I believe that as being is wonder, our issue is one of solicitation, ‘to excite’ its speech forth. This initiates not simply hope for new imaginaries going forward, but re-opening the wonder of being we’ve left out of the larger meaningfulness of life. Postman (1969) says we need more Crap Detecting, where in the spaces of the real we have made, we must draw from a deep dignity to secrete more than anticipation, but excitation. We need bigger words for the bigger of the world, and he asks if the “stuff in the head of the teacher” bears inadequate relationship to reality in the fullness sense (p. 171). He answers: consumptive and communicative reality is far too small (p. 172).

We do not have to go far to find other colonisations of voice closer to home. Bauman (2008) and Needleman (1994) boil modern reality and meaningfulness down to the concept of avarice. It is a funny word, not often used in our modern time, for precisely the same reason we do not invoke hubris. These are now staples in modern behaviour – and isn’t it strange that when behaviour is ubiquitous, language in the otherwise dies out in proportion. Needleman says avarice – traditionally, the expression of going into a
situation with false pretensions to come out ahead – is the very ground of our social exchange. It is what *conditions* vocation. Hayes says “Avarice is about ‘internalizing economics’ and being ruled by the prospect of gain, whereby everything else becomes a strategic implement for its pursuit” (p. 265). Whether it be dating or business relations or school, self-advancement within the *mores* given (and that law *allows*) presumes advantage to be taken. Incidentally, this is why Hebrew culture was against such a thing as fornication: without legal contract, there is no protection for the one on the wrong side of advantage-seeking – trust in what cannot be trusted bears wounds; and today, law looks away, and we in its moral prudency. The point here is that as the empire values of consumer culture so absorb and enshrouds all senses of what is good, justice will suffer. Life *is* avaricious in the themes of advancement. No voice can stand in counter-space. Nothing will be able to story or take up valuations for being any other way.

As this presents a contest of freedoms (a contest of promise realizable), *in* the making of glory stories forward (or *for* the humans they oft leave behind), there is for the sake of justice a need to know free speech by quite another name. If not, we may lose our own altogether. Doug Aoki (2000) indicates that because demand is for ‘texts of clarity,’ “the exclusion of inclusion” (p. 362) becomes the dominant mindset in educational spaces. But such demand *for* dominant text may increasingly ‘render us’ *by* texts entirely other *than* human, realizing our own absence altogether in so far as that which more originally was present (in speech) gets reified by dominant discourses. For these reasons, he summons *refusals* (p. 364) into teacher discourses. If urgencies for clarity take hold at their furthest reach – and being is gappish at best – then as Aoki says, “language disappears,” and surely being with it. Bauman (2008) wages that the dominations of modern culture arise from how we *define* responsibility and I note in kind that toward whatever becomes the basis for action speech will follow. As promise happens to live increasingly in the abstract, it is, in the spirit of Aoki, without language. We are written as hollow, or in the hollows of the stories it writes *of* us. “The level of abstraction – the distance between the idea and an action or event – significantly influences the idea’s chances of becoming a saving lie” (Bailey, 2003, p. 5). Look what else has disappeared under such shifting of voice, notes Bauman.
The concepts of responsibility and responsible choice, which used to reside in the semantic field of ethical duty and moral concern for the other have moved or have been shifted to the realm of self fulfillment and calculation of risks. In the process, the other as the trigger of the target and the yardstick for a responsibility accepted, assumed, and fulfilled has all but disappeared from view, having been elbowed out or overshadowed by the actors own self.

Responsibility means now, first and last responsibility to one’s self. (p. 53)

In the disappearing act of the Other in language, and thus action (as the train of thought carries on) we have “the substitution of the responsibility to for the responsibility for … replacing responsibility for others with responsibility to oneself and responsibility for oneself rolled into one.” What this says about answerability, and its possibilities in language all but disappear too.

I offer for counter invocation a hope from mischievous Aoki: “No text can be read ‘immanently’” (p. 364). No person can be by themselves in knowing, in words, and neither can these words draw thick borders one way or another around reality at all. To speak is to elude borders. To be is to do the same. The human is beyond the immanency given in the clarity of language ‘or’ the world, no matter how much it dreams clarity possible. We are enchanted, to transgress the contained. To be eludes defining. To be ‘just’ is to keep guard over this reality, and demand it in neighbourliness. If so, then here lay a summons to elicit enchantment anew, to bring to the task of human engagement the revitalization of its voice by means of seduction (Baudrillard). In Seduction, says Gane (2002), we re-enchant. “It is the manifest discourse … that turns back on deep order … in order to invalidate it, substituting the charm and illusion of appearances” (p. 131).

Vocation needs to be re-seduced, so being can counter its reduction. “I am called upon, addressed, named by a ‘Thou,’ a ‘You,’ whose name will ever elude me. And all of us” (Downey, 2000, p. 20). If we are the enchanted, we are the enchancers. We must speak! This is where vocalis meets ethics: being and voice co-emerge. Baudrillard (1996) leaves enchanting invocation a fitting close.

Ciphers do not cipher. Work over the illusion. Create illusion to create an event. Make enigmatic what is unclear, render unintelligible what is only too intelligible, make the event
itself totally unreadable. Accentuate the false transparency of the world to spread a terroristic confusion about it, or the germs or the viruses of a radical illusion – in other words a radical disillusioning of the real. (p. 104)

**Implications for Educators: Dis/posed to Wonder in Care, Call and Cry**

What are we in the business of creating, as educators? Are we producing synthetic selves, who, put under the command of the spoken demand, are making a way forward in words not one’s own? Are we really listening, being attentive to the first word (cry) of the ‘insufficient’ child in our midst; and there meeting in inter-lingual summons? How we respond may be saying (yes, valuing) more than we suspect, about whose voice we ourselves inhabit, whose version of reality – effectively, whose promise for ‘person fullness’ we are most truly beholden to. What pulls us vocationally hosts how we care, says Sharon Todd (2003).

“Responsibility needs to be rethought in terms of the pull teachers and students experience between their institutional duties and the personal, inter-human dimension of classroom relationships” (p. 142). If institutional life subsumes the child, then we are saying (handing over voice to the fact) that life belongs to institutions; they supersede us, and we are not the living. As facts of life do not include persons, voice is not therefore an event. As an impetus for responsibility, speech becomes absurd. Isn’t this how it goes in schools? Noise is a disturbance; it gets in the way of real progress. Bauman (1995) calls this kind of responsibility floated (p. 18-19): People, in drift, attached to prescriptions. It renders affairs inter-legal, and must even usurp the inter-lingual. Action is invoked by anything but the Other, but is capably masked by our tacit belief in the “fact” that every act in accordance with institutional life (synthesis) is for their good.

If the cry is the first call (fact) of being, and we take it up, we realize the ethical. Our very own “method of self reflection” is initiated by the Other’s speech, creating a disjunction of the self-referential in human affairs, and betraying all proving matrices on which our whole culture is built. That is not easy, or perhaps even possible. It requires a different axiom for sourcing concern. In the reverse however, care in referents of [instrumental] knowing initiates voice in someone else’s moral vocation. What is valued is ‘other
than’ persons, and speech by implication is not most truly cared about. Instead, we impose what Levinas calls the Said (self in theme of culture). Care has a direct relation to speech, and the presumption of its welcome in schooling tells us what we really believe about the value of human difference. We “say” as educators we are most for the child’s unique calling, their most natural endowment. Are we? Or have we lost faith (in the enchanted), and believe “the good” lies elsewhere than the human. Is our caring, after all, guided by pro/positions (ideals) or by a dis/position (the affective) toward the cries of the other?

Levinas says that the most unique human moment is in the encounter whereby one is summoned to a kind of action that frees disclosure, where being takes up its most unique calling. Appelbaum (2001) textures the insight: “Originally, a summons was a secret reminder delivered by a messenger and intended to be understood by no one but its recipient. Its inherent specificity ‘for your ears alone’ made it an encryption that addressed one regarding a critical matter that involved sacrifice, forbearance and commemoration. By design, a summons disturbs the automatic order of things” (p. 4). In this pose a “summons is an ordeal, a dangerous test, the outcome of which indicates a higher judgment.” If received, “thought is imperilled and its project (of self-replication) is at risk.” The suggestion I make in uniting Levinas and Appelbaum on the matter is that to care in this way (to be response-able otherwise) is to take up defence for the singular human voice as a vocation … to co-incite wonder, and to be ex/cited as its disclosure.

Indeed, if there is a moral-emotional relationship in human affairs, beginning in human need, then how we witness the Other will decide the ends of our human affection. We can be disposed to care in one of two ways. In the conventional ways we have taken to responsibility (even in glowing languages of work ethic), we practice unknowingly, self-affection: lining up self-other-world in a given referent for co-adequation. Self-affection is to be found in favour with the order of things, to be acceptable in the eyes of the role, and to feel the urgency to coax the child into the same. In this respect, the teacher is instrumental, disenchanted, and … disenchanting their vocation – in sabotage of their own voice and values. For this reason, Levinas poses undecidability: to let the Other come into presence, by putting beginnings and ends in suspension, and refusing languages of clarity and certitude for deciding what is real, who one is. Such a plea,
I am suspecting, may assist us in the process of counter-voicing moral realities given, so as to move us from producing synthetic selves – a child conformed to the synthesis between knowledge and pre-given valuations and vocation (respectively an arche and telos connected by a straight line) – to the founding of voice and value in a synaesthetic synaptic (sinuous) encounter. It is only by such dis/positions that our dis/closures can fundamentally re-enchant relations, where voice and vocation, in values once again made infinite, achieve the fullest summons of ethics.

Educational theory is typically (not always) about dispensing good educational practice. In fact the relation between knowledge and action is virtually incontrovertible in Western academic orthodoxy. But is this practice ortho/dox – that is, does it bear forth truth, or in the truest sense lead us to wonder in worship (being re-storied in values prior)? Ellul calls action based on knowledge ortho-praxy, wherein knowledge is sought for usefulness, control, ends. My protest is that we in the human professions need to re-orient our care … toward what is living, founded in the inter-human insufficiency of the cry of being, whose visceral first word is to call out for home. Such a care orients toward a medi/tative re/midi/ation of what leads our gaze: to go back to the middle, the gap, where being is knowable in human witness and no less. Sharon Todd (2003) follows Levinas to a pedagogy of listening, disrupting the model of pride and shame, altogether void of measures that inflict violence. “Listening is not about occupying a position or taking on an attitude but about a quality of relationality that occurs ... when we meet the Other” (p. 134). It is a disposition to care prior to doing practice, in “the immediacy of a signifying encounter with difference.”

Todd adds for this mode of care “when I listen, I surrender myself to the Other’s dense plots, to the profound idiosyncrasies that mark her speech as bearing her own historical relevance without knowing how or why, and I yield to her appeal to me” (p. 135). It “is a passive occasion, where we are immersed in an indefinable difference, where we become implicated in an encounter beyond our own ways of making sense, beyond our own comprehension.” Instead of enclosing the other, we expose our certitudes to captivations. “Listening as an exposure to the Other brings with it a profound disturbance to the self” (p. 136), but as it does, opens possibility for what a self (voice) is in the otherwise than given. “It occasions, through our
capacity to be moved and be touched by another’s life story, a painfulness that we simply cannot escape.” To listen is then, to be moved. It is an essentially affective experience, and in its practice comes syn/aes/thetic knowing. This is response-able practice, a high freedom, which is the truest sense of originality, our irreplaceability. Hannah Arendt calls it natality. It is the ever new and renewing that Brueggemann calls for in pathos, which makes possibility exactly what it is: a possibility otherwise than one named in advance and cared about as a theme. David Appelbaum says a summoning is “for your ears alone.” How will this meditation, in the otherwise than dream value monisms, summon ours for voice and vocation anew? In what ways will I be disposed to the most originary felt promise and wonder (the deepest cry) of the child or professional Other in my midst. And what kinds of care will call me forth to enact possibility? In the demanding responsibility of ethics, in prophetic counter-sensibility, will the summoning taken up invoke us to killing, or will we love?

Emptying Professions of Self-fulfilment: Vocation and Voice Rejoined

As I come to the end of a lengthy writing process, commending to the pro/fession I dearly love an earnest con/fession, I refer the za’ak of Lisa, an English teacher and professor I have had the pleasure of ... witnessing. Lisa teaches us how to cry, and by so doing issues a call toward gracious care. After a death in the family, she is brought to a place that is no place at all, to indwell being, but devoid of substance. Death called her back to an honesty she would say, to a memory for living that had long since been lost, and to vocalis that returned oneness with something deeply and soulfully prior. What Lisa Schnell (2000) re/minds in speaking uniquely about our particularly driven care, is that we are unquestioningly beholden to an elaborate seduction,

The seduction of the forward motion of our lives that we want to believe is actually leading us somewhere. That we have been seduced into that thinking becomes most evident when we try to set our lives down on paper. And as an English teacher, the habits of linearity and the demand for written coherence die hard. My students get tired of hearing me ask, over and over
again, “What’s the point, where is this essay headed?” Yet when it comes to my own project, and people ask me what the “thesis” is of my book, I have to say rather shamefacedly, that there really is none. There can be none. There is no coherent shape, no traceable outline, in the encounter of life and death, just as there is hardly ever a coherence to lives. To think otherwise would be to miss out on the surprisingly random events that, more than any coherent set of ideas, help us to ‘remember that we are here, and do exist.’

Christopher Noël would add, after the encounter with his fiancé’s death, the bitter words from her journal, “To write a memoir is, I think, to be seduced by the idea of persistence, of a single identity. What, in me, persists?” (Schnell, 2000) Lisa’s cry – her flesh found original – take us to the ‘unexpected’ … at the end of a movie that speaks to the matter of writing a life (our own) by how we write others into existence by our professions. In Stranger Than Fiction (2006), we are once again summoned back, beholden yet again to the counter-story – the disruption – that is not only the ethical, but the real: that enchanted center of life that we just can’t seem to relinquish, nor do we really want to. The response-abilities (vocation) we have so eagerly taken up are here regarded in no sense other than being a falsely constituted determination of promise. What really saves our lives is that which comes otherwise, from the sub-texts of real life, the unseen wonder oft’ covered up in tight faces, by the sense-ations (transcendence) of one another.

Sometimes, when we lose ourselves in fear and despair, in routine and constancy, in hopelessness and tragedy, we can thank God for Bavarian sugar cookies, and fortunately, when there aren’t any cookies we can still find reassurance in a familiar hand on our skin, or a kind and loving gesture, or a subtle encouragement, or a loving embrace, or an offer of comfort, not to mention hospital gurneys, and nose-plugs, and uneaten danish, and soft spoken secrets, and Fender Stratocasters, and maybe the occasional piece of fiction. And we must remember that all these things, the nuances, the anomalies, the subtleties, which we assume only accessorize our days are in fact here for a much larger and much nobler cause. They are here to save our lives. I know the idea seems strange.
As educators called to a profession that professes to care, we might ask, what is seducing us that keeps us persisting in our practice, and to what ends do we seduce? Postman said earlier that to educate is to *educe*, to bring forth the child, but where? I suggest here that wherever it is, we put in suspension all forms of promise that begin with or end in what it is otherwise than human. For too many or for too long, confession has been associated with giving up ... a lifestyle, a cherished pastime, a favoured companion, or a kind of program for self-progression. Such a response not only mistakes the sacrament (which is to jointly utter reverence to the storied), but proves as well just how committed we are to the *versions* of *selves* we want to lay hold of in the forward; how resolute we are to take leave of what is already our story, our voice, our wonder. And unless we take heed of the affections that do call us forth (or even that we are most explicitly living *in* the forward), we just may be calling on our children to give up ... hope.

There is an Other way to living in the world than the *one* we know: the one that tells us to be full of ourselves to the very end, to self-completion. Jane Tompkins took to heart this call and asked what of her persists in the making of stories, concluding that she must “get out of the way.” Patti Lather, taking to heart Derrida, put herself under erasure, and Nachmanovich said we must dis-appear. We are too present to our *selves* in projects of promise. So much so that it is not just our own lives that promise-seeking affects. “Without disappearing, those beings are in my power” (Levinas, 1996); those we *claim* to care about and otherwise subordinate to our very self-affecting. If the world we know is enchanted and therefore does dispose us to reverences of relation, true liturgy (Greek) is “putting out funds at a loss” (p. 9) putting myself in question, to answer the call that is priority to all. It is a disposition that does not bank on a future, or hold promise as some/thing to come. It is beholden to flourishing co-present to what is *already* whole. And so, “anyone who closes his eyes to the request of the other is like one who worships idols” (Talmud, Bava Batra, 10a); he reaps a dead life. In kind, I ask collectively of myself and my colleagues, what has the direction of our gaze; or else are eyes even open (awake) to the fact of the good residing in the living wonder of inter-vocality.
Inasmuch as source valuations for being are not given by the human other, and the alleged infinity of possibility the inter-human holds for our flourishing – disclosed by the wonder itself of human voice – then it must be said that we are disenchanted after all. I at least wanted to force the question in this project, to get us past the rhetoric – for whether or not it is true, to have us consider in wider ways ‘the real’ that holds our promise going forward. If it is the case that human persons are not the wonder I alleged at the outset, then their goodness or badness makes care an intellectual necessity. But I dare say, if that is what will be taken up, we have already waged our answer. Is this really what we wish to believe? Is it really how we wish to think on being? I, for one, am not yet inclined to give up. I think there is more voice to be found, more story to be told, to know and enjoy a higher reality than what has been given by absolutizing our value in abstractions.

Conclusion: Into the Sub-versions of Vocalis Begotten in Dreams

In addressing questions of totality (empires) and infinity (enchantment) – of voice and vocation in hues of promise-forward or stories-lived, and whereupon all such questions will draw upon valuations to arrive at knowing who we are – I am certainly all too aware of the challenges associated with living in the tension. But as I am more than ever disillusioned with a nature (naturalization) of things in dreams, and the authorship they thematize of being, I can do nothing other than register my voice in counter. I do not quite frankly, believe what we are told, that this is the way things are. At the very root of my tension is that vocalis has been ‘turned into’ two distinct realities: Voice (being) and Vocation (doing) are no longer joint – who we are is not what we do, and thus say – but for an imperial sleight of hand are rendered opposing. In such a case, doing must prove being – at which point the favourable action will confer a rite to exercise voice, to have influence, to be empowered. But in the process of one (vocation) taking over the signification of the other (voice), look what has transpired. Vocation (work) has issued an imperious command to voice (being) that it must catch up; for if it does, there … lay … promise. In effect, by suffering this split, being has been relegated to having its future brokered in an ascetic ascendant play: its very own possibility made realizable.
in ... non-being. What kind of story does that really offer who we are? What kind of voice speaks there? I wager that taking up its kind will have us teaching in-kind.

This distinctly new work-promise relation (voice under the tyranny of vocation) that Weber says must now be realized by proving will confer no less than our very own existential annihilation. In what amounts to converting human energy into the throes of contest by issuing the charge of catching up – being against who we are by nature – we achieve, in the absolute sense, irrelationality with the world. In other words, says Gane (2002, p. 5) in Weber’s logic of disenchantedment, rationality turns on itself, and all value becomes value/less. Perhaps we can now see what has happened, “The rationality which emerges from this process is something specifically irrational” (Lowith, 1993, p. 62), or else our “ultimate values ... devalue themselves” (Gane, p. 15), or ourselves, and “the result is that culture becomes ever more senseless” (p. 22). Under such a meaningfulness frame, all that holds promise is inane, inert. That is to say, no value is left. Its irony, says Ferry: “the promise of the ascent of man producing by way of the rational method, his descent.” In this irrational irrelation, Gauchet says of being “the secret has been lost.” What could be more irrational than turning ourselves in two, or that to be of value, we need to find our promise in work? It exerts “an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history” (Gane, p. 20). So much so, its promise has become ubiquitous; our being has become sense-less.

The only hope we have for resisting this devaluation of being, which if drawn from we live inert, is to “indwell between two worlds,” says Ted Aoki to abide ‘with’ curriculum in lived experience (p. 159); effectively, to bring vocation back to voice. To dwell in “the zone of between” is to jointly embody voice and vocation, even as we experience their pulling apart. This, to Aoki, is to live with the tensionality of teaching and being, our vocation and voice. Vocation is not something to do as the ascetic-ascendant posture has initiated. Vocation is something to be in what we do. A vocation is therefore not a job, per se, but a perpetuity of being spoken into action in the frame of life enchanted, whether to take regard of the wonder of being in our own sites of practice or giving it to that which we encounter. In parallel consideration, therefore, a promise is neither something to do or seek out in kind. It is already with us. Promise as speech, as story come forth, means the ethical action of life is to be with what is already sacred, and to glean from its
transcendence our very own flourishing. This, Aoki says is to indwell the two horizons, to realize voice and vocation in “The pedagogic being that she is” (p. 161) – that we are, in their unity – is to indwell ethics, and to live a dream, not chase one.

In his clever and humble way, Aoki offers the ultimate basis for countering the untold illusions of promise otherwise. As regards living in tension any other way, “forgetting that to be alive is to live with tension” (p. 162). I leave this as a poetic disclosure for what it can mean to teach. To live with Aoki’s tension is to feel the pull of pathos, to be prophetically disposed to the urgency that vocation belonged to anything other than voice in unjust – vocation abstract of being is violence, the subtraction of who we are and all stories that hold us. “The secret tears of the other are invocation” (Levinas, 1996, p. 37) to bring vocation back to voice, to reopen the texts of being (Leggo, 1998), to reinitiate the infinity of the good. “According to Levinas, there is only one way, by language” (Levinas, 1979, p. 14). “But if communication and community is to be achieved, a real response, a responsible answer must be given. This means that I must be ready to put my world into words.” In this way, “an escape from egotism becomes possible,” which is to say that fullest vocation (promise) has been lived …

May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. (Deuteronomy 32:2)
CLOSING WORD AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

As indicated in the Note to Reader at the outset, while this inquiry addresses education in broad terms, and does so in the context of disturbing cultural realities, it circumscribes the question of justice (person primacy) in sites of learning and being. By specifically avowing a prophetic musing for recovering more originary voice and vocation, I anticipate fellow educators may encounter a newfound advocacy for ways of being in learning that are otherwise than the ascetic-ascendant presumption that I allege holds down the learning (and teaching) subject. But as the work comes to rest within this amalgam, I do hope that others are compelled to further the reflection with some practical direction and application. As my intent was to leave the text open, I anticipate that new forms of speaking can move this work beyond the boundary in which it was originally conceived. I hereby imagine the following as future directions for research:

1) A dominant assumption in this project is that belonging to what is most originary (what is our Other, in all respects) holds forth greater promise. But, in view of troubled “places of memory,” further inquiry needs to be taken up on a curriculum of belonging for those “less belonged.”

2) Whereas prophetic speech may not be compelling in itself, or go far enough, research is called for to identify other disruption models which favour the Other but can remain insulated from political reaction or counter-poles. Secular counter-parts to the prophetic mode will also broaden appeal.

3) While I have taken up the prophetic mode of speech from one faith tradition, other traditions of counter-speech would, I suspect, richly complement and add dimension to this forum of protest. Rich prospects from the east, for example, may profile additional models for “speech as justice.”

4) To keep this inquiry fertile, it has need for those more practically oriented to envision curricular applications for enlarging “speech space” in the classrooms; for attempting the outworking of a prophetic curriculum in general. For example, might we conceive of “a curriculum of belonging” rather than one led by dreams; what would be its moral sourcing, and how would it be delivered?
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APPENDIX 1 – ‘SENSES’ OF THE DREAM IN EARLY POPULAR LITERATURE

A) The Emergence of Dream Language

Upon examining the specific developments of Morey-Gaines’ virtuous and virile era’s through the study of literature, we can first realize the dream as a new phenomenon in history; one that originates no earlier than this newly imagined idea of individual identity itself. I do not come to this by the testimony of others, though, but by an uncanny discovery of the written record where it seems the two ideas co-emerge – in common usage anyways – within a tight range of time; and, as well, over time, they become increasingly related. de Tocqueville’s insights, especially through the work of Robert Bellah, offer glimpses into this new wonderment toward self-determinations of future, and other than what is offered by the OED (below), it appears dream language was rare before the 1800’s. So, it is not mistaken to view this phenomenon alongside the rising testimony of common individualism itself, which is somewhat non-existent before Enlightenment, round two – i.e. its second wave of thought, post-1750, Hampson tells us – when inquiry shifted from the Lockean concerns of a healthy social order to notions of outright personal liberty waged by the likes of Rousseau. How fitting that America was given birth in the ambience of this time. Thus, while engaging Morey-Gaines’ changing individual, especially as it shifts to new virtues in a changing dream horizon, it is important to first reckon with the onset of the term’s popular usage, which is not through scholarship, but in popular literature, to better prospect this generative new relationship between individuals and promise.

Other than the reveries and musings of Romantic poets, where dream/y language clearly abounds, Philip Hamerton’s (2008) autobiographical writings (1834-1858) offer an instructive referent for the term’s earlier uses, with entries “consistently” depicting the dream in the light of a deception than as senses of promise known today; clearly too, prefaced by an adjective than stated as a noun outright (or verb) as it is experienced ontologically today. I offer a few for reference: “At first it seemed only a deceptive dream. Such happiness was incredible” (p. 65). “Then the boat fetched us, and we floated as in a poet's dream, till the worst of inns brought one back to a sense of reality” (p. 144). “Like the realization of a fantastic and splendid dream; I could not believe it to be a reality, and thought of some mirage” (p. 254). There are several other
places where Hamerton references dreams, and always as elusive, but in no case does it resemble a quest or a state to aim at, a destination as such. Hamerton’s usage is one of strict enchantment, quite conspicuous given my intent to establish the Dream as the very replacement of an old enchanted order – the meaning referent for an earlier kind of personhood we oppose.

Near the conclusion of Hamerton’s journal, one can see how this man of the time wrestles with such forces of change, certainly resisting escalation of the self toward a dream destination, but also prophetically sounding how it would shift sensibility toward the abstract and ungrounded if taken up. “My conclusion is that all the culture in the world, all the learning, all the literary skill and taste put together, are not so well worth having as the keen and clear sense of present reality that common folks have by nature.” An author two decades later (Austin, 1875) substantiates the peculiar orientation among the common: “Large bodies of men have what may be termed waking dreams; so that, without being either authors or dupes of imposture, they declare that they have seen what they have not seen” (p. 331). Might we add with time, that they can do what they cannot do, as “aspiration” begins to gain a foothold on dreamish sensibility.

In addition to its fancifulness early on, dream moved toward the ‘concrete’ in its mid-life use, in a distinct relation between frontier and land. This is worth noting, not only for understanding the change in perception that accords the shift from the virtuous to the virile form of autonomy, but because it also indicates that the term would become proportional to possibilities for laying hold of more concrete things – one’s own land. It is not far-fetched to say dreams for concrete things would synchronously take hold of identity too – here noting the rigid proving and disclosure ontology Appelbaum (1996, p. 111ff) laments – especially as we recall Bloom’s (1987) insight that “souls are like mirrors, not of nature, but of what is around” (p. 61). Hamerton reveals something of this spirit that use of the dream in a concrete or destiny-oriented sense was in relation to the land. “Then, with a change of tone habitual to him, and a little sarcastic; Yes, but as difficult to find as dream-land” (p. 284). In sum, The OED confirms these relations, to show the emergent etymology moving from a vaporous peripheral to an outright centering aspiration (1931, 1941).
“dream” meant only “joy, mirth,” also “music.” Words for “sleeping vision” in O.E. Dream in the sense of “ideal or aspiration” is from 1931, from earlier sense of “something of dream-like beauty or charm” (1888). Dreamy is 1567 in the sense “full of dreams;” 1941 as “perfect, ideal.” Dreamboat “romantically desirable person” is from 1947. Dreamland is c.1834; dreamscape is 1959, in a Sylvia Plath poem.

Taking cue from the earlier observed shifts between ethics (as promise) and self-regard (fullness) – or what Taylor calls the identity-morality relation – and with an appeal to the dream-land relation (1830’s) as the undisputed moral source that came to define both religious and secular promotion (Promised Land), we are now ready to learn from Morey-Gaines, specifically noting how frontier moves from the concrete and virtuous to an abstract and virile kind of destinations. What is at stake here is not only how the dream has shifted attentions to the concrete affairs of life (immanent reality) and become increasingly abstract (lived in illusion), but how doing so has resulted in an increasingly agonistic and competitive form of personhood.

B) The Adamic and Materialist Dreams: Settling in the Enclosure of Conquest

One of the significant changes that occurred with the rise of individualism at the end of the 18th century is that having “a cause” enlarged from strictly national or communal endeavours to one’s that were more singular in focus. To Morey-Gaines, this is best understood “in the unique encounter of man with frontier” (p. 61). In effect, “the dream ... has indelibly marked the West and the character of the nation with self-reliance, omnicompetence, religious vision and vitality.” But it is between the religious and the secular versions of cause (applications of personal power) that most unsettles inquiry; that is, our yearning to locate the moment of change. To bring the two into synthesis, Morey-Gaines appeals to Hoover’s “spiritual individualism,” which she regards as the somewhat paradoxical nexus between old and new world idealism. In Hoover’s terms, “diversified religious faiths are the apotheosis of spiritual individualism,” which she says “provided the imaginative leap into the exploration of transcendence and tragedy in American character” (p. 63). The journey from one form to the other begins with the “American literature of the 1850’s, with its
special emphasis on the American Adam” (p. 64), one closely associated to both the Yeoman and Character reflections above before maturing and settling into the spiritually refracted. This, the second force of individualism that emanates from Hoover’s still spiritual self has at one end “the acquisition and preservation of private property” and yet “aims to provide opportunity for self-expression, not merely economically, but spiritually, as well.” Hoover thus opens a wide space, uniting “material rewards to spiritual gain.” He praised a pioneering self-assertion that held equal appeal to the spiritual and more earthly minded. In effect, he implored all persons to the “call of the frontier,” for which America and its inhabitants had now become globally known.

The American Adam is a prototypical heroic character, who R.W.B. Lewis (1955) introduces following his study of American literature since the 1850’s. Essentially, Adam is the pre-fallen biblical character summoned to become the innocent master of his own future. “The hero is expected to be a solitary, resourceful, and self-reliant spirit, a master and maker of the world, and the captain of his own soul. The innocence of this Adam determines the special demands of his spiritual independence” (p. 66). Morey-Gaines would note that “in the hands of American novelists the story was retold as if it were an American myth and not a biblical one ... redone by the exuberance of transcendental dreaming.” She says “metaphysical questions ... were re-pronounced in cultural accents.” Thoreau was the first to bring out this innocent or virtuous heroism, appealing to a return to nature in Walden; but quite strikingly, in a way that necessitated effacing all past memory. This would be significant. It was certainly a spiritual work, but in an entirely new register, one that called upon the “artist and creator” (p. 67) within.

Whitman would follow Thoreau’s exhortation in Leaves of Grass, though turn it in his own way toward a different hopeful trope for the self creating agent. Still “bereft of ancestry,” “uncluttered with the musty terrors of past generations,” he proposes a radically “self-propelling, curious, and infinitely expansive” “self-made, self-responsible soul” (p. 68). “He and his world were things of his own imaginative devising, and his convenient lack of memory made Adam not just a new creature, but a new creator.” In this breaking with the literal word of the Bible, and the specific disdain for the past, there appear viable footings to suspect
the beginnings of a newly envisioned secular form of transcendence. Between Thoreau and Whitman is an important theme that cannot be missed for its implications on a new idea of human agency. “Linked in spirit with the Transcendental vision of a divine self, Whitman’s Adam possessed a natural intuition that was ever ready to encounter the blessings of the divine in the natural world and in himself.” In man resided frontier vision; no longer was land’s promise associated with heaven.

With Thoreau and and Whitman casting the net wide for a whole new generation of frontier writing to follow, some of the hopeful allure dims as prospects for persons changed with the encounter of tougher times and more challenging cultural themes. The innocent Adam remained, but the tone had turned toward a more helpless sentiment. Morey-Gaines chronicles the darkening spirit. Joyce’s *The American* and *The Golden Bowl* sound pessimism for cultural duplicity at home and overseas. Other texts, notably *The Innocents Abroad* (Twain), *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (Frederic), *The Marble Faun* (Hawthorne), and even to some extent *The Scarlet Letter*, each demonstrate misgivings about the place of innocence in an ever progressing social and cultural domination. The creative man was finding himself less potent in a sea of greater forms of cultural resistance. Still more writers took other angles, with Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby* uncovering the complicity of personhood and culture, and Warren’s *All the King’s Men* damning the corruption at play in unseen corners of society.

But while the innocence was stifled, Morey-Gaines insists that it was still the root sentiment that held writer’s captive and kept the force of moral regard in the still spiritually informed virtuous tradition. In fact, the innocence perspective was so enduring as secular culture mounted greater force, that by the time the materialist play was too much, it burst forth so quickly as to entirely break with the frontiers of earlier moral and reward themes. The felt emptiness and waged hostility against the single person was too much to bear, as manifest in Melville’s *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* and Steinbeck’s *East of Eden*. The turn toward more earthly, immediate and hedonistic forms of reward were soon found entirely valid. To sum it up, “Pierre is ill-equipped to confront the world” (p. 76) which is too complex inside and out. As Melville (p. 73) puts it, “himself was too much for himself.”
Without being able to “‘new-name’ the world” (Morey-Gaines, p. 76), the creative possibility of the Adamic figure, and the hope he held forth to re-arrange his world, were apparently lost. He fails his spiritual task of moving from the innocent Adam to the fully made man. “Melville mocks this promising vision of American nature” (p. 77). “The goodness of innocence, its idealism and yearning towards perfection, is as much a source of tragedy as its weakness.” To Steinbeck, who also saw the forces of good and evil too much in juxtaposition, especially in *East of Eden*, the innocent vision of self-creating had matured, on one hand casting off old world naivety and yet still holding out hope for a new form of perfection. Adam would not yet die: if not to live with and for God, then for myself and with the world. “There is still a chance for perfection, for a more perfect happiness than the world has previously devised” (p. 84). Thus begins the turn toward the material vision of reward.

The rise of Material Individualism was most likely “exacerbated by the popularity of Social Darwinism in post-bellum America” (p. 84), which “translated into a materialistic individualism that saw success in economic competition as the standard for social worth. Virtue and morality became economic commodities.” The virtue of “vocation as a calling was divested of its religious integrity and became the oppressive ‘Puritan work ethic’” (p. 85). Yet, “material individualism is based upon an idea of infinite progress and perfection given credence by the Adamic tradition.” “The self ... when properly enhanced by wealth and success, was accorded a semi-divine status.” Its ensuing creed: “each man to be responsible for his fate and fortune.” With the diffusion of the earlier form of personhood, says Morey-Gaines, “the metaphysical depth of the Adamic” was lost, “as was the artistry and intellect.” “The result was a persistent anti-intellectualism that sponsored a ‘common man’ syndrome – a glorification of the prospects and rewards due the average working man.” “Aristocracy was banished and a new tyranny took its place.” Man had to produce, and should he fail, he would inherit no greater destiny. This amounted to the simple equation “virility plus money equals virtue” (p. 86). “The right to acquire,” and “manhood and money” would spawn newly favoured cultural qualities, with an increasing “bias against education as a sponsor of character and the emphasis upon action.”
That’s all good and well of course, but when we look at the literature of the times, it is clear that those burdened with this ambition were faced with an impossible task, though unseen. Or if it was seen, cultural agents were forced to take up some denial. If only one system existed in which to prove one’s worth and promote themselves, then what choice was there but to silence disbelief? The fiction of the time is rich with such insights, and later theorists insist that the failure to take up alternative visions of personhood and promise in the allure of materialism is why these tyrannies are with us in such force today. Little has really changed. Considering Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, where one’s ‘will’ in fact becomes trapped by the urgency of acquiescing to this kind of social honour. Gatsby of course wills Daisy to love him, which in the virile version of dreaming fulfilment, results in unabashed manipulation. With the expected “immense self-confidence of this individualism ... manipulation of the material world signifies a god-like power and authority over any aspect of human life” (p. 90). In the sense of Hoover’s hope, “material and spiritual well-being are then perceived as one and the same thing.” Yet the “fatal pride of this individualism and the amount of self-deception necessary to live by its standards became major themes for American writers.”

Among the questions posed or the narratives brought out were such inquiries as “what effect did the dream of infinitely expanding ... have upon those who felt themselves included in the promise but denied any chance of fulfilment” (p. 91). Most evident texts are Sinclair Lewis’ *Babbitt*, and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, Babbitt deals with the perils of trying to live up to the heroic standard set by the wider ethos. At the outset, we are introduced to Babbitt, neither the man nor the employee, but the dreamer.

He is sleeping, dreaming a recurrent and carefully guarded dream which centers on visions of himself as a virile male adored by a lovely young girl. Waking inexorably propels him back into his everyday self, and by the time he is dressed in the morning, he is George Babbitt, successful businessman. But even in his waking life, he subtly tries to surround himself with objects that will lend to his existence the rugged potency of his dreams.

Babbitt even purchases a khaki blanket, “forever a suggestion to him of freedom and heroism.” As a symbol, Lewis names the categorical ways that Babbitt would feel heroized and valued, marking out a frontier that in
his own way was moving toward promise. Miller’s Willy Loman is also impoverished of metaphysical insight to recognize the chains underlying his speculations about promise. At first refusing and later being incapable of seeing his chains, he is emblematic of the culture we have in the promise of material transcendence alone made for ourselves to inhabit.

Morey-Gaines prophetically sounds that “the harsh materialism of this dream makes men either very big or very small” (p. 94) and with the ultimate irony being that those who peddle its promise are the ones who have already made it big. Rock stars, athletes, television personalities and celebrities of newfound fame each sing about, preach, dramatize and otherwise champion their pet dream vignette which the masses can only admire from “afar.” Or else those like Babbitt, who so deeply long to have it, will like Gatsby find ways to ‘will it’ to existence, as if by hard work sweat and tears it will one day magically come forth; and I fear too many school teachers hold forth and peddle such illusions – I for one hearing no other message in school but to dream, ever fearing its unreachable shame.

What have we then, suggest Fitzgerald and Miller, are the dream brokers and the broken dreamers: we wage in a blind optimism our entire trust as if a solitary answer in material solutions will still our dimly appearing world, one which surely in the absence of such dream allure may not appear so darkened after all. The point of course is that the force of this fierce self-promotion exerts such hegemony over our imagination and ambition that moral norms themselves even follow suit. There is, it seems, no other model for contemporary morality than the ensuing pride and shame of dream success or failure. I suspect that most all our social reflexes are conditioned by this ruthless model and that unless we prove who we are in the “good” of acquiring goods and recognition (enlarged), we are nothing; or at least that is how we are made to feel. In a sea of objective cultural orders that categorize the good in the image of the acquired, we are merely a “dime a dozen” in spite of Willy Loman’s obsession to see it otherwise. How else can we regard our selves; how else can we aspire when material individualism – and materialistic theory, dealt with in the next chapter – is all we are left to imagine of ourselves, our world and our hope.
Just like any other in the OED’s abundant list of dream adjective hostages, we are left with the pursuit of a hollow dream-self – and curiously this adjectival version is absent from the abundant listed in the OED’s dream exploits. Of course it is a fiction that is really no self at all, except for what modifies it in connotation culturally charged. At the end, Morey-Gaines has us asking, whose frontier, by way of dreams, are we clearing anyways; whose power are we so zealously serving that we soon forget even ourselves in the relentless chase? These are the urgent ethical questions that must be asked on behalf of those whom the dream has and will continue to fail (the question of being-in-the-world in ways that are more ontologically diverse). We stand before a fake salvation, a prostitution of promise. “Even to the end [Willy] is trapped by the materialism of the dream” putting all “trust in material solutions to his anguish. This is the real tragedy of material individualism. Willy is crippled by his inability to believe in anything but the trappings” (p. 95). It is the only social order he, and quite frankly we, can know. “The gospel of material individualism finally and flatly intends to take the measure of a man’s soul by the girth of his bankroll” (p. 96). As Happy Loman says, “it is the only dream you can have – to come out number one man” (p. 139). And as Charles Taylor makes plain, the academy offers no redress to this state of affairs because it allows no other way to theorize self-understanding and transcendent disposition but by means of the material.

C) The Double in Modern Literature

Sitting squarely in the milieu of the gathering dream momentum is an array of fiction that comes to expose the double nature of life (the increasing division between the mythic and public) and the increasing duplicity of human personality on its account. Popular renditions include Dostoevsky’s The Double (1846), where central character Golyadkin embodies a fictitious personae to deal with his many difficulties (Rank, p. 27); Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), which characterizes the moral person as being distinctly separate from the natural within; Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), which brings out the struggle associated with maintaining a longed for self-image that Dorian could not keep due to aging, and where Wilde draws attention to the obsessive and delusional behavior that ensues in view of this anxiety (p. 18-19). Ewers’ The Student of Prague explores how Balduin “falls into disconsolate reflections
about his unpleasant situation” (p. 4) taking up a mirror image which “has already slain his opponents” (p. 5). “Now an elegant gentleman” (p. 5), “the feared self that obstructs the love for a woman” (p. 73) is slain for romantic hopes dreamed possible. In all cases, we see two senses of self locked into a contest which in many respects mirrors the socially imposed agon that casts persons into moral warfare against all that fails normativity.

The relation between doubling and morality is one not to be missed, perhaps most ably captured in Balduin’s double “already having slain his opponent” even before there was one. That is, the imagined being had already conquered, had already absorbed opposition, which is the very function of the double: to slay any hint of mortality. In being so disposed, we not only stand atop the world, as Stuart Hall implies, but “recreate the whole world out of ourselves” (Becker, 1973, p. 2). If anxiety, as Kierkegaard and the phenomenologists suggest, comes from the body, where “man’s very insides – his self – are foreign to him” (Becker, p. 51), then the mind by projecting symbolically to make familiar the strange alleviates the body of all meaning; in performing the task of the double, we essentially become invisible. Most of all, the mind forgets that it has a body whose thoughts it birthed in the first place. Says Abram, “we forgot that desire comes from the body, that knowing is first a bodily impression” (p. 262), because Becker makes plain, “the person is both a self and a body” (p. 41), and so a self-totalization is not only an illusion, but “an impossible project.”

The Double’s collective tone echoes the Immortal Self spoken of by Otto Rank (p. xvi), where en masse, people otherwise “unsure of their identity,” have “longing for a more exalted existence,” as if to “belong to some unearthly region” that the imagination offers to console. In this way, symbolic reality, the shadow world suggested Plato, can become the way of life for an entire civilization. “Man’s urge to transcend his fear in a culturally constituted heroism” (Becker, 1975, xvii) appears in this sense to be a licensed form of certitude for a creature that is otherwise too frail to himself. The “self-symbolization” that is necessitated by a “heroic need to esteem oneself in the face of death,” and that must become the “projection of strength,” becomes in the end death’s most formidable denial. But Becker makes it more than a denial of death, the title of the book where he executes this line of reasoning; it is more to the point, the denial of life
itself. Or else, it produces “the human penchant for idolatry and the tremendous dangers of transference gone wild” (Kagan, 1994, p. 88). For us modern age, “an end to idolatry is not so easy.” Kagan suggests that Becker would have called his philosophy of education, had he written one “education for recognition of one’s own cultural idols, a kind of education which would allow students the opportunity of reaching beyond their own cultural matrix” (p. 89). Whatever and wherever this occurs in culture, one thing is shared by those who reflect on the role of the double as a denial device in modern life: “The modern entrapment is the dehumanizing sameness that springs from the duplication of the social – the menace of homogenized existence in a world conceived of as self-made” (Chowers, p. 2) under the auspices of innumerable dreams.