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Happiness

Like love, happiness is usually not the first thing that comes to mind when we think of education. In fact, for some of us it may be pretty far down the list. Insofar as we see a direct connection between happiness and education, happiness—not unlike the tough love variety of the love of the teacher (“You will thank me later!”)—is seen as what education is meant to prepare us for, rather than what education is about. In other words, while we might agree that life—in its final instance—is about achieving happiness (“I just want my children to be happy!”), it is about the prospect of leading a happy life *in the future*. In fact, a lack of happiness (like a lack of genuine love) in our children’s education may be considered a necessary evil/sacrifice to guarantee their future well-being (or, at least spare them future unhappiness). On the other hand, and maybe not surprisingly, there is an overriding emphasis in education on another—no less elusive—kind of sentiment: hope. Radical and reformist pedagogues call for hope. Critical and post-critical pedagogues insist on hope.¹ Indeed, some in educational philosophy even argue that we cannot conceive of education without some notion of hope.² But considering that hope could be defined as an anticipation of a happier life in the future, it is not only not surprising that hope (and not happiness) is given such a prominent place in theories of education, it could also be considered the most fitting (or paradigmatic) sentiment for a view of education as a preparation for a happier life to come. The same could be said about a conception of philosophy with children that aligns itself with this view of education by being directed at the realization of a more rational, more reasonable, and more just—in other words, a happier—world to come. The question is what it would mean to conceive of the community of inquiry (*qua* community of infancy) as a place and time where happiness can replace hope as a constitutive feature of education—rather than affirming this aspect of established educational forms of life. At stake here is, once again, a definition of educational life that is not predicated on negation or destiny but on sufficiency (a hopelessly happy form-of-educational-life).

The Role of Hope in Education

The idea of hope as an integral part of education is especially prevalent in critical and progressive theories of education. For Freire, for example, hope is a necessary feature of teaching because it implies that the teacher has a vision for where she wants to take the students (a vision for a better world that she wants the students to help realize). “Whatever the perspective through which we appreciate authentic educational practice,” he writes, “its process implies hope. Unhopeful educators contradict their practice. They are men and women without address, and without a destination they are lost in history.”³ In addition, “[w]ithout a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible.”⁴ In other words, without hope there is no vision (and vice versa), and without both/either there is no movement out of the present toward a better future. We find this emphasis on hope also in the work of Henry Giroux, who, in a recent article, refers to hope as “the desire for a future that offers more than the present.”⁵ And bell hooks, in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, writes: “Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness,”⁶ and quoting the theologian Mary Grey: “Living in hope says to us, ‘There is a way out,’ even from the most dangerous and desperate situations.”⁷ In all cases, the message is the same: there would be nothing left except fatalism or cynicism in the present without hope and or the utopian imagination pointing a way out. So one of the ways in which hope is used is as sentiment, desire, or disposition (driving force) that allows educators and students alike to transcend the given and move toward (help realize) a better (more rational, just, equitable, democratic, etc.) world.

But there is, importantly, another—and in a certain way more prominent—sense in which hope is used in the work of some of these authors; a sense that de-emphasizes the future-oriented aspect of hope and sees it instead as directed to or perhaps at something that remains immanent to teaching and learning (the classroom community)—an experience of the very possibility of change, that is, a precondition for change as such. We find this in Freire, who refers to hope as the experience of the unfinishedness of the world, of its becoming. He writes: “The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming.”⁸ He also writes, “Hope is a natural, possible, and necessary impetus in the context of our unfinishedness. Hope is an indispensable seasoning in our human, historical experience.”⁹ In other words, the emphasis here is not on hope as directed toward a better world to come but on the very possibility of any kind of change, that things can be different. It is directed at something that is already here as a

possibility in any communal educational practice and only needs to be allowed to manifest itself. “[H]ope,” Freire writes, “is something shared between teachers and students. The hope that we can learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowing of our joy.”¹⁰ In a similar vein, bell hooks speaks of hope as something that is present (or realizable) in the moment and directed not at the future so much as at what is possible in the moment:

The academy is not Paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.¹¹

And in her more recent book *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, hooks specifically argues against education being (only) directed at the future and instead focuses on the need to be in the present, writing that “[c]ollege education is so often geared toward the future, the perceived rewards that the imagined future will bring that it is difficult to teach students that the present is a place of meaning.”¹² Hope, on this view, turns us toward the present and a sense of community in the classroom, or perhaps realizing that there is a possibility that can be made manifest in the present that is somehow beyond the present. Rerouting hope from the future to the present and its potentiality is also found in the work of Naomi Hodgson, Joris Vlieghe, and Piotr Zamojski, whose post-critical manifesto equally affirms the world and the hope within and for that world.¹³

So we clearly have an emphasis on hope in education not as (primarily) directed at (a specific vision of) the future (preparing students for better lives to come), but as directed at the exposure or manifestation of an experience of a radical kind of openness to possibilities in the present that transgress or exceed or supersede existing limit conditions. But if this can really be said to be the dominant way of seeing the role of hope, at least in some of these theoretical accounts (i.e., being about attuning us to what is present yet neglected in the world as it is), hope is really about our present educational practice as a place and time of possibilities (what is possible in the moment/the current situation in the classroom, as it is). It is not the hope for something else to become possible in the future (happiness in deferral), but for something possible to happen with what is within and against the contemporary moment. In other words, it is

about making the classroom a place and time where, as hooks put it, “paradise can be created,” right now through the slightest of shifts, through the smallest of gestures. What we want to emphasize is that for these authors, there is an ontological claim to be made here even if it is never stated clearly. Whereas the common sense notion of hope presupposes that potentiality comes first and that it is then actualized in the future (hence the future-oriented notion of hope and the utopian imagination), we might be able to read some of the citations provided above as *inverting the order* between potentiality and actuality. It would seem that the realization of potentiality *comes about after or through* education, not as a presupposition that must wait to be actualized in a future to come, but as a moment of happiness in the present. But in that case, hope is no longer used in a commonsense way, and, in fact, we could say that it is exactly about abandoning hope understood in everyday language that makes this kind of experience possible (by turning our gaze to the present), turning the sentiment from one of hope for (*qua* anticipation of) happiness in the future, to one of the manifestation of happiness in the educational present (realization of something that is already there, namely the potential for human freedom and happiness). There is no other choice than to face the present, to see what can be done—one of those things being to engage in studious play (or put language to use and babble!) without the need to hope for something better at a future point to come. It is in this sense that we could say that it may be more appropriate to ask for a hopelessly happy kind of pedagogical practice (in which hope is replaced by happiness as the dominant sentiment).

P4I as a Hopelessly Happy Pedagogical Practice (toward a Pedagogy of Hopelessness)

We can perhaps turn back to P4C to provide an alternative to the emphasis on hope (or rather, the future-oriented variety of hope, in education), again using one of the founding P4C theorists, Sharp, as our point of departure. Indeed, Sharp argues that happiness is an essential feature of doing philosophy with children. Instead of more or less instrumental reasons for pursuing philosophical inquiry in schools (such as making better judgments, or cultivating wisdom, or improving school learning outputs), Sharp highlights happiness as a more basic motivating factor. More importantly, Sharp argues that happiness is not a state attached to the achievement of ends or of accomplishment or even well-being. Instead, happiness is a kind of “disposition” that “is not something that

can be sought and thereby achieved directly.”¹⁴ Likewise, it cannot be given to us by another. Happiness arises from inside the inquiry process itself in such a way as to put emphasis on “*being* rather than *having*.”¹⁵ Here, Sharp seems to suggest that happiness is attached to our being-thus (or whatever being) as Agamben would say. In fact, Sharp provocatively states that happiness is when a child “stands in awe of the possibilities of human nature.”¹⁶ Note that it is not potentiality *for x* that produces happiness; it is rather the awe of potentiality *as such* in our thusness, which produces happiness for Sharp. This is not a notion of happiness predicated on *having* so much as happiness predicated on exposure to potentiality, or perhaps more directly, exposure to infancy (a state of non-having within having that gives having away and thus opts for use). It is, to recall our analysis of monastic rules in Chapter 2, a state of radical *poverty* (of not having). This is a shocking ending to an essay in which Sharp argues repeatedly for a concept of self and action that is necessarily founded on a “developmental teleology” oriented toward “purposes or plans in which genuinely novel directions can and do emerge.”¹⁷ Speech is oriented toward fulfilling a certain teleological directionality. The P4C facilitator guides such speech toward reasonableness as the “ultimate criterion”¹⁸ for judging the efficacy of P4C. And then, at the end of this teleologically directed argument comes a non-teleological moment of suspension in the form of happiness. Happiness is the awe in experiencing potentiality within speech without it having to be directed at anything beyond itself. It is the being of speech rather than the having of skills that emerges as foundational to the P4C experience. In this sense, Sharp turns back to potentiality (and thus also impotentiality) in the very moment when P4C appears to be at its teleological end. It is almost as if awe at potentiality (rather than what has been accomplished in terms of the skills one has) is discovered through the course of dialogue, and that it is only when potentiality proceeds (rather than precedes) the actualization of skills that happiness is truly possible. Happiness is precisely what emerges when this end is left idle within the community, and it is exposed to its potentiality (infancy) for speech (de-completing any teleological end with awe). Moreover, individual happiness, for Sharp, is intimately tied to the happiness of the other members of the community. In “What Is a ‘Community of Inquiry’?” she writes that one of the aims of the practice of P4C is to form communities that engender “a care for one another’s happiness equal to the concern one has for one’s own happiness.”¹⁹ What makes these formulations significant is that the emphasis is not on the future, but on the fact that the practice “engenders” happiness in the course of the practice, that is, that it realizes a sense of communal well-being as the

essence of the practice. In other words, like the bonds of love that form between its members, happiness is made possible by the way in which the members of the community relate to each other as radically open/beings of potentiality, as friends, as whatever they are without identity.

Rather than just another facet of the P4C experience, we want to take the disruptive nature of Sharp's conclusion seriously and argue that this shift toward happiness opens the way for P4I to emerge. In this sense, Sharp's comments on happiness are not actually an end to her essay but rather a messianic opening to infancy: an infancy that is no longer instrumentalized, without destiny (direction/*telos*), and without end. Agamben can help us extend Sharp's theory of happiness, and in this sense help us postpone the ending of her essay even further until the very notion of an end ceases to be relevant.

Agamben on Happiness as (a Practice in) Hopelessness

Agamben's project, in its entirety, could perhaps be summarized as an exploration of the concept form-of-life. What does it mean to contemplate a life that is inseparable from its form? Or, stated differently, what does it mean to contemplate a life that lacks any negation (separation or division between *phone* and *logos*, human and animal, potentiality and actuality) and any destination (is without *telos*, vocation, or necessary ends)? This would be a life that lives only its livability or its potentiality without this potentiality being sacrificed or predetermined in any way. The problem with capitalism is precisely that life's potentiality (its labor power) is expropriated and thus divided against its form. The result—at least in the classical Marxist model—is some kind of alienation, or a radical reduction of what is livable in a life to one's position within a division of labor. Yet for Agamben, such negation and destiny can be overcome through a form-of-life. A form-of-life would be whatever life it is, or a life lived thusly, full of its potentiality for this *and* that without division. “[O]nly that life is happy,” he writes, “in which the division disappears.”²⁰ Form-of-life is happy because there is no longer a division separate life from its form, actuality from its potentiality. And: “That is why human beings—as beings of power who can do or not do, succeed or fail, lose themselves or find themselves—are the only beings for whom happiness is always at stake in their living, the only beings whose life is irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness.”²¹ Claiming our impotentiality (rather than sacrificing it in the passage from animal to human, child to adult, potentiality to actualization) is what “irremediable and painfully” consigns us to

happiness. We are consigned to happiness and this is always what is at stake in our living. But what is happiness?

For Aristotle, happiness was a necessary human *telos* or an absolute end for which all else is done. It was, in Aristotle's philosophy, an end in itself, or a pure end orienting the good life. It was the goal of ethics to promote happiness or flourishing through the habituation of the virtues via proper education. In the fulfilled life, a person would act in the right ways, at the right times, toward the right things/people, for the right purposes. This is a life of *praxis* that is informed by correct feeling and thinking oriented by an understanding of the ultimate good (happiness or flourishing). Opposed to Aristotle, Agamben turns toward Plato. In Plato's later works, Agamben finds a way to think human life that neutralizes the means-end relationship that dominates Aristotle's thinking. According to Agamben's reading, Plato posits a new notion of happiness that is not conceived of as an end guiding action. Instead, happiness is immanent to contemplation as a regressive movement (*katabaino*) that discovers the potentiality for thought's thinkability (or speaking's speakability). In contemplative forms-of-life, happiness is immanent to life as such, without dividing life into means and ends. What makes such immanence happy? Agamben posits that "life is what is produced in the very act of its exercise as delight internal to the act, as if by dint of gesticulating the hand in the end found its pleasure in its 'use'; the eye by constantly looking became enamored with vision; the legs, by bending rhythmically, invented walking."²² In other words, happiness comes from use (rather than functionality). By simply doing whatever the limbs and organs are doing, they become "enamored" and thus find a use in and through their gesticulations. These gesticulations do not have an internal *telos* guiding them toward a predetermined end point (in terms of the fulfilled life of virtue). Instead, they merely experiment with whatever they can do (with their potentiality to be thus) and this experimentation produces a form-of-life that is of use (to itself). Stated differently, the organs and limbs Agamben describes do not have an identity. Instead, they are movements, ticks, gesticulations that seem to escape any purpose, and yet they invent particular modes of life through play that is sufficient in itself. Happiness is, simply put, "absolutely profane 'sufficient life' that has reached the perfection of its own power and its own communicability."²³ This is a life that does not sacrifice its impotentiality but rather finds within it new uses that are not predetermined according to an essence or *telos*. Happy life is a life that uses itself to generate itself; it is a life that has not fulfilled its *telos* so much as a life that is a pure means without end determining what it should or should not do, should or should not be in advance of its singular becoming.

This kind of sufficiency is not to be read as mere acceptance of the way things are or of the status quo. In fact, the status quo absolutely rejects living thusly. The whole impetus driving the learning society is that the subject is never sufficient, must constantly be learning in order to improve outputs and performances, or to remain flexible for the gig economy. To prefer not to partake in constant learning is to put one's self at risk of being abandoned by the learning society. Living thusly means embracing the way things are *without identity and without functionality*. Agamben summarizes, "[E]verything here, in fact, stay[s] the same, but loses its identity."²⁴ In this sense, we are "irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness" not as an end point but as a condition of possibility within the lives that we live that is not exhausted or used up in the identities we perform or the function assigned to our gestures. It would be a life that suspends and renders inoperative *what we have learned* to be, do, and say in order to open up a sphere of play (instead of *praxis*). Notice that for Agamben there is no mention of hope at this point. Happiness is not something we *hope* to achieve in the future through a specific kind of learning. Instead, it is present in the life that we are living as a continual potentiality: Not as a potentiality *to come* but rather as potentiality *as such* (the ability to speak/not to speak that we return to in every speaking act).

Pushing this point further, we could also argue that not only is the learning society fueled by a future-oriented hope for a better tomorrow. In addition, this hope is always also a *curse* against the affirmation of the present, which must be negated in order to reach some kind of deferred fulfillment. In this case, the hope that has been absorbed into the learning society comes at a cost: *guilt* over what has not yet been achieved, a sense of failure to live up to the command to actualize a potentiality for a greater purpose (be that liberation, democracy, or revolution). In this sense, we find ourselves yet again caught in a vicious cycle wherein negation and destiny intervene to separate being from its potentiality in the present as a condition of happiness. Whereas many of the theorist cited above simply affirm hope without recognizing its complicity with the learning society, we would like to offer a more positive foundation for education, one that is not predicated on either negation or destiny but on the happiness of infancy as such.

Infancy is an experience of the potentiality to speak within speech that produces its own kind of happiness—happiness in the playful use of speech that is undestined for any function and deposes any law of learning that would assign (ahead of time) assessment values to this or that kind of speech. Recall that for Agamben, what characterizes humans is that "there is no essence, no historical

or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize,”²⁵ and that the only thing humans have to be, consists in “*the simple fact of one’s existence as possibility or potentiality*.”²⁶ More specifically, we have language, and language allows us to articulate how we think of ourselves, but how we use language is not pre-determined, which, in turn, means a radical openness to new uses. For Agamben, realizing more fully this defining feature of our being is a source of happiness. He writes: “The impropriety, which we expose as our proper being, manner, which we *use*, engenders us. It is our second, happier, nature.”²⁷ Notice that happiness is not nature. It is not a *necessary* necessity of our essence as human beings (a special telos that defines humans in a certain way). But rather, happiness is a *second* nature or a *contingent* necessity found in our manner of being. Remember from Chapter 4 that manner is that which one cannot not be or do. It is what we yield to, and in yielding to it, we become happy. Because we cannot not help but express our manners, they are necessary, but they are also radically contingent at the same time. There is nothing predetermined about manners, which are emergent, and through their emergence, they engender whatever we are (in some unquantifiable, idiosyncratic way). Manners are the spin, or halo that surrounds our *habitus*, making us singularly in a way that interrupts any attempt to assign an identity or measure to our being-thusly. But why is this second nature considered happy? What is it about manners that opens the human up to happiness? Manners are not actions that can be evaluated. They are not virtues that are guaranteed to cultivate happiness because they are anchored in a human telos. Instead, they are happy because they are precisely beyond judgment and thus have been blissfully abandoned as inessential supplements that, precisely because of this seemingly vestigial status, are the key to happiness. Manners play with themselves, use themselves, and do so in relation to the demand of existence that comes from within life itself. Happiness, on this reading, is not added to life but is always already there in how life uses itself to create a form-of-life.

Agamben himself offers testimony to the peculiar happiness of contemplation and study. When asked whether he thought the image others had of him was that of being a “thinker whose wisdom has come at the cost of ease, affection, joy, the animal pleasures,” Agamben responded: “These images are made to protect people from the risks that come with thinking about things. The opposite is of course the case. The relation of reflection to sensation, joy, and pleasure is that it sharpens and extends each one.”²⁸ In this seemingly passing comment, we find an important point about studying (in the broad sense of study that describes Agamben’s life), namely that, for him it is something that is inherently pleasurable, something that affirms happiness, in the sense of both

intensifying the “animal pleasures” and “sharpening” them through an increase in consciousness and intellectual awareness (thus cultivating a second nature or form-of-life that is a composite of manners). Happiness is not essential. Rather it is the inessential halo that surrounds the manner of our study (an event, a vibration in our being), which is so subtle that it is easily missed by those who are not themselves studiers.

Just like we may have experienced this kind of studying as happy (in the way articulated above), we can propose that the educational use of study should be seen as allowing students to experience (the possibility) of a particular form of a happy life, a life that lacks the need to actualize anything in particular in a measurable and thus quantifiable sense. But what characterizes this educational life without end is that it is not some form of meditation (in the sense of a ceasing of striving or movement, selflessness, nonaction, which we find in Stoicism or Taoism). Rather it is an activity that entails a momentum toward something, only that that something remains immanent to the process of studying: its own, immanent use of itself that is demanded of itself. This happiness is not the happiness found in the learning society, which appears to be perpetually deferred for a future when we have passed the test, or graduated, or paid off our student loans. These are driven by certain hopes (even if the hopes are rather banal) and thus always have a sense of delay and anticipation that accompanies them. There is a sense of being indebted to a future, of investing in a vision that is to come that fuels the hopes underlying the learning society. But the happiness of studious play—especially in a community of infancy—is not simply opposite of leaning either and instead is about a certain kind of rhythm that only emerges when the ends of learning are suspended and the means are experienced as such (language and speakability, for instance).

While the focus above has been on the individual experience of studying as a source of happiness (and it should be pointed out that happiness is of course always experienced by an individual), we can distinguish between the kind of ease that is made possible by the experience of infancy when we study alone, and the kind of ease that becomes possible only when we engage in a communal experience of infancy with others. As we have seen through our analysis of infancy and communal study, the community that becomes possible is one of love and friendship (see Chapter 4). Now, we may think of those terms themselves as inherently desirable, and almost as synonyms for happiness. And especially with regard to friendship, where Aristotle speaks of experiencing “sweetness of being,” this is certainly the case. So one of the ways in which communal study may allow for an experience of happiness is the kind of desubjectification that happens

when we see others as other selves (*heteros autos*), leading to an experience of *ek-stasis* (standing outside of oneself), an expansion of self beyond one's facticity, and a communion with others. Rules are the form that this collective form-of-life takes up through the use of itself. Thus rules make for happy life only insofar as they depose any law held over collective life (such as the laws of learning or the laws of reasonableness).

We want to come back here to what has already been said about the idea of form-of-life and why we should think of a community that embraces infancy as a happier community, and the realization of such a community in education, as a paradigm for such a community. For Agamben, the nature of the in-tentional community is exemplified in the Franciscan Monastic Order. While not a specifically educational form-of-life, the monastic order is comparable to the educational community in P4I, in that life in the latter could be said to not be distinguishable from its form. About such a life, Agamben writes:

A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. What does this formulation mean? It defines a life—human life—in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power. Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor is it assigned by whatever necessity; instead, no matter how customary, repeated, and socially compulsory, it always puts at stake living itself. That is why human beings—as beings of power who can do or not do, succeed or fail, lose themselves or find themselves—are the only beings for whom happiness is always at stake in their living, the only beings whose life is irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness.²⁹

It is in this sense that Agamben writes that “[a] political life” is “a life directed toward the idea of happiness.”³⁰ And, again, as we have already seen in the previous section, where we described the life of the studier as a “sufficient life,” the in-tentional community of the P4I classroom could be described as a communal educational life “[t]hat has reached the perfection of its own power of its own communicability.”³¹ To be more specific, an education in and for infancy is an education that finds happiness in the use of language—in speaking speaking's speakability, returning speech to its potentiality to be spoken. An infantile education is thus an education that untethers speaking from any identity (as proper or improper, reasonable or unreasonable) and any destiny (within a democratic society).

At this point, it is important to turn toward a possible critique of this kind of happiness. Some might argue that abandoning hope in the name of happiness

is a kind of resignation. On this interpretation, hope is what drives educators, especially those who are teaching underserved populations. This is certainly a real-world problem that needs to be addressed by anyone proposing a critique of hope. In response, we would simply say that phenomenologically speaking, the facilitator of P4I is not driven by hopes. Rather, he/she is driven by the love of students and happiness to be in the classroom. In our personal experience, hope is not a motivating factor when in the community of infancy. Instead, one is deeply engrossed in what is happening and taking pleasure in that happening. Without such happiness, it would be hard to imagine how the facilitator would continue on without burning out. Indeed, it is not at all clear how hope can stave off burn out when happiness is somehow continually deferred to the future. Those who insist on hope have perhaps invested too much *faith* in hope and its “transformative” powers. Yet instead of an orientation that says “I am burned out and will have to struggle to gain happiness tomorrow,” we would argue that saying “I am happy and will struggle to protect what I am doing” is the strongest kind of motivator. While the former waits for happiness to arrive (or laments its passing), the latter is radically *impatient* and *active* in exploring happiness in the present and how to develop ease with students through the use of language that is demanded by language’s infancy. Another way of stating this is that one is predicated on a negation while the other is predicated on an affirmation. And this does not mean that everything is perfect; rather it means that teachers and students feel that there is a practice—P4I for instance—through which an educational form-of-life has emerged that is sufficient, that is whatever it is, and that in its being-thus is happy. Such a happy life does not merely abide by normal operating conditions, rather it suspends them *right now*, in the name of an educational adventure, even if there are institutional risks to such a (profane) gesture.

The Comedy of Happiness

The critical teacher who is driven by hope is deadly serious. He or she thinks of teaching as a political action (a *praxis*), an intervention into the present in the name of actualizing a future potentiality. This is tough love in the name of human emancipation to come. This is hope for a better tomorrow through education as cultivation for a democratic future. And there is a certain amount of guilt that comes with “failing” to live up to this image of what could be achieved in the future. Here, we do not want to discount this project or undervalue its

importance in transformative projects. Instead, we want to merely suggest that there might be another way of thinking about teaching that does not fall nicely into categories of either conservative or leftist in any traditional sense, and in doing so replaces the conceptual framework for thinking about education from tough love to whatever love and from hope to hopeless happiness. This would likewise mean a shift from thinking about the gestures of the teacher as embodying a *serious action*. Here, we define action as that which is imputable to a subject who, in turn, is responsible for acting. Hence the *seriousness* of acting—there are consequences that one has to bear. The serious teacher views teaching as an action, the consequences of which are born out in the performance of his or her students. Teaching as a serious action is exceptionally ingrained in our way of thinking about educational relationships. Authors as diverse as Paulo Freire to Gert Biesta describe teaching as a *praxis*.³² How can teaching be anything but a serious action? Opposed to this tried and true logic, we would like to end this chapter by arguing that in P4I, the facilitator is disruptive precisely because of his or her *comedic* suspension of action in the name of infantile speech. In the end, it is precisely the comedic dimension of education unleashed through P4I that opens the possibility for happiness in the classroom to appear. As Agamben writes, “Comedy defines ... a sphere of human life in which happiness is not determined by action and from which, for that reason, all suffering is excluded.”³³ We are interested in exploring the ramifications for this assertion in relation to P4I.

In the book *Karman: A Brief Treatise on Action, Guilt, and Gesture*, Agamben pinpoints a particular problem that humanity has yet to come to terms with: the mystery of imputation or how we become responsible for our actions. The knot tying subject to his or her actions is the threshold across which a subject is constituted as *subjected* to the law (as culpable and therefore punishable). In his work, Agamben attempts to suspend the operations of the complex juridical apparatus found in Western culture that increasingly ties actor to action in such a way that the actor internalizes fault. Summarizing his hypothesis, Agamben writes, “[T]he concept of *crimen*, of action that is sanctioned, which is to say, imputable and productive of consequences, stands at the foundation not only of law, but also of the ethics and religious morality of the West.”³⁴ A turning point in the complex story of ethics and religious morality in the West pre-dates Christianity. Somewhat counterintuitively, Agamben locates a key origin point in Greek tragedy, which situates the question of freedom and guilt in the precarious gap that separates and unites agency (to be the cause of one’s actions) and divine fate (to be acted upon) in the actions of the hero. Unlike traditional readings

of Greek tragedy, Agamben does not locate the dilemma between the internal feeling of the actor to be the free cause of his or her actions and the whims of the Gods so much as *within* the privileging of action as such. Once action has been connected to actor, the question of imputation and the assignment of guilt become the inevitable “criterion of ethics and of humanity.”³⁵ The result is that the history of the West plays out in the shadow of tragedy, as actors are now always divided between innocence and guilt.

The second upshot of the tragic emphasis on action is that humanity is perpetually separated from its happiness. Agamben writes,

From the perspective that interests us here, what is decisive is thus that praxis, human action, appears as the dimension that is opened up for the sake of the good, as what must actualize the final end toward which human beings cannot but aim. This means that between human beings and their good there is not a coincidence, but a fracture and a gap, which action ... seeks incessantly to fill.³⁶

Notice that action (a) has a function that must (b) negate the present in the name of (c) that which humans must necessarily aim at (as their destiny). Humans find themselves *in debt* to their own end, and action is the sphere where this debt is continually reasserted. One must act in such and such a way so as to achieve the destined happiness. Yet because of the gap that action attempts to overcome, the promised happiness can only be hoped for. What humanity is left with is an infinite deferral of an end to come and the fault that they must bear in the meantime as evidence of their tragic failure. The result is similar to the split inaugurated within language by the apparatus of the oath that continually blesses life just as much as it curses it (discussed in Chapter 1).

And this is no different with the history of educational philosophy. A host of educational philosophers locate teaching squarely within the framework of tragedy.³⁷ Teaching is tragic because the teacher finds him- or herself in and through actions and their risky consequences. Or, from another perspective, the teacher assumes the mysteries of education through tragic actions.³⁸ Teaching, on this account, is doomed to the inevitability of loss, disappointment, and doubt. Indeed, much like the tragic model identified by Agamben, the tragedy of teaching is derived from the inherent antinomy that exists between the autonomy of the teacher (as actor) and as professional (acted upon by the institution) now internalized through a sense of inevitable failure. The teacher bears responsibility for these antinomies through his or her actions.

But is this the only way to conceptualize teaching? Here we can perhaps pivot to philosophy for children. For Agamben, there is another paradigm at work

in Western culture—one that does not privilege acting but rather thinking. If the former is best represented by Aristotle then the latter is best represented by Socrates. Within this second paradigm, ethics shifts from the connection between actor and action (and in turn, responsibility and fault) to contemplation. Socrates, on this reading, emerges as an anti-tragic figure who seeks truth not through action but through thought. Indeed, Socrates is critiqued precisely because of his lack of action, lack of profession, and lack of income. He is without works and deeds, but for this reason is, on all accounts, all the happier. Another way of putting this is that Socrates (and by extension, philosophy) privileges potentiality over actuality, privileging means over ends. For us, this suggests that P4C might be a way to return teaching to an ethic beyond the tragic, and in this sense, reclaim a little bit of happiness in education. But in the classical model of P4C, this dimension of thinking is foreclosed upon when thought is instrumentalized and absorbed into a means-end framework that promotes the development of a certain set of skills in order to fulfill a certain telos. Lost here is the adventure of thinking when it is opened up to exploring its own potentiality without negation or destiny. This is precisely why P4I is needed: to reconnect thinking back to an anti-tragic (happy) paradigm.

But for Agamben, the idea is not so much to simply affirm contemplation (and potentiality) *over* and *above* action (and actualization). Instead, it is to look for forms-of-life that are defined by impotential actions, or actions that deactivate themselves: contemplative forms-of-life. Such actions would not be the product of an action forcing potentiality to actualize itself (and thus sacrifice impotentiality) so much as the result of a yielding or allowing of impotentiality to materialize. Is there some kind of action that is unjudgeable, meaning an action that neutralizes the nexus that connects actor, action, and responsibility? How can we imagine such a thing? Is there, in other words, an action that decompletes itself and thus is happy (rather than guilty)? For Agamben, *comedy* offers another possibility for conceptualizing the relationship between subject and action, one that sidesteps the issue of the internalization of fault. Unlike tragedy, comedy presents us with characters *without action*. Theatrical personas imitate characters (not actions), and in this way, are ethically not imputable. Think of the slapstick antics of toons or comedic mimes. Their gestures are wild and disruptive, but we do not fault them as they are not “actions” in any traditional sense. Instead of judging the “actions,” we laugh at them in their innocent exuberance. Having suspended actions, the subject is removed from the burden of being responsible and attending judgments that assign fault. Charlie Chaplin might very well destroy the entirety of the factory, yet the audience cannot judge his gestures

precisely because they are not actions. A comedic actor like Chaplin does not will actions that express character but rather exposes his characteristic manners as such, and in this sense, cannot be cursed or blessed. Manners are not actions manifesting the strength and virtue of an actor but rather are manifestations of impotentiality or a weakness in an agent's being. And in this way, the equation wedding together means (actions) and ends (happiness) via action is neutralized.

Interestingly, Agamben cites Aquinas as an inspiration. Aquinas writes, "Of course, there are some actions that do not seem to be carried out for the sake of an end. Examples are playful and contemplative actions, and those that are done without attention, like rubbing one's beard and the like. These examples could make a person think that there are some cases of acting without end."³⁹ In other words, acts of play, of contemplation, and of involuntary gestures (manners) all seem to suggest a form-of-life that cannot be judged according to the merits of its motivations or the virtues (or vices) of its actions. Instead, what is offered is a mode of being that is *sufficiently happy* as an open-ended means, continually experimenting with the parameters of what qualifies as a life. There is no purpose orienting actions and no will *forcing* potentiality to actualize itself. Instead, there is a sense of allowing one's being to be thusly, or whatever it is. Another way of saying this is that playing, studying, and our manners all are forms of use, where functionality (always oriented toward an end) is left idle. Indeed, isn't this precisely what the comedic persona "teaches"—that the world can be deactivated, suspended, and thus open for studious play? Here, happiness is not invested in an end to come so much as it is lived as a means (without judgment and without end). In sum, P4I returns P4C to its promised happiness by enhancing its comical potentiality. And in turn, P4I offers Agamben a practice that does not simply privilege potentiality over actuality but rather opens up education to a sphere of inoperative speech acts where students practice speaking infancy (through comedic babble).

This returns us to the discussion of adventure offered in Chapter 3. We would argue that the adventurer is not the hero. The figure of the hero belongs to the tragic theater. They are the serious individuals whose actions determine their character. Instead, we want to suggest that the real star of the adventure is perhaps none other than the comedian, or, in Agamben's work, Pulcinella. Characterizing the trickster figure of Pulcinella, Agamben writes:

Despite the stereotypical pretense of a plot, in the comedy of Pulcinella there is only parabasis. Pulcinella does not act in a play; he has always already interrupted it, has always already left it, by means of a shortcut or a byway. He is pure parabasis: an

*exit from the scene, from history, from the silly, flimsy story in which one would like to contain him. In the life of humans—and this is his teaching—the only important thing is to find an escape route. Leading where? To the origin.*⁴⁰

Pulcinella does not act but rather interrupts action. And this is his teaching: that there is an exit from the actor-action-imputation apparatus defining Western society. Pulcinella teaches by making the audience laugh at his actions, which are deactivated in the very act that activates them, revealing the pure mediality of his mannerisms and of his strange speaking. When the skillful is allowed to become clumsy, when the trembling of mannerisms overtake the proper functioning of actions and linguistic utterances, then the body and language are equally opened up for possible use. Nothing is negated or destroyed here. At the same time, nothing fulfills its destiny. Instead, all that remains are gesticulating babbling bodies whose happiness is found in free use.

In relation to education, we suggest that an emphasis on comedy releases the burden of the teacher from having to take serious action fueled by hope. These narratives are tragic, even when they achieve great things. We also suggest releasing the figure of the teacher from being a hero whose job it is to save others. Instead, we offer a rather weak and strange image of the teacher-as-not-a-teacher: the P4I facilitator as a clown, and the P4I session as a kind of comedic theater, or (improvised) clowning routine, wherein ends are suspended for experiment with the speech and its speakability that emerge. The coming community of infancy is a comedic community that is subversive in so far as it suspends the laws of learning not because of love for the future so much as love for whatever appears in the present through use. Like Pulcinella, the P4I facilitator creates an *exit* in the classroom—an exit from predetermined ways of speaking and thinking. This is serious! But only insofar as it is hilariously happy. And like all great clowns, the facilitator effaces his or her will (to dominate, to be in control, to embody the Voice of authority). Instead, the facilitator keeps babbling, uncontrollably.

We can circle back here to what has been said about the P4I facilitator as teacher-as-not-a-teacher and his or her role of using his or her power to uphold the laws of the schoolhouse, while also suspending the substantive part of the oath (sacrament of language) to make space for the demand of the potential of language (i.e., its infancy) to be exposed. Describing the teacher in the P4I classroom as a clown may help clarify the ambiguous role of the teacher as teacher-as-not-a-teacher (i.e., as both representative/part of an institution, which provides him or her with power, and, at the same time, being the one

who subverts/undermines the law of learning). Like the clown, the teacher “occupies an ambiguous position between political inclusion and exclusion, between inside and outside.”⁴¹ As with other liminal figures in Agamben’s work, the teacher-as-not-a-teacher is neither fully inside nor outside. On the one hand, he or she embodies the law of the schoolhouse (maintaining the classroom, for instance). On the other hand, he or she suspends and renders inoperative the law of learning that the schoolhouse serves (by opening up a space and time for the free use of language in response to the demand of infancy). This is also why the teacher-as-not-a-teacher is a strange kind of sovereign power that is always already at risk of sacrificing him- or herself, as the law of the schoolhouse might very well deem clowning as “unprofessional” behavior for a teacher. Thus the clown is a highly precarious role to play, yet a role that is absolutely necessary for the kind of happiness that philosophical contemplation can offer to participants in a P4I session.

While this might seem rather outrageous, Agamben himself argues that comedy and philosophy are tightly connected. Indeed, his project is precisely to show that “comedy is more ancient and profound than tragedy—something upon which many already agree—but also that it is closer to philosophy, so close that the two ultimately seem to blur into each other.”⁴² This is precisely because both comedy and contemplation concern pure means (instead of means to an end), purposiveness without a purpose, love for whatever rather than love for identity, and the flowering of mannerisms over and above the determinacy of style.

Conclusion

P4I as a reconceptualization of P4C repotentializes what is already present in P4C, and in the idea of the community of inquiry in particular, namely that it is ultimately about an experience, a being-thus in the present—a being-thus that happens/is being realized in the now, but only in the weakly utopian sense of realizing the experience of possibility (through the adventure of exploring ways of being without the guarantee offered by a human nature or essence). Experiencing and maintaining this experience is what constitutes an educational life as a form-of-life (as that which constitutes itself through its manner of being). This also means that it can do without hope, as there is nothing in particular to hope for, which replaces the questionable pleasure of anticipating happier times to come with the realization of the possibility of happiness in the present. Instead of being directed at the future, our gaze can turn toward each other,

embracing/fully aware of the bonds of love and friendship that connect us (as we experience ourselves and others as potential beings), realizing that things are right (sufficient) as they are because we use what we need (having language) to begin (if we choose) the greatest adventure of all: speaking to each other, sharing our experience in a never-ending conversation, blissfully unaware of deadlines, finding a wayfaring purposiveness in babbling. Such is the comedy of studious play with friends.