LET'S TREAT AUTHORITY RELATIONALLY

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Maybe the project of relational education is not viable. I say this because there are so many educational notions that will have to change in order to reconfigure education to be relational. There are so many entrenched discourses, entrenched practices, entrenched ontological suppositions, entrenched philosophies of education, all of which are highly individualistic, and the task of rethinking so much is daunting. Never mind education: People tend to think of human actions in individualistic ways in general. Making the relational project more difficult, educational practices follow the lead of this general tendency.

Some examples of individualist thinking in education are as follows: The Tyler Rationale—with its insistence on Objectives, Content, Method, and Assessment—is steeped in atomistic assumptions about students who learn curriculum as individuals. This highly influential rationale guides much of today's elementary, secondary, and higher education. Curriculum planning indebted to Tylerism treats students as disconnected individuals who are to be taught and assessed without regard to their relation to others.[1] Inspired by the efficiency of factories and mass production, curriculum planning most often sees students as units, one might even say widgets, to be educated.[2] Current political rhetoric in the United States expounding the notion that "no child will be left behind" likewise treats the single learner as a disconnected individual. According to such slogans, at-risk students will "fall through the cracks" if we let them. This image of children disconnected and falling presents a picture of the human being that is far from relational. Standardized tests, also, are clearly individualist in their orientation toward assessing each particular student. They assess the extent to which one person does or does not measure up to the rest of the lot. These normed tests measure the ability of individuals, but they do not account for the possibility that ability itself may depend on the relational context where such ability is measured.[3]

So the project of relational education might seem overwhelming. But from a different perspective, this great challenge is what makes the project appealing. Because there is so much change to be made, there is much opportunity for new scholarship and innovative practice. I think it most unlikely that any one relational idea will change all of education at once. Instead, each aspect of education needs to be rethought in its relational particulars. The particular matter

of relation I will address in this essay is authority. Like so many other matters in education, authority has been understood in individualist terms. This essay will attempt to reconfigure authority in relational terms.

In order to set the stage, I begin with a story. This story was told to me by one of my students just recently, and I retell it here with great appreciation for its insight into the relational workings of educational authority, for its nuance and clarity, and for the authority that I have been granted by virtue of being able to retell it. The point of this story is to show that authority is not necessarily unidirectional, monological, or atomic. Authority might be predicated on relation.

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Recently, a college sophomore, let's call her Julie, told the following story in class. Julie is in college to become a teacher. And, as a student who will soon be a teacher, she pays close attention to her own relationships vis-à-vis teachers so that she might learn from them habits that would benefit her own teaching. She told this story to illustrate the ways in which some university professors are sympathetic to the experiences of students while some are not.

Julie had just had a traumatic experience. Her grandmother had passed away. She had been very close to her grandmother when she was a child, though she was separated from her now by quite a distance, having moved out of state to attend college. Julie spent a week away from college to attend the funeral and to be with her family in this time of mourning. And, as it happened, she did not inform her professors about her absence until after she returned to college.

Julie was quite apprehensive before returning to her classes. She did not want to be seen as making excuses for the coursework she had missed, and she felt a bit guilty for not contacting her instructors earlier. But at the same time, she wanted to let her professors know that she had been absent for a very legitimate reason, for an event that was much more significant than any week's worth of lectures.

On the first day of her return, she approached her English professor after class. She told the professor why she had not attended the previous week's classes. The professor acted in a very sympathetic manner. She did not say a word to Julie about the absence itself, not a word about Julie's classwork. Rather, she asked if Julie had been close to her grandmother, and Julie answered yes. Julie told her of how they used to play card games together in her childhood. The professor also asked if Julie needed anything in order to get through this rough time. Julie and her English professor stood at the front of an empty classroom. "If there is anything I can do for you," the professor said, "please let me know." Julie thanked her for her kind words.

Julie contrasts this first reception to a different sort that she faced upon explaining her absence to her history professor. The history professor said, "Well, you know that you missed last week's quiz, don't you?"

"Yes," Julie responded.

"Well, you're going to have to make that up within two days."

"All right," Julie said.

"And," her professor continued, "I'll need to have a written verification of your absence. I'll need that note before you can actually take the makeup quiz. That's my policy for every student no matter how extenuating the circumstances."

Julie responded that she would provide the note. But as she recounted this story to me, she added a couple of details about what went through her mind as this incident unfolded. As Julie explains it, "As my history teacher was talking, I became so angry with her for ignoring my feelings, for being so unsympathetic. She lost all credibility in my view. After that, I refused to work hard in that class. She lost her authority as a teacher over me."

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In this story, I am interested in Julie's comments about the way she treated the professor who was unsympathetic toward her grandmother's death. As Julie explained, her instructor's callousness caused her to discount this teacher's authority from that time forward. I am interested in this discounting because it points to a relational aspect of educational authority that is rarely investigated. Whereas educational authority is generally treated as something that one person has over another, this act of Julie's shows that she took part in a *relation* of authority. Julie's story shows that there are instances when authority works in circuits, when one person's use of authority depends on another person's participation in that authority. Julie's reaction is significant because it goes against so much educational thought. While there is much research on educational authority, authority is rarely investigated with an eye to its enactment as a relation. A slew of educational discourse assumes that authority is located solely in the hands of instructors. That is to say, it assumes that students such as Julie do not have a key role in the enactment of authority. Julie's story intimates that authority might be relational.

To highlight the uniqueness of a relational approach to authority, we can start by briefly discussing the nonrelational way that authority has been described for quite some time. Since the time of Immanuel Kant, at least, authority has been considered to be something that autonomous selves possess. For Kant, the self becomes more free, more autonomous, to the extent that one has the capacity to use the authority of one's own reason. The Enlightenment tendency to eschew the authority of the church, the state, and the medical establishment assumed that people needed to stop relying on fixed dogma. In

order to be free and autonomous, in order to be "mature," one had to refuse to rely on any authority outside oneself. "It is so easy to be immature," writes Kant. "If I have a book to serve as my understanding, a pastor to serve as my conscience, a physician to determine my diet for me, and so on, I need not exert myself at all." Instead of being guided by any doctrine that resides outside of oneself, Kant stressed the following nonrelational attitude toward authority: "Have the courage to use your own understanding! That is the motto of the Enlightenment."[4] It is easy to see in this Enlightenment rhetoric a vision of authority that is still dominant today. Most often, authority is still treated as if it is something that one person has at the expense of another. To share authority, or to partake in the authority of another, is said to diminish one's autonomy, one's freedom, and one's maturity. That is, it is recommended that authority not be part of a relation. Strength is said to come from having authority to oneself rather than sharing it.

A cursory glance at current educational perspectives on authority shows a similar nonrelational perspective. For whatever reason, educational authority is often described as something that one person possesses. It is construed as an entity that, once possessed, enables one to wield a certain amount of influence over another. One often speaks of different kinds of authority—of institutional authority, the authority of the expert, the authority of one who is wise. Yet whatever its type, authority is most often treated as if it is a thing that one person or one institution has. To be sure, there are many opinions as to whether authority is useful or not. Some educators argue that it is all right to "have" authority. Others argue that "having too much" authority is dangerous for those who do not "have" it. Many educators write of ways that authority might be "shared" with one's students. But even from these different ideological perspectives, authority is considered to be something that is wielded, or shared, mainly by one person. Certainly, the common ways that we talk about authority in English tend to solidify this picture of authority as something one person possesses. Authority is often described in measurable terms: "She commands a lot of authority." People who do not "have a lot" of authority speak of the ways they might "get more." Or it is described as something that accrues: "That is the authority of age talking." Or it is said to be something that can be lost: "In front of those students, I seem to lack authority." Described as something that can be grasped and held by one person, it appears unlikely that authority might have to do with how people relate.

But how might we understand Julie's story in a different way? How might we understand it as an example of the way authority is influenced by relation? To look into this relationality, I will turn to two different theoretical perspectives, one informed by psychoanalysis and the other informed by hermeneutics. While the first perspective speaks to the ways that individuals deal with author-

ity in relation to the details of their own life experiences, the second speaks to the ways that individuals deal with the authority of knowledge in relation to the source of that knowledge.

Relation and Psychic Life

Informed by psychoanalysis, we find that authority gets worked out in part within the inner world of human beings. It is said that the person who uses authority tends to use it in ways that reflect past dealings with authority. For example, a person might enact authority in the classroom in the same way that she is used to enacting authority as a parent, as an older sibling, or as a partner in love. A teacher who is a cruel parent at home may use classroom authority in cruel ways; a teacher who is coercive with her siblings may use authority in the same coercive way in the classroom; a dominating love partner may be dominating toward his students as well. Or a person may use authority on others in the ways that it was used on him or her by a parent, a teacher, or an older sibling. If one has been raised in an authoritarian household, one may end up being an authoritarian teacher; if one was treated harshly during childhood, one may end up using one's authority to treat other children harshly; if someone is subjected to domination in a relationship, that person may end up being dominated by students. Of course, we know that there is never a simple equivalence between past experience and present actions. It may be that one uses authority in ways that are opposite to past experience precisely because of a need to stop repeating patterns of old. In any case, a psychoanalytic perspective reminds us that the use of authority is always indebted to the psychic holdings.

And regarding the student, a psychoanalytic perspective yields the same sort of insights. Such a perspective reminds us that one tends to respond to authority in the same ways that one has responded to other authority figures in the past. How one has reacted to a parent, a sibling, or a love partner may inform the way one reacts to the teacher's authority in the classroom. For example, one might discount the authority of another person if that person were to set off authoritarian signals similar to the ones against which one had reacted in the past. If a male teacher, for example, enacts authority in the same way that one's father has enacted authority in the past, then one might discount such authority if one tended to discount the father's authority in the past. Or on the contrary, if a teacher enacts the sort of authority that the student has always respected in one's closest friends, then the student might tend to embrace that authority wholesale. However the student reacts to authority, a psychoanalytic perspective reminds us that obedience to authority rests on past experience and memory.

To return to Julie's case, it is not unreasonable that the rejection of her history professor's authority was, in fact, a rejection of the sort that she had

practiced with loved ones in her past. It may be that her history teacher's stern attitude resonated in irritating ways with a stern father or mother figure, or with a callous reaction to her by a past teacher. And contrastingly, it may be the case that the embracing of her English professor's conciliatory attitude was a response similar to past responses that she had had to other figures of authority. Perhaps Julie had been used to seeking out empathetic reactions from authority figures in the past, searching for succor from kind people in positions of power. Once again, this is not to say that we know any of this speculation to be true. The point here is rather to highlight the relational possibilities of one's reaction to authority. Whether or not we know the specifics of Julie's case, it is certainly true that one's reaction to authority often has a personal history.

So far, a comparison between the Enlightenment understanding of authority and the psychoanalytic perspective goes like this: Following the Kantian tradition, using authority is a way to shore up one's autonomy and thus one's freedom. Using one's own authority keeps one from depending on the authority of others. Such use of one's authority is a conscious act, not indebted to memory or mental states. Or, if it is indebted to memory or mental states, it is so indebted only to the extent that one attempts to *shun* authority in ways that one has shunned it before. On the other hand, the psychoanalytic perspective contends that the use of authority is under the direction of past experiences that one has had with authority. The psychoanalytic perspective, as we have so far described it, indicates that *authority has us* rather than us having authority. And of the two perspectives, only the psychoanalytic offers any glimpse at the relationality of authority. Let me explain: While the Enlightenment treats authority as one's own possession, the psychoanalytic perspective reminds us that the use of authority is ultimately indebted to the extent to which the people in the authority relation are reminded of past scenarios of authority. Whether I am the one with authority or the one subjected to authority, my participation in the authority relation depends on the extent to which the other fits into my unconscious. The unconscious is

> the inner world of fantasy, wish, anxiety, and defense; of bodily symbols and images whose connections defy the ordinary rules of logic and language. In the inner world, the subject incorporates and expels, identifies with and repudiates the other, not as a real being, but as a mental object.[5]

This unconscious has a primary role in making authority into a relation. Of course, there is a major limitation to the purely psychoanalytic account that I have just described. Namely, such an account insists too much on the interior life of those who are in the authority relation. Certainly, one's use of authority is not completely dependent on one's own personal history with authority. For

example, the teacher has certain real-life accoutrements of authority, without which his or her authority would misfire. In spite of one's tendency to use authority in this or that way, one must really *be* in a classroom, and one must have real students, in order to enact that authority. There are always social circumstances and real others without which, and without whom, one could not enact authority. Furthermore, only in the most uninformed of psychoanalytic thinking is one completely at the whim of past experiences when authority is enacted. A purely psychoanalytic account ignores the real-life choices made by those who are involved in the relation of authority. It ignores the social circumstances that put one in a position to enact authority, and it ignores the agency of those who use, and those who react to, authority.

In fact we should not assume that authority is completely a matter of the unconscious. If that were so, then the real other, the one who uses or is subjected to authority, would be little more than a place marker. Indeed, recent feminist psychoanalysis has insisted that there is a conscious, real side to authority. This real side Jessica Benjamin names the intersubjective zone: It is "that zone of experience in which the other is not merely the object of the ego's need/drive or cognition/perception but has a separate and equivalent center of self."[6] When one person enacts authority over another, she must deal with the fact that there are exterior elements of the other over which she has no control. Wielding authority over another is not determined solely by the distilled ways that one usually responds in an authorizing situation. The intersubjective encounter brings with it the requirement to really *be* an authority in the flesh, with all of the dominating consequences that might entail. The intersubjective bonds of authority get played out when one person interacts with an other who is not under her control, who is radically separate from herself. Whereas many bonds of authority involve internal, psychic manipulation that turns the other into an object of fantasy, the intersubjective bond requires one to deal with the other as a subject with agency.

Insofar as most prevalent accounts of educational authority are not psychoanalytic, they tend to assume that all situations of authority are intersubjective. As such, they assume that authority is primarily a battle of conscious wills. What follows from the purely intersubjective account is that enactments of authority take place as a zero-sum game in which the person in authority is bound to dominate the person on whom authority is enacted. From the student's perspective, authority depends not on past experiences, but on the force of authority that is being enacted right now. The best that can be hoped for is that the teacher will give up enough authority so that the playing field will be equal. From the teacher's perspective, the focus is likewise on the real-time application of authority rather than on patterns of authority that have been set up in advance. The teacher must choose what to do with this particular student or this

particular class in the here and now, whether to give up authority, share authority, or enact it fully. From the purely intersubjective viewpoint, authority is something that the teacher wields and the student does best to avoid.

It is, I think, crucial to maintain a view of authority that deals both with the inner and the outer rather than being wed to either the Kantian account or the "pure" psychoanalytic one. It is most probable that authority actually gets enacted in ways that are both deeply personal and intersubjective. As Benjamin points out, human life takes place on the borderline between past experiences and present enactments. As such, neither the psyche nor the "real" other takes precedent over the other. Rather, memory and new experience interact; they interact in ways that allow either the success or the failure of authority.

We might reconsider Julie's example in light of both the inner and the outer aspects of authority we have examined. We might remark on the different ways that she treated her English professor and her history professor. Julie really did de-authorize her history professor. She decided, quite consciously, to write her off as an uncaring person, as a professor who no longer commanded her respect. In this way, Julie actively rejected the intersubjective experience of authority. And it might be said that she used the inner feeling of concern received from her English instructor as a fulcrum by which to expel the authority of her history professor. Indeed, she went out of her way to de-authorize her history professor. . . twice. The history professor had "lost authority" in Julie's eyes not only during the time of Julie's mourning; Julie de-authorized her professor again by restating it in my presence. The second time, like the first, it was the personal recollection of a contrasting authority figure that enabled Julie to take a stance against a "real" other. Julie twice used a juxtaposition between inner and outer in order to expel the unwanted authority of one who treated her callously. One will never know the exact set of personal experiences that led Julie to authorize and de-authorize these professors. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that the difference in reactions between the two was itself enough set up an inner need to embrace one and repudiate the other. And there was the added performance of authorization and de-authorization in front of me. I, who am Julie's teacher and therefore an authority figure over her in my own right, was called upon to acknowledge, indeed to authorize, these two reactions.

This performance of authorization and de-authorization bears on the way that the personal and the intersubjective interact with each other during the relation of authority. Julie's example is a brief illustration of the way that the inner, relational response to authority brings forth its relation into real life. While the reaction of a student to the authority of a teacher is certainly indebted to the inner needs aroused by prior experience, I want to use Julie's story as a metaphor for the intersubjective afterlife of authority. By this I mean that while the initial reaction to an authority figure may be based on past experience, there is

always space for activity in the present wherein the student can actively take part in the process of either de-authorizing or authorizing. Because authorizing happens on the fault line between the psychic and the intersubjective, we must consider it to be a relational activity that begins in the psyche but ends up in the real world where humans have agency.

The Relation of Authority and Knowledge

Of course this real world is an educational world, at least as far as this particular study is concerned. This relational analysis would not have a foothold on educational authority if we did not link it to knowledge acquisition. By this I mean that if educational authority is a relation, we must also be able to discern how things get learned within this relation. Above I have addressed how authority gets either accepted or rejected in general, how one either opens the door to another's authority or closes it. When we enter an educational circuit of authority, we either want or don't want the authority of the other, it is true. But also, we either want or don't want *to know things,* to learn. How does the student partake in this learning relation? Is the student acquiescent in the face of the authority of knowledge, or does he have agency? What knowledge-related activity is carried out vis-à-vis authority? How does the student relate to authority during the learning process? Here I look to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

From Gadamer's perspective, understanding entails the acceptance of knowledge from a source outside of oneself. The key term here is *acceptance.* The act of learning depends primarily on the acceptance that the knowledge of someone else deserves a spot in one's own scheme of things. When one learns from a teacher, for example, there must be either a conscious or an unconscious acknowledgment that the teacher has something to offer that is actually superior to that which one knows at present. Gadamer notes that the authority of one person over another is based

> on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one's own.[7]

In other words, the student's role in the circuit of authority is an active one to the extent that he or she must decide to let the teacher's knowledge take priority. For authority to succeed in its aim of educating the student, the student must acknowledge that there is an important insight to be gained from the teacher. The student has the active role of authorizing the teacher by following the teacher's pedagogical lead. To learn thus entails the authorization of the teacher by the student. When the student accepts the knowledge of the teacher, she has authorized him or her.

This process of "acceptance" might sound at first glance very acquiescent on the part of the student. Indeed, it would be a thin relational understanding of authority if we were to end up by saying that the authority of knowledge acquisition is relational because the student has an active role in obeying the teacher. But as Gadamer points out, the relation of authority in education is not solely an acknowledgment of the teacher. It also entails acknowledgment of content. Yes, accepting the teacher's knowledge will mean accepting certain prejudices of the teacher, which will be limiting for the student in the sense that some of the teacher's prejudices may limit rather than enhance the student's agency. However, educational authority is also oriented around content. "This," writes Gadamer,

> is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person who presents them. But in this way they become prejudices not just in favor of a person but a content.[8]

There is an acquiescence on the part of the student, in favor of the teacher. But this acquiescence is tempered by the fact that there is a content to which the student can return over and over. This content will be available in the future for interpretation and reinterpretation. Future interaction with the content will enable the student to fend off simple acceptance of the teacher that prevailed at the time of learning.

Back to Julie's case, we now leave her inner and outer responses to authority in order to focus on the educational import of her actions. The two instructors that she mentions, the English professor and the history professor, have educational roles; they are not just generic figures of authority. In fact, we have not done justice to Julie's story in an educational sense until we speak to the fact that her instructors are teachers of *something*. It is very interesting that although Julie's account of what happened to her implies the presence of both generic authority (the callous response of what could have been anyone in authority who showed no empathy toward her grief) and educational authority (the callous response of a particular instructor of history), the two very different types of authority are lumped together and treated equally. In Julie's account, she intimates that her discounting of the history professor's authority also meant that she would, in the future, refuse to take learning seriously in that instructor's class. I sense that when the history teacher "lost her authority as a teacher," what that meant, in part, was that Julie would no longer let the content of the course sink in. I picture Julie continuing on as a student in that course in a very perfunctory way, just doing enough studying to earn a good grade. To put this plainly, Julie seems to have discounted the teacher and the curriculum in one swoop.

The work of Gadamer informs Julie's story because it reminds us that authority has a textual life as well as an interpersonal one. It reminds us that educational authority can rest not only in the personality of the instructor, but also in the content that is left over after personal authority has exited the scene. In Julie's story, one senses that she discounted the knowledge that was gained from the history professor's course because of the professor's callousness. When she says that the professor has "lost her authority as a teacher over me," I can only guess that she has not taken part in the "act of acknowledgement" that Gadamer claims is so central to the process of learning under the authority of a teacher.[9] But Julie could have done otherwise. She might have acknowledged the content itself even if she chose to reject the authority of the teacher's knowledge. The knowledge-based aspect of educational authority suggests that Julie has a relation with more than the teacher; she also has a relation with the knowledge associated with that teacher. As such, she has the opportunity to return to the authority of content at a later time when the authority of the teacher is no longer at issue. In this way, the relation of authority might be measured by the book's shelf life. Indeed, in Julie's account, it seems that both instructor and content were summarily discounted. Yet in another iteration of this story, Julie might have decided to take this opportunity to valorize the authority of the text at the same time that she de-valorized the authority of the person. My point here is that we must not forget the wonderful mediating role of educational content when it comes to educational authority. Content might be seen not as that which is necessarily lost when one dismisses the authority of a teacher, but as an intermediate zone between the inner and the outer experience of the authority figure, a zone where students can have agency over the elements of authority that might remain educative in spite of a teacher's callousness.

Importantly, the content that remains after an educational relation is not subject to our inner experience of past authorities, nor does it constitute a real other. Content provides an intermediate space for experiencing a form of authority that is neither completely under our control nor completely out of our control. Indeed, texts have a life that straddles the inner and the outer. Not unlike the inner world, where, as Benjamin says, "the subject incorporates and expels, identifies with and repudiates the other, not as a real being, but as a mental object," the text has a life that one can control without the risk associated with "real" others. One can open or close a book when one wants. One can supply interpretations that are outlandishly one's own. A person can choose the extent to which she is beholden to the text without worry that the text will force itself upon her. But even better than the inner psychic world per se, the experience of reading a text also entails an interaction with something that is outside of one's self. The text, while it is under our control, is not identical to inner life.

D. W. Winnicott has said of cultural practices like reading that they provide a "third area," one that is very close to intrapsychic space but not identical with it:

> It is useful, then, to think of a third area of human living, one neither inside the individual nor outside in the world of shared reality. This intermediate living can be thought of as occupying a potential space.[10]

I would say that it is this third area that makes educational authority a particularly rich experience. Educational authority is different in kind from both the psychic version of authority offered by most psychoanalytic accounts, and from the authority that is summarily rejected by the inheritors of Kantian individualism. In fact, Kant misses something very important in his analysis of authority that thinkers like Winnicott and Gadamer, help us to recover: the cultural life of texts. When Kant claims that "I am immature" if "I have a book serve as my understanding," he misses the qualitative difference between the authority of people and the authority of books. Our responses to educational authority can use this difference to the healthy advantage of students.

And more to the point of this chapter, I would emphasize that educational is even more relational than other forms of authority to the extent that such authority resides not only on the fault line between the inner and outer, but also on the fault line between teachers and texts. Educational authority is marked by the presence of cultural texts that give the student all the more "space" for safe engagements with authority. When one experiences authority in education, one can respond to it in very personal ways, in very confrontational ways, but also in ways that rely on the staying power of content. Because the text is an alternative to the force of the other, one can respond to the other's meaning as well as to the other directly. What's more, the interplay between inner recollection, outer experience, and textual engagement provide a sort of authoritative triangulation where one can have a relation with authority in any one of a number of permutations. Unfortunately, Julie's story did not reveal the many possibilities of such triangulation, a matter to which I will soon turn.

So far, we have looked at Julie's story as a means for making the case that educational authority should be treated relationally. I have used psychoanalytic and hermeneutic perspectives to account for this relation. These perspectives shed some light on the workings of this relation. But it might be objected at this point that even if we understand the nature of the authority relation, it still remains to be seen how such an understanding can actually help us to practice education differently. It might be said that taking an X-ray of a broken bone is not equivalent to fixing the bone. Therefore, I will turn to some of the implications of a relational understanding of authority.

Once we treat authority relationally, we can encourage students to take part in education in ways that are more empowering. Let me explain. In most accounts of education, it is assumed that the teacher is the one who "has" authority and the student is the one who is passively subjected to authority. Such assumptions keep us from investigating how students might take part in the authority relation. Guided by our new treatment of authority, we might encourage students to consider how they can benefit from the authority relation by using such a relation for their own flourishing. Because students do have agency within the authority relation, it is in the student's interest to embrace authority at some times and to reject it at others. It is in the student's interest to find ways that authority can increase human capacity, and to find ways to avoid the sorts of authority that decrease capacity. It is in the student's interest to engage with authority in very personal, introspective ways at times, and to let authority figures intrude upon one's introspective space at others. Educators have a responsibility to see to it that students are not only reactive to the authority of teachers; it must be insisted that students know how to be active vis-à-vis the authority of their teachers and the authority of content.

With the relational model in mind, we might encourage students to get past current habits of accepting or rejecting authority wholesale. Most nonrelational accounts of authority leave the student with just two options: submit or don't submit. This is because authority is most often posited as something done to the student, something that can be evaded but not engaged with. Because authority has intricacies that are introspective and intersubjective, textual and personal, it is possible to encourage students to do more than reject or accept. Rather, students might be encouraged to employ and deploy, to embrace and even manipulate authority. Students might be encouraged to embrace authority at first, only to discount it later on. They might be encouraged to consider authority itself to be an integral part of one's plan of study. That is not to say that students should always be looking for ways to embrace authority, but rather for ways to engage and disengage with authority strategically.

What I am suggesting is that one's relation to authority should be an interplay between proximity and distance, between how one assimilates authority at some times and how one keeps authority at bay at others. I am suggesting that acts, like Julie's, of discounting a teacher's authority are extremely important. Julie's story shows that she took an agentive role in the authority relation. Student agency when confronted with authority figures might consist of discounting them at some times, and it might consist of honoring them at others. For example, as Julie's story seems to intimate, one can hold one authority figure at arm's length while at the same time embracing another authority figure. Just as she discounted the authority of her history professor, she was also able to embrace the more humane authority of her English professor. It is not necessary

that one react to authority in general. As Julie's story has so vividly shown, one may benefit from one authority relation at the same time that one eschews another. I take Julie's embrace of her English teacher's authority to be a very important example of how students might use the relation of authority actively, how students might gain agency through a self-styled relation to authority.

Of course, what is missing from Julie's story is a nuanced consideration of the student's relation to textual authority. And as I have said, educational authority has an added relational component because of the central place of content. Thus, even as a student distances herself from the force of personal authority, it is still possible to seek proximity with the more intimate relation that one has with textual authority. In Julie's case, it is very unfortunate if, as seems to be the case, she ended up being disengaged from the subject matter of the course simply because her teacher was not empathetic. If Julie had been able to disentangle the personal from the textual, she might have been able to *split* the authority of text and person, valorizing one even while devalorizing the other. When encouraging students to engage with, rather than react to, authority, we must help them to feel empowered enough to engage with texts in spite of teachers! This may mean that students take up strategies that are at odds with the educational institution's structures of grading and assessment. It may mean that students study the content at a later time, without regard to passing a test or getting an A in the course. In Julie's case, she might have helped herself to the content offered in spite of the professor's lack of empathy, and she might have done so on her own time, even after the end of course, when doing so would not serve to authorize her teacher but would be solely for Julie's sake. Yes, we should advocate that students learn in spite of their teachers, and even in secret from their teachers. We should encourage students to be strategic enough to be against the authority of the teacher while being *for* the authority of the text.

And of course the opposite may be encouraged. There may be times when one's reading of texts needs to be augmented with the personal authority of a teacher who shakes up how we read. It may be the case that a student like Julie returns to *another* history teacher after a cooling-off period spent with the content, once she finds that the content interests her enough to seek the personal authority of one who might enable her to delve into the subject matter further. I certainly do not mean to say that empowerment vis-à-vis educational authority is always a move away from the teacher, and toward the text. Certainly, a student should also be encouraged to see the power of finding the right teacher, the teacher whose authority he or she benefits from. It seems to me that students become empowered to the extent that they entertain both the dangers and the benefits that authority figures represent. A teacher can be an aid to human flourishing, an aid to what we learn and how we learn it. Or a teacher can

be as harmful as Julie's history teacher was. The point of a relational account of educational authority is to show that it is within the power of the student to discern between the authority that will lead to flourishing and the authority that will quash it. In education, such discernment must take into account the personal histories, the power-laden human interactions, and the mediating space of the text. It is the obligation of educators to help students see that authority is a relation, and that they have the power to adjust to that relation in ways that lead to flourishing.

Notes

1. See Ralph W. Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).
2. See Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
3. The sort of relational context to which I am referring is nicely described in Barbara S. Stengel's chapter in this volume.
4. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?" in H. Reiss ed., *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970), 54.
5. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 20–21.
6. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love,* 30.
7. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 279.
8. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 280.
9. See also Gadamer's *The Enigma of Health* in this regard, especially the chapter entitled "Authority and Critical Freedom" (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
10. D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971), 110.