

# Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education

*The refereed journal of the*



Volume 11, No. 2  
September 2012

Wayne Bowman, Guest Editor

David J. Elliott, Editor

Vincent C. Bates, Associate Editor

## **Electronic Article**

### **Teaching and our “Deepest Motivations”: Beginning with *I-Thou***

**Mark Whale**

© Mark Whale 2012 All rights reserved.

ISSN 1545-4517

The content of this article is the sole responsibility of the author. The ACT Journal and the Mayday Group are not liable for any legal actions that may arise involving the article's content, including, but not limited to, copyright infringement.



## Teaching and our “Deepest Motivations”: Beginning with *I-Thou*

Mark Whale

### “The Good Life of Teaching”

“Why is the practice of teaching worth putting at the centre of one’s life?” (Higgins 2011, 9). Chris Higgins believes that this question must be properly addressed if people who become teachers are to become themselves—are to discover a way of simultaneously practicing their profession and “flourishing” (10) as human beings. In this essay, I aim to give an account of how Higgins addresses this question and to share my understanding of the question’s fundamental relevance to teaching. At the same time, however, I will offer a critique of Higgins’ central proposal: the use of “virtue ethics” (10) and the associated idea of “receptivity to newness in new situations” (11) as a way of avoiding factors that reduce teaching to moral obligation. I will maintain that a teacher “flourishes,” not simply by being open to “new situations,” but rather by being open to meeting, *self-critically*, new situations. I will argue that while this distinction seems subtle, it shifts the focus of a teacher’s “deepest motivations” from *what* she perceives in a “new situation” to the act of her mindful self-reflexivity, an act that is nourished in her undertaking to find a personal resonance in the “new situation”—in the materials she must teach and in the boundaries she must abide by. I will articulate the distinction through Buber’s notion of *I-Thou* (Buber 2000, 19), the idea that a person’s “whole being” (26) is found in her relation to herself as other.

According to Higgins (2011), contemporary accounts of teacher motivation are incompatible with the realities of teaching (1). On the one hand, the idea that teachers are motivated by the “image of teaching as a noble service”—kept afloat in the face of the “immense difficulties and frustrations” by their selfless consideration for their students—is, according to Higgins, simply not believable (1–2). The idea does not take into account what he calls teachers’ “human-all-too-human desires” (2). On the other hand, the idea that teachers’ motivations are inherently selfish—that the trappings of altruism are “a cover for teachers who really want to feel smart, revisit their youth, vent their aggression, and so on”—wrongly suggests that teachers’ agendas are purely personal (2). The purpose of Higgins’

book, *The Good Life of Teaching*, is to explore how teachers may attend fundamentally to their own desires, their own growth as human beings, and at the same time nourish the desires and growth of their students. In other words, Higgins is concerned to show how teaching others “may be the expression of [a teacher’s] . . . personal ambitions and deepest motivations” (Higgins 2011, 2).

Central to Higgins’ book is an effort to “probe the reasons for our dichotomous tendency to imagine teachers as either selfless saints or selfish scoundrels” (2). In this regard, he makes a distinction between what he calls “moral professionalism” and “professional ethics” (35). Where moral professionalism refers to impartial “codes of professional conduct and our role specific obligations to others” (9–10)—duties constituted independently of our own needs and desires—professional ethics, as Higgins suggests we understand them, are concerned with a notion of “the good” in teaching that is partial insofar as it “begins and ends with first person-questioning . . . about the shape of one’s life as a whole” (9). More specifically a fundamental concern of professional ethics is why and how teachers find teaching “good,” as distinct from pursuing it for “right reasons” (32) even if their actual teaching experience is draining and demoralizing.

Drawing on a number of writers, including Williams (1985), Taylor (1989), and MacIntyre (1990), Higgins argues that the codes of practice inherent in moral professionalism, while they might seem to “occupy the whole territory of the ethical” (26), constitute only “one ethical system among many” (26). Modern morality, characterized by the idea that the “good” involves doing the right thing in terms of our obligations or duties to others, is “but one narrow sub-system within [the broader scope of] ethics” (26). In other words, the dualistic conception of teacher motivation—either “serving students or using them”—is symptomatic of what Higgins calls “modern moral myopia” (25). To avoid this symptom we must re-conceptualize the way we understand professionalism in teaching, freeing it from the myopic notions of moral obligation while retaining its fundamental commitment to and pursuit of “the good.”

Following Williams, Taylor and MacIntyre, Higgins undertakes his re-conceptualization of professionalism in teaching in terms of “classical” or Greek virtue ethics. Central to the classical conception of the good life is not the question “how ought I to act?” (22) but rather, Socrates’ question, “how should one live?” (23). Higgins argues that Socrates’ question, in contrast to the question concerning actions governed by notions of

“ought,” places one’s thoughts for oneself, one’s own desires and well-being at the center of one’s efforts to live a good life. Further, he observes, Socrates’ use of the pronoun “one” rather than the pronoun “I”—How should *one* live?—encourages the individual to remember that “while this question is mine, it is also everyone else’s.” Thus, he continues, “ethical reflection not only pushes me to generalize beyond a particular context for action, but also invites me to generalize beyond my own experience” (23). In other words, central to the question “how should *one* live” is not only a person’s own desires and well-being but also consideration of the desires and well-being of others.

Given what appears to be the centrality of both self and other at the heart of the question “how should one live,”<sup>1</sup> the fundamental concern of Higgins’ project, and, indeed, of my essay as well, is how to construe the good life in a way that meets, simultaneously, the desires of a person—in this case, a teacher—and the desires of his or her neighbor—in this case, a student. Higgins tells us that modern morality’s answer to this question is effectively to eliminate personal desire from the equation by making “the good life” accord with impartial codes of conduct (that is, with duty). In contrast, he argues, classical ethics preserves a role for personal “desire”: classical or virtue ethics is “constituted by the tension between its practical pull toward the personal and its reflective push toward the [other]”—the “universal” (23). This tension is negotiated through the virtue of *phronesis* or “practical wisdom” (27). Practical wisdom involves openness to particularity, or “receptivity to the newness in new situations” (11): knowing how to act rightly in situations that are unique and therefore not amenable to formula or rule. Knowing how to act rightly (practical knowledge) is knowledge that comes not from adherence to dogmatic codes of practice tied to traditional notions of teaching, but from the ability of teachers “to think critically about the social fabric they have been enlisted to renew . . . to respond perceptively and flexibly in new situations” (278). Teachers who possess practical wisdom flourish, and those who flourish are practically wise.

### **The Argument**

Higgins’ project is surely a worthy one. As he points out, “work takes up a high percentage of our time” (37). We cannot afford, then, to relegate the “expression of [our] . . . personal ambitions and deepest motivations” (2) to “after work” (39). His book offers readers insight into a vast body of scholarship and range of aspects related to these concerns. In this essay,

however, I propose to question a fundamental aspect of Higgins' project: its reliance upon "virtue ethics." Higgins rightly insists that we make "self-regard" (3) central to the practice of our work—the practice of teaching—while maintaining the fundamental idea that "each of us exists for ourselves and for others" (3). However, I am not convinced that virtue ethics provides a way of doing this—of "avoiding the dichotomization of duty and [self-] interest" and re-conceptualizing teacher motivation in a way that preserves the mutuality of teacher and student.

I believe that Higgins' descriptions of teaching as reliant upon "a special kind of perception and openness" (131), as devoted both to "preserv[ing] and extend[ing] culture"(236), and as "sens[ing] when to take and when to yield the stage" (185) constitute excellent advice for teachers seeking to express their lives through their work. However, I am concerned that the ground for this advice and its associated actions is unsustainable. While his advice is sound, his resort to virtue ethics actually seems to gravitate toward the dichotomy—either service to students or interest in self—he sets out to avoid. Our openness to the other's desire will not result, I believe, in the enlargement and revision of what we desire but rather in simply the absorption of one desire into the other, the dissolution of self into other or other into self.

In the following paragraphs I shall argue that there is just one way of understanding desire that holds together self and other in equal regard: the understanding that desire is born and invigorated in the discovery of oneself in human relationship, the understanding that what we desire is our distinctiveness and that central to that distinctiveness is the distinctiveness of the other. I argue that in conceiving of the "tension" between self and other—between the "practical pull toward the personal and its reflective push toward the universal" (23)—Higgins assumes that human beings begin with this fundamental desire, but he does not account for it. The danger of Higgins' assumption, in my view, is that we may end up locating our desire in the "good" of *what* we desire or like—material possessions, obligations, ways of life, principles, arguments, attitudes, projects, music, teaching methodologies—rather than in the "good" that is our uniqueness, a uniqueness discovered and recognized in our *mindfulness* for the things we like and not merely in *what* we like. When we are primarily oriented toward what we like, we compromise ourselves by reducing ourselves to "means" for attaining it. To be clear, I am entirely committed to Higgins' idea that it is important to re-articulate for ourselves as teachers why teaching is something that

speaks to our fundamental desires as human beings. My concern is to constitute those desires in terms of human, self-reflexive relations—in terms of Martin Buber’s relation *I-Thou*.

### *I and Thou*

For Buber (2000), a human being does not exist as a single entity, “bounded by others.” Rather, a human being exists insofar as she takes her “stand in relation” to others (20). Thus, being human is fundamentally relational—it has to do with a relation (*I-Thou*) that is enacted between self and other. What this means is that everything a person undertakes, when she undertakes it with her “whole being” (26)—the sense I believe Higgins has in mind when he invokes notions of human flourishing and growth—has to do with the enactment of her taking a “stand in relation.” “All real living,” Buber asserts, “is meeting” (26). Anything else, anything that a person does—job, making music, teaching—for any reason other than the fundamental desire to meet and recognize herself in the other, involves a movement away from the ongoing discovery of herself as a distinct person and a reduction of a her existence to a *means* by which a desired end is achieved.

For example, a person who enrolls in music teacher training primarily for the purpose of achieving qualified teacher status rather than to meet and discover herself in her work to become a teacher, will end up spending her time in college in anticipation of her desired end. If she is to “flourish” in every moment of her life in college—to live in the “real filled present” (Buber, 27)—her desire (anticipation) and the fulfillment of her desire (her end) must be simultaneous. Why? Because if what is desired is always in the future, a person will lose the “real filled present” in her longing for it. Her desire will evaporate the moment she satiates it and her sense of present meaning will become absorbed into the past. The desire to meet ourselves—to discover our “distinctiveness” in the other—does not function this way. It is because we understand that we are “distinctive”—because we have already recognized our otherness—that we want to sharpen our distinctiveness, to re-recognize ourselves and to discover a fuller sense of ourselves in the other. Thus, the desire for distinctiveness is rooted in the relation *I-Thou*, the relation with which all self-reflexive human beings begin their lives. In the *I-Thou* relationship, desire toward and desire from—anticipation and satiation, future and past—are bound together in a “real filled present.”

We understand, then, through Buber, that what Higgins calls a teacher’s “deepest motivations” are not merely the desirable experiences that attract her to the profession of

teaching. They also constitute the position from which she begins. In this regard, when a teacher lacks motivation, when her “deepest motivations” are stifled, it is not that they are absent and must be contrived in the form of desirable reasons to teach. Rather, they are there but are denied, either by the teacher or by the institution, through the misguided belief that motivation to teach is fuelled by ends or goals—by standards, obligations, promotions, or glory.

A person who denies that her desire to teach begins with her desire to recognize the teacher in herself and, instead, sees her teaching in terms of her ambition to achieve certain outcomes, reduces the wholeness of her being, reduces the *I-Thou* relationship to one Buber calls *I-It*. Such a person understands life in terms of “transitive verbs alone,” writes Buber (20). She perceives, imagines, thinks, is sensible of, wills or desires some *thing*: an act that reduces both her experience and the thing desired to mere means. Like the college student who enrolls in teacher’s college to get a qualification, this person gives herself over to her desire. She becomes a means by which it is attained, and what she wants to attain simply a means of fulfilling her desire. Buber insists that the purpose of human life is not to attain some end, but rather that human life, is, itself, the end. The end, according to Buber, may be understood in terms of the “love [that] is *between I and Thou*” (29). The end (and the beginning) of life is the loving meeting that is the self-reflexive encounter of one person with another, an encounter that fundamentally tests and revises a person’s thoughts about herself, an encounter that must be desired and that is desire. A person who desires something, who wants to move beyond the loving encounter that creates desire and is desired, who conceives of her desire in terms of movement toward some end, reduces herself (and human beings in general) to a mere entity; and her life is reduced to an experience in which she has “no part” (21).

As I see it, the difference between an understanding of the good life of teaching grounded in Buber’s conception of “whole being” and a conception of human motivation worked out through virtue ethics is this. Where Buber understands enlivenment as *I-Thou*, virtue ethics, at least in its “modern” conception<sup>2</sup> appears to construe motivation as *I-It*: a pull toward an experience that is desired by the single *I*. To be sure, virtue ethics (holding Socrates question, How should one live? firmly before it) grants that the pull toward the *I* experience is counterbalanced by a push toward an experience desired by everyone—the universal *Thou*. What we learn through Buber, however, is that in constituting the reasons for

their actions in terms of *I-It*, teachers deny the wholeness of their professional lives as *I-Thou*. That is, regardless of what experiences teachers create in the classroom, whether they create experiences that motivate them or whether they are open to mixing up those experiences with the experiences that motivate their students—whether, in Buber’s words, “[they] add ‘inner’ [experiences] to ‘outer’ experiences” (21)—teachers will fail to recognize their true desire. Their true desire is their power to make sense of the relationship between the different experiences in a way that resonates with their whole being, a being that fundamentally involves the wholeness of their students’ beings.

### Beginnings

The reconciliation of the teacher’s “whole being” with that of her student is, I believe, central to Higgins’ project (3). I question, however, whether virtue ethics enables him to make the fundamental move necessary to effect this reconciliation: to make *I-Thou* the center of music teaching and learning. Instead, I argue, virtue ethics seems to attempt a constant oscillation to and fro between polarized “*Its*.”

To help clarify what I mean by the “constant oscillation” from *It* to *It*, I will try to provide a more exact conception of what I believe virtue ethics involves, exploring the distinction that Higgins draws between classical ethics and modern morality. Virtue ethics, writes Higgins, focuses on the classical idea that “we cherish something because of its goodness” (32). We value a particular piece of music, say, not for what it can do for us, but rather because it exhibits “goodness.” This classical idea contrasts with the modern understanding that “something is good because we value it.” This “crucial and highly problematic reversal” of the way we conceive of good (and thus, the way we understand our desire for it), arose with the advent of Christianity and its “shift from emphasizing *what* one desires to *how* one desires.” The moral “good,” in a Christian society and in its secular derivatives is constituted in terms of notions of charity that, Higgins reminds us—quoting from the Bible—“vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up . . . and seeketh not her own” (I Cor. 13, 4–5).<sup>3</sup> The shift was a shift from the “irreducibly first-person quality” of Greek ethics (Higgins 24) to a modern notion of good as “self-abnegation” (2). The result, Higgins believes, is a “categorical mistrust of desire and ego” (33).

Higgins makes a connection between Taylor and William’s ideas and teacher flourishing, suggesting (quoting Williams) that it is “The impartial good ordering of the



world of moral agents,” that denies teachers “something which is a condition of [them] . . . having any interest in being around in [the] world at all” (40). Stipulating a teacher’s duty and separating it from what she wants to do stifles her ability to flourish. If *what* she wanted, *what* she desired, remained unaffected by her preconception of its “moral” value, however, her desire for it and her pursuit are unified. Simply put, where the action and its motivation are one there is no longer a disconnect between what makes the teacher “tick” and what she is empowered to undertake in her practice.

Drawing on Taylor, Higgins argues that the “disconnect” between action and motivation is born in Christianity but it finds its secular expression in Kant’s theories of “duty.” According to Higgins, Kant’s notion of moral action is action that is “motivated solely by respect for duty, by *Achtung* before the moral law” and not “for some ‘direct inclination’ or longer term ‘selfish purpose’” (33). By “direct inclination” Kant is referring to our preferences or things that seem to come naturally to us—“talents of the mind” or “qualities of temperament” (Kant 1981, 7) that we possess or aspire to. The problem is, Kant tells us, that these “talents” and “qualities” may turn out to be immoral. In other words, they may appear to be good but, according to Kant, they can also be bad.

Intelligence, wit, judgment, and whatever talents of the mind are doubtless good and desirable, as are such qualities of temperament as courage, resolution, perseverance. But they can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. (7)

While a musician, for instance, might cherish her technical virtuosity because of its apparent goodness—delighting in “the sheer pleasure of [her] own digital velocity”<sup>4</sup>—she may, from Kant’s view, be misguided in cherishing it. Technical virtuosity can also be bad if, say, she uses these talents for “selfish purposes”—to show off to her students and to assert her superiority. Displaying her technical brilliance to her students may enliven her, but, as Kant warns us, it may also be something that is ultimately harmful.

So is Kant wrong? Higgins seems to think so. On the view he seems to advance, the goodness in the talent or the gift of technical virtuosity trumps any misgivings we may have about it. In order to flourish, our musician must be able to delight in the “sheer pleasure” of her technical brilliance *because it is good*. Surely, however, Kant has a point. Is it not the case that if a musician’s delight in her own technical brilliance could, indeed, be self-indulgent, it could stifle the flourishing of her students and her audiences?

Enter the idea of practical wisdom.<sup>5</sup> As I understand it, practical wisdom enables one to grasp goodness without resort to a fixed concept. *Phronesis* is, in Higgins' words, "the ability to learn from the particulars of complex, concrete situations how to inform and reform our general conceptions" (185). Thus, while technical virtuosity might be a good desired by the musician discussed above, its true goodness can only be gauged in light of the particular situation at hand. In short, it seems that the goodness of technical virtuosity (in this example) "is constituted [in] the tension between [the] practical pull toward the personal and [the] reflective push toward the universal" (23). Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is not tied to a singular version of technical virtuosity but is constantly moving between its personal and universal potentials.

The idea of practical wisdom is attractive, not least of all because it appears to reposition at the center of her profession a teacher's desire to teach. It seems to allow a person to hold on to her personal desires while at the same time, by virtue of her openness to the desires of others, to not fall into the trap of self-indulgence. Indeed, the idea of being receptive to the desires of others seems wholly straightforward—straightforward, that is, until we begin to examine more closely what it is we are receptive to. If my neighbor is playing loud music that I do not like, will my openness to his music result in a revision of my own ideas? Or, will I end up simply tolerating his music, on the one hand, or merely bulldozing over it with my own, on the other hand? How, through my receptivity to the "new situation" do I truly make my neighbor's desires the center of my own desires? I understand that there is a tension between us, a pull and a push, a "depart[ure] from ourselves," writes Higgins, citing Gadamer, "and then return to ourselves" (134). But how is this departure and return not simply an eternal flipping from my music to his music, neighbor to neighbor, teacher to student, self to other? Why does it result in "our ideas revised and enlarged" (134)?

In this regard, I believe it is important to consider how we understand our beginning as human beings—how we begin in life to act through the world. If, on the one hand, we begin with the idea that goodness resides *in something*, in an *It* (some object, that is, of our perception, or of our sensibility, or of our feelings), we will experience the goodness of another's *It* as contradicting our own. Where the goodness of *It* is central, the desire we experience for *It* will outweigh our desire for *Thou*, our desire to be self-critically amenable to the desire of others. The *It* that we cherish will simply oppose or collapse into the *It* cherished by the other, leading to an eternal flipping back and forth from self to other.

If, on the other hand, we begin with *Thou*—with human, self-relexive relations—our primary concern will not be with *It*, but rather with *Thou*, with the other. Our relation to *It* will change from a direct relation—*I-It*—to an indirect relation, a relation that is mediated through *Thou*—through our relation to the other. That is, when we take our “stand in relation” to the other we are not merely interested in what she experiences. Her experience is something in which we can have no part. Rather, we are interested in how she interacts with, makes sense of, or suffers what she experiences. We are interested in her self-critical relation to the *It* that makes up her life because, while we experience things differently, what we share—what we can take part in—is her work to meet her experiences in a way that she and other people witness as being “good.”

I argue, then, that we do not “revise and enlarge” (134) our experiences because, in concrete situations, we come up against, and are receptive to, experiences that oppose them. Rather, we revise and enlarge our capacity to meet our experiences insofar as we are receptive to how other people meet their own experiences. In other words, Higgins is right that our ability to be receptive to newness in new situations—to the “particulars of complex, concrete situations” —is central to our capacity to flourish as human beings. But the “newness” and the particularity that we must be receptive to and through which, embracing, we flourish, is not found in the *things* that we experience as being “good.” Rather, we flourish when we are receptive to the newness and the particularity of the other, the human being whose uniqueness lies not in *what* she cherishes but in how she makes sense of what she cherishes within the historical context of her life and the lives of other people. Thus, what empowers us to relate to a person who has utterly different tastes from us, who likes say, different music, is not our ability to tolerate what appears to be the “goodness” that she hears in the music (“goodness” which is hidden from us) but rather our ability to relate to her—to her self-critical sense of what the music means to her. As she invites us to participate in making connections between the music and her life we find ourselves making our own connections and our ideas are “revised and enlarged.” But those ideas are not merely enlarged in terms of our understanding of new kinds of sound. Rather, they are ideas that are enlarged in terms of a renewed understanding of our joined humanity, which joining and rejoining is played out in the interpretation engendered by and about the music.

### Preliminary conclusion

The difference between *what* motivates one, on the one hand, and how one self-critically relates to what motivates one, on the other hand, lies at the heart of my critique of Higgins' project. While the difference is subtle; nevertheless, I argue that understanding and articulating it is important for a teacher who wishes to flourish as a human being in her profession. Why? Because a teacher who is motivated, say, by Beethoven's music and who wants to play it in the classroom will find that either her students like the composer's music, in which case they simply mirror her prejudice, or will find that they don't like it, in which case they merely contradict her prejudice. In neither case, however, will she learn anything about her musical prejudice or the musical prejudices of her students. To learn something she would have to find out why her students did or did not like Beethoven's music in terms that made self-critical sense to her. She would also need to relate these findings to her own reasons for liking his music. But in finding out why her students hold the prejudices they do she is no longer interested simply in *what* they like or *what* motivates them. Rather, she is interested in their self-critical understanding of their motivations, an understanding that is fundamentally implicated in her understanding of her own motivation.

Thus, while it may be impossible to do anything more than tolerate the musical tastes of the other, it is possible, I think, to be receptive to the way in which the other tests her tastes in light of the rest of her life. While, as teachers, we may be unable to relate to what our students like or find motivating, we can, at least, relate to their efforts to locate what they like within the context of their lives. In this, we can both encourage them to scrutinize their desires in terms of a wider sense of human meaning and we can learn from their scrutiny. What we share with our students, then, is not *what* motivates them but rather their self-critical sense of what motivates them: their thoughtful, caring attention to how (in the case of music education) music impacts their lives. If teaching is to be a mutually up-building enterprise, the reconciliation of "self-regard and concern for others" (3), we must begin as teachers by addressing our students' self-reflexivity, by taking a "stand in relation" to them and attending, self-critically, not to what they like, but rather to the way that they meet what they like. In this regard, neither we, nor our students, lose what motivates us. Rather, what motivates us undergoes a transformation: music becomes a metaphor for *I-Thou*, a wholly experiential, sensible, felt embodiment of the relation in which we discover ourselves and other human beings.

In summary, when teaching is “the expression of one’s personal ambitions and deepest motivations” (2) one does not begin with *It*. One does not begin with something that one perceives to be good—a favorite piece of music or a methodology. One does not begin with one’s ambition to be knowledgeable or to be skillful. Nor does one begin with one’s motivation to excel, to be witty, or to be in control. Rather, one begins with one’s understanding of oneself as a self-reflexive human being whose power—whose desire—lies in one’s ongoing discovery of oneself as a distinct person, a person who discovers herself, not *as* her preferences and ambitions but in her thought *for* her preferences and ambitions, which, importantly, is amplified through her relation with her students.

A teacher who begins with *It* wants to acquire knowledge, to memorize and absorb facts, in order to feel knowledgeable. A teacher who begins with *Thou* is interested in making sense of those facts within the context of her life and the lives of her students. She is interested in the facts, not as pieces of knowledge, but rather as relational fields that nourish and create the intra- and inter-personal conversations in which she recognizes herself and her students as thoughtful, self-reflexive participants.

### **Teaching as Sharing**

Higgins’ insistence that the good life in teaching involves a teacher’s “deepest motivations” is persuasive. When the fog of our professional duties and obligations has cleared we see that there are some things that seem to motivate us and other things that do not. What I have tried to show in this essay is that the nature of our motivations might not be as clear as we think: there is a subtle yet fundamental difference between motivation toward *It* and motivation that is *I-Thou*. Nevertheless, I believe that the concreteness of Higgins’ argument is appealing. It is important that the desire to teach is articulated in terms whose impact we can and do actually witness in our teaching lives. It is with this idea in mind that I have chosen to conclude by proposing the concept of sharing as a way of both expressing and actualizing teaching as desire—as *I-Thou*. The concept of sharing helps us to understand two things about teaching as *I-Thou*. First, I argue that participants involved in the true act of sharing—the giver and the receiver—witness a sense of well-being that speaks to the heart of their humanity. Second, the concept of sharing brings together the work of teaching as meeting, on the one hand, and the concreteness of the context or subject content of that meeting, on the other hand.

When we think of the idea of sharing we understand that *something* is shared. But at the same time, when sharing is genuine it exceeds the thing that is shared. What I mean is, when we truly share something with another person, we do not share it because we feel obliged to share it, nor because we hope we are going to get something out of it, nor because we want to impose our own desires on another person. We share it because we want to share it: because the act of sharing is itself a desirable undertaking. If we share something because of its goodness it is because we understand that its goodness fosters and supports the idea of sharing. Anyone who doubts the fundamental truth of this idea must also doubt that there exists a true act of sharing (loving) in the world. We encourage our children to share their candy not just to please us, and not because they are going to benefit from it in some immediate way. We encourage them to share because in the act of sharing, not merely in the thing that is shared, they find and practice the bond that makes them human.

In the same way, when we give a gift to a friend what enlivens us is the act of giving. It is almost as if our thought for the other, embodied in the physical act of giving the gift, nourishes our thought for ourselves. The gift itself is central to the act of giving but it is not the reason for it. In other words, the desire to give and the desire to receive are not conditional upon the gift. Without the gift, it is true, there can be no giving or receiving. But gifts can also be exchanged in ways that involve neither true giving or receiving: in ways that are all about *what* is handed over, *what* is gained and *what* is expected in return. In either case, the gift is central; but true giving involves more than exchange: the act of giving and receiving is a metaphor for human relations. Thus, a gift is an expression of the giver's regard for the receiver, regard that is reflected back on the giver as she tests her sense of the gift's worthiness: not just in terms of what she believes the receiver may like, but in terms of how the receiver recognizes in the gift the giver's regard for her. It is not only a question of giving a person what she likes or giving her what you like; rather, one gives a person something in which one's regard for that person (regard that is thoughtful because it involves testing its conclusions against one's own life) shines through, illuminating the receiver's own thoughtfulness.

Like givers and sharers, teachers are fundamentally enlivened in the act of sharing with their students. The enlivening act of *sharing* one's beliefs is radically different from the feeling one gets when one imposes one's beliefs on one's students. At first sight, the difference may seem minute. But, just as we discover when a person's motives for giving us

advice are selfish, so students discover when a teacher's motives for imparting her knowledge stem from her attachment to her passion rather than her desire to share it. An act of true sharing does not enliven a teacher merely because she likes music or because she believes her students like it. Her sharing enlivens her because when she thinks about how she can reveal the relevance of music to her students—how she can share it with them in ways that enable them to make connections to it—she makes her own connections to it and engenders her thought for herself. It is the teacher's attentive, self-critical regard that shines through, and is illuminated in the act of sharing it. This acts as a kind of invitation to her students to become mindfully attentive themselves: the music is transformed from an entity to be accepted or appreciated into a relational field sustained by thoughtfulness, attention, and care.

The profession of teaching is worth putting at the center of one's life. Its good is found in the virtue of receptivity—in a teacher's willingness to “respond perceptively and flexibly” (278). But it is found in a specific quality of receptivity, a quality that has less to do with receptivity to things—situations, perceptions or experiences—and more to do with human relations. In life and in teaching we begin by taking a “stand in relation”: a stand in which we recognize ourselves and keep on recognizing ourselves, every time we are open enough to retake the stand. The relational stand is made in and from the midst of our experience: it cuts indifferently across our perception of things we like and do not like. The *I-Thou* stand transforms experience into its image, rewriting all of *It*—all of the desired and undesired things that we must teach, rules that we must obey and hours that we must endure—as *I-Thou*.

Because *I-Thou* is desire, and because “all real living is meeting,” not one moment of the “real filled present” is lost to longing, or to the emptiness that ensues when the objects of our desire are attained. Transformed into *I-Thou*, the things we desire become sites through which we enact the human paradox with which Higgins begins his argument. They become the embodiment through which we realize, in actual terms, the idea that we exist equally “for ourselves and for others” (3).

## References

Buber, M. [1922] 2000. *I and Thou*. (R.G. Smith, Trans.). New York: Scribner.

- Foucault, M. 1986. On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of work in progress. In *The Foucault reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 340–72. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Gadamer, H-G. 1989. Text and interpretation. In *Dialogue and deconstruction: the Gadamer-Derrida encounter*, ed. D. Michelfelder and R. Palmer, 21–51. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. [1835] 1975. *Aesthetics: Lectures on fine art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Higgins, C. 2011. *The good life of teaching: An ethics of professional practice*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- The Holy Bible. Revised standard version*. (1973). N. Frye, H. G. May, and B. M. Metzger (eds.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kant, I. [1785] 1981. *Grounding for the metaphysics of morals*. (J. W. Ellington, Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Kierkegaard, S. [1844] 1985. *Philosophical fragments*. (H. V. Hong, and E. H. Hong, Trans.). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- . [1847] 1995. *Works of love*. (H. V. Hong, and E. H. Hong, Trans.). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. 1990. *Three rival versions of moral enquiry: Encyclopaedia, genealogy, and tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press.
- Nietzsche, F. W. [1887] 1989. *On the genealogy of morals*. (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Plato. 1981. *Five dialogues*. (G. M. A. Grube, Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Taylor, C. 1989. *The sources of the self: The making of modern identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Williams, B. 1985. *Ethics and the limits of philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This requires some clarification. I believe that Higgins assumes (but perhaps does not articulate) that the relationship between self and other is central to the question “how one should live”—the idea that any answer must address the paradox that we exist as much for ourselves as we do for others. But, while Socrates asks “how one should live,” I maintain that he understood that his question was asked in ignorance of “how one should live,” arguing in *The Apology* that “I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything



worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know” (Plato 1981, 27). Kierkegaard reminds us in *Philosophical Fragments* (1985) of “the difficulty that Socrates calls attention to in the *Meno* (80, near the end) as a ‘pugnacious proposition’: a person cannot possibly seek what he knows, and just impossibly, he cannot seek what he does not know, for what he knows he cannot seek, since he knows it, and what he does not know he cannot seek, because, after all, he does not even know what he is supposed to seek” (Kierkegaard 1985, 9). In other words, if we know how to live, we do not need to ask “how should one live.” If we do not know how to live, we cannot ask the question because we can have no idea of the answer. Any attempt to answer the question will always be made in ignorance of the answer or in ignorance of the fact that we have the answer. Clearly, however, we do ask the question “how should one live” and we are able to answer it. If, however, we are to be as rigorous in our logic as Socrates, we must conclude that the answer is something we both do not know and know, something that requires research but, at the same time, directs and frames that research so that when it achieves its results the results are recognizable. I argue that the only thing that is both known but that must be constantly re-discovered is the centrality of our self-conscious, love for ourselves as other and others as ourselves. The question is whether Socrates understood this. In this regard, a number of thinkers make a distinction between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the pagan world regarding the notion of human self-consciousness (See Hegel 1975; Foucault 1986; Nietzsche 1989).

<sup>2</sup> This distinction relates to note 1. Greek virtue ethics cannot be understood to reduce the desire that is *Thou* to the desire for *It* if one argues, as I do, that the conception of human self-reflexivity—of *I-Thou*—was unrecognizable in the Ancient Greek world.

<sup>3</sup> Higgins quotes from the King James Version of the Bible. It is worth noting the Revised Standard Version translation of this passage offers a less self-effacing notion of charity, which it translates as “love.” “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right” (I Cor. 13, 4–5).

<sup>4</sup> I take this phrase from Auer (1980, 42).

<sup>5</sup> “Practical wisdom” is not to be confused with what Kant calls “practical reason” (Kant 1981, 23). Practical reason, in my understanding, involves an attitude of openness that has the desire for *I-Thou* as its beginning and its end. It finds its principle in the idea that we act only according to those ideas that are good for all of us. Kant’s categorical imperative states: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (30). There is, then, only one maxim according to which we can act, the maxim that insists that we begin, not with our private “inclinations,” nor with our “moral feelings,” nor with “the concept of perfection,” (46) but with our desire to push our “pull toward the personal” (Higgins 2011, 23) into the universal, to meet ourselves as other.

### **About the Author**

Mark Whale's research interests are broad, ranging from violin performance and pedagogy through to music philosophy and the wider humanities. As a professional violinist and educator, he is interested primarily in why or how engagement in musical performance relates to personhood. Mark is currently lecturing at the University of Toronto and at Humber College. You can learn more about Mark on his website: [markwhale.com](http://markwhale.com).