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## From Cognition to Being

McHenry, Henry Davis

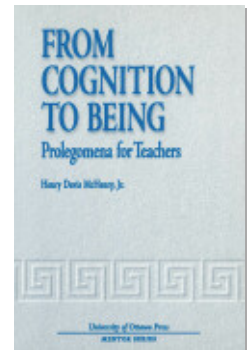
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## PART 2

# ONTOLOGY

### What Is Saying, and How Do We Be?

We are progressively leaving behind, now, the algorithmic model of teaching as instruction, and moving toward what I hesitate to call a model at all, for fear that it will induce imitation instead of invention—that is, more algorithmic teaching, more instruction. Though there is no need for inventing in algorithmic teaching, there is no room for it, either. But in our best moments together in a classroom students discover, because of the environment for being together that we have created, meaning and purpose in material new to them: then cognition and invention are one. The point is to create that environment which is not a surrounding, like a decorated room, but like an atmosphere, a breathing-space. And the point is not to construct an instrument with which to create the magic environment, the magnetic field—not to answer the question “How do I create that environment?”, for that answer is really just a means of manipulating the atmosphere, and probably the people who breathe in it. I’d rather not be a master of manipulation.

Instead, we hope to generate a conversation that pulls for that environment, that calls forth and goes with being together powerfully. Is that a distinction without a difference? Isn’t “generating a conversation” itself a technique, a form of manipulation? Since I am building the idea of teaching as a different realm than instruction, I am loath to think so; but I am not sure yet whether I can clarify the distinction between manipulation and generating conversation. So I want to explore a little, to try to tease out the distinction, on our way to creating a new speaking and listening for the act of teaching, of educating. A question opens a door. Repeated questions—continuing inquiry—prop it open.

One of the questions opened in the Introduction was: In an encounter between a teacher and a student, where does power come from? And in

Chapter One, childlike, we began by jamming this first question up against another: Who would you be if you lived in a particular philosophical picture? In the next three chapters, there is thus brought into place a certain inclination, a lean toward a quasi-illegitimate way of describing things. (What does living in a *picture* mean? And what is a *philosophical picture*, that it can be said to be lived in?) I want to establish a queer sort of atmosphere, one whose vapors show up, like fog. For, in the fog, in the indistinct half-light, our sense of hearing is sharpened: though we must walk slowly, we listen acutely, powerfully.

Perhaps, Wittgenstein suggests, there is a bind in the very idea of *looking for* something. For to look *for* something is already to assume that its structure will be manifested persistently outside ourselves: visual acuity is binding, we see at twenty feet exactly that which is at twenty feet from us. We suppose that in representing this structure to ourselves we may achieve mastery of it. But of the paradigm *knowledge-as-structure*—have we achieved mastery of that, or does it master us? Does it not shape our expectations, and so our actions, and our idea of what is possible? If meanings are structured like boards and nails, what else is there to do but saw and hammer? More vapors, perhaps. Let's see if we can listen our way through them.

The teacher's way of being. Engagement. Shared mastery. To pay attention to these, we have begun by inquiring into the ways language occurs for us, in the classroom and in the culture that flows into and out of the classroom, particularly that part of the culture in which young people develop. Following on Saussure's picture of language as a social function, an activity instead of a structure, Wittgenstein re-invented language as languaging. How then are languaging and being related? What does speaking have to do with who we are? We want now to investigate the relation of being with what Heidegger calls "Saying." Perhaps the capital letter annoys us as an undue inflation of a plain word, a plain meaning. But perhaps we can bear with it, for I do think it expands our vocabulary; it marks a different value than the small-lettered word. Being and saying are merged in listening, I will say. Listening gives how we hear what is said; it comes not only out of the paradigms we transact, but also out of the declarations and commitments we speak. What you hear is what you are listening for; what you listen for is both borne in the paradigm of our world and born in the way we commit ourselves in conversation with others. In a teacher's speaking and listening of his students resides the possibility of their greatness. "Speaking must have speakers," says Heidegger, "but not merely in the same way as an effect must have a cause. Rather, the speakers are present in the way of speaking."<sup>24</sup> Could languaging and being modulate each other? Could Saying alter the world?

## NOTE

1. *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row Perennial Library, 1971), 120.

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