At the outset of this book, I mentioned that philosophers in America are, almost universally, also teachers. Most of this teaching involves American youth from all segments of our culture, those who are openly “in transition” to American adulthood. Many schools are also heavily populated with students from other places and cultures. One of the things that bring them together, regardless of background, is the music they listen to. These are the folks who might understand the mystical features of the musics they hear, even when it’s not Springsteen. The other thing they share is the experience of learning. If musical mysticism is one mode of conversion and transformation, education is another. Indeed, for Dewey—and, I suspect, for James, too—education underwrites all possibilities of amelioration. This being the case, the question often occurs to me, What is the relationship between philosophy and teaching? We tend to treat the relationship as accidental—teaching is merely a necessary nuisance that pays the bills and allows us three months free to philoso-
phize. I have come to think this is an inadequate account of what we do. I will try, through some historical and experiential explorations, to build a case that philosophy and teaching are more intimately related. The historical exploration begins with a memorial essay written by William James.

The American tradition has “lost” any number of its important philosophers to the idiosyncrasies of scholarship and cultural memory. We have forgotten Samuel Johnson and the St. Louis Hegelians; we have routinely suppressed evidence regarding the intellectual accomplishments of Margaret Fuller and Jane Addams; we have denied the status of “philosopher” to W. E. B. DuBois and Thoreau, among others; and we have narrowly escaped losing the work of pragmatism’s initiator, Charles Peirce. These once lost and now, in some cases, redeemed thinkers have in common that they wrote something of significance. In an essay in the May 5, 1905, issue of McLure’s Magazine, William James attempted to redeem a thinker who had not written work that bore this sort of significance. Not that he had not written extensively, but the writing inclined toward an academic style and often dealt with education, which was not a popular—or perhaps even a legitimate—philosophical topic of the day. In short, as philosophical writing, this person’s work, though interesting, made little impression on the philosophical culture of the late nineteenth century. Despite this, James believed this person’s presence in our philosophical tradition was important enough for him to be commended to our memory as a “knight errant of the intellectual life.”¹ The idea is intriguing: a philosopher whose writing is unremarkable but whom we should not forget, and who, James said, “was always essentially a teacher.”²

The thinker in question is an erudite, itinerant Scot, Thomas Davidson, a member of several of the Cambridge philosophical and metaphysical “clubs” established in the later years of the nineteenth century. Davidson grew up in Aberdeen, Scotland, and became, according to Mildred Bakewell Hooker, a “wandering scholar,” traveling around the world to study in Canada, the United States, Italy, and Greece, among other stops.³ He was, his friend William Knight wrote,
“from first to last, a peripatetic, and intellectual free-lance.” David-
son was an exceptional linguist, fluent in French, German, Italian,
Greek, Arabic, and Sanskrit. Early in his career he taught in Scotland
and London, and in 1882 he, together with a group of young men and
women that included Havelock Ellis, Ramsay MacDonald, and
George Bernard Shaw, established The Fellowship of the New Life,
the aims of which included the cultivation of character through atten-
tion to simplicity, education of the young, and manual labor coupled
with intellectual pursuits. This was, as Joseph Blau put it, Davidson’s
“first attempt to organize a ‘kingdom of heaven upon earth’ that was
not a church.” In 1884, a socialistically oriented branch of the Fellow-
ship separated to establish the better-known Fabian Society. In the
same year Davidson left for the United States, where he lectured at
Bronson Alcott’s Concord Summer School and set out to establish
an American version of the Fellowship. Then, in 1889, with money
borrowed from his friend Joseph Pulitzer, Davidson purchased 166
acres in Keene, New York, in the eastern Adirondacks. There he built
his own rustic summer school, Glenmore, which he ran until his
death in 1900. It is notable that James, Royce, John Dewey, and Wil-
liam Torrey Harris were among the regular participants. Just two
years prior to his death, Davidson took on perhaps his most interest-
ing educational task—the development of his Breadwinners’ College
in New York City, a school established for working-class women and
men. In short, Davidson was what boatbuilders call a “one off.” He
was irascible, he worked against the grain, and he lived with his own
kind of wildness. Davidson’s provocative attitude helped constitute,
wherever he went, what James called a “zone of insecurity in human
affairs in which all the dramatic interest lies.”

In looking at Davidson’s life tasks, we can see why, descriptively,
James would say that he was essentially a teacher. But, for Davidson,
the description was a function of a conscious effort; it fit his philo-
sophical outlook. As Hooker suggests, philosophy was never merely
academic for him—it “was not merely a subject for contemplation
but a way of life.” And philosophy was not essentially scholarly writ-
ing, but was, as for the Greeks he admired, a conversation concerning
questions of human excellence undertaken with an attitude of openness and a melioristic outlook. In short, philosophy was for Davidson essentially an educative pursuit. This is not surprising if we think of the lives of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; but it is surprising if we think of contemporary academic philosophy, which was launched in the early U.S. graduate schools, such as Harvard and Johns Hopkins, near the end of the nineteenth century.

Though James was a central figure in this academicizing of American philosophy, he was also committed to teaching and resisted some of the professionalizing practices of the discipline. It was this commitment that led him to see Davidson’s life as a philosophical achievement. The teaching that was essential to Davidson’s philosophical practice drew James’s interest. Given this interest, it is worth considering Davidson’s reasons for holding to this essentiality and guiding his own practices according to it.

In *Education of the Wage-Earners*, Davidson argued that “It is to be hoped that the day is past when philosophy could mean a system built up by a dialectical process and imposed upon fact. *Such* philosophy was mere disguised theology, which is but another name for mythology.”9 So far, Davidson is in step with Jamesian and Deweyan pragmatism. Moreover, he regarded both Hegel and Marx as purveyors of despotic socialism—they created systems to locate and manipulate individual lives; both systems, he believed, “could hardly fail to be fatal to all the higher manifestations of intellect and affection,—to philosophy, science, art, and literature.”10 Philosophy, he believed, should not enclose individuals, but should free them to pursue their intellectual and affective possibilities. Yet, it should not aim merely at the negative freedom of libertarianism; genuine freedom, Davidson believed, required the enabling structures of humanistic studies. Moreover, he understood this freedom to be effective only in community and to have as its aim the betterment of society. In short, philosophy’s central task is the education of individuals to a freer and more philosophically minded existence, such that they might create and maintain a better world. “The task of the centuries since the close of the Middle Ages has been,” he said, “gradually to remove this yoke
of authority, and to raise men to freedom of thought, affection, and will—in a word, to rational self-guidance, or moral life.” Though not in a narrow way, philosophy is instrumental to the development of community.

Again, Davidson saw this role of philosophy as standing in the tradition of the Greeks, as developing the love of wisdom in a social context. He was a Dewey-like believer in democracy’s possibilities and took “the task of the twentieth century” to be “to raise mankind, every member of it, to complete and actual moral freedom, which rests upon insight, just affection, and strong will, realizing themselves in a social order.” This task, as Dewey also believed, is at core an educational task. “A democracy cannot long be sustained,” Davidson argued, “by an ignorant demos.” Teaching is an essential, not an ancillary, activity. It is not accidental that both William James and Ernest Moore recognized a Socratic dimension in Davidson’s practice. Moore understood that for Davidson, “learning” was not for itself but for “seeking . . . the welfare of the soul.” And James, when considering the hiring of Davidson, noted the more down-to-earth side of this Socratism: “Such a man would be invaluable in Harvard University—a kind of Socrates, a devotee of truth and lover of youth, ready to sit up to any hour, and drink beer and to talk with anyone.” The kind of teaching Davidson might provide aimed at community not by professing formulaic beliefs or routinized practices, but by acquainting students, through conversation with the world, of their own possibilities. Though it does appear on occasion, such teaching has not become a habit in American institutions of higher education.

Davidson’s Socratic outlook on philosophy as education, as teaching, had the general melioristic aim of freeing individuals and creating community. James called Davidson a “leveler upwards of men,” and this seems an apt description. It is the inverse of what is presently called “dumbing down.” The first move in achieving this aim is to bring persons to the experiences of freedom. Thus, “While the old education was education for subordination, the new education is education for freedom, or intelligent cooperation.” As we noted above, given this social function of cooperation, it is clear that David-
son advocated more than negative freedom. Such *freedom from* is useful only in a context in which discipline, sympathy, and social awareness are also at work. Indeed, Davidson maintained that “discipline is the nurse of freedom.”

His worries concerning fascism, socialism, and anarchism were not that they did not confront cultural modes of manipulation, but that they were reactionary and aimed to establish other forms of manipulative authority in place of the present ones. In contrast, the midwiving of a Socratic outlook meant that freedom, with its attendant discipline and responsibility, should be the aim of philosophical conversation and teaching. In philosophical conversation, one *experiences* freedom and self-awareness of the sort that enables one to be an individual within a society. Socratic dialectic is not a lockstep procedure with a fixed outcome, but a communal experimentation in the adventure of ideas and in the modes of human living. In Davidson’s terms, persons should be freed to be “world builders.” This should include all persons: any gender, any ethnicity, any class.

By “world building” Davidson did not mean the construction of logically impregnable pictures of the world or the creation of abstracted, intellectual homes. He had in mind the humanizing effects of art, science, physical training, and philosophical inquiry. For him such “worlding” required “culture.” Culture enabled one to achieve some positive freedom—to have possibilities in life. For him, culture was distinct from “erudition and professional training”; it meant not primarily a canon of known materials but an attitude toward and way of dealing with one’s environment that involved knowledge of some historical human outlooks and practices. Knowledge *does* provide students with a breadth of human achievement and reveals what humanity is actually and ideally capable of, but it needs to be complemented by the freethinking that acquaints students with the depth of their own possibilities. A student needn’t know everything, but should “know how to interpret the whole in terms of experience, and thus to escape the pitfalls of agnosticism and dogmatism.” Such knowing is not merely intellectual but involves the teaching of the will and affections as well. Again, this is the task of a philosophy un-
dertaken as teaching. World building engages the whole person; it is “the construction, in the child’s consciousness, of such a world as shall furnish him with motives to live an enlightened, kindly, helpful, and noble social life, a life not stagnant, but ever advancing.” The humanities are not merely to be tolerated by the sciences; their teaching is essential to the development of any world in which science might be a worthwhile endeavor. As did the pragmatists, Davidson saw life as growth and development, and rejected the idea that life was about achieving fixed and specific end states. The only question was whether such growth, under the guidance of philosophical teaching, might occur with freedom and discipline, or whether it would occur under the closure of authority or the chaos of anarchy. The person with a world would grow through freedom and discipline: “The man who knows what he is, whence he is, whither he is going, how he is related to the world and his fellows, is the cultured man.”

Such self-knowledge, however, is not to be understood as knowledge of one’s Bradleyan station and duties, but as a self-composure that allows one to deal intelligently with one’s environment. Philosophy’s task is to teach the culture that enables such self-composure.

To distinguish his own “individualism” from what Charles Peirce called “the gospel of greed,” Davidson consistently identified the individual world-building person as a social being. “It is only as a social being,” he argued, “that any soul can find the highest satisfaction, or requires education.” Philosophy, as teaching, was thus a communal pursuit in his eyes—an essential feature of any functioning democracy. Philosophy—teaching—is practiced through communication and conversation; it requires “a desire for ever deeper insight, and a sympathy with those who sincerely hold opinions different from our own.”

Philosophy is not, in its historical essence, a “profession”; it involves a political mission of self-transformation. As Davidson elaborated:

A professionally trained teacher, without a background of culture, is a mere pedant, who can never communicate a love for study, or awake the highest interests in the souls of pupils. . . . The teacher who does not feel himself, or herself, an apostle with an
important mission, but looks upon the teaching profession as a mere means of making a living, had better seek some other occupation.\textsuperscript{24}

For Davidson this political transformation is appropriate to the development of a democracy and requires special attention on the part of the state so that education is public and extends “equally to all classes of the population” to ensure that there is “freedom from castes.”\textsuperscript{25}

Providing the opportunity for learning and for leveling persons upward is a condition for successful democracy. As does Dewey, Davidson begins with the assumption that all persons can learn—that is, that they can, through the development of habits, create “harmonious worlds” for themselves.\textsuperscript{26} Since individual freedom depends on world building, and world building depends on learning, the primary task of any democracy must be to provide the possibility of learning for all its citizens. “The nation,” Davidson argued, speaking specifically of the United States in the twentieth century, “owes it to every one of its citizens to see to it that he has time and strength left to be a student.”\textsuperscript{27} It is therefore equally apparent that we philosophers and students of the humanities are central to the community’s work. Our task is to provide freedom and culture through teaching. Philosophy, history, and the arts, approached in Socratic fashion, enable lives that are “rich, full, and lofty.”\textsuperscript{28} As James noted, the Davidsonian teacher’s aim was not to create citizens who are “interchangeable parts” in a “rule-bound organism,” but to enable “flexible” lives through “liberation of the inner interests.”\textsuperscript{29}

Despite its focus on individuals instead of institutions, Davidson’s take on the relationship of education to democracy is strongly reminiscent of features of Dewey’s \textit{Democracy and Education} and, more specifically, of Dewey’s later essay “Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us.” Davidson simply focused on aspects of democracy and education that are less prominent, though present, in Dewey’s work.\textsuperscript{30} One such aspect was the individual’s responsibility to learn. Not only did the state have an obligation to make learning possible, but persons in a democracy have an obligation \textit{to be} students. But they must
be students as learning world builders, not as receptacles of information. “Citizenship,” Davidson argued, “should be a college degree, and the only degree, and all persons who have not taken it should be denied all share in political power.”

Davidson did not, however, completely ignore institutional issues. He understood that “the owners of the instruments of production” were “able to exercise a certain amount of tyranny over the working-men, while the latter still lead a precarious life, and are, in many cases, subject to dire poverty and suffering.” And he believed that one element of education in a democracy must be to provide the possibilities for stable lives with sufficient material wealth. For him, however, this transformation was insufficient in itself, since material wealth could not overcome an absence of culture or the capacity for free intercourse with persons from all walks of life. He believed, some would say “idealistically” in a pejorative sense, that we should “transfer the interest which we attribute to material wealth to that for which wealth is merely a means.” The premise underlying Davidson’s outlook is one that he traced to Greek origins: “It should never be forgotten that it is the difference of culture far more than difference of wealth or position, that separates man from man and class from class.”

As Davidson saw it, this premise was found in experience in the ways we try to keep persons “in their places” by controlling who is educated and how they are educated—a fact of experience clearly noted later by both Martin Luther King and Gandhi, among others. Davidson’s remarks on this score do not seem far-fetched a century later.

We educate only people of leisure. . . . The great body of people, who have to “go to work” early, and who, as becoming acquainted with “life’s prime needs and agonies,” are by far the most susceptible of true education, are left out in the cold, condemned, for the most part, to toil in a narrow, sordid world, without outlook, and to be the tools of unscrupulous exploiters.

And if we consider our own habits and attitudes in our colleges and universities, we might feel something of the sting in Davidson’s claim
that “We make all the nobler delights of cultured life impossible for them, and then we wonder why they take up vulgar delights.” If teaching is essential to a philosophical life, we humanists in the United States are complicit in this failure. For Davidson, we will continue to fail until we actually “educate the masses” and recognize that “education is the only thing that can do away with those internal evils that disturb the peace, and threaten the existence, of the nation—labor trouble, saloon politics, haunts of vice, slum-life, and the like.” This education is not merely technical or formal—it is about teaching “culture” that enables and empowers free action.

Davidson had a strong resistance to the traditional academy in the United States. He believed that it bred “schools” and “cults” of thinking rather than independent thinking. And, like James, he distrusted the development of the Ph.D. octopus, whereby one’s degree became for the most part a calling card for work. Accordingly, he wrote to a young friend, “The Academic niche is particularly difficult to escape from. I don’t think you recognize how unfree a man is as a member of a teaching institution.” In his terms, philosophy and teaching in any authentic fashion would be difficult to practice in institutions of higher education, since there education “stops with knowing and does not go on to living and doing.” Davidson published more than ten books in his lifetime, but we remember him, if at all, for the two schools he started, schools quite unlike traditional American educational institutions. Glenmore, his summer school for the cultural sciences, ran for ten years under his direction, bringing interested young men and women into informed discussions with a number of the best American philosophers of the time. But for Davidson, the conversations were more important than any published proceedings. The effects of such a small program were extensive. As Good notes, Herbert Schneider claimed that “The more I think of it, the more I am inclined to believe that the Davidson summer schools were much more important than the Concord summer schools in giving American idealism a so-called ‘dynamic’ (biological) orientation.” Still, it was his Breadwinners’ College, begun in 1899, just two years before his untimely death, that best exemplified the spirit of Davidson’s intertwin-
ing of philosophy and teaching. In 1898, while lecturing in New York City at the Educational Alliance on the importance of schools for wage earners, Davidson was confronted with his own academicism. As Louis Dublin reports:

In the course of the question period after the lecture, a young man arose and made this comment: “It is all very well for you to talk about education for the breadwinners. But how can people like us who work nine or ten or sometimes more hours a day, who come home tired, who have few books and no one to guide or instruct us, obtain a liberal education?”

Davidson responded as knight errant, perhaps with a quixotic touch, by agreeing to become their teacher and establishing a syllabus and timetable for his teaching. By the end, Davidson was so ill he could only correspond with his students. Nevertheless, his impact was widely felt in American culture. As Flower and Murphey state: “Students grew into professionals and teachers, and the list of those associated with the college reads like a Who’s Who of the next generation’s intelligentsia and reformers.” Through his actions, Davidson had made a case for the essentiality of teaching and given credence to his plea that the rest of us do more of it:

If the teachers of the nation, with a due sense of their power and importance, would, without hope or desire for material reward, form themselves into an association for the higher education of the bread-winners . . . and each devote a couple of evenings a week to the work, they would soon elevate the culture of the whole people, and remove the worst dangers that threaten society.

At least one of his students, Morris Raphael Cohen, took up Davidson’s call. As Cohen’s daughter Leonora C. Rosenfield wrote of her father’s first lectures at the Breadwinners’ College: “Here was a beginning at translating into reality the Davidsonian ideal of dedicating one’s teaching abilities to one’s fellow men.” Cohen’s own list of students includes Lewis Feuer, Sidney Hook, Milton Munitz, Paul Weiss, Morton White, and Herbert Schneider, among others. Never-
theless, such an example seems difficult to follow so long as philosophy and teaching are understood primarily as professions confined to university campuses and not as life tasks essential to the development of democratic community.

William James did not remind us of Thomas Davidson because of the latter’s scholarly work. Rather, he pointed us to the philosophy for which the act and art of teaching “cultural science” is central. Davidson was indeed a renegade; Dewey called him an “academic outlaw”—a title Davidson no doubt relished. His ideas are radical and suggestive. To be sure, we have established “continuing education” and “distance learning” programs in our high schools and colleges; but one gets the cynical sense that these programs are now oriented toward the production of degrees for students and the generation of money for schools. They fall well short of the Davidsonian ideal. When the majority of our high school students arrive at college with no conception of what we philosophers do or why we do it, it is important for us to take notice. Most of us teach, yet teaching is not, in general, a highly applauded practice in the contemporary academy. Many of us have not thought about how our teaching is related to our philosophical practices—not just our philosophical “positions.” Poor students in our nation still often lack the opportunity to be students of culture. In such a setting, recalling Davidson’s appeal to the essentiality of teaching to philosophy is worthwhile. It was only in Davidson’s absence that James felt the full force of his presence: “I did not realize until that moment [seeing Davidson’s obituary] how much that free companionship with him every spring and autumn, surrounded by that beautiful nature, had signified to me, or how big a piece would be subtracted from my life by its cessation.” If we are not attentive, it may be the absence of widespread humanities education that will have to awaken us to its importance. James’s attempted redemption of Davidson provokes us to consider our own relations to the art of teaching. If Davidson’s Socratic work had this sort of effect on William James, it is worth considering the pragmatic meaning and value of Davidson’s implicit suggestion that teaching is essential, at least in an existential way, to philosophy.