

Education, Faith, and Despair: Wrestling with Kierkegaard

Peter Roberts

University of Canterbury, New Zealand

What is despair? Most of us acknowledge that despair exists, but seldom pause to examine it closely. When we do give some thought to this difficult subject, we usually take it for granted that despair is an entirely negative state of mind or mode of being — something we would want to avoid or seek to overcome. Education, more often than not, is seen as a means for lifting people out of despair. Education offers hope, and hope is seen as the antithesis of despair. This essay calls these apparently self-evident views into question. I begin with Søren Kierkegaard's influential account of despair in his late work, *The Sickness Unto Death*.¹ Kierkegaard is helpful in allowing us to see that our capacity for despair is a distinguishing feature of human life. He shows that despair may be present even where happiness, serenity, and beauty seem to prevail. Kierkegaard's faith-based answer to the question of despair is, however, not without its difficulties. I argue (i) that despair need not always be seen as a problem that requires, or lends itself to, a "solution" (of a faith-based kind or of any other kind); (ii) that education, far from diminishing our sense of despair, may heighten it; and (iii) that this provides not a reason for abandoning education but rather a basis for committing to it more strongly than ever.

KIERKEGAARD ON DESPAIR

Written under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, *The Sickness Unto Death* was published in 1849. Kierkegaard had considered the nature of despair in *Either/Or* and other earlier books but *The Sickness Unto Death* provides arguably his most nuanced and important treatment of this central existentialist theme.² He identifies three forms of despair: "being unconscious in despair of having a self (inauthentic despair), not wanting in despair to be oneself, and wanting in despair to be oneself" (*SD*, 43). Asking himself whether despair is a merit or a defect, Kierkegaard answers by saying that in purely abstract terms it is unquestionably a merit. Bearing witness to the reality of despair is, he insists, not discouraging but uplifting. To not be conscious of despair is itself a form of despair (*SD*, 53). The possibility of despair is what distinguishes human beings from all other living creatures, and those who are aware of their despair have an advantage over those who are not. Yet, the actual experience of despair can bring great misfortune and misery, even ruin (*SD*, 44–45). With despair, then, we witness a reversal of the usual relation between possibility and actuality. Generally, if it is considered meritorious to be able to be something, actually being that thing is all the more meritorious. In the case of despair, this is, in one sense at least, not so: in the possibility of despair one ascends, while in the actuality of despair one descends.

We think we despair over *something* — over difficulties, failures, injustices, pain — but what we really despair over is ourselves. This, Kierkegaard contends, is the basis for all despair. Despair is analogous to physical sickness: just as there is no human being who enjoys perfect health, so too is there no individual who does not

experience at least some despair. If we peer deeply into our innermost being, we will find “an uneasiness, an unquiet, a discordance, an anxiety in the face of an unknown something” — a something we may only perceive and comprehend in glimpses, and seldom confront (*SD*, 52). Even those who appear most peaceful, joyous, and harmonious are nonetheless in despair (*SD*, 55). Underlying all good fortune, all that is beautiful, is a sense of anxiety or dread from which no human being can escape.³

The torment of despair lies in the inability to die. Just as, in living as human beings, we cannot kill our thoughts, so too is impossible for the despairer to die. The self, in despair, wants to consume itself but cannot do so (*SD*, 48–49). The title of Kierkegaard’s book comes from the New Testament story of Lazarus being raised by Christ from the dead, his sickness thereby no longer being “unto death.” Kierkegaard’s focus is on a sickness of the spirit, the origins of which, he believes, lie in the denial of Christ. For Kierkegaard, it is not the awakening of Lazarus from the dead that allows us to say his sickness is not unto death. Rather, this comes from the very existence of Christ: from the possibility of eternal life. By rejecting Christ and accepting death as the end, we live as beings constantly “unto death.”

A self, Kierkegaard maintains, is always in a process of becoming, for the self “is not present actually, it is merely what is to come into existence” (*SD*, 60). Despair is an imbalance in the self and this cannot be addressed by an effort of will alone, for the harder one works at removing despair the more deeply one becomes conscious of it and immersed within it (*SD*, 44–45). With despair, as lived, “the time is constantly the present; ... at every moment of actual despair the despairer bears with him all that has gone before as something present in the form of possibility” (*SD*, 47). Kierkegaard’s position rests on a particular account of the self we can and should become: a *spirit* self. He speaks of those who are outwardly successful, seeking and gaining wealth and honor, and perhaps securing themselves a place in the history books, as having, in a spiritual sense, *no* self — “no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self for God” (*SD*, 65). To become a self, both possibility and necessity are essential. Becoming a self is a matter of necessity to the extent that we can only become what we are, but becoming is itself the realization of possibility.

As Kierkegaard points out, becoming suggests movement from some place, yet in becoming oneself the movement is at that place (*SD*, 66). For Kierkegaard, necessity is not, as philosophers would traditionally have it, a unity of possibility and actuality; rather, “actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity” (*SD*, 66). What is often missing, Kierkegaard says, is “the strength to obey, to yield to the necessary in one’s self, what might be called one’s limits” (*SD*, 66–67). An existential crisis can change this. Faced with the most horrifying reality imaginable, the despair that is within us fights for its release — for the consent of our whole being that will allow it to be. It is at such moments, when we are at our most desperate, that the possibility of salvation comes into sharpest focus. Humanly, Kierkegaard suggests, salvation is impossible, but for God everything is possible, at all times. What is needed is a *leap of faith*. In faith, in possibility, the believer possesses an “ever-sure antidote to despair” (*SD*, 70).⁴

EDUCATIONAL DESPAIR?

At first glance, we seem to face an immediate problem when responding to Kierkegaard's account of despair. In evaluating the strength and coherence of his argument, much appears to hinge on whether we share his belief in God. If one is an atheist or an agnostic, does this mean everything else Kierkegaard has to say about despair must be disregarded? I think not. It is true that Kierkegaard cannot be understood adequately without reference to his declarations on God and faith. To attempt to isolate other dimensions of his thought from his Christian worldview (by no means the orthodox Christianity of his time, it must be added) is to risk decontextualizing and distorting his ideas. But it does not follow from this that his account of despair is wholly dependent upon that worldview for its intelligibility and potential relevance to other domains of inquiry. Parallels can be drawn between despair as it is explained in *The Sickness Unto Death* and despair as it is experienced in education, irrespective of whether one believes in God. Whether one answers "yes," "no," or "I don't know" to the question of God's existence, and whatever one thinks of the role of faith in "overcoming" despair, the educationist has an interest in understanding the conscious, inquiring human being who can ask such questions in the first place. Kierkegaard prompts us to reflect on these questions, even if we start from different assumptions in addressing them and find different answers to them.⁵

It should be noted, moreover, that the views conveyed in *The Sickness Unto Death* are not those of Søren Kierkegaard but those of Anti-Climacus. Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms is a crucial element of his authorship and this can have an important bearing on how we read and respond to his work.⁶ We know from Kierkegaard's journal that on the question of Christian belief, he regarded himself as falling somewhere between Johannes Climacus (the pseudonymous author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*),⁷ who "places himself so low that he even admits to not being a Christian," and Anti-Climacus, who "gives the impression of taking himself to be a Christian to an extraordinary degree."⁸ This helps to explain why, in the second part of *The Sickness Unto Death*, despair is depicted as a "sin." For Anti-Climacus, the existence of God is beyond question, and to reject the Christian doctrine of sin and forgiveness is the greatest sin of all.⁹ Anti-Climacus has no room for doubt, but Kierkegaard himself, while sharing some of his pseudonymous counterpart's views, is, as Paulo Freire would put it, less certain of his certainties.¹⁰ And herein lies a clue to understanding the connection between education and despair as this is depicted in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

Education promotes not greater certainty but greater doubt — and with doubt can come despair. Education, it is often believed, is a process through which we subject our ideas to critical scrutiny. In becoming educated, it is expected that we will come to question much that was hitherto taken for granted, such that we will never be the same again. Education renders the world problematic; it treats not only the objects to be known but knowers themselves as subjects for investigation. This is, at any rate, part of what we hold up as an educational *ideal*: education is *meant* to encourage us to think, to probe, to reflect. It is widely acknowledged, of course,

that it often falls well short of this ideal. The language used to describe the shortcomings of education in this regard will vary depending on the theoretical framework within which a critic is working. What passes as “education” may indoctrinate, or subject people to the dominant ideology, or more deeply immerse them in sexist, racist, homophobic, anthropocentric, or colonizing discourses. Implied by all such critiques, however, is the counter view that education has something more to offer: education can and should promote doubt and questioning of some kind, and to that extent unsettle, disturb, or disrupt the *status quo*.

We seldom pause to consider some of the broader ontological and ethical implications of our underlying commitment to education conceived in these “critical” terms. If education succeeds in promoting doubt, questioning, and critique, what impact will this have on those who are educated?¹¹ Kierkegaard helps us to answer this question, not only in *The Sickness Unto Death* (to which I shall return shortly), but in an earlier work, the incomplete *Philosophical Fragments*.¹² In *Philosophical Fragments* Kierkegaard’s plan was for Johannes Climacus, as an earnest young man, to do exactly as philosophers exhort us to do, and doubt everything. In so doing, he would suffer greatly, become cunning, and “almost” acquire a bad conscience. He would go as far in that direction as he could go, find himself profoundly unhappy, and want to return to his previous state of mind. To his horror, he would find that he is unable to go back. He would despair, his youth having been wasted in his deliberations. Life, he would find, had not acquired any meaning for him, and all this would be the fault of philosophy.¹³

Kierkegaard’s intention in *Philosophical Fragments* was to “strike a blow” at modern speculative philosophy,¹⁴ but in this respect he was only partially successful. For while he recognized that Johannes Climacus’s attempt to question everything would inevitably lead to unhappiness and despair, he could not stop himself from exhibiting many of the characteristics of the doubter. The ground on which his inquiry proceeded was one of doubt.¹⁵ As observed in the work itself, philosophy begins with doubt; in order to philosophize at all, one must have already doubted.¹⁶ Kierkegaard as author had doubts and expressed these through his work; in this particular work, he expressed *doubts about doubt*. In one sense this was a tacit endorsement of the very tendencies he was seeking to undermine. At the same time, however, it was an affirmation of the views he conveyed, for Kierkegaard, in his own experience of despair, saw himself as living proof of what can come from incessant doubting.

Education is an inherently *risky* process. In fact, we might go further than this and say that if we take the task of education seriously, we place everything that matters to us at risk; we *risk it all* every time we encounter something new through teaching and/or learning. Lest this seem a trifle dramatic, imagine a situation where no questioning, no doubting, no reassessment of older views, would be permitted: where such forms of cognitive activity were literally inconceivable and impossible. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to know what would be left that would constitute us as human beings. Kierkegaard saw, as did his great admirer Miguel de Unamuno, that our capacity for reflective thought is both a defining feature of being

human and the basis for our despair.¹⁷ Education is concerned precisely with the development of this human attribute — our ability to reason, to think things through, to wonder how and why, to ask questions and pose challenges. Of course, there is more to education than this, and if we shift our focus slightly to examine the ideal of the educated person, we will often find reference to other features that have to do with (for example) breadth and depth of understanding, creativity, care and compassion, a sense of responsibility and commitment, civic mindedness, and so on. But these other attributes often presuppose, rely upon, and complement rather than contradict, the capacity for reflective thought.

What is the “it” that is at risk when we submit ourselves to the process of education? It is, as Kierkegaard recognized, *ourselves*. For Kierkegaard, the self is spiritual in nature, but even if we cannot abide by this view, the point still holds. As human beings we are constantly in a process of remaking ourselves, and education not only prompts that process but reminds us of how and why this is so. Education places us in the same position of existential anxiety — it might be called despair or even terror — faced by Kierkegaard’s perpetually doubting Johannes Climacus: once we commit to it, *we can never go back*. We cannot reclaim the self we once were; we must live with what we become, and we can never know exactly what that will be. If we have learned something significant, something that is unlikely to simply be forgotten, we cannot “unlearn” this (unless, perhaps, we are subjected to “brainwashing” or “re-programming”). If our conscience has been pricked, if we have been made aware through teaching, formal or informal, of something that disturbs us and reshapes our ethical views, we cannot simply dismiss these troubling thoughts. While memories may fade with time, and will always be selective, the general orientation of education is to *not let us forget*. Education thus makes us live in a constantly recreated present, where neither the world to be known nor the knower can ever quite be pinned down, but it also demands of us that we carry the past into that present.

Our despair resides, then, in the imprisonment we face as hostages to our own memories, our own heightened awareness of injustices that were hitherto obscured for us, our own minds full of accumulated knowledge. Needless to say, there is also much that we learn that is thoroughly pleasant, inspiring, helpful, and desirable. Through education, we can acquire skills of tremendous value in our professional and recreational lives; we can experience the joys of reading and writing; we can come to better appreciate the beauty of nature; we can open up the vast world of science; we can become aware of other countries, other cultures, earlier times, and possible futures. But educational experiences, if conceived in the manner articulated above, cannot be carved into neat piles, each cleanly separable from the others; nor can they be placed on a kind of balance sheet with a view to determining whether the “positives” outweigh the “negatives” (or vice versa). We despair not because we have *more* “negatives” but because those memories, those thoughts and feelings, that make us suffer *matter*.¹⁸

As Kierkegaard argued, the more conscious we become of certain things, the greater our despair. It is not that we are all on a steady upward path of learning deeper

and deeper truths as we go through life; educational journeys are, I would venture to suggest, usually much more uneven than that. But as we grow older, we frequently find ourselves becoming not more relaxed, more settled, more certain, but more restless and less certain than ever. The world is, we learn, more complex than we hitherto could have imagined — and we find ourselves, despite our education, no better equipped to address its problems, or our own, than we were prior to learning what we now know. We cannot push that which is painful aside any more than we can split our bodies apart and separate one portion from the other. As Arthur Schopenhauer observed, attempting to rid ourselves of suffering simply results in a change in its form; if we achieve temporary relief in one quarter, the pain will reappear in any one of a thousand other possible ways.¹⁹ We must carry the burden of suffering with us where ever we go, often not so much as a cloak that covers us but as a gnawing sensation that will not leave us alone, will not allow us to quite break free. Despair, seen in this light, is not something dramatic created as a kind of sudden, traumatic shock to our body or being; rather, it is a quieter but more persistent discomfort, a sense, as Kierkegaard put it, of perpetual unease.

Kierkegaard, like Fyodor Dostoevsky and Unamuno, realized that reason cannot come to our rescue in addressing the forms of suffering that afflict us most deeply.²⁰ We cannot *think our way out* of a state of despair; when we try to, we often end up digging ourselves deeper into the existential hole that has trapped us. Nor can we turn to “positive” emotions as a kind of quick-fix, though many a self-help guru would try to convince us otherwise; in such cases, we merely mask the other thoughts and feelings that have given rise to our cry for help. Kierkegaard’s point about the torment of being unable to destroy the self that despairs is apt here. We cannot think, feel, or will ourselves out of existence. This, however, also suggests a problem with Kierkegaard’s position. Kierkegaard advances the idea that we must *choose* the path we follow. In *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life’s Way* he delineates three possible modes of life: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious.²¹ The last of these is, ontologically speaking, the highest — a point reinforced in *The Sickness Unto Death* with its strong claims about the need for faith. Yet, there is something that does not ring true here. It is not difficult to see Kierkegaard’s call for faith, for all the words expended on it, as a form of wishful thinking.²² Arguably we cannot “think our way into” faith, or will ourselves to believe, any more than we can think our way out of despair or simply will our suffering away. Kierkegaard, along with most others who discuss despair, still sees it as something that can be and needs to be “cured” — this, as Albert Camus points out in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was his “frenzied wish.”²³ The Kierkegaardian “solution” is a faith-based one; others seek alternative remedies in therapy, hedonistic lifestyles, meditation, social reconstruction, and so on.

Perhaps, however, such attempts to overcome despair are themselves manifestations of the symptoms for which a cure is sought. Kierkegaard remained a reflective, doubting, despairing human being even as he, or rather Anti-Climacus, argued most passionately for the need to “obey,” to accept the path of faith. The very fact that Kierkegaard poured his heart and soul into his work, mustering all his analytical abilities to demonstrate the need for faith, was itself an indication of his

desperation, his inability to truly believe the doctrine he, through his pseudonyms, was advancing. “Acceptance” can, however, take another form. We can come to accept that in some senses, despair will always be with us — both as individuals, shaping our own distinctive lives, and collectively as a human race. The weight of historical evidence is on our side in making such a claim; equally evident, however, is our persistent hope that it might be otherwise. Acceptance as it is understood here does not mean we should do nothing in the face of suffering; it simply admits that not all forms or specific instances of suffering can be overcome. Acceptance in this context also means accepting that we will struggle against despair, even if our efforts to overcome it prove fruitless; the process of struggle is itself part of what defines us as human beings.

This allows us to rethink the nature and role of education. Education, in developing further our human capacity for critical, reflective, reasoning thought, does not diminish our sense of despair; to the contrary, it enhances it. But if we can come to accept this, education also allows us to *work with* our despair in new ways. Education can assist us in understanding the despair we experience, allowing us to identify, consider, and discuss its different forms. It can also heighten our sensitivity toward others as fellow sufferers. Kierkegaard’s notion of “choosing” the path of faith may be less than convincing but this does not stop us from holding on to a notion of *commitment*. We can commit to something — an idea, a set of ethical principles, a cause, a person or group of people, or a way of life — in the face of uncertainty, admitting to our doubts and fears. Commitment does not overcome despair; it responds to it and in this respect addresses it. We can address a problem without having to “solve” it, recognizing that through the act of addressing the problem, it may be transformed, creating further problems to be addressed. This process is, for anyone committed to education, continuous and lifelong. There is never a point in an educational life where we can, in good conscience, say we have “made it” and can now relax in the knowledge that all essential problems have been solved, all key questions answered. The “leap of faith” we take in education need not be of a religious kind; it can relate more to the idea of *going on* as teachers and learners, despite uncertainty, despair, and the possibility of repeated failure.²⁴

Working with despair in the manner hinted at here need not be depressing or joyless.²⁵ To the contrary, as Camus recognized, in order to genuinely love life, we must also be able to despair of life.²⁶ Acknowledging, examining, and addressing despair in its different manifestations, in our own life and the lives of others, can allow us to appreciate more deeply the joy in small things. It can liberate us from the need to seek constant “doses” of commodified happiness, often marketed to us as a necessary tonic in an otherwise unbearable world. Education can expose the ugliness of the world and alert us to our own brutalities and other shortcomings, but this can also have the effect of prompting us to examine how it could be otherwise. Despair and joy may be in tension with each other but that does not mean they are polar opposites. They are intertwined, with our experience and understanding of one dependent upon what we know of the other. Similarly, while despair is commonly construed as a state or condition “without hope,” it can also be seen as the foundation

on which we give substance and meaning to hope. For it is precisely when all appears lost, when a situation is most desperate, that hope gains renewed significance. When all is well, we do not *need* hope; when we are at our lowest ebb, we can become more sharply aware than ever of the need to create and build hope. Hope then becomes not a matter of idle speculation but a form of reflective, focused action.²⁷

CONCLUSION

The heading for the previous section of this essay is deliberately ambiguous. Education, I have argued, heightens our sense of despair. There is also a sense, however, in which despair can be educational. Given our distinctively human capacity for reflective thought, we cannot avoid despair; there is no “cure” for it. But we can learn from it.²⁸ We must learn to live with despair, without in any way endorsing it or promoting it. Kierkegaard is right, in my view, that we despair over both wanting and not wanting to be ourselves. We do not have to accept a theistic conception of the self for this point to remain true or for it to have educational significance. Education is, in part, about learning to better understand and live with ourselves as despairing beings. Education allows us to address the condition of despair, while also accepting that this will often be a provisional, uncertain, risky process. Once committed to education, there is no going back. Education makes our lives not easier but more complex, more difficult, than ever before. It does so, however, in a manner that permits us to experience not only despair but joy, and to better appreciate just how tightly entwined those two forms of human experience will always be.

1. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1989). This work will be cited in the text as *SD* for all subsequent references.

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 2 vols., trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987). Gordon Marino sees *The Sickness Unto Death* as Kierkegaard’s “most polished and mature work,” in Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 5.

3. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte with Albert Anderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

4. *Ibid.*, 70. On the need for a “leap of faith,” see also Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 2005).

5. Compare Brian V. Hill, “Søren Kierkegaard and Educational Theory,” *Educational Theory* 16, no. 4 (1966): 344–353.

6. See further, Ian McPherson, “Kierkegaard as an Educational Thinker: Communication Through and Across Ways of Being,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 35, no. 2 (2001): 157–174; and Herner Sæverot, “Kierkegaard, Seduction and Existential Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 30, no. 6 (2011): 557–572.

7. Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

8. Cited in Alastair Hannay, “Introduction,” in Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 15.

9. Hannay, “Introduction,” 14.

10. See, for example, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* (New York: Continuum, 1997); and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

11. Helpful in this regard is Megan Boler, "Teaching for Hope: The Ethics of Shattering World Views," in *Teaching, Learning, and Loving: Reclaiming Passion in Educational Practice*, eds. Daniel Liston and Jim Garrison (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).
12. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*.
13. *Ibid.*, 234–235.
14. *Ibid.*, 234.
15. For two educational perspectives on the question of doubt in Kierkegaard's work, see Nigel Tubbs, "Kierkegaard," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 39, no. 2 (2005): 387–409; and Stein M. Wivestad, "Conditions for 'Upbuilding': A Reply to Nigel Tubbs' Reading of Kierkegaard," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45, no. 4 (2011): 613–625.
16. See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 133–159.
17. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, trans. A. Kerrigan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).
18. Compare Daniel P. Liston, "Love and Despair in Teaching," *Educational Theory* 50, no. 1 (2000): 81–102.
19. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 315.
20. Dostoevsky makes this point most powerfully through his novels. See especially, Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Everyman's Library, 2004); Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1994); Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1991). Unamuno speaks repeatedly of the limits of reason in *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*.
21. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*; Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). See also Jacob Golomb, "Kierkegaard's Ironic Ladder to Authentic Faith," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 32, no. 2 (1992): 65–81.
22. See Hannay, "Introduction."
23. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. J. O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 38.
24. Compare Nicholas C. Burbules, "Teaching and the Tragic Sense of Education," in *Teaching and Its Predicaments*, eds. Nicholas C. Burbules and David Hansen (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).
25. The same point can be made, in a more general way, in relation to the whole tradition of pessimistic thought. See Joshua F. Dienstag, *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
26. Albert Camus, "Love of Life", in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, trans. E.C. Kennedy (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 56. On the connections between love and despair, see also Liston, "Love and Despair in Teaching."
27. For a thoughtful discussion of educational commitment based on hope, on the one hand, and faith, on the other, see René Vincente Arcilla, "Tragic Absolutism in Education," *Educational Theory* 42, no. 4 (1992): 473–481. Kierkegaard addresses the links between hope, love, and despair in Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
28. This is well demonstrated in Rosa Hong Chen, "Bearing and Transcending Suffering with Nature and the World: A Humanistic Account," *Journal of Moral Education* 40, no. 2 (2011): 203–216.