Degrees of Freedom: The Challenges Facing Moral Witnesses and What Can Be Learned Through Accompanying Them

David T. Hansen
Teachers College, Columbia University

This article addresses the degrees of freedom moral witnesses can enact in their attempt both to heed the realities of human suffering (and sometimes of joy) and to render justly those realities. The moral witness walks precariously close to what the writer-witness W. G. Sebald calls "wrongful trespass" into the lives of others, precisely because of their abiding commitment to not let those lives be marginalized or relegated to oblivion. The witness must come to grips with difficult questions such as whether they are manipulating other persons' experience to make a point, or are presuming to speak for them when no such request has been made. I argue that the witness' degrees of freedom are not chimerical, but can be realized provided that the witness learns what is required to truly heed the reality of others' experience. The fact that witnesses *can* learn, which is to say transform in their ethical orientation, renders them potential educators to every aspirant for justice. To walk with a moral witness holds out the promise of cultivating one's own moral imagination and agency in a comparable spirit.

Every human being encounters the question of what degrees of freedom they harbor in interpreting their experience and that of other persons. The specter of determinism, whether cultural, psychological, or biochemical, is ever present, as is the inescapable reality, or it seems, that nobody can attain a view of the world unmediated by various assumptions, expectations, and prejudices (or prejudgments, in hermeneutic terms). In this article, I am particularly concerned with how and why the issue of degrees of freedom bears down hard on the moral witness, who aspires both to heed the realities of human suffering

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION | **Amy Shuffelton, editor**

(and sometimes of joy) and to render justly those realities. To borrow a trope from the writer-witness W. G. Sebald, the witness is always precariously close to "wrongful trespass" into the lives of others, precisely because of their abiding commitment to not let those lives be marginalized or relegated to oblivion.[1] The witness must come to grips, in a manner not faced by everyone, with fateful questions such as whether they are manipulating other persons' experience to make a point, or are presuming to speak for others who have never requested such a gesture.

To examine the theme of degrees of freedom in bearing witness, I turn first to a sketch of what I understand witnessing to entail. I highlight the orientation of what can be called "a moral witness" and illuminate the experience of several such witnesses as they confront the challenges touched on above. I will try to show that the witness' degrees of freedom are not chimerical, but can be realized provided the witness learns what is required to truly heed the reality of others' experience. The fact that witnesses *can* learn, which is to say transform in their ethical orientation, renders them potential educators to every aspirant for justice. To walk with a moral witness holds out the promise of cultivating one's own moral imagination and conduct in a comparable spirit.

A PORTRAIT OF THE MORAL WITNESS: BEING SUMMONED

A moral witness is a person who does not choose this role, as if they are simply selecting one activity in life among others. Rather, they are summoned or called to it. The person feels an "I must" as a kind of beckoning. This summons could be to attend to large scale human trauma such as war, attempts at genocide, forms of collective persecution, instances of forced migration, and the like. Here, the human-being-as-witness is drawn in a morally magnetic manner to attend to suffering others and, in the name of justice and care, to put into the world as best as their expressive instrumentalities permit what has happened to people so that others might pay heed and respond.[2]

For example, the Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich bears witness to the devastations of World War II in works such as *Last Witnesses* (2019), about children caught up in the maelstrom, and *The Unwomanly Face of War* (2018), about women who fought and sometimes died in the ranks. She illuminates in visceral terms the barbarism of war and, in effect, compels the reader to ques-

tion any foreign policy that includes war-making as an instrument of national self-interest. The aforementioned W. G. Sebald bears witness, especially in his *The Emigrants* (1992) and *Austerlitz* (2000), to persons not caught up directly in the Holocaust but who were in some respects destroyed by it. He draws the reader into facing the limits as well as the possibilities of moral remembrance. James Baldwin bears witness to the triumphs and tragedies of racial justice in the United States across his numerous works including *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Baldwin makes plain to readers that everybody in the polity, in actions large and small, influences its moral constitution.

Just as importantly when it comes to the full horizon of human experience and what a moral witness can tell us about it, the "I must" could pertain to something so beautiful in the world that the person is compelled to attest to it: to put it in front of people in the hope they may see the beauty, too, and perhaps reanimate their ways of life accordingly. What the witness has heeded could be a seemingly simple gesture, a tone of voice, a look in the eye, the movement or the stillness of a hand. Or it could be the apparently ordinary doings of a nurse in the ward, a teacher in the classroom, a chef in the kitchen. In short, the person may feel summoned to bear witness to aspects of human life that are hidden in plain sight and which, when actually noticed, can speak volumes about fundamental aspects of the human condition.

For example, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, in his extensive oeuvre including his famed "Duino Elegies," expresses exquisite "quiet testimony," to cite a term of art from the literary critic Shari Goldberg, about the poignancy, yearnings, trials and sometimes redemptions that everyday life can hold.[3] The writer John Berger and the photographer Jean Mohr collaborated on a witness to the life of a country doctor in England, which they entitled *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor* (1967). Through Berger's lyrical prose and Mohr's caption-less, sometimes haunting photographs, they render the pathos and the beauty in the man's day by day encounters with his patients.

Finally, there are instances in which a moral witness finds themselves attending in one and the same breath to both the traumatic and the apparently ordinary and every day. For example, Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, the 17th Century Mexican nun, poet, and philosopher, attests to the harsh ways in which

DOI: 10.47925/80.3.001

women's freedom was boxed in by normalized religious and patriarchal practices at the time, even while—sometimes in the very next line of the poem or prose work at hand—expressing genuine awe at, for instance, the geometrical beauty of the architecture in her convent.[4] As another example, Etty Hillesum was a young Dutch woman studying at university in Amsterdam and teaching Russian when World War Il broke out. She was also Jewish, and for that fact alone was eventually put to death by the Nazis at Auschwitz. The diary and the letters she left behind attest to her deepening moral and aesthetic sensibility under the pressure of wartime conditions. They bear witness at once to the terrible trauma engulfing her and others, and to the piercing beauty that can be discovered in the ordinary. This dual witness reaches an apotheosis when she finds herself working in the Jewish Council in Amsterdam set up by the Nazis to administrate various affairs and serve as a go-between. At a certain moment she finds herself writing:

> I often used to think to myself as I walked about in Westerbork among the noisily bickering, all too energetic members of the Jewish Council: if only I could enter a small piece of their soul. If only I could be the receptacle of their better nature, which is sure to be present in all of them. Let me be rather than do. Let me be the soul in that body. And I would now and then discover in each one of them a gesture or a glance that took them out of themselves and of which they seemed barely aware. And I felt I was the guardian of that gesture or glance.[5]

Hillesum bears witness within an aura of radical love that takes hold of her, a love that does not seek itself but rather recognizes the precarity and pricelessness of life.

In sum, there are many dimensions of human experience, from the painful to the joyous, that can summon and transform a human being into a moral witness, at least for a time and in a particular context. This metamorphosis can occur despite themselves and to their own surprise, and, in any case, is not a matter of choice or decision as typically conceived. The witnesses mentioned here did not wake up one morning and decide to bear witness. In fact, they rarely use the term, though reading them attentively helps teach us what we need to

know about it (see footnote 7 below). A related point is that there seems to be a gestation process, sometimes of long duration, until the person metabolizes this summons, or beckoning, and feels it fully and becomes conscious of it sufficiently to act.

COMMITMENTS OF THE MORAL WITNESS

Another dimension of bearing witness that those named here enact is charting a fine line between becoming too close to *or* too distant from the people and events that call them to attend. They juxtapose their intimacy with what they see and hear with considered reflection on historical, existential, political, and philosophical matters. They fashion an always singular fusion of proximity and distance: heeding in an acutely fine-grained manner the experience of others, while also retaining critical distance so that they are not swallowed up by the often wrenching nature of what is before them. They respect the truth that, for the witness seeking to grasp the reality of different others' experience, "a dispassionate eye is the condition of a compassionate intelligence."[6]

Through their distinctive closeness-distance from events, moral witnesses engage readers in a potentially formative educational experience. I do not mean they call or even think of themselves as educators. Rather, the commitments they make directly influence the substance, the tone, and the register of their voices, such that readers are drawn to listen and to reflect. The moral witness' commitments encompass (1) heeding what has summoned them, (2) immersing themselves in others' lives and first hand testimony, (3) devoting whatever time is necessary to come to a reckoning (which in the case of a moral witness like Alexievich or Sebald is years), (4) studying intensively the circumstances involved, (5) working continuously on their ethical capacities to heed the reality of others, which is a challenging, complicated, ongoing process (more on this point below), and, finally, (6) composing their witness in an accessible and compelling form, as moral witnesses such as Rilke and Baldwin so artfully demonstrate.[7]

To the extent that moral witnesses can align themselves with these commitments, they create conditions whereby they can illuminate to other people how to respond ethically in their own right. The moral witness can fuel people's historical consciousness and sense of remembrance. They can inspire others to widen their ethical horizons of care and of lived practice. Again, this

DOI: 10.47925/80.3.001

influence is less direct than it is indirect: an effect, or result, of the sheer fact that the witness heeds a summons and endeavors to come to a reckoning with it. The reader who walks alongside them is bathed, metaphorically speaking, in the light of ethical concern.

DISCOVERING AND ENACTING DEGREES OF FREEDOM

Put another way, the moral witness can provoke readers into contemplating the contours of their own moral imagination and agency. The witness can put forward, if not in so many words, the very questions they have had to confront moment by moment in their witness:

> 1. How are they to use, or indeed how *should* they use, their degrees of freedom in thinking, in inquiring, in interpreting, in communicating? How might they respond to the intensely consequential question of what these degrees of freedom are for, which from time to time can give rise to the wondrous question of why human beings have these degrees of freedom in the first place?
> 2. What *are* the degrees of freedom the witness has to render things justly, to get near to the truth of the matter? How is it that they are able, at times, to arrive at truths of war, of racial justice, and of the inextinguishable meaning and beauty that also mark human life?

In some respects, the latter issue about rendering a witness justly echoes the familiar question of representation about which so much ink has been spilled in the academy. How can a person, as a witness, speak of others in a way that is not reductionistic, or that distorts the reality of their experience or, in a word, mis-represents them? To what extent is it possible for the witness to achieve a just rendering, to let the truth of others' experience—and sometimes, by extension, in human experience writ large—stand forth and thus stand out? The term remembrance touched on a moment ago coheres with the term reminder. Can witnesses "re-mind" themselves: that is, *make over* the mind by *keeping* in mind, becoming mind-full, letting the mind become fuller, with ethical regard and concern?[8]

Relatedly, how can the witness accept the realities of ambiguity, that

sometimes the truth is many-sided, elusive, or contradictory? How can the witness accept the discovery they sometimes have that they have no comfort or consolation to offer others, only questions that may be unsettling and uncomfortable? The painter Francisco de Goya composed a witness known as *The Disasters of War*, first published in 1863, which comprises a series of eighty-two prints about the Spanish struggle for independence against Napoleon, who had invaded Spain in 1808. At first glance, the prints seem to appeal to Spanish nationalism, in a kind of "three cheers and hooray" manner. However, on second glance Goya offers nothing of the sort. He shows in a relentless, highly disturbing manner that the truth of war is that no side is ever victorious, that the humanity in humanity always loses. Anyone who follows his series of prints through to the end inevitably finds, at least for a time, their moral compass de-magnetized. It no longer functions. They are simply not sure what to make of human nature, the human condition, and themselves.

What the witnesses mentioned here realize is that there is a mode of responsibility that accompanies their degrees of freedom. As is common knowledge, there are numerous impressive arguments in philosophy to the effect that freedom is an empty if not fraudulent term without an accompanying notion of responsibility. Otherwise, instead of freedom, it is truer to the mark to speak of being capricious, licentious, or egocentric. Thus, in asking about the degrees of freedom the witness has in rendering their witness and putting it forth to the public, we are also asking about the mode of responsibility that accompanies this process. The verb itself, to render, is suggestive here. It connotes forming or fashioning: for example, "rendering" a portrait of Mr. X or Ms. Y. But the verb also connotes giving what is due, giving back, returning in kind. It conjures an ethical aura. The witness's rendering aspires to preserve and put forward a wholeness that can be contrasted with the idea of representation when the latter connotes substitution or replacement. The witness does not seek to replace the living reality of what they have witnessed with their testimony, but rather to illuminate it, to help it appear to others. But do their degrees of freedom permit them to render well? There exists no preset answer for them to rely upon, in part because nobody else is compelled by an identical summons.

Small wonder, perhaps, that these witnesses find themselves caught up

DOI: 10.47925/80.3.001

in considerable and sometimes confusing self-examination even as they look out on the world. They confront, if not in so many words, the background of skepticism that seems to always accompany talk of degrees of freedom. The academy in general, including schools of education, has long been enmeshed in sometimes incommensurable, competing theories about what it means to be a human being. There are swirling debates about the limits and affordances of self-awareness, self-fashioning, and self- and other-understanding. These contretemps can all be said to take their point of departure from a sobering remark by C. S. Lewis:

> Five senses; an incurably abstract intellect, a haphazardly selective memory, a set of preconceptions and assumptions so numerous that I can never examine more than a minority of them – never become even conscious of them all. How much of total reality can such an apparatus let through?[9]

In brief, it sometimes appears all too easy to fall into a rabbit hole of skepticism, and the witnesses I've touched on here know all about that prospect.

The summons or calling to which the witness responds, and which propels them into their endeavor in the first place, is precisely what helps them confront if not resolve these challenges to their degrees of freedom. There exists a hard-to-describe relationship between the will and the orientation of the witness which helps them see their way through to the end. The witness deploys the will, in a manner of speaking, to still the will and to accept, or give themselves over, to the posture of radical receptivity characteristic of the moral witness. That posture does not dissolve the constraints on freedom of thought and imagination, but it does render them less intimidating or paralyzing (I return to this point in my final remarks below).

At the same time, the question of how witnesses can make use of their degrees of freedom becomes that much harder because, unlike the historian or the journalist, they lack a protocol or clear-cut methodology to lean on. Though bearing witness has several shared characteristics summarized previously (see above section), it is not a method. It cannot be reduced to a textbook treatment and it cannot be taught directly, though it does have its methodical aspects and a person can learn to enact it through experience and through studying the

example of other witnesses. As touched on above, bearing witness constitutes an orientation. Orientation is a term with physical connotations, as in how a person turns toward and engages others and the world, rather than standing apart like a mere spectator or bystander who passively "observes" things. In every realized witness that comes to mind, there is a palpable aspect of physicality, as if in touching the page of the book the reader is, in a way, letting themselves be touched by the very world the witness is disclosing.[10] The witness invites the reader, in effect, to turn and orient themselves toward that world right alongside them.

Because moral witnesses lack a preset roadmap and methodological template, they invariably tumble at times into confusions and predicaments that can tempt them to abandon the effort outright. Consider Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), a Martinique-born poet, playwright, critic of colonialism, and eventual politician. Césaire's epic prose poem, *Journal of a Homecoming* (*Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal*, first published in 1939), recounts the poet's return to his island after spending eight years in his 20s (1931-1939) in Paris, where he was the recipient of a French colonial government fellowship. He immersed himself there in French letters, especially French traditions in poetry, while also encountering numerous other black students from both the Caribbean and Africa. He participated in constant conversations with them, as they studied intensively together the emerging scholarship in that era demonstrating that Africa had a long history of civilizations, a fact which flew in the face of colonial prejudices about the so-called dark continent. Césaire also interacted with other black writers from the Americas, including Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, and eventually wrote his university thesis on African American poetry about the South.

These collective experiences brought Césaire to a crossroads of his passion for French poetry and literature and his equal passion for liberation from the colonial power. His *Journal of a Homecoming* constitutes a witness to both his internal grappling with these dual allegiances and his attempt to perceive his island people justly, that is to say in a fresh manner he was incapable of before his long sojourn in Paris. In the course of his odyssey through this aesthetic, epistemic, and ethical maze, he introduces his highly influential notion of *negritude*, a term of art for a mode of black consciousness that would break free from

DOI: 10.47925/80.3.001

colonial mentalities as well as nostalgic, as contrasted with tradition-oriented, conceptions of Africa.

But the poet's return to Martinique at the end of his studies is anything but halcyon. His attempt to see his people beyond or outside of a colonial-influenced lens fails dramatically and drastically in the first half of the poem, as he cannot overcome his bitter chagrin, after returning to the island from eight powerfully formative years in Paris, at what he perceives as the existentially moribund condition of his people. He had pictured himself, in a deeper manner than he was aware (as he himself attests), as a kind of heroic figure who, like a demiurge, would return to his suffering island and help his people build a new world. But, instead, he writes his way into a nadir of bile, resentment, confusion, and anger, which brings him to a point where he considers abandoning any attempt to be of use: "How mad of me to dream up a marvelous caper (*merveilleux entrechat*) above the degradation!"[11]

However, through a series of unexpected revelations, which I lack the space to adumbrate here, his experience back home turns the tables on his ego.[12] He realizes with a shock that negritude, for him, was thus far merely a theory and had not become a lived orientation. The second half of the poem constitutes an intense reckoning through which the reader can discern, in the poet's witness, his now profound attempt to move nearer to the truth of himself and of his island people, who he slowly realizes harbor within more agentive resources than he had perceived. He engages the long history and ramifications of slavery while in the same breath coming to grips with his heritage, as he now pictures it, from pre-colonial Africa.

Césaire's powerful poetic voice, as the witness he becomes, does not romanticize his island's realities nor the ethical conundrums in rendering justly other people's experience. What he discovers, as do the other witnesses mentioned in this paper, is the distinctive mode of discipline that heeding a summons seems to require, and which I framed earlier as having to do with the will and the necessity of a radical receptivity to other's reality. These requirements confront witnesses with a formidable challenge when it comes to drawing on their degrees of freedom to fashion an account for others who have not been witness to what they have seen.

And yet, Césaire brings truths to life about the realities of freedom and oppression, of the generative value of engaging cultural inheritances in a critical manner, and more. As with Alexievich, Sebald, and other witnesses touched on here, to read Césaire's work with care is to position oneself to feel what Roger Simon calls the touch of the past and to want, somehow, to keep that touch alive in the present. To accompany moral witnesses to past events can help people, at least indirectly, resist the seductive pull of presentism.[13] That exclusivist mindset presumes that what *we're* doing is more important than anything people did in the past, that *we* do things better than they did, and that *we* don't need them—forgetting, in this mindset, that the touch of the past is precisely what calls out to us to imagine the touch of the future, *when we are the past*, and thus what we ultimately would most want to bequeath to those who come after. This talk of touch echoes why I suggested previously that there is a kind of physicality to the written witness: that if one heeds them personally something more than just cognitive transpires. Something happens to the person's feeling for things, for people, for the world, for themselves, with "feeling" understood as a mind- and heart-set more encompassing than emotion and reason taken in themselves. If I had been able to bring with me all the books I've mentioned here, I would have held up each one as a physical gesture symbolizing the fundamental moral gesture of the witness.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE MORAL WITNESS AND THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

In this article, I have addressed a number of considerations having to do with the degrees of freedom of moral witnesses, with respect to their thinking, imagining, and responding conjoined in their attempts to render things justly. Though many questions and loose ends remain, I hope the discussion resonates with the theme of the conference where I first presented this paper, namely how to face up the malevolent disinformation and falsification of events that so trouble the world today. As I have suggested, the moral witness becomes bound up in a passion for truth. Césaire, Rilke, Alexievich, Sebald, and others take whatever measures that are necessary, however unsettling and even vertiginous they may be, to get as near to truths of human experience as possible. At times, they obsess about avoiding "wrongful trespass." But they are not

DOI: 10.47925/80.3.001

fanatics—that is, precisely those individuals and groups who aspire to tear up the truth and replace it with their drive for power and destruction. Such efforts can undermine people's faith in their own degrees of freedom, and replace a view that truth is multiplex with a view that truth is nonexistent, a sure recipe for nihilism and the philosophy that might makes right.

Unlike so much that appears online and in other media these days, I would argue that the moral witnesses touched on here are *trustworthy*. This trust has nothing to do with approving or disapproving of their efforts, as such, nor does it bear on agreeing or disagreeing with them, as such. The moral witness provides something other than argument. More to the point, they make plain why something more than argument alone is required to cultivate historical consciousness, a sense of remembrance, and an abiding concern for others and the world. Through the ethical artfulness that engaging in a witness demands, which includes enacting the criteria of moral witnessing touched on previously, the witness shows, illuminates, shines a light on, discloses, lets appear, what too often can fall into the shadows.[14]

That effort mirrors the centrality of the summons that leads a person to bear witness in the first place, and that can sustain them in making their way through the inevitable vicissitudes of skepticism as well as of self-doubt that accompany the experience. Yet there is something more that heeding this summons brings to them. In a nutshell, it takes them out of themselves such that they can move beyond or at least dislodge themselves a bit from the constraints on their degrees of freedom that have been so widely investigated and propagated by the academy. There is no breaking away entirely, whatever that could mean, from these constraints, though countless poets and others have yearned for an unmediated touch with the world. But the moral witness creates what can be called a transitional space, in which they are neither the self they were or are in the rest of their lives, nor yet the self they might become. There is nothing self-less here. It's just that the self, the *self-as-witness*, is wondrously unleashed to use their degrees of freedom precisely by giving themselves over to that which has summoned them. They trust the very source, metaphorically speaking, of that summon—call it the moral heartbeat of the world—to teach them what to do, and in so doing position their readers to do the same.

REFERENCES

1 W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 29.

2 The notion of responding to a summons constitutes what I understand to be a key motivation for the witnesses touched on in this article. As such, the idea differs from Avishai Margalit's conception of a moral witness which, in his view, characterizes a person motivated from the start by overt, pre-established, and clearly enunciated moral purposes. In my view, the figures I will mention here *become* moral witnesses – persons profoundly concerned about the fate of others – precisely through tethering themselves to what has called or summoned them. See Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), especially Chapter 5.

3 Shari Goldberg, *Quiet Testimony: A Theory of Witnessing from Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823254774.001.0001

4 Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (New York: Penguin, 1997), 41, *passim*.

5 Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life, and Letters from Westerbork* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 202.

6 Simon Schama, "Flaubert in the Trenches: Exploring the Netherworld of the First World War," *The New Yorker* April 1, 1996: 97-98, 98.

7 I have conceived these elements inductively through an intensive comparative study of numerous moral witnesses including those mentioned here. I have also benefitted from the extensive scholarly literature on the moral and epistemic dimensions of bearing witness, including influential works such as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Michal Givoni, *The Care of the Witness: A Contemporary History of Testimony in Crises* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016); James Hatley, *Suffering Witness: The*

DOI: 10.47925/80.3.001

Quandary of Responsibility after the Irreparable (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000); Sybille Kramer and Sigrid Weigel, eds., *Testimony/ Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

8 Giorgio Agamben elucidates a provocative perspective on what can be summarized as the "impossibility" of bearing witness given limitations of language and the force of history and politics; see Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (Princeton, NJ: Zone Books, 2002). For commentary in a context of educational philosophy, see Marie Hallender, *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonials: Through the Lens of Agamben* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot, 2012). My sense from studying the witnesses mentioned in this article is that, if not in so many words, they feel the truth that no witness can ever be morally complete much less perfect, but that the endeavor remains warranted and can yield a meaningful, generative issue.

9 C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 74-75.

10 On this point, see especially Roger I. Simon, *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

11 Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Journal of a Homecoming*), trans. N. Gregson Davis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017/ 1956), 113.

12 I am at present completing a book on Césaire's witness as well as that of several other influential writers.

13 A number of colleagues have written about the challenges of engaging students with the touch of the past in a presentist-oriented climate that is fused with a strong instrumentalist ethos in schools. See, for example, Ann Chinnery, "'What Good Does All This Remembering Do, Anyway?' On Historical Consciousness and the Responsibility of Memory" in Gert Biesta (Ed.), *Philosophy of Education 2010*, 397-405 (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society), https://doi.org/10.47925/2010.397; Mario Di Paolantonio,

"Guarding and Transmitting the Vulnerability of the Historical Referent" in Deborah Kerdeman (Ed.), *Philosophy of Education 2009*, 129-137 (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society), https://doi.org/10.47925/2009.129. I responded to their work, in part, by taking a close look at Sebald's witness in David T. Hansen, "W. G. Sebald and the Tasks of Ethical and Moral remembrance" in Claudia W. Ruitenberg (Ed.), *Philosophy of Education 2012*, 125-133 (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society), https://doi.org/10.47925/2012.125. See also Ann Chinnery, "Caring for the Past: On Relationality and Historical Consciousness," *Ethics and Education* 8, no. 3 (2013): 253–262, and Mario Di Paolantonio, "Roger Simon as a Thinker of the Remnants: An Overview of a Way of Thinking the Present, Our Present…," *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 34, no. 3 (2015): 263–277. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-014-9439-y

14 For a fuller treatment of these claims, see David T. Hansen and Rebecca Sullivan, "What Renders a Witness Trustworthy? Existential and Curricular Notes on a Mode of Educational Inquiry," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 41, no. 2 (2022): 151-172. For a consideration of bearing witness to educational life in classrooms, see Hansen, *Reimagining the Call to Teach: A Witness to Teachers and Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-021-09800-w

DOI: 10.47925/80.3.001