

THE BEAUTIFUL RISK OF EDUCATION



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One has to accept that "it" [ça] (the other, or whatever "it" may be) is stronger than I am, for something to happen. I have to lack a certain strength, I have to lack it enough, for something to happen. If I were stronger than the other, or stronger than what happens, nothing would happen. There has to be weakness. . . .

—Jacques Derrida (2001, p. 64)

CHAPTER ONE

Creativity

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

In recent years there has been a flurry of publications and reports about the role of creativity in education. The general tenor of this work is that creativity is a good thing that deserves to be promoted in schools, colleges, and universities, particularly as an antidote to those forms of education that are considered to “stifle” creativity. The emphasis in these discussions is, however, almost entirely on the creativity of children and young people. In this chapter I approach the question of creativity from a different angle. I am interested in education as itself a creative “act” or, to be more precise, in education as an act of creation, that is, as an act of bringing something new into the world, something that did not exist before. I am particularly interested in seeing education as a process that in some way contributes to the creation of human subjectivity—and I will qualify below why I think that it is appropriate to think of education in these terms.

To think of education as an act of creation leads us straight into the major theme of this book, which is whether we can only think of creation in strong terms, that is, as the *production* of something—literally the production of some *thing*; or whether it is possible and desirable to think of the act of creation in a different—that is, a weak—way. While “creativity” is a relatively noncontentious notion that seems to have a “feel good” factor about it—harking back to romantic notions of the child as a naturally creative being—the notion of “creation” is far more contentious. This partly has to do with the central role creation narratives play in almost all cultures (see Leeming 2010) and partly

with the predominant interpretation of the creation narrative in the book of Genesis. In this interpretation creation is depicted as a powerful act by means of which God has brought reality into existence.

This particular interpretation has haunted both secular and religious discourses up to the present day. It has led to an opposition between those who base their religious beliefs on the idea of this powerful divine act of creation out of nothingness—*creatio ex nihilo*—and those who reject such creationism in favor of a scientific explanation of the origins of the universe. The irony, however, is that both parties are in a sense after the same thing, that is, the identification of a first original event from which everything else has emanated. God's act of creation out of nothingness is in this regard structurally similar to the idea of the Big Bang or the search for the most fundamental particle—sometimes called the “God particle”—from which the universe is made. The problem with such strategies is that by trying to identify an origin, they always raise the question of the origin of the origin, the question of what came before. As long as we think of creation in causal terms, we end up either with an infinite regress or with an arbitrary stop—something Aristotle realized when he posited the idea of the “unmoved mover” as the first cause of the world of motion.

The question I ask in this chapter is whether it is possible to think of creation differently, that is, not in strong metaphysical terms—in terms of causes and effects—but in weak existential terms—in terms of encounters and events. I develop my answer to this question in two steps. In the first part of the chapter I follow John D. Caputo's deconstructive reading of the book of Genesis in order to show that the predominant understanding of the “act” of creation is not the whole story and that an entirely different understanding of what creation entails is actually available—one in which risk plays a central role. In the second part of the chapter I connect this to the question of the educational interest in human subjectivity. Here I turn to the writings of Emmanuel Levinas and his “ethics of subjectivity” in order to suggest that human subjectivity should not be understood in natural terms, that is, as part of our essence, but rather in existential terms, that is, as a “quality” of our relationships with what or who is other. Subjectivity is, in other words, not something we can have or possess, but something that can be realized, from time to time, in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter. Understanding subjectivity as an ethical event leaves us, in a sense, empty-handed as educators. Yet I will argue that it is precisely the experience of empty-handedness that can help us to understand what a weak understanding of the role of education in the event of subjectivity might entail.

THE BEAUTIFUL RISK OF CREATION

In his book *The Weakness of God*, John Caputo (2006) not only provides a different understanding of the “process” of creation but also argues that the way in which creation has commonly been understood, that is, as the act of an omnipotent God, is actually a Hellenistic invention. As Caputo explains, the God “whose act was to be cleaned up by metaphysics and made into pure act ... was God blended from biblical poetry and Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics” (ibid., p. 73; see also p. 59). This is the God who, in the King James translation, was there “in the beginning” and from that position “created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, King James Version). This formulation, as Caputo puts it, expresses “sheer, clean, lean, perfect, stunning, uninhibited power” (2006, p. 56). But the Hellenistic reading of the opening sentence of the book of Genesis is quite different from a translation of the Hebrew text that has *not* gone through Greek metaphysics and that is *not* trying to depict God as the original origin, as the Aristotelian “unmoved mover.”

In the King James Version we read, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1–2, King James Version). Yet in an alternative translation we get, “When God began creation, the earth was unformed and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and God’s wind swept over the water.”¹ The difference between this rendition and the previous one—and this small difference is absolutely crucial—is that in the latter translation when God began to create, “things had already begun” (Caputo 2006, p. 57). God (Elohim²) begins, as Caputo explains, “where he finds himself with co-everlasting but mute companions: a barren earth, lifeless waters, and a sweeping wind” (ibid., p. 57). What is God (Elohim) doing there? Caputo argues that God is not bringing earth (*tohu wa-bohu*), water (*tehom*), and wind (*ruach*) into being, but that he is rather *calling them into life* (see ibid., p. 58). The “astonishing thing” here is *not* that God creates something out of nothing but “that God *brings being into life*” (ibid., p. 58; emphasis in original). “That is the wonder,” Caputo writes, “and that life that God breathes in them

1. Taken from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bereishit_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bereishit_(parsha)) (accessed December 29, 2011). See also Caputo (2006), p. 57.

2. In the book of Genesis there are two names for “God”: Elohim and YHWH (Yahweh). The latter is sometimes translated as “Lord” or as the “Lord God” in the King James Version.

is what God calls 'good,' which goes a step beyond being" (ibid., p. 58). God, therefore, is not "the power supply for everything that happens" but is "the source of good and its warrant" (ibid., p. 73).

There is, however, a second creation narrative in the book of Genesis, which is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Here the protagonist is not Elohim but YHWH or Yahweh. The dominant mark of the first creation narrative, that of Elohim, is that of what Caputo, quoting Milan Kundera, calls "our 'categorical agreement with being'" (ibid., p. 66). The "rhythmic refrain" of this narrative is that of an "originary benediction, 'And God saw that it was good'" (ibid.). Caputo explains that in this narrative "Elohim creates by the word of his mouth" (ibid.). This means that Elohim "is not responsible for the fact that the elements are *there* but for the fact that they are fashioned and *called good*" (ibid., pp. 66–67; emphasis in original). It also means that creation is "not a movement from non-being to being, but from being to the good" (ibid., p. 67). But when YHWH, the Lord God, comes unto the scene,³ we get a different verdict. No longer "good," not "evil" but, as Caputo argues, "guilty" (see ibid.).

Caputo describes the difference as follows: "If Elohim is a calm, distant, celestial, hands-off creator, Yahweh is very nervous about what he is getting himself into and is much more of a hands-on micro-manager" (ibid., p. 67). The crucial point for Caputo is that Yahweh, unlike Elohim, seems to have "little taste *for the risk of creation, for the risk of parenting*" (ibid., p. 68; emphasis in original)—a risk that Caputo, with reference to Levinas, refers to as "the beautiful risk of creation" (ibid., p. 60). Yahweh does not so much give Adam and Eve life as he gives them a *test* of life. "He gives them life on a kind of conditional trial loan to see if they are going to abuse it and try to become like him, in which case he is prepared to withdraw from the deal and wipe—or wash—them out" (ibid.); this is unlike the story of Elohim where life is what Derrida (1992a) would refer to as an *unconditional* gift. Yahweh, as Caputo puts it, "seems to have a bit of a short fuse, seems inordinately suspicious of his own creation, and is far too nervous about his offspring for a good parent" (ibid., p. 69).

There are two important observations here—observations that also have relevance for the discussion about education that is to follow. The first

3. It is important to note that historically the story of YHWH is thought to be of an earlier date than the story of Elohim. This is why it is significant that the author—or Redactor, as the author is called in the literature—of this part of Genesis has put the story of Elohim first. "First the good news, the Redactor seems to think, then the bad news" (Caputo 2006, p. 67).

point Caputo makes is that creating, “like procreating, is risky business, and one has to be prepared for a lot of noise, dissent, resistance, and a general disturbance of the peace if one is of a mind to engage in either” (ibid., p. 69). While Elohim appears to be willing to take this risk—knowing that real trust is always without ground, that it cannot be “returned,” so to speak, that it is unconditional (see Biesta 2006a, chapter 1)—Yahweh remains *distrustful* of his creation, appears to be unable to take the risk, or is only able to take the risk as a *conditional* risk. “Right from the start,” Caputo writes, “Yahweh is hedging his bet” (ibid., p. 71).

The second observation is perhaps even more important for our discussion, as Caputo points out that whereas Elohim creates adult beings like himself, Yahweh wants to bring forth “eternal children” (ibid., p. 70). “Elohim wants images who are not children but adults, not faint images but robust ones, not bad copies but true ones” (ibid., pp. 70–71). Yahweh, in contrast, “has little heart for the risk that any parent takes, which is that their offspring will outstrip their intention and spin out of control, and things will not turn out as the parents planned” (ibid., p. 71). Yahweh prefers his creatures to remain children—seen but not heard. Right from the start Yahweh is therefore trying to “minimize the risk he is taking, and he has no tolerance for failure” (ibid., p. 71). This is why the original setting of his creation is not a “garden of delight” but rather “a minefield of tricks, traps, tests, trials, and temptation” (ibid., p. 71) where it is almost inevitable that his creatures will fail.

WEAKNESS, CREATION, AND THE GOOD

Caputo argues that we shouldn’t think of the two creation stories as opposing accounts, as two options we have to choose from. He emphasizes that the Redactor who put these stories together in one narrative is making a bigger point. In the first narrative we find “the original covenant that Elohim makes with creation, which is that what he has made is good” (ibid., p. 71), whereas in the second narrative “that judgment is put to the test by showing us to what extent things go wrong” (ibid.). Neither creation narrative, however, sees creation as a transition from nothingness into something. “These stories tell, not of an omnipotent creator creating *ex nihilo*, which stretches our credulity, but of a maker making something over which he has only so much control and no more” (ibid., p. 71).

Here lies the significance of the elements God has to work with. These elements—earth (*tohu wa-bohu*), water (*tehom*), and wind (*ruach*)—“are not evil, just fluid; they are not wicked, just unwieldy; they are not demonic, just

determinable, flexible and unprogrammable" (ibid., p. 72). There is therefore an element in them "which is not precisely God's image but in which God is trying to fashion his image, a certain irreducible alterity that God wants to cultivate, fertilize, plant, order, and bring round to the divine way of doing things but whose irreducibility and resistance the Lord God is just going to have to learn to live with and hope for the best" (ibid.). The elements thus signify "a certain limit on God's power and call for God's patience" (ibid.). God, "like any good parent, must learn to deal with the unpredictability and the unforeseeability, the foolishness, and even the destructiveness of his children, in the hope that they will grow up and eventually come around" (ibid.). What makes the two creation stories different is not their account of creation but the different *attitudes* Elohim and Yahweh take to creation. Caputo summarizes the difference as follows: "Elohim is cool; Yahweh is a nervous wreck" (ibid.).

What we are getting through these creation stories is the announcement of "a kind of covenant with life that we are asked to initial" (ibid., p. 74). As Caputo explains, "We are asked to say 'yes' to life by adding a second yes to God's 'yes' (Rosenzweig); to countersign God's yes with our yes, and that involves signing on to that risk; to embrace what God has formed and the elemental undecidability in which God has formed or inscribed it" (ibid., p. 74). Caputo adds that God "indeed has a plan for creation, but God, like the rest of us, is hoping it works" (ibid.)—and this hope is, in the end, all there is. Against this background Caputo refers to Walter Benjamin's contention that history is "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" and that we are driven through time by "a storm blowing from Paradise" (ibid., p. 74). Caputo contends that Benjamin "was right enough," as in the very next chapter "Cain murders Abel and the bloody course of history is launched" (ibid.). But this is not the only wind blowing out of Paradise. There is "a gentler breeze that pronounces all things 'good'" (ibid., p. 75). This other gesture of creation "gives the world significance, not a cause, a meaning, not a metaphysical explanation" (ibid., p. 75). By placing this narrative first the Redactor of Genesis is saying that "for all of its violence and ferocity, we cannot let the storm of the catastrophe, the history of ruins, overwhelm us" (ibid.).

So where does that leave God? It basically leaves God without power. Or to be more precise: it leaves God without metaphysical power, without causal power, without omnipotent power, without Hellenistic power, so to speak. According to Caputo—and I agree—this is not a bad thing. To think of God as omnipotent in the metaphysical sense of the word is actually a dangerous fantasy as "the sovereignty of God is readily extended to the sovereignty of man over other man, over women and animals, over all creation"

(ibid., p. 79)—which is why he writes that omnipotence is not a mystery but actually “a mystification and a conceptual mistake” (ibid.). “The very idea of ‘creation from nothing’ and of divine ‘omnipotence’ has the fundamental mark of idealizing, epistemological and psychoanalytic fantasy, that is, the removal of all limits imposed by reality, carrying out an action in an ideal space where there is absolute perfect control and no trace of resistance from the real” (ibid., pp. 79–80). It is, as I have put it in the Prologue, an *infantile* attitude, not a grown-up one. Against the idea of God as a strong force and of creation as an act of bringing being into existence, Caputo thus presents “the event that stirs in the name of God” as a “weak force” (ibid., p. 84) and helps us to see creation as a confirmation of what is already there as “beautiful and good” (ibid., p. 86). The event of creation is thus that of bringing being to life by affirming its goodness. That is all there is to creation. And it is a very risky business, not a matter of omnipotence. We might even say that engaging in the business of creation in this way expresses a belief. But not belief in the cognitive sense, not belief in a set of propositions as in “I believe this, this, and that,” but a belief in life, in the goodness of life, and in goodness itself.

Along these lines Caputo thus helps us to see that the “choice”—if that is the right word—is not between creationism and anti-creationism, is not between creationism and its rejection. It rather is between what we might call “strong metaphysical creationism”—where creation is an act of unbridled power—and “weak existential creationism”—where creation is an event through which being is brought to life. The choice, so we might say, is therefore a choice between essence and existence, between metaphysics and life, between whether we want to take the risk of life—with all the uncertainty, unpredictability, and frustration that come with it—or whether we look for certainty outside, underneath, or beyond life. The quest for certainty, as John Dewey also knew, always gets us into trouble, not only because of the many conflicting certainties that are always on offer but also because this quest keeps us away from engaging with life itself—it keeps us away from the things that are right in front of our eyes, the things that really matter and that require our attention, right here and right now. Which brings me to the question of education.

THE SUBJECT OF EDUCATION

I have indicated in the Prologue that education functions in (at least) three areas: that of qualification, that of socialization, and that of what I have referred to as subjectification. While the question of what it means to create

in and through education is relevant in all three domains, I wish to confine myself in this chapter to the dimension of subjectification, that is, to the way in which educational processes and practices contribute to the emergence of human subjectivity or “subject-ness.” Subjectification, so we might say, expresses a particular interest—an interest in the subjectivity or subject-ness of those being educated—that is, in the assumption that those at whom our educational efforts are directed are not to be seen as objects but as subjects in their own right; subjects of action and responsibility. The interest in the subjectivity of those we educate is perhaps a modern interest, as it is connected to notions of freedom and independence that gained prominence in educational thought and practice from the Enlightenment onward (see Biesta 2006a). One could say that it is only from then on that it becomes possible and important to make a distinction between socialization—which is about the ways in which, through education, individuals become part of existing orders and traditions—and subjectification—which is about ways of being that are not entirely determined by existing orders and traditions.

By using the notions of subjectivity, subjectification, and subject-ness I am not advancing a particular conception of human subjectivity or a particular theory about how subjectivity “emerges.” There are different answers to be given to these questions, and by identifying the subject-ness of those being educated as a proper educational interest I am trying to be open to the different ways in which subject-ness and its educational emergence might be understood. The notions of subjectivity and subjectification, to put it differently, do not in themselves articulate a particular conception or theory of subject-ness and its emergence. I am, however, avoiding certain other words and concepts, most notably the notion of *identity*—which for me has more to do with the ways in which we identify with existing orders and traditions than with ways of acting and being that are “outside” of this—and also the notion of *individuality*—which tends to depict the human subject too much in isolation from other human beings. By using the notion of *emergence* I am also, for the moment, trying to be open about the “how” of subjectification, although the word I am deliberately avoiding here is *development*, as I do not think that the emergence of subjectivity should be understood in developmental terms, not, that is, if development is located in the domain of being (see below). Although the notion of *subjectification* may have negative connotations as it hints at forms of subjection, I will argue that it is the “echo” of a certain kind of subjection that is actually very relevant for how I will propose to understand subjectivity and its emergence.

When I suggested in the introduction to this chapter that I was interested in seeing education as a process that in some way contributes to the creation

of human subjectivity, this may have sounded preposterous. If we think of creation in the strong, metaphysical sense, then the idea that we as educators create our students doesn't make any sense at all. But with Caputo we not only have a different way to approach the whole idea of creation; his ideas also help us to ask whether human subjectivity can only be understood in terms of being, essence, and nature—that is, in strong metaphysical terms—or whether it is possible, and perhaps even desirable or necessary, to understand human subjectivity in weak existential terms. To explore this latter option I return to the work of Emmanuel Levinas—and I say “return” because Levinas continues to be a source of inspiration for my understanding of the question of human subjectivity (see Biesta 2006a, 2010b; Winter 2011), and his ideas on this matter are too important not to be mentioned in the context of this book.

AN ETHICS OF SUBJECTIVITY

The work of Emmanuel Levinas is uniquely concerned with the question of human subjectivity (see, e.g., Critchley 1999; Bauman 1993). Yet instead of offering us a new theory or truth about the human subject, Levinas has articulated a completely different “avenue” toward the question of human subjectivity, one in which an ethical category—responsibility—is singled out as “the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity” (Levinas 1985, p. 95). Levinas’s thinking thus poses a challenge to the “wisdom of the Western tradition and Western thought” in which it is assumed that human beings “are human through consciousness” (Levinas 1998a, p. 190). He challenges the idea of the subject as a substantial center of meaning and initiative, as a *cogito* who is first of all concerned with itself and only then, perhaps, if he or she decides to be so, with the other. Levinas argues instead that the subject is always *already* engaged in a relationship that is “older than the ego, prior to principles” (Levinas 1981, p. 117). This relationship is neither a knowledge relationship nor a willful act of the ego. It is an *ethical* relationship, a relationship of infinite and unconditional responsibility for the Other.⁴

Levinas stresses that this responsibility for the Other is not a responsibility that we can choose to take upon us, as this would only be possible if we were an ego or a consciousness *before* we were “inscribed” in this relationship.

4. I follow the convention among translators of Levinas to use Other with a capital “O” as the translation of “autrui”—the personal other—as distinguished from “other” with a lowercase “o” as the translation of “autre”—otherness or alterity in general.

This responsibility, which is the “essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity,” is therefore a responsibility “*that is justified by no prior commitment*” (ibid., p. 102; emphasis in original). It is, as Levinas puts it, a “passion” that is absolute. This means, however, that the question of subjectivity is not about the *being* of the subject but about “my right to be” (Levinas 1989, p. 86). As Levinas argues, it is only in the “very crisis of the being of a being” (ibid., p. 85), in the *interruption* of its being, that the uniqueness (see below) of the subject first acquires meaning (see also Levinas 1981, p. 13). This interruption constitutes the relationship of responsibility, which is a responsibility of “being-in-question” (ibid., p. 111). It is this being-in-question, this “assignation to answer without evasions,” that “assigns the self to be a self” and thus calls me as this unique individual (ibid., p. 106). This is why Levinas describes the “oneself,” the unique individual, as the “not-being-able-to-slip-away-from an assignation,” an assignation that does not aim at any generality but is aimed at *me* (ibid., p. 127). The *oneself*, therefore, “does not coincide with the identifying of truth, is not statable in terms of consciousness, discourse and intentionality” (ibid., p. 106). The oneself is a singularity “prior to the distinction between the particular and the universal,” and therefore both unsayable and unjustifiable (ibid., p. 107). The oneself is not a being but is “beyond the normal play of action and passion in which the identity of a being is maintained, in which it *is*” (ibid., p. 114).

By identifying responsibility as the “essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity,” Levinas tries to get away from the idea that human subjectivity can be understood in essential terms, that is, as a metaphysical essence. Levinas acknowledges that he describes subjectivity in ethical terms, but he hastens to add that “ethics, here, does not supplement a preceding existential base” (Levinas 1985, p. 95). This is why I would like to suggest that Levinas does not provide us with a new *theory* of subjectivity—a theory that would claim, for example, that the subject is a being endowed with certain moral qualities, capacities, or response-abilities—but rather with an *ethics* of subjectivity (see also Biesta 2008). Levinas urges us to approach the “question” of subjectivity in ethical terms, that is, in terms of being made responsible and taking up one’s responsibility. Levinas is therefore not trying to answer the question as to what the subject *is*—what its nature is, what its essence is—but rather is interested in how subjectivity *exists* or, to be more precise, how my “subject-ness” is possible, how it can appear or manifest itself. This is never a question of subjectivity in general—which is another reason why there is no theory of subjectivity in Levinas—but is a question of *my* unique subjectivity as it emerges from my singular, unique responsibility.

The question of uniqueness, however, is again not a question that can be answered by looking at the characteristics that make me different from everyone else. For Levinas uniqueness is not a matter of our essence or nature—which also means that it is not a matter of identity. When we use identity to articulate our uniqueness, we focus on the ways in which I am *different* from the other—which might be called *uniqueness-as-difference* (see also Biesta 2010b, chapter 4). In that case we make use of the other to articulate our own uniqueness. We might say, therefore, that identity is based upon an instrumental rather than an ethical relation with the other. The question for Levinas, however, is not about what *makes* each of us unique. Instead, he looks for situations *in which it matters* that I am unique, that is, situations in which I cannot be replaced or substituted by someone else. These are situations in which someone calls me, in which someone does an appeal to me, in which someone singles me out. These are not situations in which I *am* unique, but situations in which my uniqueness *matters*—where it matters that I am I and not someone else. These are situations in which I am *singularized*—situations where *uniqueness-as-irreplaceability* emerges—and thus situations where the event of subjectivity *happens*. Subjectivity-as-irreplaceability, subjectivity-as-responsibility, is therefore *not* a different or other way of being of the subject, because, as Levinas argues, “being otherwise is still being” (Levinas 1985, p. 100). The uniqueness of the subject and subjectivity-as-uniqueness rather emerge in a “domain” that lies “beyond essence,” so to speak, a non-place or “null-site” as Levinas puts it (Levinas 1981, p. 8) that is *otherwise than being*.

The uniqueness of the human subject is thus to be understood as something that goes precisely against what Levinas calls the “ontological condition” of human beings. This is why he writes that to be human means “to live as if one were not a being among beings” (Levinas 1985, p. 100). Or as Lingis puts it, “The self cannot be conceived as an entity. It has dropped out of being” (Lingis 1981, p. xxxi). What makes me unique, what singles me out, what singularizes me, is the fact that my responsibility is not transferable. Levinas summarizes it as follows: “Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse. This charge is a supreme dignity of the unique. I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. I can substitute myself for everyone, but no one can substitute himself for me” (Levinas 1985, p. 101). This is also why responsibility is not reciprocal. The Other may well be responsible for me, but Levinas emphasizes that this is totally the affair of the Other. The intersubjective relation is a nonsymmetrical relationship. “I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it” (ibid., p. 98). It is precisely insofar as the relationship

between the Other and me is *not* reciprocal that I am subjected to the Other, and it is in this way that my subjectivity becomes possible. In this sense we might say that my subjectivity is to be found in my subjection to the Other, which means, in the shortest formula, that for Levinas "the subject is subject" (Critchley 1999, p. 63).

A PEDAGOGY WITH EMPTY HANDS

If we follow Levinas in his suggestion that uniqueness is not a matter of essence but of existence, that it is not a matter of being but of "otherwise than being," then it follows that subjectivity or subject-ness ceases to be an attribute of something (literally of some *thing*) and instead becomes an *event*: something that can *occur* from time to time, something that can emerge, rather than something that is constantly there, that we can have, possess, and secure. This is so because for Levinas subjectivity is not to be confused with responsibility. Our responsibility is simply "there," it is given; our subjectivity, in contrast, has to do with what we do with this responsibility, how we respond to it or, with a phrase from Zygmunt Bauman (1998): how we take responsibility for our responsibility. While my uniqueness matters in those situations in which I am "called" to responsibility, in those situations in which I cannot be replaced since it is *I* who is being called, not "the subject" in general, the question of whether I take up this responsibility and respond to the assignation is an entirely different matter. With regard to this, Levinas is adamant that I am only responsible for my own responsibility. What others do with their responsibility is entirely up to them. I cannot *make* anyone else responsible.

The latter point is of crucial importance for education, as we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that now that Levinas has provided us with a new understanding of subjectivity, we can embark on a program of moral education so as to make our students into responsible human beings. This would immediately pull the event of subjectivity back into the domain of being and thus would miss the very point of what Levinas is trying to say, which is that subjectivity is an ethical event, something that might happen, but where there is never a guarantee that it will happen. And this is because responsibility is not something that we can force upon others; it is only something we can take upon ourselves. One could say, therefore, that Levinas leaves us educators empty-handed, as no program of action follows from his insights. Yet this empty-handedness is not necessarily a bad thing, because it precisely puts us in a position where we realize that our educational interest in the emergence of subjectivity is not to be understood in terms of production, in

terms of strong, metaphysical creation, but rather requires a different kind of educational response and a different kind of educational responsibility.

If the possibility of subjectivity, the possibility of the event of subjectivity, has to do with those situations in which we are called, in which we are singled out, in which we are assigned to take responsibility for our responsibility, then one of the important things for educators to do is to make sure that our educational arrangements—our curricula, our pedagogies, our lesson plans, the ways in which we run and build our schools, and the ways in which we organize schooling in our societies—do not keep our students away from such experiences, do not shield them from any potential intervention of the other, do not contribute to making our students deaf and blind for what is calling them. Doing so will not guarantee anything, of course, other than that it will not block the event of subjectivity. But whether this event will occur, whether students will realize their subject-ness, is an entirely open question. It is beyond our control and fundamentally out of our hands. Keeping education open for the event of subjectivity to occur does, of course, come with a risk, because when we keep education open anything can happen, anything can arrive. But that is precisely the point of the argument put forward in this chapter, in that it is only when we are willing to take this risk that the event of subjectivity has a chance to occur.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have explored what it means to create and, more explicitly, what it would mean to contribute educationally to the creation of human subjectivity or subject-ness. Against a strong metaphysical conception of creation as bringing being into existence, I have, with the help of Caputo's deconstructive reading of the creation narratives in the book of Genesis, pursued a weak notion of creation as calling being into life. Here creation ceases to be a movement from non-being into being and becomes a movement "from being to the good," as Caputo puts it. Creation thus becomes an act of *affirmation* that gives what is there—the "elements," in the broadest sense of the term—significance and meaning, not a cause or a metaphysical explanation.

The two creation stories not only provide us with two very different accounts of what it means to create—a strong, metaphysical account and a weak, existential account. They also provide us with two very different accounts of what it means to educate and, more specifically, what it means to educate with an orientation toward and an interest in the event of subjectivity. The story of Yahweh not only shows us an educator who wants to stay in

control and wants to minimize or even eradicate any possible risk involved in the act of creation. The story also shows what the ultimate consequence of such a risk-averse educational attitude is. Because Yahweh is not willing to take a risk, his creatures are being prevented from growing up, are being prevented from becoming subjects in their own right, from realizing their unique and singular subject-ness. Elohim, in comparison, shows us an educator who knows that creation is a risky business and has to be a risky business and that without the risk nothing will happen; the event of subjectivity will not occur.

Reading Caputo and Levinas together thus provides us with a first insight into how and why the weakness of education matters, particularly in relation to the subjectification dimension of education, that is, to the way in which education contributes to the occurrence of the event of subjectivity. While it is clear that educators cannot produce this event in the strong metaphysical sense of the word, taking the risk, keeping things open so that the event of subjectivity may arise, is nonetheless a creative gesture and a gesture of creation, albeit in the weak, existential sense in which being is brought into life—a life shared with others in responsiveness and responsibility.