

Claire Elise Katz - Teaching Our Children Well Pedagogy, Religion, and the Future of Philosophy

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The future of philosophy has been a concern for philosophy ever since its inception. We can find any number of examples of this concern dating as far back as Thales, who had to prove that he could have made money if he really wanted to do so, and as recent as the November 2003 issue of Reader's Digest, that presents the following joke:

Wondering why my niece was returning to college to get a master's in philosophy, I asked "What can you do with a degree like that?"

"Well", she replied, "it will qualify me to deal with questions like 'What is existence?' 'What is the essence of things?', and, 'Do you want fries with that?'"

One can read Plato's Republic or Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics as treatises on how to have the best society, where "best" is defined as a place where philosophy not only exists but also thrives. But it is difficult to imagine presently that an educational theory that promotes philosophy as part of the curriculum would be taken seriously, much less a political philosophy whose primary aim is the flourishing of philosophy and philosophers.

What characterizes the good life and philosophy's role in that characterization continues to haunt us. With each characterization, philosophy, which Aristotle referred to as "the queen," must defend its existence. From Plato to Locke and Rousseau, John Dewey and Jane Addams, to contemporary culture, the struggle has raged between the theoretical life—the life of the mind—and the "practical" life, or the life of experience. As old as philosophy is, it seems that philosophy's future has always hung in uncertainty, subject to the whims of the masses. But to consider the future of philosophy, we might also want to consider what philosophy is: what does it teach and how does it affect those whom it teaches?

Philosophy was once a discipline that concerned itself with all areas. Although it tried to offer an account of the world that went beyond what the poets could offer, it did not initially oppose itself to religion. With the rise of Christianity, Western philosophy saw a need to distinguish itself from religion's approach addressing questions regarding the natural world. Although much of Western philosophy was influenced by the Christian beliefs of the philosophers, philosophy as a discipline began to contrast itself to religion.

Certainly one can see that there were good reasons for doing so. Philosophy's emphasis on argument, reason, and universality sets it apart from religious discourse, faith, and the aim of theology. But in so doing, philosophy has also become dishonest about its relationship to religion. The so called secular views of Western philosophy are not completely secular. They often mask a religious ideology that cannot be questioned or discussed, since those who hold the views deny its presence.

Pedagogically, we see more pressing problems. The antagonism between philosophy and religion often places students (and teachers) of philosophy in awkward positions. Those who wish to understand their own religious beliefs more deeply and within the context of larger philosophical questions often feel as though they must choose between philosophy and religion, since no real philosopher continues to hold religious beliefs. This fragmentation of philosophy, of which questions concerning religion are but one example, leaves philosophy impoverished.

Finally, this antagonism precludes philosophy from finding anything useful in religious discourse, a presumption that seems, at best, misinformed. And this antagonism also allows religion to believe that philosophy can only undermine its aims—that philosophy’s goal is to supercede religion.

The second, and related, example of philosophy’s fragmentation can be seen, ironically, in its relationship to education. Philosophy has lost sight of its original, powerful aim—to know thyself and the world in which we live. Since philosophy also saw itself as replacing the poets and their claims to know the world, this aim was also tied to the project of teaching. On the one hand, philosophy is so focused on the text that its concern centers on what the text says and not on what it means for our everyday life. On the other hand, much of philosophy—and education in general—has lost site of the text completely. The literacy and sensitivity of thought that accompanies philosophical education, and one might hope all education, needs to be revitalized. I further suggest that it needs to be expanded outside the walls of the university and into the grade school learning environment.

This essay argues that philosophy’s explicit separation from religion and from questions regarding pedagogy undermines the very nature of philosophy’s project. A return to questions regarding pedagogy would reveal that philosophical discourse is significant not only in college education but also in pre-college education. And a return to questions regarding religion would reveal that religion can enrich one’s own philosophy. Finally, I suggest that the task of introducing philosophy into the college and pre-college classroom could be enhanced if it were to employ the valuable reasoning, hermeneutical, and pedagogical tools found in the Jewish tradition.

Part I: Know thyself, mortal!

The question of what role philosophy plays in our lives can be framed within the larger context of a discussion regarding intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. I do not mean to suggest that my aim is to ask if we are more or less intellectual than we were a decade, a generation, or even 1000 years ago. For example, I cannot say that we were more intellectually disposed as a culture 10 years ago, 20 years ago, and so forth. This claim, I believe, is one that Allan Bloom does make, at least with regard to a certain population of students that he once taught.¹

I would agree that there are historical differences in the perception and purpose of the university. Certainly the kinds of education and services that the university offers and the reasons that people attend the university are vastly different from one of its original purposes—namely, as the site of education for the elite who would be the leaders in the community (ministers, politicians, and so forth). I cannot address the history of this tension between intellectuals and their critics. However, focusing on this tension might help us think about the perception of philosophy within the context of education. I should begin by admitting that my worry about anti-intellectualism is that I believe it now infects the university itself, such that the once infamous distinction between the “town and gown” has become sufficiently blurred. The distinction between those outside academia who might have little respect for the life of the mind, and those inside the university, who are supposed to be promoting that life, is quickly becoming a non-distinction.

Let me offer two examples regarding my claim. The first comes from a 60 Minutes episode and it reflects the attitude toward the university from those outside of it. The segment was intended to “expose” research universities and those nasty little myths that we all know:

graduate students are teaching all the classes and professors do not really seem to do anything there. In fact, as the argument goes, the graduate students were doing all the work. The segment focused on the privileged life of the university professors who only teach a 2/2 load, and who, in spite of that “light” load, often have graduate students doing their work for them, e.g., grading the papers, facilitating discussion sections, and even teaching many of the courses offered by the department. The negative tone of the segment revealed that its producers did not understand the demands of either teaching or research, nor did it consider the latter to be of any productive use in society. In light of the attitudes towards research in general, one can only imagine where philosophy (the ultimate “useless” discipline) would be situated along this academic food chain. It was ironic, however, that a society which only pays lip service to the value of teaching, could then cite teaching as the example of that which is productive.

My second example comes from the play, “Wit,” recently made into an HBO movie. I have discussed this play at length elsewhere, so I will only mention it briefly here.² This play opens with a woman—a college English professor and scholar of John Donne’s poetry—who is recently diagnosed with stage IV ovarian cancer. The play insinuates that this woman was so concerned with the life of the mind that she did not make time for regular health check-ups. The play then begins a multi-layered examination of all the ways in which “experience,” understood as a lack of [intellectual] knowledge, is better than knowledge. For example, the nurse is clearly favored over the doctor because, as the nurse says about herself, she does not know anything.

I cite these examples not as proof but as an indication of what our culture thinks of the life of the mind. To be clear, I would never claim that one ought to be so caught up in Plato’s dialogues or John Donne’s poetry that one fails to experience the poetry of life itself, whether that experience comes by listening to the ocean, having children, sharing a meal with friends, tending to one’s health, or being in love. The woman in the play is clearly someone who missed even her own teacher’s command to go out and enjoy the splendor in the grass, as her fellow students were doing. In fact, it is the extreme of this woman’s life that brings into relief the tension in how we view and value both the experiential and the intellectual elements of our lives. The example reinforces the myth that one can only be had to the exclusion of the other, rather than seeing each as enhancing the other. And so I return to the issue at hand: the future of philosophy and I approach this question from a pedagogical perspective.

The most famous imperative from philosophy, a phrase that even those outside the academy can recite, is “know thyself.”³ Although we believe this to be Socrates’s motto, we find in Plato’s *Charmides* a slightly different expression of this phrase: “Know thyself, mortal” (emphasis added). This expansion of the phrase gives new life to the familiar expression. The phrase now appears to command one to know one’s boundaries and limitations; one ought to know who one is, and more importantly, who one is not. In this instance, one is to know that one approaches the Delphic Oracle not as a god, but as a mortal. Hence, hubris, the common fatal flaw for heroic mortals, is not merely a display of arrogance, but also a transgression of boundaries. It is a crime considered so heinous that it is frequently the common cause of one’s self-undoing and ultimately one’s death. But what does it mean to know one’s self? How is this important to professors of philosophy and to those whom we teach?

This expanded phrase also introduces a religious component to the command that was previously absent. Philosophy typically regards itself in opposition to religion and religious questions, with a few exceptions: philosophy of religion is a sub-domain of philosophy that

raises meta-questions regarding the nature of religion; Medieval philosophy engages the explicit relationship between philosophy and religion, although it is increasingly difficult to find these courses in most philosophy departments; and Jewish philosophy, which is almost completely excluded from the Western philosophical canon, except for the presence of Spinoza, is even rarer to find in a philosophy department.⁴

As I mentioned above, with few exceptions the American university was conceived as the educational site for future leaders, especially religious leaders.⁵ Thus, there was a time when the most educated among us were those who saw religion and education as integral to that education. Our perceptions of religion have changed dramatically—those who practice religion often do not see the need for education and those who are educated frequently cannot imagine any role that religion might play in their life. This question is most important within the context of philosophy, where students enter our classes and often worry that their faith might be shattered and their relationships with others permanently disrupted. How, then, do we as philosophy teachers, integrate questions regarding religion, implicit in the Delphic oracle's command, into our classes? What does it mean to know thyself and does the outcome of this activity mean dispensing with religion? Or, could it mean that we need to bring religion back into the discussion?

There is a multitude of theories that tell us how the self comes to know itself. Yet, in spite of the many different theories philosophy offers for how we come to know ourselves, e.g., through self-reflection, through friends, through the behavior of others, and so forth, academic philosophy has nonetheless moved away from the actual project of knowing oneself. "Knowing oneself" appears to be a luxury not that we are unable to afford, but that we are unwilling to purchase. Academic philosophy has separated the reading of the text from reading ourselves. In turn, our own behavior, and our inattention to it—especially in the classroom—may serve to undermine the very project of teaching philosophy.⁶ I argue that it is the teaching of philosophy that will ensure philosophy's future.

We can see most clearly philosophy's fragmentation by examining the increasingly limited role that philosophy of education and religion plays in the wider philosophical discipline. The move from the ancient to the modern period in philosophy is also a move away from texts that demonstrated the interrelatedness of, for example, political philosophy and philosophy of education, or political philosophy and moral education. These treatises either housed the different subtopics within one text (Plato's *Republic*), or if they were written as separate treatises, they pointed directly from one to the other (Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Politics*). But in the modern period these treatises on political philosophy, education, metaphysics, and so forth, were produced separately. As a result, ignoring the treatises on education was made easier until they eventually receded into the dusty rooms of libraries, from where they were rarely retrieved.

The philosophers of the modern period saw the relationship one topic had to the others, and we see this most clearly in Rousseau's treatise on education, *Emile*, and Locke's "Letter on Tolerance." However, the result of writing them as discrete essays, particularly with separate treatises on education and religious concerns, was for contemporary scholars to think of these topics not simply as an independent discipline, but also as an insignificant or secondary one.

The irony of this effect is that a pedagogical model like the one Rousseau provides might become a model for education, even though those who are drawn to the child-centered aspects might never subscribe to his political philosophy or even his educational philosophy (and many might not even know he produced either). These same people

might not even be able to draw the links between what they are doing in the classroom and the larger context in which the school exists, were they ever asked to think about what they are doing in the classroom. Thus, not only does philosophy not ask questions about teaching, teachers (pedagogues) no longer ask philosophical questions. This fragmentation encourages the everyday person, including our students, to believe that philosophy and philosophical concerns have no bearing on one's everyday life. The relationship the philosophy of education has to ethics, politics, religion, metaphysics, epistemology, existentialism, authenticity, and the good life has become less apparent. And the issue of subjectivity as it would arise within the teacher-student relation is an issue that has been lost philosophically, within the academy and to some extent in scholarly philosophical writing.⁷

The discipline of philosophy transforms lives; although how and in what ways is not always apparent to us. Philosophy teachers do not simply teach a body of information. Teaching philosophy is not about having students memorize facts or formulas. And although experiences clearly can be life changing, it is more often the reflection on those experiences that does the work of transformation. With its emphasis on reading texts and reflecting on them, philosophy aids one in thinking about his or her life. One need only look at the underlying assumptions in existentialist philosophy and even ancient Greek philosophy to see this point. But more significantly, one would have to ask what we are doing in the university and teaching in the liberal arts if we did not believe that reflecting on texts changes our lives. This transformation occurs both through the content of what we teach and how we teach that content—the two are related.

The famous dictum, "know thyself," commands us to examine our lives, to know who or what we are, and to live our lives accordingly. The expanded phrase "know thyself, mortal," uttered when one enters the temple at Delphi, reminds us that we are to know that we are mortal; that we are not gods or goddesses, not in the technical sense anyway. We are exalted to know our boundaries and our limitations, and we would be engaged in hubris to cross such boundaries.

I suggest here that our experiences are enhanced by our reflection on them. Clearly, we have initial responses to our experiences; but do they not offer us greater meaning, are our lives not better enhanced, when we have reflected on those experiences? And vice versa, are books not more meaningful when we have been somewhere, or we are going somewhere mentioned in a book, when we have actually experienced love, or when our relations with others reflect those described by an author. Is it not the case that books transport us to places we might not otherwise go; do they not ask us to think about the horrors of love, rather than merely its romantic elements; do they not ask us to think about what justice, sexual equality, freedom, beauty, and about good and evil? Do they not ask us to consider human relationships, questions about religion, and the significance, if not the existence, of god? Is it not the role of the university to free the mind so that one can think about these ideas, an activity that was once considered a luxury? And is philosophy not the best discipline to help us perform this task—by its very definition, to engage in this kind of endeavor, even if we are using a piece of literature as the vehicle is to engage with that literature philosophically?

The books that challenge us to think, to wonder, and to reflect also offer an opportunity for us to engage in imaginative variation, and our minds are expanded in ways that we might not otherwise have foreseen. But most of all, it is the life of the mind that is intended to direct us toward that age old Delphic dictum to know thyself taken up by Socrates. For Socrates, the unexamined life was not worth living. Although Socrates might not be the

likely friend of Dewey (one can only guess that after his trial Socrates might not have been a big fan of democracy), is it, nonetheless, not the case, that the unexamined life is anathema to a democracy?

It is therefore difficult for me to think about the future of philosophy without thinking about the role teaching plays in that future. Philosophy is frequently perceived as a solitary and isolating discipline: one takes one's book and goes to his room or to the highest peak of a mountain to read. To the contrary, philosophy is best done as a conversation in a community of those who also wish to learn, an endeavor exemplified in the Talmudic tradition of learning. We often see theories that suggest that reading literature is a vehicle to moral development. And so it might be. But I suggest that this vehicle is useless without a driver—the teacher. The role of the teacher often goes unacknowledged; the teacher is viewed as the disseminator of “academic” information and her role as textual guide is disregarded. Not only does philosophy need to be honest regarding its relationship to religion, but we as teachers need to be honest about the role we play in the classroom, namely, that this role is no more neutral than is the content of the subject matter. We as teachers of undergraduate philosophy students, and certainly of children in pre-college schooling, have an interest (and this is putting it mildly) in the character development of our students. Knowing thyself often implies a hope for the transformation of that self, and the self hoped for is often an ethical self. What then is the relationship between religion, education, and philosophy? Here is where I turn to the question of religion and textual analysis.

Part II: Know Thy Biblical Narratives

If we take seriously my concern that philosophy aims at teaching us to know ourselves while also teaching us to read a text critically, then might we not consider bringing religious texts into the classroom—and here I emphasize the Hebrew Bible. The narratives of the Hebrew Bible lend themselves to engaging with students in a manner that addresses all the concerns I raised previously. First, it allows students to see a “familiar” text in a different light. Let me give an example using the story of Cain and Abel—a familiar story to be sure.

When asked to recite this story, most students have distilled it the point that all they can say about it is that Cain murdered Abel. The issues of jealousy, sibling rivalry, parenting, responsibility, and so forth, have receded from these students minds, if they were ever there in the first place. A closer examination of the text reveals a richness that the students never knew was present. We read the story in class and quite literally examine the story line by line, discovering that there are gaps in the text that require us to refrain from drawing hasty conclusions or snap judgments. The story provides an opportunity for endless discussion, since the interpretations that may emerge from it are inexhaustible.

Second, the gaps that are addressed by the centuries of rabbinic readings, collected under the title midrashim, are especially effective for opening up textual discussion. But more importantly, the biblical narratives have a particular story to tell, even if the conclusions to those stories are left open. And although I cannot prove this claim, I would nonetheless argue that the biblical narratives are unique. There is something about them that pulls us in and requires our attention. There is something in the very narrative itself that demands that we read it carefully. To read the story and not see the gaps is, quite frankly, not to read the story.

Finally, the performative dimension of reading the biblical narrative encourages the development of “character” that we hope to teach. The questioning of others with whom we engage, the humility we develop before the other and before the text, and the dedication to truth rather than to preserving our own idiosyncratic ideologies all point to the kind of character we would hope to find in developing children, adolescents, and young adults. Moreover, the bonds that are formed through this kind of engagement emphasize that this is not simply an intellectual exercise. Rather, the performance of this kind of pedagogical style encourages a learning that takes place on a different level from simply acquiring the information disseminated.⁸ The narratives and the Jewish model of engaging with them focus our attention on human subjectivity—on responsibility to the Other.

Emmanuel Levinas refers to the relationship between philosophy and religion as the Bible and the Greeks, and he refers to this tenuous relationship in several of his writings on Judaism.⁹ Many have noted that his philosophical writings are the performative dimension of what he writes about in the Jewish writings: the translation of the Hebrew into Greek.¹⁰ And it is worth noting that Levinas translates Hebrew into Greek and not vice versa. Levinas subordinates philosophy to religion (Judaism), even though he admits that biblical verse often displays a philosophical accent. For Levinas, philosophy’s subordination to religion coheres with his view that ontology be subordinated to ethics. And thus we can see why he turns to the biblical narratives as illustrations of his philosophical argument.

In Levinas’s view, the biblical commands that enjoin the ‘I’ to respond to the Other exemplify the ethical relationship that one has to another: “Thou shalt not kill”; “Thou shalt love the stranger”; and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The biblical commands require that the ego project out of itself toward the other. The Bible, then, illustrates the origins of human subjectivity: “The Bible teaches us that man is he who loves his neighbor, and that the fact of loving his neighbor is a modality of meaningful life, of a thinking as fundamental--I would say more fundamental--than the knowledge of an object, than truth as knowledge of objects.”¹¹ The Bible renders the Greek necessary because the human begins in religion or, “if you will, the subject begins, starting from its relation, its obligation with regard to the other.”¹² Judaism means, for Levinas, this responsibility to the other, a responsibility that is nontransferable, a surplus of responsibility, a responsibility for the other’s responsibility, a responsibility that is not chosen, but rather that has chosen me. The Bible, Judaism, marks the time of election, the time of chosenness. The Bible reflects the responsibility of a time before memory and before choice itself.¹³

In his interview with François Poirié, Levinas tells us that “Judaism is not the Bible; it is the Bible seen through the Talmud, through the rabbinical wisdom, interrogation, and religious life.”¹⁴ In an interview published under the title “On Jewish Philosophy,” Levinas tells his interlocutor, “it seems to me essential to consider the fact that the Jewish reading of Scripture is carried out in the anxiety, but also the hopeful expectation, of midrash.”¹⁵ Levinas goes on to name Rashi’s commentary in particular as that which brings the CHUMASH to light: “the Pentateuch--Chumash--never comes to light without Rashi.”¹⁶ To approach the Torah Jewishly, then, is precisely to approach it through the rabbinic commentary on it. Thus, midrash keeps the Torah alive by preventing its easy thematization. And it prevents this thematization by posing questions and offering alternative readings of the text.

Talmudic scholar David Stern writes, “[S]ince interest in the midrash was first expressed some fifteen years ago, scholars have been trying to find in midrash an alternative to the various ‘logocentric’ hermeneutical traditions . . . that have dominated Western literary culture since antiquity. As a result, the urge to define the hermeneutics of midrash has

been invested almost from the beginning with a desire to locate in Rabbinic exegesis a hermeneutic embodying Otherness."17 The hermeneutic method involved in midrash demonstrates an interpretative process that allows for polysemy without indeterminacy. Stern offers us one reading of midrash that sees "the interpretation of Torah as a figure or trope standing in for God."18 And he recounts another reading of midrash that claims that the study of Torah—in other words, midrash—is as much a path to holiness as is following Halakhah. Levinas echoes this point when he tells us, "[I]t is worth noting that the study of the commandments--the study of the Torah, that is, resumption of the rabbinical dialectic--is equal in religious value to actually carrying them out. It is as if, in this study, man were in mystical contact with the divine will itself."19

The interpretative model of midrash is similar to Levinas's saying insofar as the saying is an excess, that which lies beyond the said. In Levinas's words, the saying opens me to the other.20 The saying expresses the infinite of the other person. Philosophy, then, is derivative of religion because it is what allows us to take the ethical message of Judaism and project it into a universal language. This is why I emphasize the "Jewish" model of reading the Bible, and why I suggest that it be incorporated into philosophy. This view is not unlike Levinas's own view expressed in "For a Jewish Humanism."21

Levinas rehearses the feelings of those who are concerned that learning Hebrew is learning yet another language and that the Jewish school represents a return to the confessional school.22 But Levinas's position is far more radical. He believes that the "teaching of Hebrew and the Jewish school that ought to see such teaching as its principle vocation in no way betray the ideals of the secular school, and that the study of Hebrew itself lends support to what can today give a meaning to Judaism. It lends support to the Jewish humanism which cannot remain indifferent to the modern world in which it seeks a whole humanity."23 Certainly, Levinas was advocating Jewish education to a segment of the Jewish community who wanted to continue to believe in the ideals of the secular school. Nonetheless, the very concepts he sees in Jewish education that are not in conflict with the ideals of the secular school are precisely those same concepts that should transfer to the secular, or public, school. As Levinas reflects, "The Hebrew language and the texts, to which it is substantially linked and which are revealed only through it, is the vehicle for a difficult wisdom concerned with truths that correlate to virtues. This wisdom is as necessary as the Greco- Roman legacy. Laid down in the Hebrew Bible, the Mishnah and the Gemara, this civilization built on justice unfolds in science."24

The midrash is not simply rabbinic commentary on the Torah. Because of the problems inherent in the Biblical Hebrew—for example, the absence of punctuation and vowels (although there are vowel aspirations)—midrash exposes the problems while providing only a "plain" reading of the narrative. But midrash is not simply a tool for reading a story. The Bible is a holy text, and the rabbis believe that through midrash, that is, through their interpretative process, the holy voice of God as alterity opens itself up to us. Levinas also holds this view. Midrash opens up the voices in the Torah that are muted in the text, either because they are explicitly absent from the narrative structure or because the narrative structure lacks clarity. Midrash lifts these voices out of the text and then brings them to bear on the narrative. By enabling our access to these others, midrash brings us closer to the ethical and, thus, closer to God. While I am not proposing that we introduce a conventional notion of God into the public schools, I am proposing that we expose our students to the idea of alterity—to other voices and especially to the idea that there are voices in the text and in the world that are often muted if not outright silenced.

In "Antihumanism and Education" Levinas claims the following:

It is not because the Western Jews detached themselves from Judaism that Jewish education became deprived of meaning; it is because Jewish education submitted itself in advance to the humanities that Judaism became conscious again of having certainly played a part in the birth of values which had fallen into the public domain and been embellished by European culture, but also of no longer representing anything of current affairs.”²⁵

In other words, the so-called secular humanism that many secularists advance, even advance within the context of public school, is actually Jewish at its very core. Thus, ironically, it appears that religion has nothing unique to offer, since it has already been taken up into the very values of the culture—even if disguised in a secular mask.

So rather than recoil in horror that a religious text might be introduced into a so-called secular environment, we might want to consider what this introduction could offer. Again, I am not suggesting that we proselytize; nor am I suggesting that we ask children in public schools to keep kosher or to pray. To move in this direction would, in fact, be antithetical to Judaism itself. Judaism’s “theology” does not include dogmatism. Judaism does not focus on what one believes but rather on how one acts. Thus, the significance of the 613 commandments is important for those who want to practice Judaism. Nonetheless, its focus on action should not be underestimated with regard to pedagogical efficacy. Thus, I am suggesting that we introduce students to a kind of reading that will increase sensitivity to others rather than encouraging their numbness. Additionally, we must admit, just like philosophy must admit, that even public schools have at least an ambivalent relationship to religion. As long as there is discussion about teaching values, we must admit that there is a religious discourse implicit in classroom activity. I argue for this “Jewish” approach to reading because Judaism divides ethical behavior from religious behavior. Observant Jews are required to uphold 613 commandments. But Judaism recognizes that there are multiple paths to God, holiness, and righteousness. And it recognizes that while some may choose to be Jews, ethical behavior—treating others in a certain manner—is required of everyone, regardless of his/her religious beliefs. One does not need to choose Judaism in the strict sense of it as a religion in order to be ethically accountable. The Jewish religion explicitly acknowledges righteous behavior and responsibility that is separate from the practice of Judaism as such. And so I would argue that this “Jewish” way of reading is compatible with the aims of public education.²⁶

Conclusion

I often vacillate in my belief that philosophy is elitist. In one sense, it is elitist; not everyone can do it nor can everyone do it well. Why should we think that philosophy is any less technical or demanding than medicine, law, or physics? It has its own set of questions that motivate it as a discipline; it has its own language; and it has its own history and subject matter. Nonetheless, in spite of my belief that not everyone will be able to do philosophy well, I do believe that it is a “good thing” for everyone to be exposed to it. While it might not be possible to make all of philosophy comprehensible, certainly it is the case that some element of it can be made accessible, or at least appealing, to those who might not make a career out of it. Certainly the modes of questioning and reading that philosophy promotes can be gleaned as pedagogically useful. If we cannot accomplish this task, what are we to say of ethical decision making and critical thinking, especially for those who choose careers outside of the academy such as business, medicine, and law? What are we to say about the future of democracy?

I suggest that the future of philosophy means a return to one of its original objectives: to know thyself. I propose that philosophy's future be thought in terms of negotiating the tension between its appeal to the elite (and therefore its apparent exclusivity) and its usefulness to the ordinary citizen. I recommend that we not only take philosophy to school—the university and K-12 school—but that we also bring along the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. By placing religion within the context of philosophy and by placing both within the context of primary education, we would be compelled to ask after the role of education within the context of society and even our political life: for what purpose are we educating? We would create the habits of thinking and reflecting that would become an integral part of every person's life. And this kind of teaching would demand that teachers reflect on their own place in the classroom.

Moreover, these young people would become accustomed to discussing topics that are now relegated only to philosophy classrooms in the university and Sunday school lessons in their church, synagogue, or other house of worship. By using biblical narratives within the context of philosophy, the motivations for using these narratives would be kept in check—just as one hopes that philosophical discourse is not used to coerce students (one might have to rename this activity something other than philosophical discourse), the narratives would be used to accomplish the pedagogical aim of encouraging students to think deeper, longer, and with more sensitivity. This activity should preclude anyone from saying, “But the Bible says....” as a means to convey the absolute truth of a moral lesson.

How different might the world be if we could engage our younger students in a higher level of discourse regarding ethics, politics, religion, friendship, and love? Of course I cannot prove, nor do I necessarily want to claim, that the future of philosophy as a discipline depends on the “masses” learning to reflect in their everyday life. But I would suggest nonetheless that philosophy turn its attention to children, who are in many ways more open to what it has to offer.

I realize that my claim that philosophy should meet religion is controversial (philosophers are not known, generally, for their enthusiasm towards religion). And I realize it is even more controversial to suggest that the two should meet in what is viewed as a secular educational environment where children are involved—neither philosophy nor religion has been welcome here. I am not suggesting that we introduce proselytizing into the classroom. Rather, I am suggesting that we take seriously the fundamental relationship that philosophy has to religion. Instead of bracketing these questions, or pretending that philosophy is not motivated by them, we should allow them to surface in the classroom, not for the purposes of criticizing them so that we can finally put them rest; nor for the purposes of using them to coerce students into accepting certain religious beliefs. Rather, philosophy teachers need to acknowledge that these questions and concerns motivate much of the philosophy that we currently teach, from ancient philosophy to modern philosophy to American philosophy to contemporary European philosophy.

Questions about ethics, metaphysics, and politics cannot be divorced from religion and religious commitments. To do so is either to make them so abstract that the questions and the answers may in fact become meaningless or to ignore that there is a veiled religious component already assumed in the discussion. The midrashic tradition in Judaism keeps alive the text and the questions it raises. When approached through this tradition, the Biblical narratives teach us how to read carefully, critically, and sensitively. Is this literacy not what we want from students, who we hope will participate in the democratic process?

I realize the potential irony in my claim that it is Levinas, or a Levinasian approach to education, that will enable us to “know thyself.” Yet, one might say, this makes sense. My claim is that a particular approach to the biblical narratives increases or encourages attunement and sensitivity to other voices—and to the voice of the other. And this is the expression of the ethical subject that Levinas has in mind. Thus, the “self” in the know thyself is an ethical self, a self that comes into being through responsibility to the other.

The process of questioning that we find particularly in the Talmudic tradition is intended not simply to teach students to question in order to find the “right” answers, although certainly this is one aim. Rather the Jewish tradition recognizes something unique about the journey one takes in the educational process. The questioning between the two study partners requires each participant to admit that there is always something more to be known. This process intends to develop humility and a certain integrity regarding truth. Certainly, it is intended that the partners develop respect for each other in addition to building a close bond of friendship. How might the schools be different if we adopted a social model such as this one rather than continuing the anti-social model of desks lined up, one behind the other, or, desks organized to make a large table, but the children are told not to talk to each other?²⁷ Might we not benefit more if we encouraged their inclination to be social and taught them how to be social? Might we not have a different world if the very way in which they learned was structured around developing bonds with each other, rather than taking already social creatures, placing them in a social environment, punishing them for being social—and then wondering why they kill each other?

And so I close with a quote the following quote from the novel *The Reader*. In the novel *The Reader* a father is asked by his son whether it was better to do what he thought was in someone’s best interests, against the wishes of the individual. The father replied that even with children, how far one can act in this manner is a real problem. “It is,” he says, “a philosophical problem, but philosophy does not concern itself with children. It leaves them to pedagogy, where they’re not in very good hands. Philosophy has forgotten about children.” It is with this last sentiment that I end my paper. The future of philosophy may be secure. But what form it will take and what it will be able to offer us may very well depend on whether it can be more honest about its relationship to religion. Its future will depend on how well we can teach our children