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Claire Katz

THE NECESSITY AND LIMITS OF THINKING FOR ONESELF[1]

Abstract
The status of Emmanuel Levinas's essays on Judaism with regard to his larger philosophical work has long been at issue. Central to those essays is a set of writings on Jewish education that Levinas penned while the Director of the ENIO*—from 1946 into the early 1980's. In these essays, Levinas argues not only for the new ethical subjectivity that he describes in works like* Totality and Infinity*, but also confides in his readers how this subject is to be cultivated: through a robust Jewish education. The primary question, then, that guides this essay: "Why does Levinas turn specifically to Jewish education?," an education that includes the Jewish sacred texts? Is it not the case, in light of certain beliefs about the humanities exerting a humanizing influence that a humanities education can accomplish the task of cultivating humanity in the way that Levinas hopes? This essay begins with a general discussion of the "crisis" in the humanities and then turns to Levinas's views on education, Judaism, and assimilation in order to situate these views within his larger philosophical work.*

In a 1966 radio interview published as *Education after Auschwitz*, the critical theorist, Theodor Adorno declares, "the premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again… The only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection. But since according to the findings of depth psychology, all personalities, even those who commit atrocities in later life, are formed in early childhood, education seeking to prevent the repetition must concentrate upon early childhood."[2] Adorno's comments, made in response to the atrocities of the Holocaust, imply that barbarism is not something that poses merely a threat of a relapse. Rather, Adorno insists, Auschwitz was the relapse. Adorno's solution lies in creating an environment that will prevent another Auschwitz by cultivating individuals who can resist authoritarian thinking.

Around the same time period, responding to questions about her phrase, "the banality of evil," the political philosopher, Hannah Arendt replies, "The banality of evil," is not a slogan—she is the first to use this phrase[3]. She uses this term to convey that there is no depth to evil; it defies thought. When one tries to penetrate evil, there is nothing. Only

[1] My thanks to Indiana University Press for permission to reprint some of the originally published material in C. KATZ, *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2013.
[2] T.L.W. ADORNO, *Education After Auschwitz*, in ID., *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, transl. H.W. Pickford, Columbia University Press, New York 1998, pp. 191-204.
[3] See H. ARENDT, *The Jewish Writings: Hannah Arendt*, ed. J. Kohn and R.H. Feldman, Schocken, New York 2007.

the good, she says, has depth. What she sees in Eichmann while observing him during his trial is a man who cannot think for himself—he appears no different than a programmed robot or a trained monkey.

Briefly returning to her concern about one's ability to think for one's self, Arendt responds to an interviewer's question about the Jewish response to her book that she is not concerned with public opinion, and indeed public opinion has a way of stifling individual opinions. She recalls the Founding Fathers who equated rule based on public opinion with tyranny, and we see a similar view advanced by the 19th century British philosopher, John Stuart Mill who argued in *On Liberty* that we needed to guard against the tyranny of the majority. Indeed, her need to defend herself against the Jewish community that vehemently criticized her for voicing her analysis speaks to this point.

Later in the interview she responds to the criticism of her term "banality of evil," by again stating that those who commit evil have no depth. They are thought-less. She suggests "we resist evil by not being swept away by the surface of things, by stopping ourselves and beginning to think—that is, by reaching another dimension than the horizon of everyday life" (p. 479). The more superficial someone is—and by this Arendt means, the less someone thinks for himself—the more likely he is to commit evil, or to be co-opted by a machinery that is evil. She points to Eichmann precisely because at each turn he would say, "Who am I to judge… if all around me think it right to murder innocent people?" For Arendt, this statement becomes the example par excellence of the unthinking, the superficial, the banality of evil. How can one utter those words and not see the problem with that sentence?

It might seem obvious that the way to prevent evil is by thinking—more thinking, and more thinking for oneself. But is that really enough to prevent evil? Like Arendt's argument, Adorno's argument is compelling but I would add that resistance to authoritarian thinking will not by itself mitigate the danger that he fears. Although the critical thinking that Adorno advocates may help someone resist authoritarian thinking, and although thinking for oneself might be necessary to separate oneself from the herd, thinking for oneself will not necessarily provide one with good moral judgment nor will it necessarily provide the will or the motivation to act on such thinking. Critical thinking alone will not help someone become a person who resists authoritarian rule. Adorno's prescription is necessary but I do not believe it is sufficient. His warning nonetheless echoes the concerns that the 20th century French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas began voicing soon after he was released from the German POW camp in 1945. I will return to this point later.

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If the question, "How does one develop ethically?," occupies much of moral education, the more specific question, "How does someone develop so that they turn toward the suffering of another?," haunts Emmanuel Levinas's ethical project. The question, then, that guides this essay: "Why does Levinas turn specifically to Jewish education?," an education that includes the Jewish sacred texts? Is it not the case, in light of certain beliefs about the humanities exerting a humanizing influence that a humanities education

can accomplish the task of cultivating humanity in the way that Levinas hopes[4]? Is it not the case that Shakespeare's writings could just as easily replace the Jewish sacred texts?

Our current debates about the humanities and humanistic education return us to a more basic question about the aim of education: What is the role education plays in the cultivation of a self, and more specifically, in the cultivation of a moral self? James L. Jarrett's 1973 book, *The Humanities and Humanistic Education*, opens with an exploration of the crisis of the humanities. In this case, the sciences, feeling underprivileged and undervalued, were beginning to bear down on the humanities. The criticisms of the humanities Jarrett rehearses in 1973, the height of the explosion of university education, could easily be printed today without a date and no one would blink. Jarrett's book should be a signal that as academics many of us are nostalgic for a time when we believe the humanities were never under siege—but this is indeed nostalgia. Each epoch sees itself as "in crisis"—not recognizing that there has not been a time when the humanities have ever enjoyed unfettered respect, admiration, and support. We need only recall how Socrates's illustrious philosophical career ended to realize that when one asks too many questions, one might be invited to leave the community.

Responding to the current debates surrounding the humanities, Frank Donoghue, an English professor at Ohio State University, traces the roots of the corporate model of education back to the turn of the 20th century, the rise of industrialization, and the increased power attained by those with wealth. [*The Last Professors: the Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*] It was not long before the newly moneyed were exerting power and influence over university education, while simultaneously expressing their suspicion of the very education they were funding. As Donoghue's analysis shows, education that did not aim to produce anything, that is humanities education, was rejected in favor or something—anything—utilitarian.

Within the first six months of 2010, a flurry of books on education—addressing both primary and higher education—emerged with the goal of telling us precisely where in fact we have gone wrong and what we should do now. A survey of these books appeared in Stanley Fish's blog entry on June 10th, 2010, titled, *A Classical Education: Back to the Future*[5]. Fish begins his piece by reminiscing about his high school ring, which

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[4] Martha Nussbaum makes this point in several of her books, most recently *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*.

[5] See S. FISH, *A Classical Education: Back to the Future*, "New York Times", http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/07/a-classical-education-back-to-the-future/, accessed June 7, 2010, and June 22, 2010. In his essay, *Deep in the Heart of Texas*, published two weeks later, Fish responds to a set of "reforms" proposed by the Texas A&M Board of Regents. For example, the Regents complained that faculty act as though the colleges and universities belong to them, and they therefore criticize faculty who write articles that seem of use only to their academic peers. In response to this complaint, Fish writes: "That is what academic research is all about: highly qualified scholars working on problems that may have no practical payoff except the unquantifiable payoff of advancing our understanding of something in philosophy or nature that has long been a mystery." See S. FISH, *Deep in the Heart of Texas*, "New York Times", http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/21/deep-in-the-heart-of-texas/, accessed June 21, 2010.

My point in citing this particular passage has less to do with the attack to which Fish responds—though the attack is dangerous to academia and Fish's response is spot on. Instead, my point is that Fish's position has changed over the years and where he once would argue that there is no discernible

he had worn for nearly forty years. His reminiscence was, in part, tied to attending his fifty-fifth high school reunion a few weekends before writing this entry. In this piece, Fish recalls the curriculum of the high school he attended, appropriately named, Classical High School. As the name suggests, its curriculum was based on a classical education. And lest anyone protest that such an education was only for rich, privileged white males, Fish quickly contests this point with his statement that his classmates comprised all walks of life—including children of non-English-speaking immigrants.

The three books that Fish surveys are Martha Nussbaum's *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Diane Ravitch's *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, and Leigh Bortins' *The Core: Teaching Your Child Foundations of Classical Education*. To their credit, all three books are thoughtful, and Ravitch in particular is to be commended for publicly admitting that her previous views on education were mistaken. Where Bortins and Ravitch focus on the primary grades, Nussbaum's book complements them by focusing on the connection that higher education, specifically one focused on the humanities, has to pre-college schooling. Most importantly, as Fish points out, what they all share is a focus on teaching and learning, and not testing and assessment, and all those other words that have become the vocabulary of administrators at all levels of education[6].

With regard to the question of humanities education and its relationship to the cultivation of character and the development of civic responsibility, we find, on one side of the debate, Hannah Arendt, who argues that education is not political and is not intended to effect change[7]. Rather, its aim is to introduce the child into the world in which he or she is born thus enabling that child to participate in the public sphere when she is an adult. The role of a classical education then is to introduce the child to those

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value in the humanities but the pleasure one gets from partaking in it, this current position is closer to my own—that there is value but it is not a value as we understand it in simple terms of commodity and exchange. See also M. BÉRUBÉ, *The Science Wars Redux*, "Democracy: A Journal of Ideas", 19 (2011), http://www.democracyjournal.org/19/6789.php, accessed January 6, 2011; D. BROOKS, *History for Dollars*, "New York Times", http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/08/opinion/08brooks.html?_r=1, accessed June 7, 2010; S. FISH, *The Crisis of the Humanities Officially Arrives*, "New York Times", http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/11/the-crisis-of-the-humanities-officially-arrives/, accessed October 7, 2010; and S. HEAD, *The Grim Threat to British Universities*, "New York Review of Books", http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/jan/13/grim-threat-british-universities/?pagination=false, accessed January 13, 2011.

[6] I recognize that for the most part, education in the primary grades has a different set of goals than those viewed as part of higher education and I realize that the conversation can quickly become confused if we conflate these very different kinds of education. Yet, it is worth considering education theoretically, regardless of its level. It is worth noting that while the aims of pre-college education might differ from its higher education counterpart, the two are nonetheless intimately related. Often that which drives higher education influences how pre-college curricula are structured.

We can argue about why this is the case—e.g., that public school and higher education are accountable to different constituencies, most notably, the taxpayer who demands to see "something" for his or her money. As any educator of classical education will state, a classical education produces something that precisely cannot be seen or easily assessed.

[7] Colleges of liberal arts, indeed even some particular programs (e.g., see how Women's and Gender Studies programs describe themselves), prominently display the word "leadership" in the description of the education they provide their students.

traditions and ideas that inform the world in which the child now lives. Although Arendt's political philosophy is often viewed as unclassifiable by conventional categories in political theory, having positioned herself against progressive education, her own view of education is decidedly conservative.

The other side of the debate is represented most clearly by Martha Nussbaum in her 2010 book, *Not for Profit*, tellingly subtitled, *Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Where Arendt believed that education was not intended to mold in any particular fashion, Nussbaum takes up the mantle of progressive education and deploys it to promote an educational project that she believes will create more people who are better suited to participate as democratic citizens. For her, this means creating more people who will live with each other in mutual respect and fewer people who will seek comfort in domination[8].

1. *Education and the Public Space*

In her 1956 essay, *The Crisis in Education*, Hannah Arendt offers a challenging critique of progressive education and in so doing she explores this fundamental question: Is education political[9]? Focusing on primary education, Arendt believes progressive education is founded on several confusions, each resulting in succession from the previous one. Although progressive education's child centered approach is a response to a previous confusion whereby children were thought to be little adults, the pedagogy that progressive education offers is just as pernicious. Arendt's critique of progressive education emerges from the way she answers the question, "Is education political?"

It would not only be impossible, but also an injustice, to sum up John Dewey's philosophy of education, and in particular his magnum opus, *Democracy and Education*, in only a few pages[10]. It would nonetheless be helpful to consider several prominent themes that run throughout his work in education before exploring Arendt's critique. In particular, Dewey focuses on the respective roles of the teacher and the student's peers, the creation of habit and moral education, and the relationship between past and present. Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, first published in 1916, contains the details of

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[8] There is large and ever growing literature on this topic. The collection, *Debating Moral Education: Rethinking the Role of the Modern University*, stands out as particularly good. See E. KISS and J.P. EUBEN (eds.), *Debating Moral Education: Rethinking the Role of the Modern University*, Duke University Press, Durham 2010. In particular, the essays by Stanley Fish and Ruth W. Grant. See S. FISH, *I know it when I see it: A reply to Kiss and Euben*, pp. 76-91 and R.W. GRANT, *Is Humanistic Education Humanizing?*, pp. 283-295. See also P. EUBEN, *Hannah Arendt on Politicizing the University and Other Clichés*, in M. GORDON (ed.), *Renewing Our Common World: Hannah Arendt and Education*, Westview, Boulder 2001, pp. 175-199.

[9] H. ARENDT, *The Crisis in Education*, in EAD., *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Viking Press, New York 1968. I have addressed Arendt's critique of progressive education in my essay, '*The presence of the Other is a presence that teaches': Levinas, Pragmatism, and Pedagogy*, "The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy", 14 (1-2/2006), pp. 91-108. For contemporary essays on Arendt's essay and on thinking about Arendt in relationship to questions concerning education, see M. GORDON (ed.), *Renewing Our Common World*. See also the work of Natasha Levinson, Aaron Schutz, and Wendy Kohli.

[10] J. DEWEY, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Free Press, New York 1916.

his educational project.

In the last section of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey sums up his theory of morals thus: "Discipline, culture, social efficiency, personal refinement, improvement of character are but phases of the growth of capacity nobly to share in such a balanced experience. And education is not a mere means to such a life. Education is such a life. To maintain capacity of such education is the essence of morals."[11] This view of education, which repeatedly characterizes education not in terms of the content learned but rather in terms of the processes by which it is learned, permeates his work in the philosophy of education. For Dewey, habit, which is the key to education, does not mean that our activities simply become rote and thoughtless. Rather, they become the means by which we form certain predispositions, which then enable us to act more easily in the future[12]. The wider the group of experiences and the greater the context and connections in which to have these experiences allows habit to be interrupted by the novel—to be able to see the significance of something new as something new[13].

Dewey's conception of how habits are formed, while being the most significant part of his educational philosophy is also the part that is either ignored or misinterpreted. In spite of these problems of application, Dewey's focus on practice is the most compelling part of his educational theory. Contrary even to current models of teaching morals, ethics, and character, Dewey argues that one must practice these behaviors if one is going to cultivate them. Moral behavior is not learned through catechism; nor is it learned by reading posters on the school walls that have the words "honesty," "patriotism," and "fidelity" emblazoned on them[14]. Not unlike the educators who preceded him, leading all the way back to Aristotle, Dewey believes that the character we develop is the character that is practiced.

We see, then, how he arrives at his view that democracy and education have a reciprocal and mutual relationship—democracy is dependent on an educated populous if it is to function effectively; conversely, if democracy is not *practiced* within the context of schooling, all the "education" or knowledge learned in and out of schools will not enable an individual to become a participating citizen in a democracy[15]. For Dewey, democracy is not a structure that exists outside of the individual. Rather, it is an attitude or a disposition that one inhabits. More importantly, as stated above, education is not a means to moral development, or rather a means to moral behavior; it *is* moral. The very act of engaging with others, the social dimension of education, necessarily makes the process of education moral. This is why, for Dewey, to disengage education from its social dimension is to undermine the very nature of education.

Long hailed as the "father of progressive education," Dewey lived long enough to see

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[11] J. DEWEY, *Democracy and Education*, pp. 359-360.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., pp. 340-341. One can see the influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.* The *phronemos* cultivates *phronesis,* or practical wisdom, through experience—and indeed through friendship, which allows even someone who is already practically wise to gain still more insight into possible ways to act.

[14] Though not as simplistic as the points I just mentioned, Kant's philosophy of education does focus more the intellectual model than on a model that focuses on practice. See *The Metaphysics of Morals* and *On Education.*

[15] J. DEWEY, *Philosophy of Education*, Littlefield-Adams & Co., Totowa 1971, p. 34.

a complete perversion of these ideas in their implementation. Most of the criticisms of progressive education, including those put forth by Arendt, are more relevant to the implementation of progressive education than to Dewey's vast writings on it. This faulty implementation encouraged critics of progressive education, who continue to have no shortage of complaints, including an accusation that the curriculum lacks any content and is morally bankrupt. For example, twenty-two years after *Democracy and Education*, Dewey published *Experience and Education*, which provides a detailed but succinct description of progressive education. His response in this book addresses not only the critics of progressive education, but also the progressive educators who have misinterpreted and inaccurately implemented his philosophy. Additionally, this concise book reads like it anticipated the criticisms advanced by Arendt and thus provides direct responses to the array of criticisms Arendt offered[16].

Within these pages, Dewey takes up the question of the "old and the new" with regard to the question of tradition and content, one of Arendt's main targets. He states very clearly, and logically, that tradition has a place in progressive education. He never held the position that his curriculum should ignore tradition, the past, or "books." Specifically, he never intended for teachers not to know anything, which by definition would mean they have no authority in the classroom, and certainly no authority with regard to matters of the intellect or creativity. Rather, Dewey's focus was on *how* material is taught. His view was not an Either/Or philosophy of education: either we have tradition, and books, and a knowledge base, which requires students to sit in their seats and read books in order to accomplish this task; or, we let children roam around the room not really learning anything, but developing the desire to learn and dabbling in an interest here and interest there. The first view insists that to know anything, to be an expert, is to read books. The implication is that while students might know more facts, they will not have really learned anything. The second view argues that while students might be experiencing more, we are developing nothing more than a generation of dilettantes. The war between theory and practice being played out on the educational battlefield appears to arrive at an impasse. Dewey's view quite simply put, but more difficult to implement, as the history of the contemporary public school has shown, is that it is not enough that children learn a certain body of material; rather, they need to have their whole disposition toward learning habituated to want to learn more, to see how learning one thing naturally leads to learning something else, and those connections should be encouraged and pursued[17].

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[16] J. DEWEY, *Experience and Education*, Collier Books, New York 1938.

[17] Contrary to how he has been viewed by his critics, Dewey's philosophy of education is not anti-intellectual. Rather than being empty of content, Dewey's philosophy of education emphasized even more content—seeing an allusion in a poem should prompt a student not only to look up the word in a dictionary but explore its origins, for example the mythological tale from which it was taken. Teachers need to be trained not only to encourage more learning, to keep students' interests alive, but also in a discipline, if not many disciplines—teachers need to be able to see these connections, have intellectual material available to them, and be thoughtful, reasonable thinkers. They need to be able to encourage their students to pursue their interests and insights. Their authority needs to be grounded precisely in knowing something. To counter the conservative claim that just as roaming around a classroom does not mean children are developing habits to learn freely, Dewey would argue that neither does sitting still in a chair with mouths closed mean children are learning any more facts, reading any more

Returning to the 1956 essay, Arendt's principal criticism of progressive education develops from her position that children are born into a world and it is the responsibility of both the parents and the teachers (read as the educational system) to educate these children about *this* world, not the world it might be in the future. We have a responsibility to the children and to the future world not to imagine for these children what the world might be but rather to let the world unfold. Contrary to the view that education is political—and progressive—Arendt believes education is conservative, in the most literal sense of this term. Her argument for this position lies in her view of natality and action[18].

Education, according to Arendt, lies in the gap between past and future; its goal is to enable the future by teaching about the present (which includes the past). Without knowledge of the world in which they live and the past that influenced the coming about of this world, children and then adults are in no position to effect change. We, as parents and teachers, must take responsibility for this world, even if it is not the world that we created and even if we wish it were different from what it is. Children are new, but they are born into an old world. To educate them about the possible new world, and not this old world, is ironically to close off their possibilities—for it is already to imagine the new world and educate them in this limited way, for this one possible world. Thus, Arendt argues, in spite of being motivated by change, and inspired to make the world a better place, progressive education, ironically, promotes a fascist educational system, one directed by a particular ideology for a particular future[19]. For Arendt, then, education is not about action, nor is it about the creation of the novel—the new. These are reserved for the public space, which for her does not characterize the classroom.

Arendt's view of the relationship between education and the political is counter-intuitive, but compelling nonetheless. Although she sees politics as progressive, education for her is conservative, since it preserves the past and teaches about the present. Without knowledge of the world in which they live and the past that influenced the coming about of this world, children and then adults are in no position to effect change. In Arendt's analysis, although progressive education delineates between a child's

efficiently, or becoming more thoughtful.

In spite of my brief defense of Dewey's philosophy of education against its detractors, there remain significant concerns that need to be addressed and here Arendt's criticisms are helpful.

[18] See A. SCHUTZ, *Is Political Education an Oxymoron? Hannah Arendt's Resistance to Public Spaces in Schools*, in S. RICE (ed.), *Philosophy of Education 2001*, Philosophy of Education Society, Urbana 2002, pp. 324-332, http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/pes/article/download/1913/624, accessed January 25, 2014; N. LEVINSON, *Hannah Arendt on the Relationship Between Education and Political Action* [a reply to Schutz], in S. RICE (ed.), *Philosophy of Education 2001*, pp. 333-336, http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/pes/article/download/1914/625, accessed January 25, 2014; N. LEVINSON, *Beginning Again: Teaching, Natality and Social Transformation*, in F. MARGONIS (ed.), *Philosophy of Education 1996*, Philosophy of Education Society, Urbana 1997, pp. 241-251, http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/pes/article/download/2271/965, accessed May 19, 2008.

[19] We find elements of this ideology in contemporary models of democratic education, and indeed this point was made in response to Nussbaum's book, *Not for Profit.* To promote a particular set of values, though not inherently wrong, undermines the main thrust behind a democratic society governing itself, namely, the pluralism of that society. I would be more inclined to label this "moral character" or "moral education" rather than "democratic education." And here we come full circle and arrive back at our question about what education, or in this case, schooling, is intended to accomplish.

world and an adult's world, this separation nonetheless has the dangerous effect of essentially leaving children to their own devices. Teachers, she concludes, are no longer the authority in the classroom. Worse, she observes, the tyranny of the "child" majority can often be more tyrannical than the absolute authority of the adult teacher[20]. This confusion over "who's in charge" led to a similar confusion in the public and private spheres, where education, by virtue of the state mandate surrounding it, pushed schools, education, and childhood into a political realm. She argues that the privacy needed for children to grow and mature, relatively undisturbed, has been compromised by this thrust into the public arena[21].

Arendt's definition of the public space reveals that we are required simultaneously to take risks and to engage in self-restraint. She observes that the latter has the potential to stymie growth. Education should remain a private space in which this self-restraint is not required. One can see the insight in Arendt's claim, even if one might disagree with the extreme position. As Arendt sees it, in order for the public space to work, the participants must be willing to allow their honest opinions to come to the fore and be assessed openly by everyone participating in that space. Those who are involved in intimate relationships with others with whom they also participate politically must be willing to set aside the intimate relationship and engage the other person with the kind of respect that would allow the other to share his/her political position. This entails a continued negotiation of the self that occupies both a personal or private space and a

[20] In a recent conversation with the parent of one of my daughter's friends, I lamented the sorry experience that my daughter was having in school. Her teachers for the previous school year had been smart, funny, and wise. A rare set of traits in anyone. This present year, her teachers seem not to exhibit any of these traits. To say that my daughter's experience in school has been frustrating would be an understatement. The other parent's response was that this was just another opportunity for rebellion, to assert one's own individual identity. I understood the point and the motivation for the response: sometimes one has to see the positive in these experiences or it becomes too easy to despair. However, my reply was that I did not think all of childhood should have to be a series of rebellions, that some places need to be safe spaces where a positive expression of oneself was allowed. One should be able to formulate a positive expression of identity not only an expression as a negation of something else. I think that this is especially true of a child's experience in school. For this reason I am closer to Hannah Arendt's views about school than I would otherwise probably admit.

I bring up this discussion because this is precisely why the school needs to be a safe place for learning and not another site for rebellion, for having to assert one's independence, especially when the risk is simply too great. Arendt talks about the safety of the classroom precisely because she views the school—and education—as apolitical. As such, students should not be placed in a position where they are put at risk nor should they be put in a position where they must take these risks. I have disagreements with Arendt's position and I will explore those in more detail, but her claim opens up the question about the relationship that education has to the larger society in which it is situated.

[21] One need look only to celebrities in our current culture to confirm Arendt's point—Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, et al. Arendt herself noted the children of celebrities—though we now have celebrities who are children themselves. I can only imagine the horror that Arendt would express at the proliferation of "public" space that enables very young children to expose themselves to the entire world via the internet. If we recall the new ways that bullying now manifests itself on the internet, we can begin to understand what Arendt means by the need to protect the privacy of young children and not expose them to the political—the public space—so early in their development. For a wonderful video that explores this particular point, see: *Hannah Arendt reads from 'The Crisis in Education'*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouj5fklnzks, accessed September 25, 2011.

public space.

Arendt fears that this kind of negotiation is too complex and potentially too dangerous for school-age children who would need to negotiate the selves they are as friends with the selves they might be if engaged politically. The light of the "public eye" on a self that is still developing as a personal self might be too much to bear for a young child or even a young adult. A brief look at the history of the child star, or the children of famous people, supports Arendt's point. Continually placed in the public's view, many of these children never develop into flourishing adults. Even an unscientific poll would confirm that children often keep very honest opinions to themselves if they fear those opinions might set them apart from their peers or open them (personally or intellectually) to ridicule, thus validating Arendt's two-fold view that children recognize their peers can be more tyrannical than the adults and that in turn, the classroom does not provide the safe space needed for children to exercise their political views.

As a result of her observation, Arendt's view of education is paradoxically both optimistic and pessimistic. On the one hand, her optimistic view that self-restraint is *not* required in education, contradicts not only many of our personal experiences with education but also her own goal of education as a kind of cultivation[22]. She argues in her account of freedom that it is in the public space that an individual often discovers what one is capable of, acting in ways that were not predicted. Is this not the case in education also? Do we not discover who we are and what we believe when we participate in discussions that require us to take intellectual risks? On the other hand, her pessimistic view that making education a public space would stymie growth runs counter to the progressive view that specifically endorses individual growth and development, via the pursuit of one's own interests, ideas, and activities. It also runs counter to the progressive view that the "public" is learned or practiced[23]. Instead, we might note that education provides an opportunity for a diverse set of equal individuals, not between the student and teacher, but among the students themselves to be given a voice.

It is not clear that Dewey would entirely disagree with Arendt's concerns. However, he would probably ask Arendt the following question: how can we expect adults to have the capacity to think creatively, to solve problems, to relate to their peers respectfully and forcefully, if we do not allow them to create these practices through the educational process beginning in childhood[24]? In other words, if freedom is defined as spontaneity and unpredictability, it is then positioned against a view of freedom that would emerge because the agent acts from a self that has been cultivated with certain habits and a set of choices. What then does it mean to be a self who is free, if at the end of the day, the way we act is not within our control? The kind of freedom that Arendt presses recalls the radical freedom of existentialism, one that is paradoxically so free that it is "unfree"

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[22] One of Arendt's arguments against turning education into a public space is that we must practice self-restraint in public or political spaces. This would have the effect of stymieing education. Here I think Arendt is a bit out of touch if she believes that children in American education do not need to practice self-restraint, independent of the question of progressive education.

[23] See A. SCHUTZ's lovely essay, *Contesting Utopianism: Hannah Arendt and the Tensions of Democratic Education*, in M. GORDON (ed.), *Renewing Our Common World: Hannah Arendt and Education*, pp. 93-125.

[24] S. SMITH offers an insightful discussion of this point in her essay, *Education for Judgment: An Arendtian Oxymoron?*, in M. GORDON (ed.), *Renewing Our Common World: Hannah Arendt and Education*, pp. 67-91.

insofar as it no longer seems willed by the agent. We find evidence for this claim when Dewey ends the first chapter of *Experience and Education* with the following problem: "We may reject knowledge of the past as the *end* of education and thereby only emphasize its importance as a *means*. When we do that we have a problem that is new in the story of education: How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present?"[25]

The question "Is education political?" not only depends on how we define "political" and how we understand the aims of education, but also how we understand the subject of education: the child who is cultivated into the adult[26]. What "political" means for Arendt is very different from what it means for Dewey or another philosopher following traditional categorizations of this term. What is most interesting about "child-centered" education, which emerged out of Rousseau's philosophy—(see the legacy in Dewey, Montessori, et al.)—and of which Arendt is so critical, is that very few if any of the schools who boast its pedagogy are aware that both Dewey and Montessori trace their ideas to Rousseau. Even if these schools could name Dewey or Montessori as the inspiration for their child-centered educational approach, few, if any, know anything about its origins, its connection to political philosophy, and the development of the political citizen, which in light of Rousseau's concerns may or may not be the kind of political citizenry we want to develop[27].

Most educators who have adopted a child-centered approach like Montessori's method or Dewey's progressive education have simply divorced the educational process from the political philosophy that inspired that educational model. This separation continues today where public schooling has become a patchwork quilt of mixed messages and subtexts, and where the lessons that are most effective have very little to do with the content introduced in a classroom[28]. For example, do those who adopt this

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[25] J. DEWEY, *Experience and Education,* p. 23.

[26] Nonetheless, depending on how we view the nature-nurture battle, we can claim that education frees the mind in some ways while also cultivating it in others. This is the point that I believe some who promote humanities education wish to underscore. I recognize that I am painting with broad strokes. My aim is not to deliver a treatise on the history of humanities education or even modern humanism. Instead, I wish to highlight certain dominant views of subjectivity and humanism that have been appropriated, rightly or wrongly, accurately or inaccurately, by contemporary approaches to both education (here read as schooling) and moral development.

[27] Scanning any number of mission or philosophy statements about a school—public, private, or independent—one finds this phrase in common: "Our curriculum is child-centered." Unless the school is teaching in the old Latin School tradition—developed long before Piaget, indeed even before Rousseau's educational treatise became influential, nearly every school is child-centered in some form or other.

[28] Most recently when I was taking a walk on the track outside of my daughters' elementary school, a group of second graders emerged for recess. Apparently, they had not exited or reentered the school correctly the previous week when a substitute was in charge of the class. So they were going to be punished that day. The punishment consisted of the whole group walking around the perimeter of a hardcourt. They were to walk in a single file line with hands clasped behind their backs and a "bubble in their mouth." The expression is used to indicate that if their cheeks are puffed as if there is a bubble in it, then they cannot talk. I continued my walk for ten more minutes and then left for home. When I left the kids were still walking. Admittedly, I was unsure about what to do. Even without having read Foucault or Althusser, I would have thought that this Stalag-type punishment seemed a bit excessive.

approach also subscribe to the suspicion of community that motivated Rousseau? For Dewey, such a suspicion would tragically undermine the very community of learning that he promotes. Yet, given his emphasis on moral philosophy and evidence of his own moral courage as a professor in the academy, Dewey might have agreed with Rousseau's political concerns and thus his motivation for developing the educational treatise as he did. Montessori's emphasis on individual learning picks up on the streak of independence that runs through *Émile,* but Rousseau reveals both at the end of *Émile* and in its sequel that cultivating independence at the expense of not seeing ourselves as dependent and vulnerable is a flawed project through and through. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

The significance of Arendt's analysis of the crisis in (American) K-12 education lies in how her critique of progressive education necessarily reinvigorates the age-old question of the respective roles that theory and practice play in education. This question, in some form or other, lies at the heart of every debate about education: the return to the basics, core education, vocational training, critical thinking, applied science, service learning, and the role of the humanities. In many cases, but certainly not all, we can see the theory-practice dispute as an undercurrent in these debates. Although they are presented as mutually exclusive, they need not be. Indeed, one might argue that the political dimension of education is precisely where theory and practice intersect[29].

So, they did not enter or exit the building correctly. So what? So, show them again how to do this and then let them go play. They are seven years old after all. How many times do I forget how to do something? And what is the lesson that in the end is being taught to these kids? More obviously, public schools simply display an extraordinary number of mixed messages—kids learn to share in kindergarten only to be taught a bit later that knowledge is not shared. Property is not to be shared; in fact, it is to be guarded dearly. Kids are supposed to say they are sorry and make amends, only to learn that the goal of corporate America is to get away with not doing these things. Exactly why are these lessons taught? The public schools seem torn between teaching knowledge and teaching wisdom, and in the end I am not sure they are good at either (though without question, individual teachers are excellent at both and my daughters have been lucky enough to have them).

[29] Arendt's position is not without merit. However, when pushed to its end, one wonders what she sees as the purpose, function, or even value of education. Certainly one can argue that it is only through a foundational education that one is then able to participate creatively in the public space and if this kind of creativity is encouraged too early, the creative experience could be undermined. Additionally, if all those who participate in this kind of public space are not able to participate as equals, then the children run the risk of the tyranny of their peers—in spite of the democratic approach being instituted precisely to mitigate the tyranny of the school experience itself. Arendt defines the political as diverse equals coming together to create something spontaneous. For her, the political is precisely that which is not *practiced* and not *learned;* it is that which is spontaneous, unexpected, and unpredictable. Many of the examples of political action that she provides even indicate that those who acted had personal histories that would not have predicted or anticipated their future political activity. That is, although education is thought to enable the future, it is not clear that Arendt sees any connection between the education one receives and the possibility of political action that will affect the future. If this is the case, then one wonders why any educational system could be recommended over any other.

2. *Saving Democracy*

Martha Nussbaum opens *Not for Profit* with the following line: "We are in the midst of a crisis of massive proportions and grave global significance… a worldwide crisis in education."[30] Nussbaum attributes this crisis to radical changes at all levels of education, namely, cuts in the humanities and the arts[31]. For Nussbaum this crisis signals the fragile future of democracy, which hangs in the balance. Economic growth sought by so many nations has led people to go for the bottom line at all costs and at the expense of educating for abilities that are fundamental to a secure democracy. She writes: "These abilities are associated with the humanities and the arts: the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a 'citizen of the world'; and, finally, to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person."[32] She links the future of democracy with humanities education and thus explicitly links education with the political development of the individual.

Where Arendt does not see the possibility for education effecting change at all, much less counting on it for positive change, Martha Nussbaum, professor of philosophy and law at the University of Chicago, believes that the future of democracy hangs in the balance and the humanities are both necessary and sufficient to save it. Variations on this theme can be found in all the books I mentioned earlier in this essay, giving me cause for concern even as I admire many of the points each makes. Nussbaum's book in particular, in its zeal to defend the humanities, overreaches and may promise a feat that the humanities cannot achieve, nor should they be expected to do so. By making this promise, she may actually render the humanities and humanities education more vulnerable, rather than less, to its critics.

In the chapter, *Educating Citizens*, Nussbaum explores the cultivation of citizens with moral courage, those who would have stood strong in Milgram's experiment with authority and would have been immune to the position they were assigned in the Zimbardo prison experiment. She tells us in this chapter that "[w]e need to understand how to produce more citizens [who are prepared to live with others on terms of mutual respect and reciprocity] and fewer of [those who seek the comfort of domination]."[33] How do we achieve this goal? Her answer—through an education in the humanities. In the chapter immediately following this one she outlines an educational process that is at once child-centered (Rousseau, Dewey, et al.) and based on a Socratic pedagogy, i.e., one that takes critical questioning as its point of departure. She cites progressive education as a means to accomplish this task and praises, for example, the Philosophy for Children program, developed by Matthew Lipman, which is based on Dewey's philosophy of education with an emphasis on developing critical thinking and reasoning skills. With this focus, Nussbaum's view of education is put in direct opposition to Arendt's.

We could approach Nussbaum's claim from several different angles, but the first one that comes to mind is to ask what it means to educate for a democracy when one of the

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[30] Martha Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2010, pp. 1-2.
[31] Ibid., p. 2.
[32] Ibid., p. 7.
[33] Ibid., p. 29.

values that a democracy holds dear is precisely the plurality of voices within it. Taking up the mantle of progressive education, Nussbaum seems to consider democracy in only one form—that we are all like-minded with a similar set of values. But this is not true of either a democracy or of humanities education. Indeed, we must consider that when we teach the humanities all of humanity—the good side and the dark side—is explored. Additionally, we must consider that when we teach our students, who they are as individuals will influence how they filter both what they read and what we, their teachers, say.

Nussbaum advances her argument by deploying both Rousseau's *Émile* and an education founded on a Socratic pedagogy. These two modes do not fit together neatly. Rousseau needs the kind of education he describes in *Émile* to mitigate the ability reason can have either to corrupt or empower an already corrupt soul. Rousseau needs to cultivate a man who will be immune to the corrupting forces of reason exemplified in particular by philosophical reason, which too frequently looks like sophistry. Reason at an early age is precisely the problem and "child-centered" for Rousseau would not mean the Philosophy for Children program, which Nussbaum mentions as an example of a promising educational model[34]. I would argue that it is more than a promising educational model, but not for the reasons Nussbaum wants[35]. And for those of you who have read *Émile*, you know that Rousseau's educational project spectacularly fails.

In the end, in this particular chapter, Nussbaum attempts to draw an easy line between Socratic questioning and democracy while also trying to draw a line between humanities education and the morally cultivated to create an argument that is remarkably deficient. If we know anything about Socratic questioning it is the presumed integrity it displays in the pursuit of truth. Socratic questioning requires the participants to question everything including the future—or value—of an idea for which Nussbaum wants to install Socratic education to defend, namely, democracy. True to its own mission, the Socratic gadfly pokes and prods everything, including those values that we might now believe to be true and right. And we must expect and allow our students at any age to do the same[36]. The humanities education that Nussbaum promotes, which includes critical reasoning, not only runs the risk of creating people who are not concerned about others but also people whose greed and selfishness are now backed by reason to justify those actions.

As was pointed out by the political theorist, Ryan Balot, if Nussbaum is arguing that a humanities education is superior for achieving moral wisdom, then those of us with PhDs in the humanities are super superior, leading us down the path of the philosopher

[34] Or at least not before the age of reason, as Rousseau determines it—somewhere around 12 years of age or after.

[35] I hold a Masters degree in the Philosophy for Children program. I received it in 1987 when the M.A.T. program was still quite young. I absolutely believe in this program to help students develop critical reasoning skills, to develop a community of inquiry with their classmates, and to develop self-esteem. However, we need to remember that if philosophy is to be taught as philosophy and not ideology, then we must risk that students, even students in this program, will not all arrive at the moral answers we believe are correct. Yet, even if they do arrive at those answers, we cannot be assured that they will act on them.

[36] For a particularly good formulation of the question and an answer, see R.W. GRANT, *Is Humanistic Education Humanizing?*.

king, which is decidedly not democratic[37]. Of course, the irony that Balot so astutely identifies is then betrayed by the fact that many with PhDs in the humanities are not morally superior at all and too frequently they act in ways that realize Rousseau's worst fears about reason providing the moral justification for bad behavior. Nussbaum could argue in return that those who are using reason to justify greed or other forms of bad behavior could be shown through reason the error of their ways. But then we could find ourselves in a game of intellectual chicken with recourse to nothing that could tip the argument one way or the other. On this model, there is nothing that could be referenced as the final arbiter of the dispute.

I believe that Nussbaum's intuition is correct but her solution to the problem is not. Let me return briefly to Arendt and Dewey. Hannah Arendt warns us in her essay that children can often be much more tyrannical toward their own peers than adults are toward children and this peer pressure could turn from healthy encouragement to bullying. We know even as adults how hard it is to go against our peers. Although Dewey recognizes that there can be a fine line between the leader and the tyrant, he believes that children are capable of identifying the difference. One could argue in response that to act in either of these ways—either by being tyrannical or by absenting oneself—is the behavior of someone who is not truly a member of the democratic community in the classroom, but to say that is to admit that the citizens would have already been cultivated rather than to say that it is education that does the cultivating. Dewey may be correct that children know the difference between the one who is "too bossy" and the "real" leader. However, children are not often capable of standing up to such people. And my point here is simply that even Dewey's model of education *already assumes* another layer or level of cultivation in order for the political dimension of this community to be effective. That is, in order for the social community to work as such, in order for it to be effective, which by implication means to be ethical, the children and participating subjects might already need to be cultivated as such. I believe this is Nussbaum's error also. Nussbaum wants character formed in a very particular way. The education that Nussbaum believes the humanities deliver cannot be achieved by the humanities, especially if the humanities are taught in a way that liberates the mind.

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So then what will?

In 1973, almost ten years after Arendt and Adorno's comments with which I opened this essay, Emmanuel Levinas published *Antihumanism and Education*, his most developed essay on Jewish education[38]. He opens this essay by connecting the western view of

[37] Balot was one of the scholars who posted to the Association for Political Theory Virtual Reading Group, organized by Lisa Ellis, a political theorist at Texas A&M. Balot's post can be found here: http://aptvrg2011.blogspot.com/2011/06/chpt-4-socratic-pedagogy.html. I accessed this post Monday June 27, 2011, and again Tuesday June 28, 2011.

[38] E. LEVINAS, *Antihumanism and Education*, in ID., *Difficult Freedom*, transl. S. Hand, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1990, pp. 277-288. This essay was originally published in "Hamoré"—a journal of Jewish teachers and educators. Reprinted in *Difficile Liberté*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1976, pp. 385-401. I would like to thank Michael Gottsegen for his very helpful answers to my questions about

humanism with a conception of freedom that is protected by the liberal State. We see him struggling with the same questions about humanism and humanities education that continue to haunt most contemporary discussions of education. However, this essay explicitly invokes Jewish education as response to the evil that the world saw unleashed in the 20th century.

Levinas situates Jewish education as that which *simultaneously* inflames the mind and cultivates an ethical subject who is responsible for the Other. That is, Jewish education is not anti-intellectual, but nor does it simply rely on the intellect to cultivate an ethical subject. The aim, then, of Levinas's philosophical project is to employ an educational method that is informed by his understanding of Jewish education as that which cultivates intellectual acuity and also develops responsibility for the Other. His view of the ethical relation not only points to an educational model that includes reading biblical narratives Jewishly; it also relies on this model of education to cultivate an ethical subject. Levinas's insight reveals the role that alterity plays in midrash, since the role of midrash is to open up the text and allow voices that are otherwise muted to be heard.

Levinas's implicit identification of the talmudic approach to learning not only radicalizes his philosophical project. It also transforms how we think about education, our understanding of both teaching and learning[39]. Education, and indeed a particular kind of education, is fundamental to the creation of the subjectivity that Levinas describes. If, as Levinas suggests, politics is derived from ethics, then it is the Jewish tradition from which Levinas's own ethical/philosophical project emerges that provides us with a more effective pedagogical model that encourages us first to engage with each other face to face. If we are not first mindful of Levinas's warnings, if the political, even as education, is not rooted in the radical ethics that he describes, we will simply leave ourselves vulnerable to becoming the perpetrators he warns against[40].

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this essay. Although Michael's answers confirmed my own interpretation of the article, his elegant phrasing certainly made the philosophical points much clearer to me.

[39] He makes this reference explicit in his writings on Jewish education, some of which are collected in *Difficult Freedom*.

[40] Carl Cederberg wrote a lovely dissertation tracing the concept of the human in Levinas. At the end he discusses what is at stake politically in Levinas's concept. Like most recent political theory, he turns to philosophers like Agamben and Rancière. I do not know if either of these thinkers will be successful at offering a politics comparable to Levinas's ethics. Nor do I think that Bonnie Honig's work is immune to criticism. But it seems that any account of the political that will allow for the radical ethics Levinas suggests must also stretch beyond the tools in the Western philosophical toolbox. See C. CEDERBERG, *Resaying the Human: Levinas Beyond Humanism and Antihumanism*, Södertörn högskola, Stockholm 2010. My thanks to Hans Ruin for introducing me to this work.