

Richard A. Freund, University of Hartford

From the Editors of *Spotlight on Teaching*:

Millennium fever is afoot with books, articles, conferences, symposia, and courses on the subject. As a fan of David Letterman's "Top Ten List," I thought it would be important to get our colleagues to suggest titles of books for a "top ten list" of favorite books for teaching and teaching religion. The result is a listing of books from AAR members around the country. As a teaching and learning vehicle for the AAR membership, we at *Spotlight on Teaching* thought it would be appropriate to give some suggestions towards making the next millennium of teaching one which is grounded in great pedagogy. In order to facilitate this, Laurie Patton, Emory University, Associate Editor, and I put advertisements into

Religious Studies News

and

Spotlight

over the past year to encourage our membership to send their suggestions for a top ten list of books on pedagogy for the next millennium. It was hoped that all faculty might commit themselves to teach in the next Millennium in ways that help their students become serious and critical thinkers, consumers, and participants in society. In the end we decided not to place books in a top ten list, but rather to present the books recommended by everyone. The authors who sent in suggestions are from a diverse number of institutions and teaching contexts: Phyllis H. Kaminiski, St. Mary's College, Indiana; Bobbi Patterson, Emory University; Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Union Theological Seminary; Fred Glennon, Le Moyne College; Steven M. Johnson, Montclair State University, New Jersey; and Thomas V. Peterson, Alfred University. Paula Cooly, Macalester College, John Hatfield, San Diego, and David Howell, Ferrum University, provided us with an annotated listing of the most useful books in teaching and the teaching of religion which he has compiled over the past decade and we are indebted for his work. We hope it will be instructive and that interest in teaching and learning techniques will be a major part of the development of religious studies in the coming Millennium.

Richard Freund, University of Hartford, Connecticut

Here are my suggestions for the "top ten list." I decided to divide my list into two parts. After I looked at most peoples lists, I noted a lack of consideration for anything written before the 1960s. Although I am a product of this "baby boomer generation" I did not feel that it was proper to ignore the accomplishments of the last 950 years previous to the 1950s. In my list, I decided to include works from 1000-1950 and works from the 1950s to the present. These are books

which have affected who I am as a professor of religious studies and often as a person. As many of you probably feel, teaching goes beyond the halls of the institutions where we teach — affecting us to the core of who we are as people. Often books on pedagogy and teaching have made us better communicators, colleagues, mentors, spouses, citizens and people. We hope you enjoy the selections cited here.

Pedagogy: My Own Journey

The need to think about pedagogic issues concerning critical reasoning skills in our courses in religion in general, and Jewish ethics in particular may not be self-evident. Some, like myself, have been trained to study Judaism as a phenomenology unto itself and not as a vehicle for teaching critical reasoning or cognitive development. I once thought that critical reasoning skills should be better taught in a "critical reasoning" course, or were either gained (or not) through the mysterious and silent process of general "education." The ability to develop critical reasoning skills which are beneficial not only in one course but in all university courses (and in the "real world") is a particularly vexing problem in university education. This is especially difficult at schools where religion or Judaism courses are required for general education or humanities credits, or where the religion/Judaism program/department is seen as a "service-oriented" program/department and not just evaluated for its numbers of majors/minors. Critical reasoning skills should be a part of the curriculum in the Judaic studies courses because they clarify the place of Judaic studies in the liberal arts education. The ability to develop critical reasoning skills in a Jewish ethics course, for example, should be a primary goal of the curriculum, and in small programs/departments this is one way of "justifying" or clarifying the role of Judaic studies courses in the university liberal arts. Often, faculty ignore the role of Judaic studies in the pedagogic issues of the university liberal arts or relegate it to ethnic studies. I have found that this misses an important opportunity to show one of the crucial arguments for Judaic studies in the curriculum.

Critical reasoning skills in the humanities imply that a student can take information about the human condition, submit that information to "rigorous and systematic analysis, and arrive at personal conclusions. Religion, and especially religious ethics, is one area of the human condition which is often overlooked (or not seriously analyzed) in other courses and developing these skills in the unique area of Jewish ethics demonstrates the unique place of Judaic studies in the humanities. Judaic studies courses also offer a unique opportunity for teaching critical reasoning skills if a conscious effort is made to do this, and if the methodology and overall perspective of the course lends itself to the task if one makes an effort to direct discussion, thinking, reading and writing in this direction. It is in this spirit that I list the books which have affected my pedagogy and I think will stand the test of time into the next millennium.

Top Ten List of Books Which have Affected My Pedagogy: 1000 CE to 1950 CE

The five authors I have chosen to highlight from 1000-1950 will be known to some and not know to others. Most of these works were not intended to be books on teaching and pedagogy, but rather books which dealt with how we organize our material. For me, perhaps the most dramatic shift in my teaching has occurred since I started thinking about how we organize the materials which we call "data." Before I read these books, I always assumed that data was a simple set of pieces of information which could be related to another by just "telling" another the data. After I read these books I realized that the imparting of information to another is serious business, and more importantly, the method of relating the information may often be the message. What I have gained from these books could be defined as a methodology issue, a way of thinking about religious texts and ideas which I was not aware of before I read these books. The five authors are in chronological order:

Maimonides (1135-1205), Descartes (1596-1650), John Dewey (1859-1952), Martin Buber (1878-1965), and Max Kadushin (1895-1950). The books are Maimonides' *A Guide for the Perplexed* (1190), Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637), Buber's *I and Thou* (1923), Kadushin's *Organic Thinking: A Study in Rabbinic Thought* (1938), and Dewey's *Problems of Men* (1946).

Maimonides' *A Guide for the Perplexed*

Sometimes I wish there was a Maimonides in today's world, A towering giant who would be able to write a modern-day *Guide for the Perplexed*. Pedagogically speaking, Maimonides' work, *The Guide for the Perplexed* was progressive and unprecedented in the twelfth century. He clearly knew his public well, writing in a dialect of Arabic in Hebrew characters, about ideas which probably perplexed many within the Jewish and non-Jewish communities with whom he came in contact. Maimonides and this work were both vilified by the Jewish public after his death (as many great works and people often are) but the work and the man were resurrected some 200 years later as the public finally caught up with his ideas. Maimonides, (known in Hebrew by the contraction: Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon or Rambam) a philosopher/physician Rabbi of twelfth century CE Egypt drew many of his ideas from non-Jewish sources and was able to integrate the the fundamental principles of philosophy into his understanding of Judaism. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*

, part II, chapter 25, Maimonides clearly acknowledges this:

"Owing to the absence of all proof, we reject the theory of the Eternity of the Universe; and it is for this reason that the noblest minds spent and will spend their days in research. For if the Creation had been demonstrated by proof, even if only according to the Platonic hypothesis, all arguments of the philosophers against us would be of no avail. If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof of his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions."

Maimonides mentions Aristotle, Plato, and many other philosophers and theologians by name. The curious fact is that Maimonides could have presented the theory of Aristotle and Plato without presenting their respective names. Jewish writers up to the time of Maimonides would anonymously present conflicting ideas, and then either confirm, disregard, or refute these ideas. Not so with Maimonides. Numerous times throughout his non-legalistic works (philosophical), he mentions the "Aristotelian" school of thought and the Mutakalimum (a Moslem school of thought) by name. It seems, however, that though Maimonides was well acquainted with the ideas of non-Jewish sources, these sources were used by him in a proscribed manner. In the case of the creation epic, the Aristotelian theory was regarded in as much as it agreed with or confirmed the account in the book of Genesis. When, however, this theory went beyond the biblical account, or confuted an accepted Jewish interpretation of the Creation, Maimonides rallied to the "Divine" account as against the determinations made according to Aristotelian human phenomena. Again, when the theories of the Mutakalimum are mentioned by name, they are brought as contrasts to, or confirmations of "standard" Jewish views. Maimonides could not, in all good faith, bring non-Jewish views which totally refuted the Jewish views in his own period. In fact, when faced with Jewish sources that had been heavily influenced by non-Jewish sources, which indeed did totally challenge the normative Jewish view of the day, Maimonides responded quite obliquely as in the *Guide*, part II, chapter 26:

"In short, it is a passage that greatly confuses the notion of all intelligent and religious persons. I am unable to explain it sufficiently. I quoted it in order that you may not be misled by it."

As a pedagogue, Maimonides was a teacher who clearly wanted his students to recognize the existence of divergent views about the universe. Unlike other teachers of the period who denigrated without present these divergent views, Maimonides presents, argues and often leaves unresolved major views which diverged from the traditional views of Judaism in the twelfth century. Maimonides lived in the twelfth century CE and had access to almost all of the then known world's literature in Cairo, Egypt, where he lived. Beginning in the ninth century CE, Greek and Latin works were systematically translated from the Syriac, (almost all Greek and

Latin literature had been translated to Syriac starting in the early centuries of the Common Era) and directly from their original languages. This process, which continued through the rise of Islam, encompassed all known centers of learning, from Greece and Rome, to Spain and India. Philosophical works were at a premium, since the developing Moslem world specialized in the conversion, assimilation and adaptation of the 'conquered' culture. Maimonides was part of this process. Sparked by a philosophical renaissance and a following of Arabic speaking Jewish readers, he embarked upon the long process of adaptation. It seems that Maimonides had a "Classical" education, as he went on to become a respected physician in the court of an Egyptian noble. This, in addition to his Jewish education, put him into the unique position of being an educator par excellence. Maimonides' unique education put him in the position of being able to adapt sources which had no exact parallels in Jewish thought. In short, following a pattern of adaptation which is perhaps as old as religion itself, Maimonides took known ideas and exemplification, rework them into the warp and woof of a new creation, a new thought, and presented them. His view is one which I have always tried to infuse in my own teaching: the existence of varying (but not unlimited) positions for discussion, the need to foster systematic thinking about fundamental issues of life and living, and the need to challenge often long held truths if they contain faulty positions.

One example is Maimonides' view of free-will. The Maimonidean view can be summarized in the following way regarding free will and evil: Virtues were neither totally the "will of God" nor despite the "will of God." Humans were given the potential for receiving these virtues by the "will of God" and that these virtues were perfected by habituation. This argument is a summary of the motivations and reasons for all Maimonides' ethical writings. He is effectively answering the absolute predestinationists of the period (Jews and non-Jews) regarding ethical behavior and those who were absolute Aristotelians regarding human behavior (Jews and non-Jews). In the *Guide to the Perplexed*, III.17 Maimonides admits this:

"...the vicissitudes of human fortune are attributed by Aristotle to. pure coincidence, by the Asharites to the sheer will of God, by the Mutazila to [Divine] wisdom.....An objection as to why human individuals are cared for by providence while members of other species are not does not apply to my position alone, for one must first ask why man and not the other animals was given reason? The answer here is, 'So God willed,' or 'So his wisdom decreed,' or 'So nature determined,' depending upon which of the three preceding positions one holds, and the same answer will do for the question of providence."

Maimonides never hesitates to present the views of Aristotle, by name, (a citation system which was unusual in his own times). Maimonides, however, was above all else, an innovative thinker and a person who wrote in order to teach people how to think not just blindly follow dictates. He wrote his *Guide to the Perplexed* at the end of his life in order to direct others in the lifetime

search which he himself had made, and perhaps to make their search a little less painful. He has surely made my journey less painful, first because he was (and still is) so revered within Judaic tradition, but more because he had a plan for how to view oneself in a multi-ethnic, diverse world of ideas — a world much like our own. It is encouraging to me to realize that over 800 years ago someone could conceive of this world that we are still working towards in the next millennium.

Rene Descartes' *Discourse on Method*

In philosophy (and perhaps other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences), the beginnings of the main questions of modernity can be discerned in the work of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes began his career as a mathematician, working on analytical geometry. He thought that mathematics could reveal a universally applicable model for all areas of human endeavor. The question Descartes asked was whether all areas of human knowledge could be reduced to mathematical-like principles to which all reasonable individuals would naturally consent? In answer to that question he formulated his famous "Rules of Method," which held that one should analyze every idea, text and truth by breaking it down into its simplest parts and then reevaluating every aspect of the idea without ignoring any part or argument. Of course, this method is the basis for all modern critical thinking, but Descartes' method revealed the problem of human understandings of perception in general. Although I rarely have students actually read Descartes' writings, I use his ideas in most of my courses. Descartes found himself in doubt about almost everything. So do I and so do most of my students. I teach Descartes' main points in almost every lesson and religious tradition I teach. I find it reveals much about the modern mind and agenda of most teaching about religious studies:

1. Descartes' method directly challenges and in a way rejects the ultimate authority of tradition; especially religious tradition, until such time as the tradition is systematically examined.
2. Descartes' method demonstrates the importance of informed human reason for deciding all truth.
3. Descartes' method reveals the power of the analytic proof as a means for informing human reason. Human wisdom arrived at by analytic proof is capable of resolving complex or compound questions by breaking them down into simpler and more manageable issues.
4. Descartes' method reveals the individual thinker's independence from established truths and authority. The individual thinker's own analytic search provides one's perception of the truth.
5. Descartes' method reveals the problems of human understandings of perception in general. The method demonstrates that human understandings of reality represent a subject-object perception dichotomy. What is known is always subject to the mediation of one's individual human reason.

Descartes' method comes as no surprise to the Religious philosophers and theologians among us, but for all pedagogues, these lessons are crucial to the enterprise of teaching. Clear and systematic analysis of ideas, articulating this analysis and recognizing the dichotomies of human perception is a lesson which has become central to my own teaching.

Martin Buber's *I and Thou*

I and Thou (1923) and other writings of Martin Buber are devoted to understanding human interaction. Buber has become a methodological and interpersonal influence upon my classroom environment and teaching. Buber may be seen as the ideal type of mediator figure for religious studies pedagogy, because he was versed in the vocabulary, the implications, and inadequacies of the general philosophical literature and so involved in the issues of interdisciplinary social science research. He drew from theories of biology, psychology, literature, linguistics and philosophy in his writings. He appreciated both the philosophical and the religious traditions for what they had contributed and was seeking an understanding of religion's (and more specifically Judaism's) unique contribution to civilization as part of his own search for identity. Like other contemporaries of his time, Buber sought a theory which unified the apparently divergent thought systems in which he found himself. He, like his collaborator, Franz Rosenzweig, believed that revelation was an ongoing and intimate event. It was an experience which occurred regularly and was not limited to singular places and people. Rosenzweig saw, as did most Jewish thinkers of this period, God's disclosure in Judaism's ritual laws, while Buber found this experience to be without formal structure and universal. For Buber, the essential differences between the Greek ethical tradition and the biblical ethical tradition represent an important distinction. Buber defined the biblical ethical system as one in which the human being existed in a constant state of interrelationship with God. There is no differentiating the individual as being apart from God—apart from the world—apart from another human being. The human's existence is so dependent upon the existence of these interlocking pieces of reality as to make his/her own existence meaningless without a relationship to the others.

My reading of Buber has changed me as a person and a teacher. His concept of dialogue or "I-Thou" relationship has singularly affected me when I listen to students; conceive of who they are in my classroom, and interact with them in office hours. The I-Thou simply means that we are constantly in dialogue with the world and as such, every part of the world (people, animals, even inanimate objects!) needs to be treated as an equal, a subject (rather than an object) of our discussion and thoughts. The I-Thou is the source of all positive interaction in the world. The I-It, however, is the antithesis of this relationship. In this relationship, there is no true dialogue, only a monologue where everything in the world is to be treated and seen as an object which is ours for our own exploitation and use; an object, in relation to "me," the subject. Buber saw the

I-It as the source of all that is negative in the world. Buber writes:

"To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.

The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination I-Thou (Ich-Du) The other primary word is the combination I-It (Ich-Es); wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words He or She can replace It.

Hence the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It... Relation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it. We are molded by our pupils and built up by our works. The 'bad' man, lightly touched by the holy primary word, becomes one who reveals. How we are educated by children and by animals! We live our lives inscrutably included within the screaming mutual life of the universe."

This poetic, nearly mystical writing affected me when I first read it as a graduate student and continues to enlighten my students about how I see our relationship in the class and even my relationship to the materials I am teaching. I try to maintain an I-Thou in class and with the materials, although as I have told them, often it is necessary to draw back and to become a critical analyzer of the materials, purposely to view the materials as an object for investigation. Ultimately, however, I tell them that though we have these moments of I-It with the materials (and often in grading I am forced to objectively consider their accomplishments) at no time do I feel that I lose that overall I-Thou reverence for the materials and them. Often as I sit listening to a student speaking in class I remember these words: "But this is the exalted melancholy of our fate, that every Thou in our world must become an It." I have learned from Buber that it is inhuman to live your life totally within the framework of the I-It relationship, but it is equally inhuman to expect that you can live your entire life within the I-Thou.

Max Kadushin's *Organic Thinking: A Study in Rabbinic Thought*

Since one of my major areas of teaching is Judaism (especially Rabbinic Judaism) I wanted to mention one lesser known book which has affected the way I see Judaic and other religious texts and traditions. One rabbinics scholar, Max Kadushin, sought to identify the logical system

of classical rabbinic texts and applied a theory of "organic thinking" to understand the way Rabbinic texts and traditions function. Max Kadushin (1895-1980) was trained in New York in the 1920s when it was fashionable to find ways to organize knowledge in a discipline. Einstein and others were searching for ways unifying fields and organizing apparently random information and by the 1920s, a theory of "organic thinking" developed by biologists, anthropologists and philosophers had become prominent. Kadushin's basic insight was that rabbinic thinking is clearly not systematic or logical (in the philosophical sense of the word) but is directed by an internal order. He held that rabbinic literature was representative of a type of thinking in which numerous rabbinic concepts interact in an "organismic" pattern. According to Kadushin:

"Every concept is related to every other concept because every concept is a constituent part of the complex as a whole. Conversely, the complex of concepts as a whole enters into the constitution of every concept; and thus every concept is in constant dynamic relationship with every other concept. Rabbinic thought, hence is organismic, for only in an organism are the whole and its parts mutually constitutive."

His insights about rabbinic literature, a religious literature which was originally orally maintained and studied and written down and annotated for over two millenia, are important insights about most religious literatures. The perceived need of religions, religious people, and especially moderns to impose modern forms of logic and order upon ancient and traditional literatures is often courting a misunderstanding of these literatures. What his controversial insights tell us is how subtle and distinct the "order" and "organization" of religious ideas can be. How the pieces of religious literature may be more than the sum of their individual parts and yet often represent a tradition and its development which are interrelated by experiences which are organically connected. This experience is similar to a living creature who carries with him/her the genetic material of thousands of generations of development which may not be directly expressed but indirectly related through one's encounter with the materials. When I feel that I have reached the limits of relating "about" a religious idea in class, I often give students the "experience" of the religious concept and hope that they will see that organismic connection. I take solace in Kadushin's pedagogic insight every time I teach a course on rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic texts which are notoriously unwieldy when it comes to seeing the dialogue connections between the starting and ending points of arguments which take place over thousands of years are all related in this organismic way.

John Dewey's *Problems of Men*

I studied in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s and many of my education professors

introduced me to the writings of John Dewey. Dewey's *Pragmatism* made a tremendous impact upon how I think about religion. He seems to taken some of his insights from Descartes and added aspects of American life and culture to a view which resonates in the way my students look at life and most aspects of what I am teaching:

"At present, the arbiter is found in the past, although there are many ways of interpreting what in the past is authoritative. Nominally, the most influential conception doubtless is that of a revelation once had or a perfect life once lived. Reliance upon precedent, upon institutions created in the past, especially in law, upon rules of morals that have come to us through unexamined customs, upon uncriticized tradition, are other forms of dependence. It is not for a moment suggested that we can get away from customs and established institutions. A mere break would doubtless result simply in chaos. But there is no danger of such a break. Mankind is too inertly conservative both by constitution and by education to give the idea of this danger actuality. What there is genuine danger of is that the force of new conditions will produce disruption externally and mechanically: this is an ever present danger. The prospect is increased, not mitigated by the conservatism which insists upon the adequacy of old standards to meet new conditions. What is needed is intelligent examination of the consequences that are actually affected by inherited institutions and customs, in order that there may be intelligent consideration of the ways in which they are to be intentionally modified in behalf of generation of different consequences. (emphasis my own)."

I think that the idea of American Pragmatism is extremely liberating for students to understand; especially students who are studying about traditions which are thousands of years old and want to be able to simultaneously honor the past and recognize that these same traditions have changed and will continue to change in a systematic and orderly fashion. I have found that despite efforts to encourage students to investigate and evaluate an idea for themselves, students generally accept an idea which is ancient is better or more correct than an idea which was posited in the modern period. An ancient or medieval (or even premodern period) text contains a well-worn and tested idea (and therefore, innately more "correct") and therefore, it is much more likely to be right than an idea which is found in a contemporary publication. Pragmatism is one word I have learned in order to account for the creative and often unexpected way that American ingenuity has articulated itself.

Perhaps because of the circumstances of the creation of the United States on these shores, its innovative government, business techniques, university education and unique attitudes regarding the diverse religions and ethnic identities which have flourished here, students need and want to have a word to describe it. I have found Dewey's writings on American Pragmatism as a way to define the reasons why we the American Academy of Religion are somewhat different than anything that has existed before in the Academy in the teaching of religion. Dewey

encourages us to think about these institutions with a form of irreverence which was uncommon in educational theories. His confidence in the process has been reassuring, and my own experience has taught me how well he perceived a national trait years before it was part of contemporary theories. This has allowed me to think about how unique it is to teach in an American institution in this time period (and I think most of my students now understand how unique their education is as well!).

Five books which changed the way I think about my teaching from the period after the 1950s to the present are: *How Children Fail* by John Holt (1964), Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969) and *The Soft Revolution* (1971), William G. Perry's *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* (1970) and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982).

Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*

I begin with the last work first because it continues to raise questions for me in my own style of teaching. My style of teaching has been called by some students as confrontative and extremely demanding. I definitely confront students with critical thinking questions and issues in a way which is direct and often (I am told) threatening because I challenge my student's established views. Sometimes I do this to see how they will react and to hear them defend the logic that they say goes with their opinion. Although I try to create a sense of community and safeness in the classroom too often, students "shut down" from my direct confrontative style and tone or find that the constant over-analysis of what they say is distracting. The 1982 publication of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* created a stir in a number of disciplines and continues to interest me. Carol Gilligan, states that "the ideal of care is an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left out." Gilligan's book is a direct challenge to the moral developmental studies and conclusions of the 1950s and 1960s published in three volumes by Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg, a Harvard psychologist, indirectly follows conclusions reached earlier by Freud; and even parts of the Western philosophical tradition which assign stages to moral development and which demand more and more integration of logical principles and less and less contextualization of these principles. Kohlberg assigned the highest stage (stage 6) of moral development to the integration of rationally demonstrable universal; (and often abstract) ethical principles in human behavior. Gilligan has demonstrated that this developmental chart is problematic for many, including many women. The "voice" of the student varies because of questions of gender and socialization but more importantly because the universal voice is not always heard in the same

way. I find now that when I notice students not participating I question more than just the methods and information but also my style of teaching. I also look more at the different voices of students as equal parts of a choir of intellectual proportions. Before I read this book, this was something I did not even consider.

William G. Perry's *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*

William Perry attacks a similar problem. Perry began to notice the different types of intellectual and moral thinking he encountered in the 1950s and 1960s and concluded (distinct from Kohlberg) that different people learn in different ways but share developmental patterns which were discernible. Perry analyzed the cognitive and moral development of college age students in his book, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*. After reading this book I never viewed my students in the same way. I always tried to see where they might be in their intellectual development in order to help them reach a new level of understanding of the material. Briefly, Perry presented three stages of observed development in the college years. He calls the first stage: "dualism." Dualism sees the world in clear, "black and white" ways in which there are clearly distinct issues, groups, answers presented for assimilation. Generally, Perry demonstrated that during the college years a student moves from:

1. Dualistic approaches to information; seeing them as distinct and non-connected pieces of data
2. To "multiplicity" or the identification and accepting of differing but equally valid understandings of phenomena
3. To "contextually understood" information which allows a form of discrimination between different perspectives on data based on context

In the case of many of my courses on world religions, Judaism and Christianity, Jewish Ethics, the biblical world etc., "multiplicity and contextually understood" perspectives are central to the enterprise of the course. The problem is that the concept of Judaism and other religious systems are separate, distinct entities with wholly unique structures. Students tend to use dualistic thinking (this/other) and rarely did I find that a student moved easily towards "multiplicity, contextually understood perspectives," or applications. This form of dualistic thinking, unfortunately, is also not in line with many of the overall goals which we set for our studies of religion. In general, the academic study of religion in the university setting demands that all world religions be studied from the perspective that they are all equally "true" and intrinsically linked (although distinct). It is difficult to apply this same perspective in confessional settings, but it is possible. The approach is to view world religions and "Jewish" ethics, for example, as "separate but equal" phenomena. It is even more difficult to introduce contextuality to students if they have never been introduced to the nondualistic, multiplicity of ideas

conceptualizing. I realized after reading this book that I would forever be concerned about the student's overall intellectual development in addition to his/her ability to grasp the materials. It was not a panacea or a hard and fast blueprint for diagnosing where my students were at in their development, but it gave me guidelines for imagining where they might be in their own development, for understanding some of their responses to my classes, and where I might want to take them in the intellectual journey of teaching.

John Holt's *How Children Fail*

The first work of pedagogy I read as an undergraduate was *How Children Fail* by John Holt (1964). It chronicles his own teaching in elementary and junior high schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I originally thought I was going to be teaching middle school so I spent time taking courses in educational theory and this was a book which touched a cord in my own learning experience. His simple message is that children fail not because they are unintelligent or uninterested, but because teachers fail to cultivate their natural abilities and curiosities. This message obviously applies directly to the elementary and middle/high schools, but I have found it to be a universal insight. I can still remember when I first read this book as an undergraduate and thought it was a revolutionary concept. It opened up a whole new way of thinking about what "needed" to taught. One passage stands out in my mind (his book is written from a journal he kept and has excerpts of the journal):

April 27, 1960

We teachers, from primary school through graduate school, all seem to be hard at work at the business of making it look as if our students know more than they really do. Our standing among other teachers, or of our school among other schools, depends on how much our students seem to know; not on how much they really know, or how effectively they can use what they know, or even whether they can use it at all. The more materials we can appear to "cover" in our course, or syllabus, or curriculum, the better we look; and the more easily we can show that when they left our class our student knew what they were "supposed" to know, the more easily can we escape blame if and when it later appears (and it usually does) that much of that material they do not know at all.

I have tried over the years to think about this statement in preparing a syllabus "jam-packed" with bells and whistles and stuffed to the gills with so much data. Now after over twenty years of

college teaching, less has become much more and the most emerges from the students themselves.

Neil Postman's and Charles Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* and *The Soft Revolution*

It was in this tumultuous period in American social history that much of what I have learned about pedagogy was formed. It has been percolating ever since this period and I think much of what I hold to be important in pedagogy I learned from these works. I remember one simple phrase which I read in this first work, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, which I have kept in mind as I evaluate the work I am doing each semester.

The statement is:

"It is not uncommon, for example, to hear 'teachers' make statements such as: 'Oh, I taught them that, but they didn't learn it.' There is no utterance made in the Teachers' Room more extraordinary than this. From our point of view, it's on the same level as a salesman's remarking, 'I sold it to him, but he didn't buy it - which is to say, it makes no sense. It seems to mean that 'teaching' is what a 'teacher' does, which, in turn may or may not bear any relationship to what those being 'taught' do."

I usually look to see what it is that students are actually taking away from my classes and judge my success not by some generic barometer of body of information, but rather what it is that students did take away with them. Postman and Weingartner's suggestions for a subversive change in one's teaching are still items which I inject into my syllabi and course work. They listed eleven different ideas for making the act of teaching a subversive activity:

1. Write on a scrap of paper these questions: What am I going to have my students do today? What's it good for? How do I know? Tape the paper to the mirror in your bathroom or some other place where you are likely to see it every morning.
2. In class, try to avoid telling your students any answers, if only for few lessons or days.
3. Try listening to your students for a day or two. We do not mean reacting to what they say. We mean listening.
4. If you feel it is important for your students to learn how to ask questions, try this: Announce to the class that for the next two days you will not permit them to make any

utterances that are not in the form of questions.

5. In order to help yourself become more aware of the subjectivity of your judgements, try this experiment: The next time you grade your students, write down your reasons for whatever grade you assigned to a student.

6. Along the lines of the above, we would suggest an experiment that requires only imagination, but plenty of it. Suppose you could convince yourself that your students are the smartest students in the school. What would you do differently if you acted as if your students were capable of great achievements? And if you acted differently, what are the chances that many of your students would begin to act as if they were great achievers?

7. In its most effective form, the experiment involves telling your students that all of them will get A's for the term and, of course, making good on your promise. At first, the students will not believe you, and it has sometimes taken as long as four weeks before all the students accept the situation. Once such acceptance is achieved, the students can begin to concentrate on learning, not their grades.

8. Perhaps you have noticed that most examinations and, indeed, syllabi and curricula deal almost exclusively with the past. The future hardly exists in school. Can you remember ever asking or being asked in school a question like "if such and such occurs, what do you think will happen?" Perhaps you can make it a practice to include future-oriented questions at least once a week in all your classes.

9. Anyone interested in helping students deal with the future (not to mention the present) would naturally be concerned, even preoccupied, with media of communication. We suggest that media study become an integral part of your classes. No matter what "subject" you are teaching, media are relevant.

10. There is nothing in what we have said in this book that precludes the use, at one time or another, of any of the conventional methods and materials of learning. It is neither required nor desirable that everything about one's performance as a teacher be changed. Just the most important things.

11. Our last suggestion is perhaps the most difficult. It requires honest self-examination. Ask yourself how you came to know whatever things you feel are worth knowing.

I cannot remember how many times these suggestions have made me reconsider how I teach. These short books were written in a period that has come and gone, but the issues they raise have affected my teaching and perhaps might give others insights for the next millennium.