

Moral and Spiritual Inquiry in the Academic Classroom

A Lecture for the 2006 Institute on College Student Values

“Hidden Wholeness: Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose in College”

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I offer you very practical advice today—following Rebecca Chopp’s and Alan Wolfe’s concerns, as expressed yesterday, that faculty are resistant to moral and spiritual inquiry in the academic classroom. I hope to answer how exactly college and university professors can provide opportunities for students to search for meaning and purpose in their own lives—how faculty *can* promote examination of students’ own values and beliefs—in the academic classroom. The short answer is: in a wide variety of ways. I’ll discuss five different models of how to do it from the experiences of particular professors at Stanford University. Before I begin recounting their case studies, though, I offer you some universal “do’s” and “don’ts” from their experience:

Do’s

1. Expect spiritual and moral development of college students, along with their intellectual development.
2. Model engagement with issues of meaning and purpose. Professors are meant to profess, not just to convey knowledge.
3. Yet, be careful to maintain the integrity of your own discipline. Teach what is appropriate in your field, and don’t teach beyond your current training and abilities.
4. Help students move beyond ethical subjectivism and relativism—beyond “Whatever I think is internally-justified, and there’s no basis to critique me.” And beyond “There’s no final basis upon which to critique any moral stance, and therefore any one is as good as any other.”
5. Encourage students to learn how to take a personal ethical stance, periodically revising it in the light of critical reflection and increasing life experience.
6. Recognize that learning to “know thyself” is an important part of the liberal arts experience, both for students and for professors.
7. So is empathetic learning, by which students and professors come to put themselves in others’ shoes and look at the world through their eyes.
8. Training college students merely for economic success and security is insufficient. Training for marriage/parenthood/family is also important, as is training for community responsibility and citizenship.

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Don'ts

1. Proselytize your own philosophy of life as the "correct way."
2. Belittle students' own deeply held beliefs (but distinguish encouraging students to reflect upon and challenge them).
3. Press students to reveal private, subjective matters in public.
4. Use students as tokens of identity categories, like Blacks, Jews, Asians, Gays.
5. Be merely critical. Help in the process of students' reconstruction.

I'm the Dean for Religious Life at Stanford. I'm a university chaplain, and my job description calls for me to fulfill "a leadership and facilitation role campus-wide in issues involving moral and ethical values" and to "nurture the spiritual life of all members of the university community, " among other responsibilities. I work with a staff that includes two associate deans for religious life, and our Office for Religious Life mission statement commits us "to guide, nurture and enhance spiritual, religious and ethical life within the Stanford University community." So I took it as my responsibility to encourage our professors, in a formal presentation at a Faculty Senate meeting last year, to provide opportunities for students to discuss the meaning and purpose of life in the classroom setting.

Survey Data

I explained that a 2003 survey by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA had found that 76% of students nationally say they are "searching for meaning and purpose in life" in college, while 56% say they have never been given the opportunity to discuss the meaning and purpose of life in any classroom setting. Hence, three-quarters of students want something that a majority of them never get from their professors. This is particularly surprising, I pointed out, since liberal education has traditionally included character development, training for citizenship, helping students work out their personal values and ethics, and encouraging them to build a sense of what's ultimately important in life. I cited certain language along this line from the Stanford Founding Grant of 1885.

In the discussion period that followed, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education lamented that certain students have been emotionally traumatized in the classroom by offhand comments by faculty that "utterly dismiss a spiritual life." As he explained, "We cannot underestimate the wound that these comments can inflict upon a student in this developmentally intense period in their life." The Dean of Humanities and Sciences asked if our office could provide training for faculty who want to develop more expertise in facilitating discussion of values and personal beliefs in their classrooms.

Faculty Perspectives

These were very encouraging responses from rather high up in the academic hierarchy. Our work was cut out for us, though, by some other faculty members who raised questions about whether it's appropriate at all to explore students' spiritual and moral issues in the college classroom. That's exactly why we have chaplaincy programs, some said: to deal with this on an extracurricular basis. There are also dormitory programs with faculty speakers, and there are opportunities to meet informally in professors' homes. Concerns were raised about cult activities on campus and about religious groups' Bible studies that are not open to a variety of approaches and opinions. As for the classroom, it was asked how a professor can honor the diversity of the student body with the large numbers of different religions and beliefs represented on campus.

How can ethics be taught when it is imbedded and expressed differently in so many divergent religions? What relationship does this have to teaching ethics to those without any religious or spiritual commitments? The final faculty comment of the session was this: “I’m a little nervous about talking about what should go on in the classroom, because I respect my colleagues and I think that they have their own visions of what should go on in the classroom. When we look around the world now, we see that under the aegis of religion and spirituality, ethical horrors are perpetrated every day. I just get nervous about whether we should move this way in the classroom.”

Earlier in the discussion, though, a professor of computer science had disagreed with this perspective: “It is clear to me that a discussion of these kinds of questions is perfectly appropriate for an academic setting. These are the critical questions that we all have to face at some point, and they underlie any discussion of ethics and moral reasoning.” He praised the Office for Religious Life for our efforts in helping to bring discussion of important issues to the classroom, adding that “since so many of the issues that we face in the world today have to do with a failure to understand what other people with different religious beliefs are thinking, it is critical to have these kinds of discussions. I would like to see more coordination with faculty, more involvement by faculty.”

This particular professor had in fact been involved previously in two panel discussions that I organized—one for our alumni day and another for representatives of the thirty religious organizations operating on campus under the aegis of the Office for Religious Life. Those sessions had been entitled “Spiritual and Moral Inquiry in the Classroom: When and How Is It Appropriate?” The first panel was comprised only of professors who teach outside of religious studies and philosophy, and yet who provide classroom opportunities and encouragement for spiritual and moral inquiry in relation to the subject matter of their courses. The second panel included one professor from religious studies and one from philosophy. I’ve had the opportunity to talk with each of those five professors subsequently. It’s the experience of those professors that I bring to you today.

Professor Elizabeth Bernhardt, German Studies

Let’s start with German Studies Professor Elizabeth Bernhardt. She teaches a seminar for a dozen students called “Resistance Writings in Nazi Germany.” It concentrates on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor and theologian who was imprisoned and executed for his involvement in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. She explains that it’s impossible to read Bonhoeffer without going through some sort of personal transformation, and yet she doesn’t want to engage in anything approaching proselytizing in her class. She finds it “scary,” as she puts it, to deal openly with students’ values and beliefs—their moral and spiritual perspectives—having had no formal training herself in either ethics or religious studies. Moreover, she was personally reared not to talk about these things in public. She’s always been a practicing Roman Catholic, but this is an intimate personal and family matter for her, rather than something to be exposing in her professorial life.

Nonetheless, she feels compelled by the material, and by her pedagogical duty to her college students in a liberal arts context, to help them struggle with their own values and beliefs in the classroom setting. So, in effect, she gives a consumer protection warning on the first day of class that she has three goals for her students: 1) To know what happened in Nazi Germany; 2) To commemorate and honor Bonhoeffer and others who stood up to Nazism; 3) To commit personally. That is, in terms of the third goal, she tells her students that it’s not enough to admire some good people who faced evil; students must put what they learn into their own lives in some way and act on it. The third goal raises eyebrows for some students: “What do you mean that I’m

supposed to do something with this course?” Yet, she’s never lost a student on this basis, and most are very grateful for this goal by the end of the class.

It’s been important to the success of the course that there’s genuine diversity in the classroom. Usually this means a fairly equal split between committed Protestant Evangelical Christians, cultural Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) who no longer attend church, Jews, and secular students who have nothing to do with religion. The latter group are often “budding civil rights lawyers.” She encourages—but does not require—students to speak personally from their own experience as they engage with Bonhoeffer’s writings. So, they come to know most of the others’ religious backgrounds, or lack thereof. She’s been fascinated by some of the dynamics: Jews have said how much they like Evangelicals, because they seem nicer than other students and appear interested in them as Jews. But then it goes a step further, which surprises secular Jews. They are challenged by the Evangelicals to be real Jews, committed Jews: “Your culture has been so at risk so recently and you don’t even go to synagogue now?” Generally this has been taken positively by these Jews, some of whom end up more deeply involved in their faith. There are Catholics and Protestants who have been only Christmas-and-Easter Christians but end the course saying that they want to go back to their churches and participate more fully, without buying everything the church is teaching. Non-religious students often speak of greater respect for religious people and describe how they have come to a clearer understanding of what’s important in their own lives and how to engage themselves in careers and avocations that matter.

Professor Bernhardt explains that the turning point in the course comes when she is willing personally to “witness.” This term is not comfortable for her, since it’s not part of her own Catholic tradition, and it embarrasses her to speak personally, since that is not the way she’s been trained as an academic nor raised as a child. When students begin to talk about themselves, she comes to feel that it’s only fair that she tell them something about where she’s coming from. The result is a new kind of intimacy in the classroom—a sense that students are bound together forever with their teacher. It also opens up students who’ve been hiding behind their own curtains and transforms those who have been showing off in class in an egotistical way. The power structure in the class changes, and students and professor all become mutual learners.

This last fall her witnessing moment first came when two secular gay students in the class were condemning what they felt was judgementalism directed against them by Evangelical Christians. This was an unusual year when there were no identified Evangelicals in the class. As the abuse of prayer by certain right-wing TV evangelists started to be condemned, Professor Bernhardt felt moved to speak. She said, “I don’t personally laugh at people who pray. I try to pray all the time. Bonhoeffer said, “Pray all hours of the day.” Her speaking personally freed students to express both their discomfort with religious practice but also their desire to do it. One of the Jewish students in the final paper explained that “I’m trying to learn how to pray.” Coming to understand Bonhoeffer’s own Evangelical beliefs—opposing birth control and abortion and euthanasia—led to papers on China’s family planning policy, Oregon’s assisted suicide law, and honor killings.

Another form of witnessing came when Professor Bernhardt explained: “I’m not kept up at night about the meaning of life. To me it’s simply “being in service to others. In my tradition, and Bonhoeffer’s, Jesus died on the cross as the ultimate service to others.” This came as a revelation to some students who thought of the crucifixion either as blood-and-gore suffering or as something essentially to be passed over on the way to the resurrection of Easter Sunday. A gay student explained how skeptical he had been about religion and spirituality: “I’m still not religious. I don’t think I’ll ever be. But I felt so much better when I heard Professor Bernhardt say that the meaning of life is service to others and tie that to Bonhoeffer’s sacrifice. My commitment in leaving this course is lifelong service to the gay community and its struggle for justice and

respect.” Professor Bernhardt speculates that he would even consider going to church now, if he felt truly welcome somewhere as a gay man.

I asked her why helping students find meaning and purpose in their lives wasn’t a matter for chaplains or parents rather than college professors in the classroom. First of all, she explained, she wouldn’t dare to teach Bonhoeffer if students’ ethical purpose and life commitments weren’t currently engaged in the process. Second, she explained that many college students are at a developmental stage when they’ve become skeptical of what they’ learned at their parents’ knee or from people in official religious positions, including both clergy at home and chaplains on campus. It’s an obligation of liberal arts faculty to pick up the moral and spiritual dimensions of students’ lives and serve as a bridge to adult connections to institutions that embody these dimensions. Again, she explained, that requires some personal witnessing by faculty in the classroom.

I asked her what she would say to fellow faculty who feel out of their depth in dealing with students’ values and beliefs in the classroom. She reiterated that she does too. Making her own private commitments public is not easy. Admittedly, to do so requires professors to clarify what they believe and why they believe it. That takes time and effort. But if faculty don’t do it, they end up teaching as relativists and not modeling genuine struggle for students to stand somewhere in their lives. It is very important, Professor Bernhardt emphasized, for students to be encouraged to develop their own understanding and commitments, not to mimic that to which their professors witness. Proselytizing is unacceptable, but so is teaching as if nothing ultimately matters.

Professor Mark Mancall, History

The second case study is of Mark Mancall, who has been a professor of history at Stanford since 1965. His primary area of academic expertise is south and southeast Asia. For a dozen years he directed Stanford’s Overseas Studies program, and for more than thirty years he has directed a program called Structured Liberal Education (SLE)—designed specifically for first-year students interested in an interdisciplinary approach to the liberal arts. It emphasizes intellectual rigor and individualized contact between faculty and students. Professor Mancall might be considered a Jewish-Atheist-Buddhist, although, having spent a lot of time in Bhutan, he would prefer to describe himself as a “Red Monarchist.” He feels that all people have a spiritual life, although we rarely explore it in higher education. We need to work actively on integrating such exploration into the curriculum.

The way to do that for Professor Mancall is first to push students to question everything critically and actively—so much that it keeps them awake at night. Students need to learn how to think about their own position without ever resorting to saying “That’s what my parents taught me.” The reality for Professor Mancall is that we humans are deeply divided internally and with each other. To aspire to become a “whole” being, for him, is to aspire to become anesthetized or dead. We and our societies are fully alive only when we are in creative conflict within ourselves and with each other. Therefore, to understand an historical moment, person, or text is to uncover the dynamics of conflict involved.

A critical part of the liberal arts learning process, he feels, must also be to reveal as much of ourselves as possible, both as students and as professors. When studying an historical figure or text, one must be willing to talk about oneself in relation to him, her, or it. Professors in particular need to live their lives as openly as possible. That includes their personal lives as well as their most dearly held ideas and ideals. What is going on in my own family and with my colleagues and friends? Am I having financial problems? This is how life is. What are my personal biases and predilections? How do I approach my academic field? What really seems important and what doesn’t? There is no such thing as “objectivity” in the liberal arts. As Professor Mancall

puts it, “We don’t exist if we’re not coming from somewhere, and we must be open enough to tell our students where we are coming from.” That does not mean that professors should expect students to agree with them or follow them. To the contrary, students should be learning how to critique others’ positions, including their professors. In fact, they should be in active conflict with their professors. Mark Mancall’s job as a professor is to give his view of a text, because a text does not speak for itself. He has the authority of his training and experience in his area of expertise. He needs to be honest about what he knows and why. Then students have something to fight back against—a starting point or a backboard to begin developing their own perspective and their own values and beliefs.

For Professor Mancall, higher education at its best should be a matter of rigorous self-examination, for professors as much as for students. As an historical figure is studied, students should be encouraged to ask about this person’s spiritual crises: How does this figure search for meaning and purpose? What are his or her questions? Then, one must ask as a student what one’s own questions are—specifically in relation to what’s being studied and not in the abstract. That is how true learning takes place, not to mention spiritual development. And, of course, spirituality here means much more than religion, although that can be one expression of it. At minimum it would also include dimensions of art, music, architecture, and literature. Then we might add physical education, environmental studies, human biology, psychology, physics, and so much more.

Mark Mancall does not defend a relativist position in the world, however. Once students have been challenged, professors must be around to pick up the pieces. Students must decide what really matters and how to lead their lives. All ideas and values are not equally valid and students must not be led to think so. Professors need to help students think about their vocation, not imply that they are simply imparting knowledge for the sake of knowledge. What is ultimately worth spending time on and committing one’s life to? What are the moral implications of certain paths? A scientist must struggle with how his or her research is going to be used, as the creators of the atom bomb finally did. Lawyers must not only follow a code of professional responsibility, but also engage in moral dialogue with their clients and continually ask themselves about what kind of legal work they should be doing. The arts are meant to improve and embellish life, not serve as mere private amusement for their creators or for academics who study the arts.

It is also critical for universities to reclaim their founding missions, like Stanford’s: “To promote the public welfare by exercising an influence in behalf of humanity and civilization.” In the long run, if the institution has lost its spiritual and moral compass, its professors will not be able to point the way by themselves. The general cultural ethos of the institution is too strong, and that’s what students will learn more convincingly. If research is primarily directed by grant money and not by expanding knowledge and furthering the public good; if education simply furthers students’ self-interest and not the public interest; if the university compromises itself for the benefit of its donors and alumni; if university employees at the lowest level are not treated equitably and fairly—then all the professorial efforts in the world to help students find meaning and purpose in their lives will be overwhelmed by the primary lessons being taught by their university.

Professor Eric Roberts, Computer Science

Now, it may seem that moral and spiritual inquiry is a natural part of the study of history or literature. But what about engineering, math and science? The next case study, Eric Roberts, is a professor of Computer Science in the School of Engineering. He’s the professor in the faculty meeting, who expressed the view that moral and spiritual inquiry are perfectly appropriate in the academic classroom. In his department, he’s been the principal architect of the introductory

programming sequence, which was for many years the largest course at Stanford in the Silicon Valley. Along with other courses like programming methodology, he teaches a class entitled “Computers, Ethics and Social Responsibility.” It’s primarily for majors entering computer-related fields, and it involves ethical analysis of the reliability and risks of complex systems, privacy, and responsibility of professionals for the applications and consequences of their work. He also teaches a seminar with freshman preference entitled “Technological Visions of Utopia,” where students study Saint Thomas More’s *Utopia*, as well as contemporary works where computers play a central role. So, both religious worldviews and moral reasoning are highlighted in these classes. He engages his students personally by asking their opinions of the utopias they study and by canvassing them for ethical dilemmas they have faced personally. He doesn’t advocate any spiritual or ethical viewpoint in class himself, but he’s known by many on campus both as a practicing Quaker and as an activist in several organizations seeking to promote the responsible use of science and technology.

Professor Roberts has found that ethical relativism is a huge problem for engineering and computer science students. Trained in the use of the scientific method, where the falsification approach has hypotheses failing in the face of counter-evidence, these students tend to throw out any ethical theory for which there is a counter-argument, which there always is. He often needs to stress the importance of moving an ethical theory forward robustly, and tentatively accepting it, even in the face of apparent contradictions. Professor Roberts feels it is important to model ethical engagement as a teacher, without imposing his own views on students. He’s been the president of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility and the president of Student Pugwash USA. He notes that the latter organization, which encourages students to use their training in science and technology to make a better world, does not take any organizational stands. Yet, it insists that its student members must take a personal stand, no matter what it is, rather than being ethical relativists.

In his classrooms, Professor Roberts stimulates active dialogue and models enthusiasm himself. He requires critical thinking, and he pays special attention to unpopular and disagreeing perspectives. He stresses that it is important for students to come to “know thyself.” The idea of a university, as he sees it, is not directly to transmit knowledge, but to help students to develop intellectual capacity—not only for their career, but also for their participation in their family and in the body politic. He also explains that in engineering there are universally-applicable professional codes of ethics which students need to know—and need to know how to apply.

So, there are three approaches to moral and spiritual inquiry—in the humanities, social sciences, and engineering. What about the two disciplines where this kind of inquiry should be a natural: philosophy and religious studies? Ironically, the two professors with whom I spoke in these areas take a less personal approach, both in terms of encouraging their students to self-reveal and in their own modeling. Yet, that may be perfectly appropriate to material that is more directly on point in ethics and in religion.

Professor Debra Satz, Philosophy

Debra Satz is a professor of Philosophy, and she teaches courses in moral and political theory, as well as in philosophical issues concerning race and gender. She is also the director of an interdisciplinary honors program called “Ethics in Society.” She privately identifies herself as a secular Jew. Her training has led her to feel that it’s inappropriate to bring her personal perspective into the classroom, and her teaching is primarily Socratic—asking questions of students and pushing them to refine their positions through critical analysis. This has led to results like a student saying to her at the end of a course, “I’ve so appreciated being taught by a libertarian.” Professor Satz could only say in response, “Don’t infer anything about my beliefs

from the way I teach.” She did not go on to explain to the student that she is decidedly not a libertarian. She is also reluctant to create any kind of pressure for students to reveal personal information about their backgrounds or deepest beliefs, although she is open to students trying to connect their own lives and values with the texts they’re reading.

Maintaining personal privacy for students and professor has been difficult in a course she teaches on race and racism in America, however. It’s a very diverse class, both in terms of ethnicity and understanding of what it means to be an American. Determining how and why students have such different experiences and viewpoints becomes a project of the course, and she invites personal anecdotes for reflection, and she responds to challenges as to why she is teaching the course as a white Jew. She helps students to understand how different the world looks through others’ eyes, and she asks students to give the benefit of the doubt to other worldviews long enough to help them listen carefully. As a result, she sees quite a bit of personal transformation occur in the way students think about themselves and others. Still, she would never force students to identify something about themselves, nor would she identify students by their ethnicity and then ask them what they think or feel on that basis. She does not cold call students; at most, she might say, “A number of voices haven’t been heard yet in class.”

When teaching political theory, she wants students to read writings of major theorists, take them seriously on their own ground, and occupy their world from the inside. Especially when students strongly reject a particular theorist, she pushes them to understand what would draw someone to see reality this way. The default as a student should be “I’m missing something here,” rather than “This writer is an idiot.” Before moving to an outside view and judgment, she wants to be sure the student has grasped the particular theorist’s inside view. Empathetic learning, in a sense then, is moved from students’ own interaction with each other to an encounter with a text. Only after that is done should one step outside and apply critical analysis to the position presented.

Especially when teaching political theory or ethics, Professor Satz speaks of her own views very cautiously, not wanting students to think that hers are the “right” answers. Current students are looking for answers, she says, but she wants them to learn how to think. Students want to please authorities like teachers, but she doesn’t want to foreclose their personal struggle to find out for themselves. The risk of using Socratic method and not self-revealing as a teacher, though, is that students merely come out as skeptics and relativists with good debating skills. They can end up saying that since all views have problems and costs, it really doesn’t matter what one’s own values and beliefs are. Here it’s important, she feels, to convince them that although there are competing value systems in the world, we have no choice but to live by the best one that we can currently determine. Otherwise, much that is wrong can be done in our name or through our apathetic complicity. One needs to take a stand. And it should be based on solid reasoning, not just on personal preferences. Professor Satz feels that Stanford’s founding language—“to promote the public welfare by exercising an influence in behalf of humanity and civilization”—does really matter. Therefore, she will sometimes model this as professor, revealing where she comes out on an issue and why, as her current best thinking, or what kind of action she has personally taken on a matter of social concern.

Religion can find its way explicitly into her classroom when talking about church-state relations in political theory, including spiritual bases for civil disobedience and the appropriate place for religious exemptions. Philosophers can argue for the importance of religion, too, as when John Locke argues that humans’ being created in the image of God and imbued with inalienable rights is the basis for human equality. Empirical and naturalist explanations are not as compelling, because they tend to reveal how unequal human beings really are. Religion seems to back up a deep theory of equality, and hence Professor Satz makes sure that this issue is an important part of the classroom discussion about Locke’s theory of human equality.

Professor Brent Sockness, Religious Studies

Finally, moving to the discipline of Religious Studies, I spoke with Professor Brent Sockness. Personally he's a Lutheran Christian. His principal research interest is nineteenth century German theology and ethics. He explains that he addresses students' own spiritual and moral issues only "obliquely" in the classroom. This might not be immediately obvious, since one of the courses he teaches is called "The Problem of God." He describes it as "philosophical inquiry into the concept of God through its classic formulations, modern critics and contemporary defenders." Starting with the thirteenth century theologian Thomas Aquinas, working through philosophers Ludwig Feuerbach and David Hume, and ending with the contemporary theologian Gordon Kaufman, Professor Sockness insists on close reading and critical reflection on texts. He wants his students to get deeply into the minds of each of these thinkers, in his own time and place, and makes clear by example that the classroom is not the place for students to witness to their beliefs or to share their own spiritual perspectives. He understands that looking seriously at theological texts may lead to spiritual and moral transformation for his students, but students' personal edification is not the goal of his course. Instead, he wants his students to understand where these four figures stood and then to think critically about their positions and theories.

Professor Sockness is pessimistic about universities' "values" initiatives, because he doesn't believe it's realistic to try to replace what's been instilled in students through their homes and communities over the prior twenty years. At best, students can learn to think critically about what they have inherited and to speak civilly about it with others. Yet, he thinks that neither subjectivist nor relativist positions can ultimately be substantiated. Our morals may emerge from our communities of origin, and in that respect be particularistic, but few of us really live our lives as if everything is relative. The purpose of moral theory is to make lived moral positions explicit and to promote critical reflection on them. It is important to learn as well that there are mutually exclusive perspectives that have been conscientiously held throughout history, not all of which can be normatively correct.

He also believes that promoting religious literacy is a laudable goal in the college classroom, because our students are usually quite uninformed, or misinformed, about their own religious traditions, much less anyone else's. If our students were better educated about religion as a human phenomenon, and about the great world religions, we would avoid many of the egregious mistakes that seem to be made daily in the public policy arena. This is what it means to have academic "spiritual" and moral inquiry in the classroom for him. Academic work by its very nature is distancing and often objectifying. If it does not seem to bear any resemblance to self-help programs, pastoral counseling, twelve-step recovery, or preaching, so be it! That's why we have higher education – to provide a space in society uniquely dedicated to scholarship, critical inquiry, and the reflective life.

None of this is to say that we shouldn't expect university professors to be people of personal integrity, to be careful listeners, to be responsible creators and stewards of their disciplines, to understand teaching as a vocation, and to care deeply about their students as fellow human beings. There may also be times when a professor's or a student's personal experience will be helpful in elucidating the subject matter of the course. Yet, one's own experience, religious or otherwise, is not the point, nor is it significant whether the course material is immediately relevant to one's own world. Getting outside of oneself is in its own way a moral and spiritual good!

Conclusions

In conclusion, there are many different ways to engage students in moral and spiritual inquiry in the classroom. Our job in colleges and universities is to take the project seriously. We must remember our liberal arts obligation, even in large research institutions, to help students find meaning and purpose in their adult lives. We also have an obligation to society at large to graduate future leaders who, in the words of Stanford's founding grant, will "promote the public welfare by exercising an influence in behalf of humanity and civilization." That means they must be religiously literate and ethically sensitive, as well as highly skilled in critical reflection. They must be well launched on the project of coming to know themselves, as well as coming to know others through empathetic listening—being able to see the world through others' eyes as well as their own. They must be willing and able to take stands and commit their lives in the face of bigotry and destructiveness. Only then can we say that we are worthy inheritors and stewards of the liberal arts tradition, which has always been concerned about the whole development of college-educated students and about the survival of civilization itself in a dangerous world.
