A Response to Anna Strhan's Paper:
A Clues for Discussing An-Other Religious Education

TATSUYA ISHIZAKI
Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University

Reading Anna Strhan's paper led me to consider the problems of locating religious education and moral education in relation to current Japanese education. I will respond to the question of religious education in Strhan's paper and consider her interpretation of the insights within Levinas's thinking. Then, after exploring the problem of the relation between morality and education in Japan, I will consider relations between morality and religion from a Levinasian standpoint. At first, I will analyze the problem of subject (subjectivity) in the critical realist model in Religious Education. Next, I will deal with the meaning of 'being religious' and 'ethics' within Levinas' thought. To conclude, I would like to comment upon how we might search for an-other religious education from the point of view of ethicality in Levinas' thought as a reconsideration of daily life. I will then reconsider religious education through the perspective that Levinas opens up, to retain the possibility of speaking about religion after being released from various theoretical forms of 'private' religion, in other words, speaking about 'religiousness' beyond the framework of 'belief.' In this sense, I will suggest Strhan's study contributes to the question of what religious education is.

INTRODUCTION

Reading Strhan's paper led me to consider the problems of locating religious education (RE) and moral education in relation to current Japanese education (Strhan, 2010a). I will respond to the question of religious education in Strhan's paper and consider her interpretation of the insights within Levinas's thinking. Then, after exploring the problem of the relation between morality and education in Japan, I will consider relations between morality and religion from a Levinasian standpoint. I will begin by briefly outlining the Japanese educational context with regard to religious and moral education.

Religion is assumed to be private rather than public in modern Japanese society; it is not located within society as a public institution. In terms of education, in Article 20 of the Constitution of Japan, Article 9 on the Fundamental Law of Education orders that religion is to be respected, but that institutions of education, as national organizations, must not provide

religious education, or any other religious activity. These regulations apply to religious education within public educational institutions. In the many private schools, however, basic information about religion is taught as a compulsory subject as well as a part of moral education.

Against such a background, the opportunity that many Japanese have to experience religion within the framework of religious education is limited. Yet this does not mean that religion is entirely absent from Japanese schooling as students might, for example, read Buddhist and Christian writings in Japanese or in Morality classes. Moreover, there is the opportunity to hear teachings of Buddhism, Shintoism and Christianity in educational spaces beyond school.[1] However, as religious education is not a formal or compulsory part of Japanese education, I will consider here the aim of moral education in Japan, before returning to the question of religious education more broadly. I would like to consider Strhan's paper with reference to moral education as related to social norms and individuals' values, while considering carefully the difference between religion and morality.

In a general sense, moral education involves not only instilling moral norms but also guiding and supporting the student to 'become moral' and to be able to form their own answers to the question 'what is morality?', or 'what is a morally desirable being?'. In other words, the aim of moral education is to guide and support the student to acquire social customs and to be able to respond to social demands. In Japan, this purpose is expressed as 'Cultivating Morality' ('Guidelines for the Course of Study for Junior High School', 2008).

In 2006, the Fundamental Law of Education was revised with respect to how morality was to be evaluated. The ideal of 'patriotism'—'to nurture an attitude . . . to love our country and our home'—was included. This, the government claimed, would not contradict Article 19, which states that freedom of thought and conscience should not be violated. As a result, however, many people concerned with education drew attention to the danger of the nation intervening in something that it is believed should remain a private question for individual Japanese. Despite these concerns, the curriculum guidance on patriotism was implemented in many elementary schools, and some began to evaluate patriotism on a grading system of three levels. This could be seen as indoctrinating students into a kind of social norm and 'desirable sense of value' by locating 'morality' as a school 'subject' under the name (or slogan) 'Cultivating Morality'. This approach is problematic, therefore, as it makes morality an object of compulsory evaluation.

This problem relates to Strhan's doubts about the phenomenological model that aims at 'deepening interfaith dialogue' and 'being more tolerate'. This raises some questions:

- What are the criteria of human internal development?
- Should religion or morality be evaluated?
- Should we (teachers) teach the student conventional right or wrong?
- Does understanding follow on from belief, or does belief follow understanding in religion?

The different answers to these questions would have significance for reconsidering the problem of indoctrination in religion. If morality at the stage of 'belief' is not considered to have rationality in itself, it would make sense to ask the same kinds of questions about morality as Strhan asks about religion. In other words, the problems of religion and morality are the same as those of belief and reason.[2] In relation to belief and intelligibility, Levinas says that

'intelligibility' is making 'all significance, all rationality, go back to being' (Levinas, 1986, p. 112), 'belief' as the religious life is the relation to the divine itself that transcends existence, aspiring 'to a *beyond, to deeper than oneself*—aspiring to a transcendence different from the *out-of-oneself* that the intentional consciousness opens and traverses (Levinas, 1986, p. 110). Important for the discussion to come, then, is the idea of 'the relation to the divine' as discourse, 'the idea of infinity come to me' (idée-de-l'Infini-en-moi) in Levinas' thinking (Levinas, 1986, p. xiv).

THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECT(IVITY) IN THE CRITICAL REALIST MODEL

WE ARE GROWING UP WITH LEARNING WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT DO.
(Advertisement aimed at preventing minors from smoking)

I will now provide a brief example of a recent event in Japanese education to provide some illustration for the discussion that follows on moral education and social norms.

Last year, a smoking room was set up for students in a private high school. This raised the issue of allowing high school students to smoke in school. As a result, the prefectural police were sent the papers of the principal and teachers involved, which were then passed to the Public Prosecutors Office. This case, I would like to suggest, provides a starting point from which to respond to Strhan's paper that overlaps with my own concerns as a teacher in a correspondence high school, where the students have various problems.

It was reported in the news that smoking and truancy, for example, were common among the students before entering this school. Students had been smoking before the smoking room was set up. Previously, in this high school, smoking was neither allowed nor condoned. But, as the principal and teachers had already discussed repeatedly how to help students to stop smoking, they tried instead to provide educational guidance as a means to help the students to stop smoking gradually. At first, they encouraged the students to smoke *only* in the smoking room. This was intended to gradually decrease their smoking, in the hope that they would eventually stop smoking altogether.

The fundamental principle informing this approach is the need to stop young people under 20 years old smoking. However, minors' smoking is not such a simple problem that they come to stop smoking by being taught the current social norm that 'smoking is unwholesome'. In school, however, school personnel aim to teach students to abide by principles and rules. If students violate these, they will be forced to respond by punishing students by various means. The smoking room, however, as an alternative approach, is an experiment with more effective methods of enforcing social and moral norms that use the sort of psychological understanding that is used in everyday situations.

This type of conflict situation, arising from a dispute over social norms, happens frequently in the daily life of educational institutions, and is clearly not limited to the problem of minors' smoking. The problem of deviation from social norms continually raises the question of how the teacher should respond to both the social norm and the student, before the question of how they guide the student toward a right response. In this case, right or wrong aside, the school personnel neither ignored the social norm, nor took an attitude of overlooking the students' smoking. Could

we, therefore, regard it as a practice that aimed to wait for the students' awareness of social norms positively, whilst at the same time guiding them? The approach of not being obedient to the social norm by understanding it as given from outside, but rather building the norm within each student might be related to 'the critical realist model' that Strhan discusses.[3]

The case outlined above relates, therefore, to the problem of the ideal approach to ethics education in Japan. The educational purpose of 'Ethics' in the high school is understood as follows:

> [h] aving the student deepen their understanding and meditation of self-formation, being and way of life as human whilst young, having them improve the practical motivation that to form character, encourages them to establish the self as a living subject. Bringing up the necessary ability and attitude as citizens who have good sense, with the spirit of respect for human (Ministry of Education, Culture, sports, science and technology Japan, 2008).

The study of 'Ethics' in school demands that students are able to deepen their meditation on their own problems, by understanding ancient thought as knowledge in an inclusive sense. In that process, struggling with various insoluble problems in human life, they come to try to form their inner life.

This idea of ethics education is connected with the question of how the critical realist model of RE might bring 'awareness' within each student in relation to the ideal of 'cultivating the student's autonomy'. Let us reconsider Andrew Wright's argument, as presented by Strhan. Strhan agrees with his idea that the role of RE should not be to indoctrinate within Christianity and to learn the Bible, but should offer the learning opportunity to reconsider religious and social truths critically. However, she does not seem to agree with the emphasis on rational justification in this model. Rather, she highlights the fundamental questions of what we can and should examine under the name of God within RE. Considering this in relation to classroom planning, the following questions arise:

- Should RE have a curriculum appropriate for training the elite, to acquire the skills of problem-solving and to improve social adaptability, to deepen self-understanding? Or
- Should RE have similar teaching methods to other subject disciplines?

The quotation at the beginning of this section, 'WE ARE GROWING UP WITH LEARNING WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT DO', describes the process of human growth from the point of view of 'possibility and impossibility'.[4] But, ethics is not, I would argue, a question of 'can/cannot' but whether I am accepted or not in the relation to others.

If we follow Levinas, the autonomous subject doesn't transform herself to belong to social discourses, before responding to others, but substitutes herself for the other as the subject takes on responsibility for others. RE might contribute to disclosing the manifestation of the other as far as RE keeps asking the question 'what is human maturity?' with respect to the relation between the human and God.[5] It is necessary to refer to Levinas's use of the idea of ethical subject (subjectivity) in relation to this, which he considers to be suffering, atoning for the other. Because [I] become as substitution for the other not by my identification but by myself being

dis-identified. In other words, it is as a sensitive being who is receptive to the approach of the other that I have already been accepted by others unconditionally, whilst at the same time, I am always already responsible for the other. This describes how I become by myself through the revelation of the other in a way that is different from how ethics education conceives of becoming moral as becoming someone who can give faithful judgment to traditional moral and social norms. I understand Strhan as suggesting that RE cannot lead to ethical subjectivity in a Levinasian mode as long as it follows the critical realist model in trying to explain relations with God. Considering the location of 'self-understanding' from Levinas' view, it could be very important in an interpretation of the relation between 'deepening self-understanding' and 'listening to the voice from the other' (or 'responding to the other'). In other words, the task is to question the plausibility of the theory of the causal relationship in reconsidering this problem.

THE MEANING OF 'BEING RELIGIOUS' AND 'ETHICS' WITHIN LEVINAS' THOUGHT

Religious Education may be divided into the following five categories according to their different purposes: 1) Confessional religious education; 2) Religious knowledge education; 3) Safety education against religion; 4) Religious tolerance education; 5) Religious cultivation of aesthetic sentiments. Strhan appears to favour 'Religious cultivation of aesthetic sentiments' in particular.

Teaching religion as knowledge in Religious knowledge education (2) is concerned, in Levinasian terms, with the *said* about God or with 'being religious' as following stated religious doctrines.[6] This might be different from the commitment to religiosity, being able to explain about the religion, or to respond to the question, 'What is the religion?', for this is education as a the process of language acquisition. Levinas describes the experience that commits to religiosity in terms of 'transcendence'. To give the example of tolerance: tolerance will be more deeply learned by facing others than by knowing what 'tolerance' is. However, I also think that it is very important to investigate various ethical problems critically, in the process of the formation of autonomous subjects. Ethical subjectivity in Levinas' thought does not manifest itself in the process of learning. That is to say that being ethical in a Levinasian sense is not something that can be evaluated as a 'learning outcome'. It is not a competence chieved once and for all. In that respect, it is different from the critical realist model. Levinas expresses the ethical relation as follows:

> The ethical fact owes nothing to values; it is values that owe everything to the ethical fact (Levinas 1986, p. 147).

The ethical relation is not the same as 'Morality' or 'Communication'. It is not an ethics about anything but rather ethics as existing for another; the meaning of ethics is not constructed but searched for. Ethics will start where (or when) 'I' acknowledge 'the Other' beyond 'the self'. Ethics is not like practical knowledge (or applied knowledge) in Levinas' thought. Transcendence within ethics is to tear off the individual from the social totality, at the same time, to be reflected within that totality under the responsibility for others. In an education that

emphasizes this aspect of the ethical, 'knowing' that 'God is merciful' means 'Be merciful as well as God': this might mean to hear and follow the other's voice. We do not learn practical knowledge but break into the relation with God through others.

THE POSSIBILITY OF AN-OTHER RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

To conclude, I would like to comment upon how we might search for an-other religious education from the point of view of ethicality in Levinas' thought as a way of reconsidering our daily lives. It is difficult to establish universal religious education. It might be argued that the public role of religious education should be to prepare dialogical places where people who have different values and beliefs talk mutually, based upon their different (religious) experiences. As a result, I am led to reconsider religious education in this broader public sense through the perspective that Levinas opens up, to retain the possibility of speaking about religion after being released from various theoretical forms of 'private' religion, that is, speaking about 'religiousness' beyond the framework of 'belief'. In both senses, Strhan's study contributes to the question of what religious education is.[7]

In recent history, the specific aims and purposes of education have developed according to the demands of capitalism. Perhaps within our current situation, their meaning and importance have lessened. Communication with others and social norms are unstable and therefore under these circumstances, the relation between self and other should be seen as a manifestation of the processes of ethical subjectivity. This can demonstrate the 'missing' or rather 'missed' ethical core of the current frameworks of education. It is possible that a model of RE that attends to the challenges of Levinas may produce a new style of speaking about education in our daily lives, always maintaining tense relations with public education, without being subsumed within such frameworks. In this context of rapidly shifting social norms, I intend to pay close attention to what directions religious education in Britain and Japan will take in the future.

THE SPACE OPENED UP AFTER THE DIALOGUE

The way in which Strhan's study and practice of religious education connects with Levinas' thought hinges on the interpretation of the term 'religion'. One of the clear similarities between academic subjects cultivating aesthetic sensibilities, for example, literature, art, history, etc. and religious education, is in their concern with interpretation. In many subjects, educational practice is oriented toward a goal. In religious education, however, remaining unbounded by a particular interpretation or sense of value is very important. In other words, the central issue is to understand religion in complex and various ways. Understanding the diversity of society, culture, and traditions might require extending ourselves beyond a particular interpretation. In studies such as the humanities, for example, literature, art, history, etc., this entails considering the relation between a text and its interpreter.

When we interpret a kind of practice, we lead rightfully to different 'truths' by way of interpretation. In education, in particular, teachers take the initiative to present a subject and its

criteria in their planning and acting. To facilitate students' absorption of the above-mentioned educational practices, I think that the practice of religious education might contribute to the idea of 'education as text', or open up a space for reconsidering educational practice from Strhan's viewpoint. That is: 'My sense that there is something wrong with the current model of religious education arises from experience rather than rational argument' (Strhan, 2010b). This suggests a significant point from which to reconsider the question, 'What is religious?'.

Religious practice in Japan brings the perspective of *pathos,* rather than the perspective of *logos,* regarding experience as understanding. I think that the 'religious education' that Strhan advocates is made possible not by reflecting on our own personal experiences, but through a dialogue with a text that we can share. 'Transcendence' is not a problem of 'personal' transcendence, the Divine, but lies beyond the 'personal' dimension as the practice of opening a space to accept something we cannot understand.[8]

NOTES

1. When I entered a Protestant university, I attended a religious education class for the first time. In the class, the Bible was taught, and I remember that I learned the movement of Zionism.
2. 'Žižek's theorization of religious belief also emphasizes that it cannot be reduced to knowledge' (Strhan, 2010). Paul Ricoeur (ADD DATE) investigates the concept of 'belief' in detail.
3. Actually, however, many students are forced to remember what is written in the textbook in Ethics Education classes.
4. Levinas points out the danger of using the term of 'we' among the people who believe in the same religion on his essay *Entre nous* (Levinas, 1991).
5. In addition, it is necessary to study the concept of 'maturity' and 'education' in Levinas' thought.
6. Levinas says that Christianity would incline toward legitimate doctrine, indicating the problem of thematizing God in religious experience (Levinas, 1990).
7. Interpreting the idea of 'Religious Public' in Levinas' thought, it is that the closing of the self is destroyed by being exposed to 'the Other' that transcends the self. I think that her practice as discussed in part 4 of Strhan's paper corresponds closely to the idea of 'Religious Public'.
8. I thank Paul Standish and Naomi Hodgson for their help in revising the original version of this paper.

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