are all distributed according to merit) is somehow profoundly opposed to democratic equality just because it leads to some differentially distributed goods, both social and economic. However, he does not present a way in which these goods, which will be distributed unequally in any society, might be fairly distributed.

This is not to suggest that the current system of distributing these goods is either good or just: it probably misdefines merit, and it certainly discriminates on the basis of class of the birth family, skin color, gender, and culture. This is why the book fails to provide a more realistic analysis of what is wrong and what possible alternatives might exist, leaving the reader somewhat frustrated. Pointing out the shortcomings of our present social structures is easy; presenting realistic alternatives is a great deal more difficult.

Part of the reason we disagree over whether schools are failing or succeeding is the fact that one person's idea of failure is exactly what the next person wants schools to devote themselves to wholeheartedly. For pointing this out, this is an important book, though I nevertheless wish it were better.

Finally, we ought to note the most important feature of this book is that it is not, when all is said and done, a critique of schools at all. It is not that schools have failed society; society, lost to all attractions except those of commerce, has failed schools.

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Teachers of My Youth:
An American Jewish Experience,
by Israel Scheffler. Dordrecht, NL:

Between 1880 and 1914 the Jewish population in the United States grew from 250,000 to over four million, the vast majority of whom came from Eastern Europe. Immigration brought both safety from persecution and the threat of cultural and religious assimilation. Those
immigrant families who sought to ensure their children’s knowledge of and identification with Judaism in their new country were forced to so without the strong cultural framework and social cohesion which framed their European experience. In order to provide a Jewish education for their children in America, these families turned to a heterogeneous group of teachers who were themselves struggling to make a living in – and to make sense of – their new country. Among these immigrant families were the parents of Israel Scheffler, the noted Harvard philosopher of education. In this book of memoirs, Scheffler weaves the threads of memory, autobiography, and reflection into a largely sympathetic portrait of the educators in whose classrooms the young Scheffler sat from kindergarten to university.

Scheffler shares stories about and insights into his teachers, each of whom embodied different aspects of traditional European Judaism transplanted into new and foreign surroundings. He recounts their teaching styles, religious practices, political beliefs, their personal nicknames, characteristics, and idiosyncrasies and how the language each teacher spoke in the classroom, beyond serving simply as the language of classroom instruction, reflected their attitudes toward religion, tradition, and the authority of sacred texts. The Yiddish speaking teachers held to the belief that Hebrew remained the tongue of the holy texts, while the Hebrew speaking teachers did so as a reflection of their commitment to the re-establishment of modern Hebrew as a living, spoken language. English speaking teachers tended to have a strong command of the language and perhaps also had a different kind of understanding of the challenges of teaching the traditional texts and traditions to immigrant Jewish children from Yiddish-speaking homes. There were devoutly religious teachers and there were non-religious teachers who identified more strongly with Zionism, socialism, or other political movements. Scheffler’s memoirs provide a valuable window on a unique niche in the history of Jewish education in North America and raise questions concerning the broader issues of immigration and the cultural transmission of language, culture, religion, and values experienced by other immigrant groups.

In the final chapter Scheffler moves from a narrative to a lecture mode arguing that universal principles of rationalism, empiricism, and critical inquiry are fundamentally incompatible with the particular world of a religious tradition based on

Sacred texts taught without a philosophical attitude [which] are in danger of being received either as literal but incredible