

Principia



A Journal of
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Education*

Brian A. Williams, *Editor*

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Principia: A Journal of Classical Education is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal that publishes articles, policy research, editorials, and reviews related to the history, theory, practice, and pedagogy of classic liberal arts education and contemporary classical schools, colleges, and universities.

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Introducing *Principia* and Classical Education

On behalf of the editorial team and advisory board of *Principia: A Journal of Classical Education*, allow me to welcome you to the inaugural issue of the first peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated to the history, theory, practice, and pedagogy of contemporary classical education.

In 2018, conversations began among a handful of academics who recognized that classical education had become a distinct subfield within the discipline of education and that it would be well-served by its own academic peer-reviewed journal. We recognized that most of the original research and writing being generated by scholars and teachers about classical education would not fit easily into disciplinary journals dedicated to fields such as classics, history, philosophy, literature, or modern progressive and industrial education. Even if select articles did appear in such journals, we reasoned it was unlikely the articles would reach the people for whom they were written, namely, other scholars and teachers involved in this vibrant renewal. This recognition led to the founding of *Principia: A Journal of Classical Education* as the first scholarly journal dedicated to this educational paradigm. Several academics involved in those early conversations now serve on *Principia's* editorial team, and I am grateful for their expertise, friendship, and dedication, as well as that of our distinguished board of advisers. I should single out two editorial team members for special acknowledgment, because they have been my stalwart collaborators from the beginning: Robert Jackson of the Great Hearts Institute and Matthew Post of the University of Dallas. In addition, I am grateful to the Classics Department at Baylor University for hosting the journal's website, and to the Philosophy Documentation Center for publishing the journal.

The time is ripe for a peer-reviewed journal of this sort. Over the last forty years, classical education, sometimes referred to as “historic liberal arts education,” has become a significant presence in the educational landscape. Private schools, public charter schools, parochial schools, co-op schools, online schools, independent educators, and homeschool networks and curricula offer K–12 classical education to students across the United States, Canada, and, increasingly, the world. In addition to English-speaking countries like England, Australia, and

New Zealand, classical schools can be found in China, South Korea, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil, among others. Classical education can be found in schools that are secular, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian across the range of traditions: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox. Its reach extends to higher education, as well. Select North American colleges and universities offer four-year core curriculum programs and classical general education programs that complement traditional majors. Several of these institutions also offer undergraduate and graduate programs designed to train teachers and administrators for classical schools worldwide. In addition, numerous publishers, conferences, institutes, associations, and trade magazines tend the fires and fuel the flames of renewal.

Increasing numbers of doctoral graduates from a variety of disciplines can also be found teaching in or leading classical schools. The content and quality of education and the collegiality of a small faculty of friends combined with the caliber of students, the paucity of jobs in their fields, and growing disillusionment with the pressures and politics of higher education have drawn them to classical schools. Similarly, established scholars are investing in classical education, either because their children attend classical schools, the paradigm aligns with their own practices, or they see the value classical education offers students and society. Many of these scholars and teachers have produced original research around the history and practice of historic liberal arts education or have developed theories and models for its recovery and application, whether as a whole or with respect to specific disciplines. We have established *Principia* to encourage, curate, and disseminate this growing body of scholarly research and writing.

Some readers of *Principia* may be fully conversant with classical education, others may not. Either way, a brief overview may be useful, though I hasten to remind readers that while brevity may be the soul of wit, it can also birth the jejune. Accepting that risk, and acknowledging the differences between schools and educators across space and time, I offer the following.

The goal of classical education is to educate whole persons through the accumulated wisdom of the ages for a lifetime of flourishing regardless of their profession or place of employment. It attempts to recover the integrated ends, curricular materials, pedagogical methods, and formative culture that characterize the 2,500-year-old tradition of liberal arts education, while remaining open to new works of profound insight, beautiful artistry, and genuine discovery.

INTEGRATED ENDS

Educators within the liberal arts tradition generally align the ends of education with those of human formation and flourishing in seven distinct areas: intellectual, moral, aesthetic, spiritual, physical, practical, and social. Students are formed in these ways while they are led to pursue and participate in four

transcendent goods (the true, good, beautiful, and holy) and three immanent goods (the healthy, beneficial, and neighborly). In order to illustrate this holistic vision of education, the following chart aligns the areas of formation with their ends, governing questions, means, deficits, and the deleterious results that occur when a single end is myopically pursued to the exclusion of the others.¹

Area of Formation	Governing Question	End or Goal	Means or Virtue to Acquire	Deficit or Vice to Overcome	Danger if Pursued Exclusively
Intellectual	What should we know?	The True	Wonder and Intellectual Virtue	Ignorance	Curiositas ²
Moral	What should we love or how should we act?	The Good	Ordered Loves and Moral Virtue	Vice	Moralism
Aesthetic	What should we create or enjoy?	The Beautiful	Skill and Taste	Ugliness	Aesthetism
Spiritual	Who or what should we worship?	The Holy	Piety	Acedia	Pietism
Physical	How should we use our bodies?	The Healthy	Discipline	Malady	Narcissism
Practical	What work should we perform? ³	The Beneficial	Skills	Uselessness	Pragmatism
Social	How should we relate to community?	The Neighborly	Service and Civic Virtue	Individualism	Tribalism

¹This summary and chart represent my attempt to name and synthesize the ends and goods pursued across the entire tradition. Though no historic educator nor associate editor of *Principia* deserves blame, I owe the model of aligning questions and ends to an excellent book I wish I had written: Joseph Clair, *Reading Augustine: On Education, Formation, Citizenship and the Lost Purpose of Learning* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

²*Curiositas* is a subcategory of the vice of intemperance. It describes the unrestrained intellectual appetite that pursues knowledge irrespective of moral norms or goods that should constrain or order it. Classical examples include the proverbial cat, Icarus, the Sirens' call to Odysseus, Adam and Eve in *Genesis* and *Paradise Lost*, Faustus, Dante's Ulysses in the *Comedy*, the sorcerer's apprentice, and Hans Christian Anderson's little mermaid, among others.

³The medieval Christian educators Hugh of St. Victor and Bonaventure lauded the "mechanical" or "common" arts as ways of mitigating the material effects of the fallen creation and serving the well-being of individuals and communities. The tradition has generally held them in high regard ever since. They include any profession that meets material needs, including medicine, the performing arts, commerce, farming, sewing, cooking, and architecture, among others.

This vision resembles the Greek practice of *paideia*, which describes how children were led to mature adulthood through holistic formation and the cultivation of the compound virtue *kalokagathia*, the good-and-beautiful, or what Cicero and the later Latin tradition simply called *humanitas*, and what Hugh of St. Victor called *pulchrum esse*, beautiful being. Classical educators, therefore, do not merely prepare students to pass the next exam, progress to the next grade, earn a diploma, access higher education, or secure gainful employment, but to live well and die well alongside their teachers who are endeavoring to do the same. Recognizing that “the child is the father of the man,” and that the road of human flourishing goes ever on and on, classical educators look at the eight- and eighteen-year-old students in the desks before them and see the thirty-eight-, fifty-eight-, and seventy-eight-year-old adults they will become. Of course, even a classical school is but one formative community among others—families, religious institutions, and local, regional, and national cultures—so its influence is not total, but it is intentional, integrated, and enduring.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century classical educator and sociologist, W. E. B. DuBois invokes this holistic vision when he writes in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “the true university will ever have one goal,—not to earn meat, but to know the end and aim of that life which meat nourishes. . . . The final product of our training must be neither a psychologist nor a brickmason, but a man.”⁴ Other Black classical educators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—Anna Julia Cooper, Alexander Crummell, and William Sanders Scarborough—make remarkably similar claims, as do educators like Aristotle, Alcuin, Philip Melancthon, Bathsua Makin, John Henry Newman, and Dorothy Sayers, among others. To narrow the scope of education, they imply, is to narrow the scope of human beings.

This broad scope of education was intentionally narrowed by several models of education that came to dominate the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These include “industrial” models, which risk reducing education to training for gainful employment; “progressive” models, which risk reducing education to romantic “self-actualization” or the construction of “social selves” tailor-made for late-modern liberal democracies; and higher education “research” models, which risk narrowing education to the production of disciplinary specialists for the modern university. Championing pragmatic immediacy, at least these first two models explicitly rejected the capacious vision offered students by the classical liberal arts tradition, its multi-dimensional ends, and the cultural endowment of languages, literature, arts, and philosophy it had been conserving and entrusting to successive generations. However, sustained systemic dissatisfaction with these reductive and instrumentalized models of education contributed to the recent

⁴W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 79, 83.

and rapid growth of classical liberal arts education. The concern is not that education leads to economic, practical, civic, or cognitive ends, but that one of those ends might wrongly be presented and pursued as the sole end. Even so, classical education defines itself less by negative comparisons and more by the positive pursuit of the seven ends mentioned above.

CURRICULAR CRITERIA

Though ends do not justify means, they should determine them. Therefore, along with recovering the integrated ends of the longer tradition, contemporary classical education also attempts to recover select curricular materials, pedagogical methods, and aspects of school culture that seem conducive to integrated multi-dimensional formation. It also incorporates new insights and practices that support those ends. One challenge with summarizing 2,500 years of classical curricula is to avoid the impression that it was authoritatively established in ancient Athens or medieval Paris, preserved inviolable by successive generations, so that it can now be downloaded and implemented on a Monday morning in late August.

However, classical education does not represent a dead artifact but a living tradition. In Jaroslav Pelikan's famous phrase, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."⁵ Therefore, "tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide."⁶ In this, Pelikan follows the nineteenth-century classical educator John Henry Newman, who argued that a living idea, like liberal arts education is not always purer or clearer at "the spring," that is, at its origin, but often becomes "more equable, and purer, and stronger, when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full."⁷ Similarly, the bed of classical liberal arts education has become deeper and broader than when the idea first bubbled out of the minds of Socrates, Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle, producing tributaries that run in and out of it, and producing fruits they never imagined. Even so, like all traditions, common features endure.

Historically, education in classical Athens began with early formation in piety to instill gratitude for one's ancestors, one's city-state or nation, and the divine; in gymnastic that trained the body; and in "musical" education that nurtured wonder and trained the moral affections through the disciplines of the "Muses"—poetry, history, music, and drama. These were followed by the *trivium*, the verbal arts of grammar, dialectic (sometimes called "logic"), and rhetoric,

⁵Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

⁶Pelikan, *Vindication*, 68. He continues, "Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition."

⁷John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: James Toovey, 1845), 40.

which together taught students to read well, reason well, and speak well. It provided a nascent understanding of language and logic that students needed before moving to advanced studies, and it offered the rudiments of virtuous rhetoric as a way of persuading people to believe the true and act on the good. So the trivium pursued intellectual, practical, philosophical, and ethical ends. Though the art of grammar—reading, exegesis, and interpretation—comes first, whether dialectic or rhetoric immediately followed depended on the educators and their particular time and place. Some considered dialectic the culminating verbal art, given its contribution to philosophical discourse, while other privileged rhetoric, given its contribution to civil discourse, courtly orations, or church preaching.⁸ As part of “grammar,” contemporary classical schools also teach Latin, and some offer Greek, to help students experience the beauty of the ancient languages and acquire unmediated access to authors like Homer and Plato, Vergil and Seneca, Paul and Augustine.

After the trivium came the mathematical arts of the *quadrivium*, consisting historically of arithmetic, music (or *harmonia*), geometry, and astronomy, which together trained students to understand harmony and proportion through discrete and continuous patterns in both time and space. These four arts were more than modes of inquiry for understanding the material world, they were also propaedeutic ways that prepared students for advanced mathematical, scientific, philosophical, and theological studies. This can still be seen in the ways that a well-taught quadrivium prepares students for studies in probability, algebraic geometry, physics, cosmology, and calculus. Though considerable recovery work has been accomplished with respect to the trivium, several projects are currently underway to recover the vision and practice of the quadrivial arts and the liberal arts of mathematics.

Though which arts qualify as “liberal” differs between educators up to the fifth century CE, Martianus Capella and Boethius authoritatively settle the number at seven, with three verbal arts and four mathematical arts.⁹ These seven are called “liberal” because they “liberate” the mind from ignorance, liberate it to discover and demonstrate knowledge, liberate the student from reliance on a teacher, and liberate the educated person to move confidently in the social and natural worlds.¹⁰ Historically, after the seven liberal arts, some students progressed

⁸Despite recent usage, “grammar, logic, and rhetoric” were not used historically to refer to the stages of a child’s development. References to the “grammar stage,” “logic stage,” and “rhetoric stage” cannot be found in the literature prior to the mid-twentieth century, nor can references to the “grammar, logic, and rhetoric” of a given subject or discipline.

⁹Though Hugh of St. Victor subsequently identifies twenty-one arts, he agrees that the seven arts of the trivium and quadrivium are basic to the others.

¹⁰The term “liberal” also referred to arts and activities pursued by people who were free from lives of consuming manual labor, and so had the leisure to pursue other activities. As many will know, the Greek word for “leisure,” *σχόλη* (Latin, *schola*) is the root of the English word “school.”

to philosophy as the love and pursuit of wisdom, and though “philosophy” has been organized in different ways, it usually included natural philosophy (contemporary advanced math and “sciences”), first philosophy (epistemology and metaphysics), moral philosophy (ethics, politics, and economics), and divine philosophy (theology) as the “queen of the sciences.” Most contemporary classical schools include versions of these in their curricula, though by different names and with varying degrees of emphasis.

Thinkers in the tradition often laud the value of the “mechanical” or “common” arts and the “fine” arts, but these generally enjoy a larger presence in contemporary schools than they did historically, where they were learned through apprenticeship rather than at school.¹¹ Even so, the tradition comes to value both: common arts because they meet real needs and affirm the material goodness of the world, and fine arts because they manifest beauty and bring refreshing delight to the soul.¹²

The section quoted above from DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* includes a window into the classical curriculum at Atlanta University, where he taught:

In a half-dozen class-rooms they gather then,—here to follow the love-song of Dido, here to listen to the tale of Troy divine; there to wander among the stars, there to wander among men and nations,—and elsewhere other well-worn ways of knowing this queer world. Nothing new, no time saving devices,—simply old time-glorified methods of delving for Truth, and searching out the hidden beauties of life, and learning the good of living. [This curriculum] was laid before the Pharaohs . . . was taught in the groves by Plato . . . formed the *trivium* and *quadrivium* . . . And this course of study will not change; its methods will grow more deft and effectual, its content richer by toil of scholar and sight of seer.¹³

Note the references throughout to Plato, the *Aeneid*, the *Iliad*, astronomy, history, the *viae* or “ways” of the trivium and quadrivium, the ancient and enduring curriculum, and the transcendental properties of the true, beautiful, and good. DuBois also includes a general principle for determining curricula, which further distinguishes classical schools. He asks: “where . . . shall we ground knowledge

¹¹I have long hoped to see the founding of liberal arts trade schools, which apprentice students in trades without excluding them from the benefits and delights of the liberal arts tradition.

¹²The liberal, common, and fine arts are “arts” because they refine common practice, learned through imitation, with reasoned rules and precepts in order to produce better “artifacts,” whether justified knowledge of the world, material objects that meet needs, or works of beauty that please the soul. Though the Greek *ἐπιστήμη* and Latin *scientia* are not identical, they both generally refer to the knowledge that results from the arts. Therefore, though terms differ, educators in the tradition distinguish between “art,” as a skill to be developed, and “science,” as the body of demonstrated knowledge the arts produced—hence the pair “arts and sciences,” which refer neither to “fine arts” nor in large part to “physical sciences.”

¹³DuBois, *Souls*, 78–79.

save on the broadest and deepest knowledge? The roots of the tree, rather than the leaves, are the sources of its life.”¹⁴ And so he avers to “time-glorified methods” and materials—the roots rather than the leaves.

To that end, though criteria differ slightly between schools, most contemporary classical schools are guided by some set of the following questions, which are intended to help them distinguish roots from leaves and determine which roots will best nourish the hearts and minds of students in their particular school given its location in space and time:

- Has a work been handed on by generations across a broad spectrum of sects, ideologies, and nationalities who consistently recognize its inherent depth and beauty? Is it a “modern classic” that is likely to be handed on in a similar way?
- Does it explore and articulate universal human experiences and questions in deep and beautiful ways?
- Does it explicitly or implicitly participate in “the Great Conversation” about important matters across space and time?
- Has it influenced later thinkers, authors, generations, and cultures intellectually, artistically, socially, or politically?
- Does it nurture love for the true, good, beautiful, and holy?
- Especially for younger students, does it model and inspire virtue, naming good and evil as such?
- Is it the best introduction to a particular idea, or does it provide a unique perspective on that idea?
- Is it an important work and one that students are unlikely to read, or read well, on their own?
- Is it appropriate to the students’ age and stage, does it cohere with the curricular arc, and does it help students integrate their knowledge and advance their understanding?

The classical tradition regards works that generally satisfy these criteria like treasures in an inherited cultural endowment that should be preserved, protected, promoted, and passed on to future generations as beneficial gifts to be valued and enjoyed together, regardless of age, class, region, gender, race, nationality, or religion.

A living tradition also revisits and sometimes recovers pieces of itself that were overlooked or abandoned during its path to the present. In that spirit, some classical scholars and educators are reintroducing works from women that were

¹⁴DuBois, *Souls*, 80.

known in the tradition but largely unknown to contemporary schools. Among these forgotten “roots” are the ninth-century Dhuoda, author of the *Liber Manualis*, an Augustinian handbook of moral and spiritual formation for her son; the tenth-century Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, who wrote the first Christian dramas in medieval Europe, modeling them on the Roman playwright Terence; and the prolific Christine de Pizan, one of the most accomplished and educated persons of the fifteenth century, and author of forty-one books and poems, including the *Book of the City of Virtues*, *Book of the City of Ladies*, and *The Path of Long Study*. Other women from the tradition include the twelfth-century composer Hildegard of Bingen, the seventeenth-century polyglot educator Bathsua Makin, and the eighteenth-century Black poet Phillis Wheatley.

The tradition has also always incorporated new authors. For instance, no one in the sixteenth century read John Milton, no one in the seventeenth century read George Eliot, and no one in the nineteenth century read Flannery O’Connor, but after they wrote, their works became welcome dialogue partners in the Great Conversation. So the proverbial canon of books is never closed. New “leaves” grow from the tree and sometimes catch the light in ways no other leaf has. To that end, scholars and educators are also introducing into their curricula Black authors who drew on the classical world to respond to the contemporary one. These include the nineteenth century classically educated Maxwell Philip, author of the compelling pirate novel, *Emmanuel Appadocca*, each chapter of which is introduced by a different Shakespeare quote; Ralph Ellison, author of one of the great American novels, *Invisible Man*, which invokes Homer and Dostoevsky; Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison, who minored in Classics and drew on classical poetry and tragedy throughout her novels; and, of course, Martin Luther King, Jr., who chose the Bible and Plato’s *Republic* as the two books he would take to the proverbial desert island. Referring to the latter, he explained, “whatever realm of theology or philosophy is one’s interest—and I am deeply interested in both—somewhere along the way, in this book, you will find the matter explored.” Other late-modern Black authors and educators in the tradition include Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and the Black classicists I’ve already mentioned: Crummell, DuBois, Scarborough, and Cooper. Each of these authors help us see the breadth and depth of the classical tradition and the living resource it offers students for understanding, interpreting, and responding to the world in which we live.

PEDAGOGICAL METHODS

Good teaching is good teaching, so classical education does not claim to possess exclusive access to methods entirely unknown to other educators. Shards of the methods and materials from the classical tradition are present throughout every system of education, as one would expect. Nor does contemporary classical ed-

ucation employ every method or practice known from the tradition. That said, its distinctives include an emphasis on “poetic knowledge,” a well-stocked and generative memory, discovery and demonstration, socratic teaching, seminar, and the teacher as part of the curriculum.

Classical education generally regards poetic knowledge as the first step in education. This does not refer to a knowledge of poetry, but instead to the knowledge a person has through an immediate sensory–emotional experience of things, whether horses, Shakespeare, or the Milky Way. It nurtures wonder because it results from an immediate encounter with reality; thus, it precedes analytical or critical examination. Though precritical, it constitutes real knowledge—consider how a boy on a Kansas farm knows something essential about horses without ever studying the mineral composition of hooves, or how a girl delights in the banter of *Twelfth Night* in performance before examining doubling in English class, or how someone lovingly knows the storied constellations of the night sky before learning about astrometric binary stars. As Dennis Quinn writes in “Education by the Muses,” education that begins with wonder and poetic knowledge “introduce[s] the young to reality through delight. It is a total education including the heart, the memory and passions and imagination, as well as the body and intelligence.” Classical education regards “poetic experience” and “poetic knowledge” as central to its commitment to work with human nature, nurture students’ intellectual appetites, and foster their affections for life-long wonder and the delight of learning.

Classical educators are also concerned to help students develop and craft a well-stocked, integrated, and generative memory rather than merely create a mental repository. Classically, memory was an activity that enabled thinking as an act of composing and inventing—inventing ideas, arguments, images, and stories that draw on and draw together what a student remembers. Memory is the *arca sapientiae*, the chest of wisdom, from which mental treasures are drawn. Augustine and “the second Augustine,” Hugh of St. Victor, along with the contemporary Mary Carruthers, are our best sources on this, but classical educators also hear Quintilian whispering that “all education depends on memory, and we are taught in vain if whatever we hear flows past us” (*Institutes* 11.2.1). To that end, classical schools have students read widely and employ song, chant, catechism, Aristotle’s common topics and four causes, and any pedagogical or mental tool that helps students develop and use their memory, because what they hold in and can retrieve from their memories is what they know.

The emphasis on active student formation has also led most classical schools to practice seminar and “socratic teaching,” because they help students develop the skills of reading closely, questioning carefully, thinking coherently, and speaking eloquently. In seminar, students learn how to have a conversation with one another—rather than with the teacher—about a given text or idea; in socratic teaching or *elenchus*, by contrast, the teacher probes students’ assertions

and commitments to assess their coherence and rationality, sometimes driving them to *aporia*, when, like some of Socrates' interlocutors, students realize their own incoherent conclusions and questionable assumptions. Some schools also utilize practices like disputation, debate, and tutorial teaching to accomplish the same goal. Similarly, the basic principle of "discover and demonstrate" guides teachers trying to help students develop the habit of discovering on their own and demonstrating what they think they know.

Finally, because students learn through *mimesis*, that is, imitation, classical teachers recognize they need to be the kind of virtuous and thoughtful people they want their students to become. In this way, the person of the pedagogue becomes both content and pedagogy. John Henry Newman captures the experience of many students and teachers, including my own in both roles, when he writes, "The general principles of any study you may learn by books at home; but the detail, the colour, the tone, the air, the life which makes it live in us, you must catch all those from those in whom it lives already. . . . We must come to the teachers of wisdom to learn wisdom, we must repair to the fountain, and drink there."¹⁵ This locates the faculty of friends at the heart of the school's pedagogy and culture.

SCHOOL CULTURE

Because classical education regards education as formation for life rather than simply preparation for employment, it recognizes that schools are micro-cultures and moral eco-systems that shape the minds, hearts, and hands of those deeply immersed within them over many years, especially when those years transpire during the most impressionable season of life. Schools that lack an integrated culture also shape their students, but in a disjunctive way that leaves it up to the student to try to integrate head, heart, and hands as best they can, which usually means not very well or in ways that reinforce the cynical and skeptical spirits of the age that deny that coherent integration is possible. Nurturing an integrated and coherent school culture begins with a faculty of friends who have a common vision and vocabulary of education—it includes the curriculum and pedagogy but also the ambient beauty of the school (or lack thereof), the way students comport themselves, whom and what the school celebrates, how students experience time, the use of assessment and grades, the school motto and mission, how parents are involved, and so forth. Each of these contributes to the formative culture of the school that will necessarily shape the attention and affections of students, and how they relate to themselves, other people, and the world.

This overview is but a sketch, and I have used broad and suggestive strokes—too few for a complete picture, but hopefully enough for a coherent image to

¹⁵John Henry Newman, "What is a University?" in *Rise and Progress of Universities and Benedictine Essays* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2001), 8–9.

have emerged that will give readers an impression of what contemporary classical education is and how it differs from other educational paradigms.

CLARIFICATIONS

Given the questions sometimes raised about classical education, I feel compelled to add that classical educators are not quaint antiquarians. They don't replicate old rituals, employ old methods, and read old books simply because they possess a predilection for old things. Nor does classical education represent the educational version of the Society for Creative Anachronism, however much fun some people find enacting the knight errant or lady-in-waiting on a Sunday afternoon. Classical education represents neither a hobby, play-acting, a defensive retreat from the "modern world," nor the latest project of either right- or left-wing politics. Neither is it a bulwark of any particular race, class, nation, region, or religion. Instead, it blends new insights and discoveries with the accumulated wisdom, vision, methods, and materials of the longer educational tradition to prepare contemporary students for a lifetime of living well and contributing to the common good.

It may also be helpful to distinguish between 1) the long tradition of liberal arts education, 2) the field of Classics, and 3) the contemporary practice of classical education, which are sometimes confused. The long tradition of classical liberal arts education refers to the paradigm and practice that flowed from three Mediterranean cultures—the classical Athenian, Roman, and early Christian, especially those Christian communities in North Africa and Asia Minor. Because the Mediterranean was the crossroads for so many cultures, the intellectual tradition that developed in its context was capacious and polyphonous, drawing together wisdom and stories from the African, Asian, and European continents. Beginning in Athens in the fifth century BCE with Socrates, Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle, it was inherited and developed by Romans like Cicero and Quintilian, further received and refined by Christian educators like Clement, Basil, and Gregory of Nazianzus, who were followed by medieval educators like Augustine, Boethius, Alcuin, Maimonides, Jacob Anatoli, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Hildegard of Bingen, and Hugh of St. Victor. From them, the tradition passed to early modern writers and educators like Christine de Pizan, Erasmus, Philip Melancthon, Comenius, John Milton, and John Colet, leading eventually to teachers and professors like John Henry Newman, Anna Julia Cooper, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, John Senior, and many others along the way.

Secondly, there is the distinct academic discipline of Classics, which emerged as a specialized discipline in the early nineteenth century to study, specifically, the languages and literatures of classical antiquity, especially Greece and Rome, and their reception. This field of studies ostensibly began in the Renaissance but was nurtured by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century neo-classical movements in Europe and the early United States, leading to the foundation of Classics and

Classical Philology as areas of disciplinary specialization in the earliest research universities of Europe and the United States.

Finally, there is the contemporary practice of classical education, which draws on the longer tradition of classical liberal arts education without attempting to replicate any one era in that tradition. Classical schools also draw on the field of Classics, teaching classical literature and languages, but integrating these with texts, languages, the fine arts, new mathematics, and scientific discoveries that have emerged since the classical era. Therefore, classical education aims to produce neither Carolingian Franks nor disciplinary Classicists. This new phase of classical liberal arts education in primary and secondary schools can be identified with the independent founding of four schools between 1979–82: Trivium School in Massachusetts, Cair Paravel Latin School in Kansas, Logos School in Idaho, and Trinity School in Indiana. These schools were not, however, *sui generis*. Instead, they were inspired by earlier educators and authors like Dorothy Sayers, as well as by twentieth-century programs like the celebrated Integrated Humanities Program (IHP) at the University of Kansas, Thomas Aquinas College, the revised curriculum of St. John's College, the "Core Curriculum" program at Columbia College within Columbia University, and the "Basic Program" at the University of Chicago. Several educators who animated these programs collaborated with one another and suggested that college may be too late and too short for students already deeply formed by a shallow culture and fractured education. Therefore, they encouraged their students to start K–12 schools in order to introduce younger students to the riches of the liberal arts tradition, to nurture their wonder and delight in learning, and to form their hearts and minds from an early age.¹⁶

Contemporary classical education is an attempt to recover and continue the long liberal arts tradition that began with the Greeks, Romans, and early Christians, but which was overwhelmed by dominant twentieth century paradigms. Like any living tradition, it continues to grow and change, while remaining committed to the integrated intellectual, moral, aesthetic, spiritual, physical, practical, and social formation of its students, using the best pedagogical means and materials available to orient them to whatever is true, good, beautiful, holy, healthy, beneficial, and neighborly.

THE VISION OF *PRINCIPIA*

And so we return to where we began, with the service *Principia: A Journal of Classical Education* hopes to offer. The editors and advisory board hope that it will deepen and broaden the river of classical education—to return to Newman's metaphor—as it flows from the classical past through the contemporary present into the distant future. We hope it will offer scholars, academics, and teachers

¹⁶The threads of influence between these institutions and the earliest K–12 classical schools is a fascinating story that remains largely untold.

from around the globe a venue for robust and vigorous dialogue and debate about classical education. As with any scholarly journal, even though articles and reviews may not always reflect the conclusions of the editor or editorial team, they will extend the perennial conversation about classical liberal arts education and how it can best educate students for a life of holistic well-being and service to the common good. While the primary audience of *Principia* is scholars and academicians, we hope that the research and insights this journal provides will make substantive and positive impacts on the practical implementation of classical education in schools and homes around the world.

To that end, we look forward to receiving submissions of original research, writing, and book reviews related to the history, theory, practice, and pedagogy of classic liberal arts education, and we look forward to sharing the fruit of scholarly labors with you, our readers.

Sincerely,

Brian A. Williams
General Editor

The Liberal Arts and Virgil's *Aeneid*: What Can the Greatest Text Teach Us?

Julia D. Hejduk

ABSTRACT: As the classic of classics and the bridge between pagan antiquity and the Christian era, Virgil's *Aeneid* stands at the center of the humanities' Great Conversation. Yet this poem of Empire, with its flawed hero and its ambivalence toward divine and temporal power, raises more questions than it answers about the nature of human history. The epic's true moral complexity, mirroring the insoluble conundrum that is human life, makes it especially relevant in an era whose political polarization resembles civil war. Reflecting on centuries of readers' deeply personal relationships with the *Aeneid*, this article discusses how even today the "greatest text" can provide companionship and inspiration on our life's journey.

My beloved, late mentor, Wendell Clausen, had a charmingly derisive smile for a brand of watered-down scholarship he labelled "What Virgil Means to Me."¹ Nevertheless, he was a man with a deep and abiding love for poetry, the kind who would memorize a few lines before bed every night, and whose modeling of that kind of love ultimately had a greater effect on me and others than any specific insight in his published work. What Virgil meant to him, what Virgil means to each person who reads Virgil, is, in fact, the most important thing about Virgil.² For a classicist, the main goal of teaching and scholarship

¹This article is based on a talk delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Core Texts and Courses (2014) and at Rhodes College, Carthage College, Austin College, and Emory University. I am grateful for the warm hospitality and the excellent comments from those audiences.

²In all of Clausen's scholarship, one can hear his speaking voice; see especially "An Interpretation of the *Aeneid*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 68 (1964): 139–47. My

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is to help ourselves and others enter more deeply into that peculiarly intimate relationship with the dead which emerges through reading, in hopes that this bond may, in turn, affect our relationships with the living. That is my justification for blending scholarly observations with personal reflections in this essay on a poem that has become a lifelong companion.

First, I should define my terms. To say the *Aeneid* is the “greatest text” does not necessarily mean that it is the *best* text, but that more than any other it represents and defines the Great Texts enterprise, that conversation among important books which is the lifeblood of Western thought and the heart of classical education. It absorbs and transforms all previous literature, from the sublime epics of Homer and the tragedies of Euripides to the shaggy Roman writers feeling their way in a new idiom; and it becomes an inevitable source for everything that comes after. If no actor is more than six removes from Kevin Bacon, no serious work of Western literature is more than three removes from Virgil’s *Aeneid*. As Jan Ziolkowski observes, “to describe the epic as a bestseller would make sense only if the customary noun were ‘betterseller.’”³

What explains the poem’s fascination? Partly because Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue was seen as a pagan prophecy of the birth of Christ, he became the bridge between Greco-Roman antiquity and the strangely persistent cult that sprang up about fifty years after his death; pagans and Christians alike were eager to claim him. He was both sage and seducer, a compendium of all philosophical wisdom but also a temptation that could lure the innocent away from the simplicity of the Gospels—in short, a perfect symbol of the road both into and out of Jerusalem that the life of learning has always been. Most know how St. Augustine laments wasting tears on Dido when he should have been weeping for his own soul, or how Virgil guides Dante through the *Inferno* and all but the very end of the *Purgatorio*. Less familiar is the key role Virgil plays in Everhelm and Onulf’s *Life of St. Poppo, Abbot of Stavelot*. There we hear how the good abbot healed a poor monk named Gozzo who was afflicted with a peculiar case of Virgilitis, one in which sage and seducer are both very much in evidence:

He cried out suddenly that a troop of demons was assuming the appearance of Aeneas, Turnus, and other characters from Virgil, and that he was being assailed, to his very soul, by those who in learning had been of the most value to him.⁴

edited volume on the so-called Harvard School is an attempt to capture the voices—and emotions—of numerous scholars of Virgil as well as to introduce some of the major interpretive questions Virgilian scholars wrestle with. See *Happy Golden Anniversary, Harvard School!* Special issue of *Classical World* 111, no.1 (2017).

³Jan M. Ziolkowski, introduction to *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, by Domenico Comparetti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), viii.

⁴Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael C. J. Putnam, eds., *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 896.

These tidbits should at least have made the case for “greatest text.” It follows that if the *Aeneid* cannot teach us anything, it is questionable whether any text can.

The other term calling for definition is trickier: liberal arts. Everyone knows that the word “liberal” relates to “liberty,” and we often hear something to the effect that “the liberal arts will set you free.” What we do not hear very often is that freedom, *libertas*, is a concept that is defined as the negative of slavery, *servitus*: etymologically, to be free means not to be a slave. The concept arises out of Greco-Roman societies for whom slavery was an institution that seemed entirely natural, the master/slave dichotomy as inevitable as male/female or parent/child. The so-called servile arts are those which aim at a tangible, utilitarian, and measurable end, just as a slave’s purpose is to be useful. The liberal arts involve knowledge for its own sake, and they are a product of the leisure made possible because someone else (namely, slaves) is doing the grunt work.

I bring this up for two reasons. First, it is important to realize how thoroughly the devotion to the servile arts has permeated modern discourse on education, especially by non-educators. The underlying assumption is that everything of value needs to be quantifiable in monetary terms or immediately and obviously useful. In his wonderful essay on the history of the word “free,” C. S. Lewis explains a distinction deriving from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (1.2.11):

The free study seeks nothing beyond itself and desires the activity of knowing for that activity’s own sake. That is what the man of radically servile character—give him what leisure and what fortune you please—will never understand. He will ask, ‘but what *use* is it?’ And finding that it cannot be eaten or drunk, nor used as an aphrodisiac, nor made an instrument for increasing his income or his power, he will pronounce it—he has pronounced it—to be ‘bunk.’⁵

This is not to denigrate activities that increase material wealth. For women especially, living in a prosperous society means not having to devote every minute to scrounging for food or washing out diapers by hand. And the reading and writing that are part and parcel of the liberal arts happen to have the side benefits of aiding creative thinking, broadening perspective, and cultivating persuasive expression, all of which tend to lead to higher incomes and to create the conditions that give rise to actual wealth-producing innovations. But that is not their *purpose*—or ours. Amid all the administrative fervor for “evaluative metrics,” we need to remember what the actual object of the game of life is, namely, happiness—or more specifically, all-fulfilling, everlasting joy. The things that wound us with beauty, that free our understanding from the shackles of time and space, that connect us with the whole human community, living and dead, are the “3 Fs” so often neglected by measurement-mad educational reformers: fiction, fine arts, and foreign languages. After our basic physical needs are met, one of the main

⁵C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 127.

purposes of prosperity is to create the leisure and resources requisite to explore, produce, and enjoy these fruits of human culture. When wealth becomes the end rather than the means, when the worth of every activity is judged by how much it can increase income or power, then we are in danger of forgetting what it means to be human.

Second, it is important not to ignore or suppress the dark origin of the so-called liberal arts. The leisure to read and write complex things has always been the privilege of the upper classes, made possible because of the servile arts practiced by those at the bottom of the socio-economic pile. Ancient Greece and Rome were slave-owning societies, as was our own country for much of its history; the men who formulated the basic concepts of individual liberty and the rule of law thought it was normal and acceptable for one human being to own and use another. It is uncomfortable to think about, and it should make us feel at least a little bit guilty—preferably the good kind of guilt that causes us to appreciate the gifts we have been given, to desire to share them as widely as possible, and not to squander them on garbage. But paradoxically, it is also the case that all that reading and thinking and heartfelt contemplation of the human condition, along with the rise of Christianity and technology and a host of other factors, did eventually contribute to the demise of slavery, to universal education, and to the possibility that every person will have the immeasurably precious opportunity to participate in the humanities' Great Conversation.

This is where the *Aeneid* comes in. Rome began with Romulus and Remus, one brother killing another. The shadow of that fratricide hangs over all Roman history, and the era in which Virgil grew up was marked by particularly bloody civil wars, first between Julius Caesar and Pompey, then between Mark Antony and Caesar's adopted son Octavian, who would later become the emperor Augustus. Though Virgil died in 19 BCE with the *Aeneid* still unfinished, he had begun writing it a decade earlier; the Battle of Actium, in which Octavian's forces vanquished those of Antony and his Egyptian consort Cleopatra, had taken place in 31 BCE. A *New York Times* article archly titled "Why Wasn't It 'Grapes of Glee'?" points to a correlation between the "literary misery index" and the "economic misery index" from the previous decade.⁶ The *Aeneid* was born in a decade of tumultuous transformation, an age poised precariously between the fresh memory of civil war and the hope for lasting peace.

What gives the poem its universal appeal is partly this precariousness. We hear the constant counterpoint of the voice of empire and the voice of grief, the focus on future greatness alongside deep compassion for the exiled, the suffering, the losers. *Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*: such a massive thing

⁶Pam Belluk, "Why Wasn't it 'Grapes of Glee'? Study of Books Finds Economic Link," *New York Times*, January 8, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/09/science/study-finds-literary-mood-reflects-previous-decades-economy.html>.

it was, a thing of almost unimaginable weight and cost, to found the Roman people (*Aen.* 1.33).⁷ As the liberal arts rest on the backs of slaves, so the Roman Empire rests on the backs of those who lost their homes, their loved ones, and ultimately their lives when Aeneas and his people took over Italy with no justification other than Fate.

Far from minimizing the moral complexity of empire, Virgil amplifies it at every level—especially in his depiction of the gods. At first, the basic framework seems simple. Troy has fallen, but Aeneas will survive to plant the Trojan remnant in Italy, fighting a war with the native peoples and finally merging the Trojans with them to form the society that will give birth to Rome. As Jupiter famously declares in his opening prophecy, “Upon these (the Romans) I place no limits in time or space: I have given empire without end” (1.278–79). What makes it difficult to get there is the persistent blocking action, what Denis Feeney calls a “multivalent frustrating negativity,” by the goddess Juno.⁸ She knows she cannot ultimately stop her enemy, yet she still wants to drag things out, add delays, and hurt him by making his people suffer. But by the end of the poem, Aeneas’ immortal enemy has been ostensibly won over to the proto-Roman cause, and he kills his mortal enemy Turnus, thus paving the way for him to marry the princess Lavinia and continue the line that will give birth to Rome.

The problem is that even the basic “Juno bad, Jupiter good” model is fraught with difficulties.⁹ Of the three reasons given for Juno’s fury against the Trojans, one is pure wounded vanity: the Trojan prince Paris chose Venus over her in the world’s most fateful beauty contest. But the other two, “the hated race and the honors of snatched-up Ganymede” (1.28), stem from her husband’s philandering with Trojans: the race was hated because it sprang from Dardanus, offspring of Jupiter’s affair with Electra; and Ganymede was Jupiter’s Trojan boy toy, plucked off a mountaintop by the god’s eagle. Does it make sense to put all the blame on the jealous wife when her husband’s infidelity is the cause of her rage? Moreover, readers have long been disturbed by the way Jupiter channels Juno at the end of the poem, when he sends a hellish Fury to torment Turnus, just as his wife sent a Fury—perhaps even the same one—to infect Turnus and others to help start the war. But what I find even more disturbing is that the *only* things Virgil’s Jupiter cares about are *fama*, “fame” or “reputation,” and *imperium*, “empire” or “power.” He is entirely indifferent to things like beauty, love, and human happiness or suffering—in short, he doesn’t give a fig for the liberal arts. Juno, by contrast, ex-

⁷All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁸Denis C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 134.

⁹This section is a highly condensed summary of the argument I expounded at length in “Jupiter’s *Aeneid*: *Fama* and *Imperium*,” *Classical Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (October 2009): 279–327 and updated in *The God of Rome: Jupiter in Augustan Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 58–102.

hibits actual compassion for both Dido and Turnus, Aeneas' primary antagonists. When Dido is in her death throes but cannot die, Juno intervenes for no other reason than because she "pitied her long suffering" (4.693). A notable German scholar wrote that the idea of Juno weeping is *undenkbar*, "unthinkable"—and yet she is clearly and unambiguously weeping, *adlacrimans*, when she pleads with Jupiter in book 10 to let Turnus live just a little longer (10.628). Juno may be a demon, but in many ways Jupiter, the mouthpiece of Fate, is even worse.

Against such a divine backdrop, what becomes of a man like Aeneas, the paragon of *pietas*? The word conveys not just religious piety but a deep sense of responsibility toward all who are connected with him. Such is the problem of evil, as Virgil formulates it at the beginning of the poem: "Why did she make the man of *pietas* endure so much misfortune and undergo so much suffering? Is such wrath in the hearts of the gods above?" (1.9–11). That question—of the suffering of the innocent—is the one that matters, and any philosophical or theological system that does not put it front and center is of no value whatsoever. The *Aeneid* confronts it head-on, intertwining it, mysteriously, with the grand narrative of human history and of individual human lives. In stark contrast to the Bible, Virgil's poem lacks the guiding agency of a loving and beneficent God: the only prayers Jupiter answers are those which contribute to Roman *imperium*; individual happiness or suffering is of no importance to him. Can the epic hero persecuted by divine wrath and executing the dictates of Fate nevertheless be a model for us on our life's journey? I believe he can—but once again, we must face up to the darkness and recognize the many ways in which our hero is a failure.

As a husband and lover, he is a disaster. We all know the stirring image of Aeneas escaping from Troy carrying his father on his back and holding his little son by the hand, the perfect emblem of the present bearing the weight of the past as it guides the future. His wife Creusa, however, is not in the picture, because he told her to "follow our footsteps *a long way off*," *servet vestigia longe* (2.711); that she got left behind is entirely his fault. I realize the plot requires that Aeneas not have a wife in tow, but Virgil *could* have shown her dying in his arms. And as for the affair with Dido, as if it were not bad enough for a lonely woman to have a handsome stranger wash up on her shore, she has her emotions manipulated directly by Mercury on Jupiter's orders, then has Cupid disguised as Aeneas' son, on Venus' orders, "breathe hidden fire into her and deceive her with poison" (1.688). Aeneas, by contrast, gives in to his passion of his own free will. Dido was a just and successful ruler, courageously building her society in adverse circumstances, until Aeneas came along and ruined her: as she says, "happy, oh, too happy, if only the Trojan keels had never touched our shores" (4.657–58). Dido's suicide is devastating evidence that erotic love, which our society likes to stir up casually in order to sell things, is a force more powerful than Jupiter's thunderbolts—and more dangerous. But when Aeneas encounters

her shade in the underworld, he is as clueless as ever: his main self-defense is “I couldn’t believe I’d hurt you that much by leaving” (4.463–64).

As a reader, Aeneas is also a disaster. When the storm sent by his archenemy Juno blows him off course to Carthage (her favorite city), he comes upon a temple to that goddess decorated with scenes from the Trojan War. Most of them depict particular moments of suffering, loss, and defeat for the Trojans, such as you would expect to find on their enemy’s temple. But what is his reaction? “There are tears for things, and mortal affairs touch the mind! Don’t be afraid: fame will bring salvation!” (1.462–63). This is a model of misreading, of how our own hopes and desires can sway us and blind us to the plain meaning of what we see. Sometimes he is prevented from reading things that could have had an impact on his own self-perception: on the doors of the temple near the entrance to the underworld, which depict the labyrinth and scenes from Cretan legend, the scene Aeneas is about to read when the Sibyl yanks him away is probably that of Theseus abandoning Ariadne, just as he himself abandoned Dido.¹⁰ Sometimes his reading involves a total lack of comprehension: presented with the magnificent shield depicting “Roman history in the future tense,”¹¹ Aeneas “rejoices in the image, ignorant of the reality,” *rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet* (8.730). And his final reading of a work of art—the golden baldric Turnus wears, which depicts the Danaids’ murder of their husbands on their wedding night—fuels the terrible wrath and burning fury that causes him to reject Turnus’ supplication.

How about as a model of religious piety, that *pietas* for which he is so famous? Not a disaster, perhaps, but far more problematic than is usually realized.¹² For instance, the prophet Helenus tells him in book 3 that, above all, the one thing he must do *first* on reaching Italy is pray to the divinity of Juno; the first thing Aeneas does on reaching Italy, however, is pray to the divinity of Minerva. Lest the reader think this was a fluke, the same thing happens in book 8: the god of the Tiber River tells him to get up at first dawn and pray to Juno, postponing Tiber’s own honors until later; Aeneas gets up at first dawn and prays to the Italian nymphs and Tiber! Aeneas does eventually get around to praying and sacrificing to Juno, but for the Romans, performing rituals *correctly* was essential; a ritual error was called a *piaculum*, a sin or mistake requiring expiation through a new offering, which was also called a *piaculum*. I have argued at length that Aeneas himself is ultimately the *piaculum* demanded by the religious logic of the Romans

¹⁰See Sergio Casali, “Aeneas and the Doors of the Temple of Apollo,” *Classical Journal* 91, no. 1 (Oct–Nov 1995).

¹¹W. H. Auden, “Secondary Epic,” in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), 455. Auden’s title alludes to the distinction between “Primary Epic” (Homer) and “Secondary Epic” (Virgil) eloquently described by C. S. Lewis in *A Preface to ‘Paradise Lost’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942).

¹²See Julia T. Dyson, “The *Piacula* of Aeneas,” in *King of the Wood: The Sacrificial Victor in Virgil’s Aeneid* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 29–49.

and the narrative trajectory of the poem, that his sacrifice of Turnus points to his own sacrificial death. But whether or not one accepts that argument, nearly all readers agree that Aeneas' brutal rampage after the death of Pallas in book 10, which includes such atrocities as his sacrifice of a priest and his taunting of victims who appeal in the name of fathers, brothers, and sons, is a mockery of *pietas* and an outrage to basic standards of human decency.

Little wonder, then, that when I first started reading the *Aeneid*, I always found myself rooting for the other characters, especially Dido and Turnus, whose happy lives were shipwrecked by the proto-Roman juggernaut. The first time I really started to have sympathy for Aeneas was during the summer of 1994, at an NEH Institute at Emory University on "Reading Virgil's *Aeneid* in the Humanities Curriculum"—but not because of the seminar itself.¹³ On the first Friday of the six-week seminar, a nagging pain in my right calf became too strong to ignore, and I went to the teaching hospital on campus for an ultrasound. It turned out I had a potentially life-threatening blood clot and had to spend a week hooked up to an IV; the remainder of my time was spent in a wheelchair with my leg elevated. Like Aeneas, I had been blown off course; my desires had been thwarted; no longer a free agent, I was dependent on the kindness of others. Thanks to the incredible generosity and humanity of all those around me, this turned out to be a pretty soft landing; but it still gave me a taste of the frustration of helplessness. And it helped me to see what matters about Virgil's admittedly flawed hero, why the *Aeneid* is a poem of adulthood: *Aeneas does not get to do what he wants to do*. It is hard to forgive him for his stilted parting speech to Dido, which includes zingers like "I shall speak a few words on behalf of my case" (4.337) and "if I could live my life the way I wanted to, I'd be . . . back rebuilding Troy" (4.340–44) in lieu of the outpouring of love we want to hear. But the brilliant half-line at the end sums up, with restrained perfection, the eternal conflict between duty and desire: *Italiam non sponte sequor*, "I'm pursuing Italy not by my own choice" (4.360).

In that sacrificial paradigm lies yet another uncomfortable but important message. I mentioned above that Virgil leads Dante through almost the entire *Purgatorio*; but he cannot lead him all the way.¹⁴ Because he and the other pagans lived before Christ, they never knew the one true God. As he tells us on the threshold of the *Inferno*, "for such defects, and no other sin, we are lost, and only so far afflicted that without hope we live in desire" (*Inf.* 4.40–42). *Sanza speme vivemo in disio*: surely this is one of the saddest lines in the whole

¹³The volume that came out of that seminar is an outstanding collection of essays by different scholars on each book of the *Aeneid*: Christine G. Perkell, ed., *Reading Vergil's Aeneid: An Interpretive Guide* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

¹⁴On Dante's reading of Virgil, see my "Virgil: The *Aeneid*," in *Finding a Common Thread: Reading Great Texts from Homer to O'Connor*, ed. Robert C. Roberts, Scott H. Moore, and Donald D. Schmeltekopf (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2013), 66–80, 325–26.

poem. On the threshold of Paradise, Dante finally beholds Beatrice, and he quotes Dido's words as she feels herself falling for Aeneas, "I recognize the traces of the ancient flame" (*Purg.* 30.48, *Aen.* 4.23). Disordered human erotic love is transformed before our eyes into real and lasting love for the Creator, the goal of Dante-pilgrim's journey. He turns to tell Virgil the thrilling news—but Virgil has disappeared. Like Aeneas, destined to die three years after his poem's end, Virgil is destined to lead others to the enjoyment of something that he himself will never see.

Dante provides a beautiful image for this self-sacrifice in Virgil's meeting with the poet Statius, who lived during the first century of the Christian era. In the *Purgatorio*, Statius tells how the prophecy of Christ in the Fourth Eclogue contributed to his conversion, even though Virgil himself did not understand the purport of his own words:

You acted like a man who goes by night, who carries the lamp behind and doesn't help himself, but makes the people in back of him learned, when you said, "The age is being renewed; justice returns, and the first human time, and a new offspring descends from the sky." Through you I became a poet, through you, a Christian. (*Purg.* 22.67–73)

The lamp behind, *il lume dietro*: the same could be said of Aeneas, striving for the glorious Roman future that he will not live to enjoy. As I have observed of Dante's brilliant perception of the almost-but-not-quite Christianity of the *Aeneid*, "The loss of the beatific vision is not a judgment on Virgil's soul; it is a comment on Virgil's poem."¹⁵

Pondering this image of the lamp behind, I was struck by similarities to the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. To all who interacted with her, she radiated joy and peace; as Malcolm Muggeridge says, "in a dark time she is a burning and a shining light."¹⁶ And yet, as we know from her private letters, her interior life after she founded her Missionaries of Charity was often characterized by feelings of desolation and darkness so painful as to be almost unbearable. The depth of her longing and her obedience exceeds my imagination. We can hear the voice of Jesus on the cross in her words:

I understand a little of the tortures of hell—without God. I have no words to express what I want to say, and yet last First Friday—knowingly and willingly I offered to the Sacred Heart to pass even eternity in this terrible suffering, if this would give Him now a little more pleasure—or the love of a single soul. I want to speak—yet nothing comes—I find no words to express the

¹⁵Ibid., 78.

¹⁶Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God: The Classic Account of Mother Teresa's Journey into Compassion* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2003), 146.

depths of the darkness. In spite of it all—I am His little one—and I love Him—not for what He gives—but for what He takes.¹⁷

No matter how great her internal pain, she was determined to smile at Jesus, and at everyone else:

If you only knew what goes on within my heart.—Sometimes the pain is so great that I feel as if everything will break. The smile is a big cloak which covers a multitude of pains.¹⁸

To the reader of Virgil, this cannot but recall his description of Aeneas washed up on the shores of Carthage, having lost (as he thinks) two-thirds of his men, after he has given the remnant a cheering speech that shows him a true leader: “He simulates hope on his face, pressing the pain down deep in his heart” (*spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem*, 1.209).

So similar, and yet so utterly different—as different as martyrdom is from murder. For while Mother Teresa’s smiling through her pain for Jesus’ sake reflected and perfected her deep holiness, for Aeneas, the pain finally bursts forth and overwhelms him. At the poem’s close, where he sacrifices Turnus, burying his sword in his enemy’s heart—*condere*, the same verb used for “founding” the Roman people—Aeneas is “enflamed by furies and terrible in his wrath” (12.946–47), a mirror image of Juno at the beginning. It is hard to feel good about this eruption of *furor*, that vengeful madness which constantly threatens the stability of the individual personality, human society, and even the universe itself. When we reach the end of the *Aeneid* my students sometimes ask whether a page got left off by mistake. We are right to feel pity and fear as Turnus’ soul flees, resentful, to the shades below.

And yet that act of impassioned violence was necessary to make way for the Roman Empire—the source of most of our language, our laws, our government, our arts and sciences, nearly everything that we are. In “The Silence of Vergil and the End of the *Aeneid*,” one of the few scholarly articles that has made me cry, Robert Edgeworth expresses this haunting paradox:

Yet one great reason for the *Aeneid*’s ceaseless pull on human hearts and minds is that many readers somehow sense that the poem’s ambivalence is the way humanity is. We wish it were not so; what we long for is that cool, lucid clarity of justice for which we are forever doomed to thirst . . . in vain. Vergil knows about the darkness within the human heart and he shows it to us plainly here at the end of the *Aeneid*. But Vergil gives us more than

¹⁷Brian Kolodiejchuk, ed., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 172.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 176.

tears for the way things are (1.462); he gives us hope. For the darkest deed that you or I shall ever do, even though it be to our everlasting discredit, may yet prove to be the cornerstone on which the brightest of futures may rest. Be it so!

Be it so.¹⁹

Robert Edgeworth died of cancer in his fifties; this article, published posthumously, was actually assembled by his (and my) friend Rex Stem from two papers Edgeworth delivered shortly before his death. Like Aeneas, like all of us at some point in our lives, he was blown off course. But he found even in the *Aeneid's* darkness the lamp of consolation, the comfort of communion, through the intimacy of reading, with the poet of tears.

What, then, does the greatest text teach us? Moral issues are too complicated to be expressed in tweets. Erotic love is dangerous. The nature of evil does not change. The lust for shiny objects is deadly. Stability, of the self and society, is fragile. Suffering can transform cartoon bad guys into pitiable human beings. Freedom is not something to be taken lightly. Even our failures may light the way for others. The most meaningful life may not be the one that maximizes self-gratification. Expressed this way, these all seem so trite—and yet, really, all the great truths are platitudes, and one of the purposes of art is to present them vividly to our imagination so that they can take root in our soul.

Thousands of years ago, thousands of miles away, Virgil's Jupiter promised, "Upon these I place no limits in time or space; I have given empire without end" (1.278–79). But he could hardly have foreseen what that empire would eventually become. To Virgil's god of Rome, for whom power was the highest good, the words of C. S. Lewis—a son of the British Empire that was Rome's heir—would have made no sense:

To be happy at home, said Johnson, is the end of all human endeavor. As long as we are thinking only of natural values we must say that the sun looks down on nothing half so good as a household laughing together over a meal, or two friends talking over a pint of beer, or a man alone reading a book that interests him: and that all economics, politics, laws, armies, and institutions, save insofar as they prolong and multiply such scenes, are a mere ploughing the sand and sowing the ocean, a meaningless vanity and vexation of spirit.²⁰

Nor could Jupiter, or Virgil, have foreseen that Aeneas' descendants would be reading these words written on a *computer* by a *Catholic woman* in the *United*

¹⁹Robert J. Edgeworth, "The Silence of Vergil and the End of the *Aeneid*," ed. Rex Stem, *Vergilius* 51 (2005): 11.

²⁰C. S. Lewis, "Membership," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 1949), 161–62.

States of America. Such are the ironies of history, the unintended consequences of empire. I close with that thought, and with a note of thanks to the poet who held the lamp behind him—and to you for helping to keep it from going out.

Augustine's *De Magistro*: Teaching, Learning, Signs, and God

David Diener

ABSTRACT: Augustine's *De Magistro* (*On the Teacher*) is a short and relatively minor dialogue that often is overlooked. Nevertheless, it is an important text, both for its role in the development of key themes in Augustine's thought and because of its epistemological and pedagogical contributions to the philosophy of education. This paper explores the significance of *De Magistro* in three steps. First, it introduces the dialogue and offers a summary of Augustine's argument therein. It then examines important contributions that this dialogue makes in the development of Augustine's thought regarding signs and the inner teacher. Finally, it explores some educational implications of *De Magistro* regarding the nature of teaching and the use of Socratic dialogue that Augustine plunders from the previous work of the pagan Plato.

St. Augustine's *De Magistro* (*On the Teacher*) is a short and relatively minor dialogue. It certainly is not as well-known as Augustine's other works like the *Confessions*, *The City of God*, and *On Christian Doctrine*. Nevertheless, *De Magistro* is an important text, both for its role in the development of Augustine's thought and because of its epistemological and pedagogical contributions to the philosophy of education. Though Joseph M. Colleran's claim that this dialogue "became one of the most influential of [Augustine's] earlier writings" is perhaps hyperbolic,¹ it is true that medieval thinkers continued to wrestle with the epistemological issues this dialogue raises and were indebted to Augustine's treatment

¹Joseph M. Colleran, "Introduction" to *The Teacher in St. Augustine: "The Greatness of Soul" and "The Teacher,"* trans. Joseph M. Colleran in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation 9* (New York: Newman Press, 1978), 115.

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of them.² *De Magistro* also is unique among Augustine's dialogues in a number of ways. It is the only one of his extant dialogues that Augustine mentions by name in the *Confessions*; it is the only dialogue in which his son Adeodatus is the primary interlocutor; and, perhaps most importantly, it is the only dialogue that Augustine does not correct in any way in his *Retractions*.³ In the following I explore the significance of *De Magistro* in three steps. First, I introduce the dialogue and offer a summary of Augustine's argument therein. I then examine important contributions this dialogue makes in the development of Augustine's thought regarding signs and the inner teacher. Finally, I explore several educational implications of *De Magistro* regarding the nature of teaching and the use of Socratic dialogue, which Augustine plunders from the pagan philosopher Plato.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

St. Augustine's wrote *De Magistro* in 389 CE in Thagaste, shortly after his conversion to Christianity (386), his baptism (387), and his return to Africa from Italy (388).⁴ The interlocutor is Augustine's biological son Adeodatus,⁵ and the dialogue records or is at least based on an actual conversation between the two when Adeodatus was sixteen.⁶ Given that Adeodatus died shortly after this conversation, some have hypothesized that Augustine wrote *De Magistro* as a memorial to his son.⁷

²Thomas Aquinas, for example, takes up Augustine's question of whether one human can teach another in his *Quaestiones Disputatae (Disputed Questions)* in question eleven which is titled, like Augustine's dialogue, "De Magistro." St. Bonaventure's sermon "Christus Unus Omnium Magister" (Christ, the One Master of All) also shows dependence on Augustine's work in *De Magistro*.

³Douglas Kries, "Magistro, De," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 520.

⁴See Allan D. Fitzgerald, "Thagaste," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, 824. Augustine was born in Thagaste in 354, and he returned in 388 to live on the family property. After his ordination in 391 as a priest in Hippo, Augustine donated his property to the church in Thagaste.

⁵See Allan D. Fitzgerald, "Adeodatus," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, 7. Adeodatus was born in 372, the son of Augustine's concubine of about fifteen years. Adeodatus was baptized with Augustine in Milan in 387 and returned with Augustine to Thagaste in 388. He died, however, shortly thereafter (probably in 389).

⁶See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 9.6.14: "We took the boy Adeodatus, my natural son born of my sin. . . . There is a book of mine called *De Magistro*, which consists of a dialogue between Adeodatus and myself. You know that all the ideas expressed by the second speaker in the discussion are his, although he was only sixteen when it took place."

⁷See, for example, Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1996), 146; Colleran, "Introduction," 116.

The dialogue varies in tone as father and son move from almost playful exchanges to meticulous and relatively abstruse reasoning.⁸ At multiple points Augustine deflects the careful arguments or objections raised by his son, thus leaving a number of questions unanswered. When faced by one of Adeodatus' objections, for example, Augustine dismissively responds, "However it may be, let us go on to the next point lest something most absurd happen to us. . . . At the proper time we shall understand more clearly this kind of difficulty, if God will. Now go back. . . ." (*Mag.* 2.3–4).⁹ Adeodatus, later summarizing this part of the dialogue, reminds his father that, "You made some reply, jestingly avoiding the profundity of the question, and putting it off for another time. Don't think I have forgotten the explanation you owe me" (*Mag.* 7.19).¹⁰

The central issue in *De Magistro* concerns the role of teacher, learner, and God in the act of acquiring knowledge. This theme, however, is not manifest from the outset. Rather, the discussion opens with Augustine asking about the nature and purpose of language: "What do you suppose is our purpose when we use words?" (1.1). The immediate answer is that we use words in order "to let someone know something" (1.1). They discuss possible exceptions such as singing and praying, and together agree that "There is no other reason for the use of words than either to teach or to call something to mind" (1.2).

The discussion then turns to the nature of words themselves. They agree that words are signs and that signs necessarily signify something (2.3). Augustine leads Adeodatus through a word-by-word analysis of Virgil's phrase from book 2 of the *Aeneid*, "If it pleases the gods that nothing be left of so great a city" (*Si nihil ex tanta superis placet urbe relinqui*), identifying what each word signifies. They agree that nothing can be demonstrated without a sign, except for actions that we are not doing when we are asked and can immediately start doing (walking, for instance) or actions that consist simply in giving signs (speaking, for example) (4.7). Thus Augustine offers a threefold classification: "[1] When the question concerns signs merely, signs can be demonstrated by signs. But when the question is about things which are not signs, they can be demonstrated [2] by carrying out the action, if possible, after the question has been asked, or [3] by giving signs by means of which the things can be brought to mind" (4.7). They begin

⁸See Colleran, "Introduction," 116, where he describes the dialogue as "spontaneous in expression and irregular in construction. Interruptions, corrections, repetitions abound. . . . Profound and challenging thoughts, couched in engaging rhetoric, blend with arguments that sometimes become specious and tenuous and with explanations frequently too repetitious to escape the charge of being somewhat boring."

⁹Augustine, *The Teacher*, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. John H. S. Burleigh, The Library of Christian Classics Ichthus Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

¹⁰Cf. *Mag.* 9.27 where Augustine dismisses another objection raised by Adeodatus: "We shall have a better opportunity at another time to discuss that problem more carefully. Meantime what you have admitted is sufficient for what I am desirous of establishing now."

by analyzing the first case—signs that are demonstrated by signs—meticulously exploring the distinctions between signs, names, significables, and words.

At the end of this lengthy discussion there is a major transition. Augustine asks Adeodatus to summarize what they have learned thus far (7.19), which Adeodatus does (7.19–20). Augustine admits that, “It is hard to say at this point what goal we are striving to reach by all these round-about paths” (8.21) and that Adeodatus probably thinks they “have just been playing a game and diverting the mind from serious things by these apparently puerile questionings, or, perhaps, that a very small gain has been made, if any” (8.21). Augustine explains that while it is true that they have been amusing themselves, he did not lead Adeodatus in this game merely for the sake of playing but rather “in order to exercise and sharpen our mental powers” (8.21).

Having thus summarized and justified the discussion to this point, in the second half of the dialogue they turn to the classification of signs that do not signify other signs but rather signify significables (*significabilia*).¹¹ They explore various uses of the word “man” both as a word itself (as in “Man’ is a noun.”) and as a sign (as in “You are a man.”). Augustine argues that “Things signified are of greater importance than their signs” on the grounds that “Whatever exists on account of something else must necessarily be of less value than that on account of which it exists” (9.25). While it is false that things signified are always preferred to their signs (in the case of “filth,” for example), nevertheless the *knowledge* of a thing that is conveyed by its sign is more valuable than the sign itself (9.25–27). Augustine furthermore claims that, “Knowledge of the things signified by signs is preferable to knowledge of their signs” (9.27). Thus there are four items in the hierarchy: the sign, the thing signified, knowledge of the sign, and knowledge of the thing signified. Adeodatus objects to the claim that knowledge of things signified is preferable to knowledge of their signs, and Augustine concedes that, “It is enough for my present purpose that we agree that knowledge of things signified is better than the signs even if not better than knowledge of the signs” (9.28).

At 10.29 the text transitions again when they question whether in fact anything can be demonstrated by carrying out the action (walking, for example)¹² and then turn to the relationship between signs and teaching. Augustine discusses the relationship between teaching and giving signs, concluding that, “There is absolutely nothing which can be taught without signs” (10.30). Returning to the example of walking as well as one of bird catching, however, Augustine immediately reverses course and challenges this conclusion with the particular (i.e., non-universal) claim that “Some men can be taught some things without

¹¹Significables are those things to which signs point. For example, the object on which I currently am sitting is the significable of the sign “chair.”

¹²This is the second of the three categories discussed back in 4.7.

signs" (10.32). He then goes further and makes the universal negative claim that "Nothing is learned even by its appropriate sign" (10.33). The justification for this conclusion is that "If I am given a sign and I do not know the thing of which it is the sign, it can teach me nothing. If I know the thing, what do I learn from the sign?" (10.33).¹³ When we first hear a word (the word "head," for example), we do not know what it means. When the word is frequently repeated, however, and we observe when it is said, we discover that the word is a sign for something that we already know from having seen it. Thus, "The sign is learned from knowing the thing, rather than vice versa" (10.33).¹⁴

What, then, is the role of words? According to Augustine, words "bid us look for things, but they do not show them to us so that we may know them" (11.36). When a word is spoken, we either do or do not know what it means. If we do already know, then we learn nothing new when the word is spoken. If we do not already know, on the other hand, then we "perhaps are urged to inquire" (11.37), but we are not reminded of what we already know. In either case, we learn nothing new through hearing the word.¹⁵ As Adeodatus later summarizes, "By means of words a man is simply put on the alert in order that he may learn" (14.46).¹⁶ When words that we already know are used to tell us a story about something (about the three young men thrown into the fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar, for example), we may *believe* the content of the account but cannot *know* it. Based on the claim in Isaiah 7:9 that, "Unless ye believe ye shall not know,"¹⁷ Augustine draws the following distinction between belief and knowledge: "What I know I also believe, but I do not know everything that I believe. All that I understand I know, but I do not know all that I believe. And I know how useful it is to believe many things which I do not know, among them this story about the three youths. I know how useful it is to believe many things of which knowledge is not possible" (11.37).

¹³Cf. Ryan N. S. Topping, *St. Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 50: "While it is possible to learn about things without the mediation of the signs, apart from knowledge of the thing itself, a sign has no epistemic value for us. . . . For words to be useful you must know the thing to which they point beforehand."

¹⁴See also 10.34 where Augustine goes on to argue that "We learn nothing by means of these signs we call words. On the contrary, as I said, we learn the force of the word, that is the meaning which lies in the sound of the word, when we come to know the object signified by the word."

¹⁵See also 11.36: "We learn nothing new when we know the words already, and when we don't know them we cannot say we have learned anything unless we also learn their meaning."

¹⁶In the last paragraph of the dialogue, Augustine acknowledges that the role and value of words has not been exhaustively addressed: "At another time, if God permit, we shall inquire into the whole problem of the usefulness of words, for their usefulness properly considered is not slight" (14.46).

¹⁷This is a mistranslation of the original Hebrew and closer to the Septuagint.

How, then, do we acquire knowledge if nothing can be learned through signs? According to Augustine, “He alone teaches me anything who sets before my eyes, or one of my other bodily senses, or my mind, the things which I desire to know” (11.36). Thus we learn not by listening to anyone outside of ourselves using words but by listening to the truth (i.e., Christ) within us: “Our real Teacher is he who is so listened to, who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God” (11.38). Everything that we perceive is perceived either by bodily senses or by the mind. Just as we need light in order to see sensible things, so too we need this interior truth in order to “know intelligible things with our reason” (12.39).¹⁸ If I use words to speak what is true and the one listening to my words sees the truth of which I speak, it nevertheless is not I who teach him by means of my words. Rather my listener is taught “by the things themselves which inwardly God has made manifest to him” (12.40). Thus we can understand and see the truth in Jesus’ claim in Matthew 23:10 that we have one teacher, the Christ. Augustine concludes the dialogue by applying this doctrine to all that he has “taught” Adeodatus through their conversation: “If you know that what I have said is true, and if you had been interrogated at every point, you would have answered that you knew it to be true. You see, then, who taught you; certainly not I, for you would of your own accord have given the right answer each time I asked. . . . I have never the power to teach anyone” (14.46).

SIGNS

Having thus summarized Augustine’s argument in *De Magistro*, I now turn to an examination of two key themes in the dialogue that make important contributions to the development of Augustine’s thought. The first is his theory of signs. Augustine’s ideas about semiotics (the study of signs) arise within and contribute to a centuries-old discussion. Earlier theories of signs had been developed by the Stoics and Epicureans, who built on Aristotle’s use of signs as instruments of inference, particularly in his *Rhetoric*.¹⁹ The Aristotelian use of signs as instru-

¹⁸Cf. Colleran, “Introduction,” 117: “As words have no power to make us know physical realities unless we have previously had some experience of those objects through the senses, so, Augustine argues, words cannot make us ‘see’ intelligible realities within the mind. That can be brought about only by the power and wisdom of God. . . . As physical light is necessary that we may perceive corporeal realities, so the divine wisdom must ‘illuminate’ the human mind, verifying St. John’s description of Christ as *the true light that enlightens every man that cometh into the world* [John 1:9]” (emphasis in the original).

¹⁹See, for example, Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1357a32–b21. See also Stock regarding the basis of Augustine’s semiotic theory in Stoic notions of utterances. According to Stock this is most apparent in Augustine’s earlier works, and over time Augustine’s thought about signs evolves such that in his more mature treatments “Stoic notions about utterances are increasingly embedded in a Christian-Platonic inquiry into words and things” (*Augustine the Reader*, 146).

ments of inference continued in the Latin rhetorical tradition through the work of Cicero and Quintilian, and Christian patristics like Origin and Ambrose used theories of signs to explain how we can make inferences about the mind of God based on the words in scripture.²⁰

Prior to *De Magistro*, Augustine had offered a treatment of signs in his *De Dialectica* (*On Dialectic*). The basic terms in that text are the sign (*signum*) and the thing signified (*res*). He proposes that a word (*verbum*) can be the sign (*signum*) of a thing (*res*), provided that the word be understood by the hearer when uttered by the speaker.²¹ He then examines the relationship between verbal and written signs, as well as the relationship between the sound of words and the meaning of words. Based on these distinctions he defines four key terms: the word (*verbum*), that which the mind understands through the word (*dicibile*), the aural awareness of the word (*dictio*), and the thing (*res*).²²

In *De Magistro*, Augustine builds on and adds to his theory of signs from *De Dialectica*. First, he examines not only the elements involved when we use signs but also their relative value. His fourfold scheme, for example, between the name (*nomen*), the thing (*res*), the knowledge of the name (*cognitio nominis*), and the knowledge of the thing (*cognitio rei*), is used for the purpose of determining a hierarchy among them (9.25–8). “Whatever exists on account of something else is inferior to that on account of which it exists,” Augustine claims, and thus, “The use to which words are put is superior to the words; for words exist to be used, and used to teach” (9.26). This argument imports a hierarchy of value to his theory of signs and gives teleological significance to the use of signs as part of his broader epistemology. Signs have a purpose beyond themselves, and our knowledge of the things they signify, not the signs themselves, are of greatest value.

Another contribution of *De Magistro* is that Augustine applies semiotics to an inquiry into the role of teacher, learner, and God in the act of acquiring knowledge. He does this by employing his theory of signs in order to analyze the epistemological implications (and limitations) of human communication. Building on his previous work, he focuses on the effects that signs have on their hearers. As Michael Cameron explains, “The sign substitutes for the thing, as in *De Dialectica*; but [in *De Magistro*] the auditor performs a corresponding act of substitution by trusting the experience of the sign as a viable replacement for

²⁰Michael Cameron, “Sign,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 793–94.

²¹Cf. Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 139: “The thing is whatever is sensed, comprehended, or concealed when utterance takes place; the sign is perceived sensorially in one way and understood intellectually in another (and it can be verbal or written.) [Augustine] thus ties some traditional definitions of the elements of speech to speakers and hearers and to mental activities.”

²²Augustine, *De Dialectica*, 5. See Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 139–41 for an analysis of Augustine’s semiotic theory in *De Dialectica*.

the experience of the thing signified.”²³ This expanded analysis of how a sign points to a reality in the mind of the hearer leads Augustine to new conclusions regarding the nature of education and human communication more generally.

The semiotic developments in *De Magistro* lay the groundwork for Augustine’s extended treatment of signs in his later text *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*) which “contains Augustine’s longest sustained discussion of signs in his works, and synthesizes previous insights.”²⁴ In *De Doctrina* Augustine focuses on the theological implications of signs regarding, for example, God’s communication to us through scripture, the sacraments, and the incarnation.²⁵ Augustine’s description of these important theological themes, especially in *De Doctrina*, build on the epistemological implications of the semiotic theory developed earlier in *De Magistro*. In addition to the implications for his own thought, the semiotic theory of *De Magistro* makes a unique contribution to the broader intellectual tradition as well. Through his examination of the role that signs play in human communication, Augustine “is the first to have proposed a relationship between the sender, the receiver, and the sign (normally a word).”²⁶ This is a significant development, and after Augustine this relationship became “a standard feature of medieval and modern theories of language.”²⁷

THE INNER TEACHER

The second theme in Augustine’s thought to which *De Magistro* makes an important contribution is that of God as inner teacher. Augustine’s understanding of the inner teacher is central to his explanation of how we acquire knowledge, and according to William Ligon Wade it is even “the most fundamental and central principle of Augustine’s philosophy.”²⁸ This doctrine of the inner teacher exists in nascent form in works prior to *De Magistro*. For example, in his first Christian publication, *Contra Academicos* (*Against the Academicians*), Augustine says to Alypius, “You said not only briefly but even reverently that only some

²³Cameron, “Sign,” 794. Thus, for example, we can discuss a given object’s properties by using signs without needing an immediate experience of that object in order to do so.

²⁴Ibid., 795. See 796–97 for a concise explanation of Augustine’s taxonomy of four types of signs in *De Doctrina*: unknown literal signs (2.11.16–15.22), unknown figurative signs (2.16.23–42.63), ambiguous literal signs (3.1.1–4.8), and ambiguous figurative signs (3.5.9–25.35).

²⁵See Emmanuel J. Cutrone, “Sacraments,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 741–45. Cf. Cameron, “Sign,” 795.

²⁶Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 7.

²⁷Ibid. Stock also notes that “Augustine is credited with introducing the notion of signification into theories of language” (162).

²⁸William Ligon Wade, “*On the Teacher*”: *Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas: A Comparison: A Dissertation Presented in 1935 to the Faculty of the Graduate School of St. Louis University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*, ed. John P. Doyle (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2013), 22.

divinity can show man what is true" (3.6.13).²⁹ Similarly, in *De Beata Vita* (*On the Happy Life*) Augustine writes about God as an internal light that is the source of all truth: "A certain Admonition that pleads with us to remember God, to seek Him, and—after driving out all distaste—to thirst for Him flows out to us from the very Font of Truth. This secret sun pours forth its radiance into our interior lamps [i.e., our 'inner eyes' or minds]" (4.35).³⁰

As these passages show, Augustine's theory of the inner teacher rests on a correspondence between intellection and the sense of sight. When we see a physical object, there are three elements involved: the object that is seen, our faculty of seeing, and light which enables us to see. Similarly, in an act of intellection the three elements involved are the truth that is intelligibly known, our faculty of knowing, and the light which enables us to know. Thus for Augustine, "Intellection is to the mind what seeing is to the eye."³¹ Just as our sense of sight needs the presence of the sun's light in order to see, so too our intellect needs the presence of the light of truth in order to know: "On the one hand we need light that we may see colors, and the elements of this world. . . . On the other hand, to know intelligible things with our reason we pay attention to the interior truth" (*Mag.* 12.39). This light of truth, according to Augustine, is Christ: "Whenever we learn, it is Christ, the everlasting Word of God, who actively illumines our minds."³²

This comparison between intellection and the sense of sight can be found throughout Augustine's works. The significance of *De Magistro*, however, is that it is the first time Augustine "formulates definitely and clearly the essential features

²⁹Augustine, *Against the Academicians*, trans. Sister Mary Patricia Garvey (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1957).

³⁰Augustine, *On the Happy Life*, trans. Michael P. Foley, in *St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). See also Augustine, *The Soliloquies*, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953) for a clear anticipation of his view in *De Magistro*: "The earth and light are visible, but the earth cannot be seen unless it is illumined. Anyone who knows the mathematical symbols admits that they are true without the shadow of a doubt. But he must also believe that they cannot be known unless they are illumined by something else corresponding to the sun. About this corporeal sun notice three things. It exists. It shines. It illumines. So in knowing the hidden God you must observe three things. He exists. He is known. He causes other things to be known" (1.8.15).

³¹Wade, *On the Teacher*, 32–33. See, for example, Augustine, *De Ordine* 2.3.10: "Understanding is to the mind what seeing is to the sense" (*Menti hoc est intellegere, quod sensui videre*).

³²Topping, *St. Augustine*, 51. Cf. Kries, "Magistro," 520: "The inner teacher, Christ, [thus] turns out to be the ground or possibility upon which human knowing is based." Cf. also Wade, *On the Teacher*, 66: "We must actually see the intelligible reality in the light of the interior Truth which is Christ dwelling within us. Christ is the light which enlightens every man coming into this world and has the same influence on our intellectual knowledge as the sun has on the knowledge we acquire by means of the bodily eyes."

of the theory with his fundamental reasons for such a theory.”³³ His analysis of signs and their limitations leads Augustine to conclude that words spoken by a teacher cannot teach us anything that we do not already know. This conclusion serves as the basis for Augustine’s argument that we must “listen to Truth which presides over our minds within us. . . . Our real Teacher is he who is so listened to, who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God” (11.38).³⁴ Since signs from an external teacher cannot give us knowledge, our knowledge must come from the inner teacher who can teach without the use of signs.

In subsequent texts Augustine builds on this understanding of God as the inner teacher. For example, he writes in his *Epistulae* (*Letters*) that God “externally admonishes us by his ministers through the signs of things but by himself teaches us internally through the things themselves” (144.1).³⁵ Similarly, in *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* (*Homilies on the Gospel of John*) he explains, “There is something in our soul which is called intelligence. This part of the soul, which is called intelligence and mind, is enlightened by a higher light; this higher light, by which the human mind is enlightened, is God” (15.19).³⁶

Exactly how Augustine understands this divine illumination to function has been interpreted in various ways by various thinkers. Some medieval theologians, for example, interpret Augustine as teaching that our concepts are produced directly by God and imprinted on our intellects as a representation of reality. Malebranche claims to derive from Augustine his doctrine that the soul acquires its concepts by seeing the divine ideas insofar as they are imitated by creatures. Gilson interprets Augustine’s interior teacher not as an explanation of how we obtain concepts but rather as the source and guarantee of the truth of our self-evident judgments. Thomists, such as Charles Boyer, sometimes maintain that in Augustine’s view God illumines the intellect indirectly by creating in us an internal light, an intellectual faculty, that is akin or equivalent to the agent-intellect of Aristotle and Aquinas.³⁷ However these interpretive nuances are understood, what

³³Wade, *On the Teacher*, 22. Cf. Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 160 where Stock argues that in *De Magistro* “neoplatonic metaphors of enlightenment are first coupled with explicit statements concerning interior instruction by means of Christ.”

³⁴Cf. Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 161: “*De Magistro* is a turning point in his consideration of language and ethics through the introduction of the concept of illumination.”

³⁵Augustine, *Letters 100–155*, trans. Roland Teske, pt. 2, vol. 2 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003).

³⁶Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, trans. Edmund Hill, pt. 3, vol. 12 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009). See Colleran, “Introduction,” 118n12 for an extensive list of additional passages in Augustine’s mature works where he discusses the inner teacher.

³⁷Colleran, “Introduction,” 120–21.

is clear is that the inner teacher is a central concept in Augustine's epistemology and that it finds its clearest justification in the argument of *De Magistro*.

TEACHING AND SOCRATIC DIALOGUE: A CASE OF PLUNDERING

Having examined the important contributions that *De Magistro* makes to the development of Augustine's thought regarding signs and the inner teacher, in this final section I turn to some of the dialogue's educational implications, particularly with regard to the nature of human teaching and the use of Socratic dialogue.³⁸ To begin, it is important to recognize that Augustine's educational philosophy in *De Magistro* demonstrates a clear case of the "plundering the Egyptians" approach to pagan thought he elsewhere advocates. In book 2 of *De Doctrina Christiana*, for example, he explains that just as the Israelites appropriated from the Egyptians their idols, gold, silver, and garments in order to employ them "for a better use," so too Christians should adapt the liberal instruction found in the learning of the heathens "to the use of truth." This "gold and silver," which the pagans "dug out of the mines of God's providence" and are "perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils," we ought "to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use" (2.40.60).³⁹ The philosophy of education Augustine puts forward in *De Magistro* is a clear example of this plundering from Plato's epistemology, particularly as articulated in the *Meno*.⁴⁰ More specifically, Augustine's understanding of education in this dialogue is an appropriation and adaptation of Plato's thought in three aspects: the problem, the metaphysical solution, and the consequences of that solution regarding the nature of teaching and the use of Socratic dialogue.

In Plato's *Meno*, the overarching question is whether virtue can be taught. After a series of proposed definitions of virtue and Socrates' refutation of them all, Meno puts forward a skeptical argument in order to show that learning is impossible: "How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?" (80d4–6).⁴¹ Socrates restates the first part of the paradox thus:

³⁸For a helpful introduction to "Socratic dialogue" or what is also sometimes called "the Socratic method" or "Socratic conversation," see Jeffrey S. Lehman, *Socratic Conversation: Bringing the Dialogues of Plato and the Socratic Tradition into Today's Classroom* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2021).

³⁹Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. J. F. Shaw. (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2009).

⁴⁰Augustine probably never actually read the *Meno*. Nonetheless he clearly was acquainted with many of the Platonic doctrines expressed therein. On this topic, see Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 147.

⁴¹Plato, *Meno*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976). Note that there are actually two paradoxes here: The first is a paradox of inquiry and asks how one can search for what one does not know. The second is a paradox of discovery and asks how one can know that one has discovered what was being sought if it was not previously known.

“A man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know. He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for” (80e1–5). In *De Magistro*, Augustine poses the problem of learning in terms strikingly reminiscent of Meno’s paradox: “If we consider this a little more closely, perhaps you will find that nothing is learned even by its appropriate sign. If I am given a sign and I do not know the thing of which it is the sign, it can teach me nothing. If I know the thing, what do I learn from the sign?” (10.33).

The problem both Plato and Augustine articulate in the form of a constructive dilemma is that learning appears to be impossible. Augustine adds a semiotic layer to the paradox, but the educational implications are basically the same. What, then, is a solution to this problem that would make learning possible? In the *Meno*, the response offered by Socrates is Plato’s theory of recollection (*anamnesis*) based on the transmigration of souls. The human soul is immortal, argues Plato, and through repeated cycles of birth and death it “has seen all things here and in the underworld” such that “there is nothing which it has not learned” (81c5–6). What we often call “learning,” then, consists not in acquiring some new knowledge that one previously did not possess but rather in remembering or recollecting the knowledge already latent within one’s soul. As Socrates concludes, “Searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection” (81d4–5).

Augustine’s solution to the problem of learning parallels Plato’s, but he Christianizes Plato’s metaphysics. Given that learning cannot come through communication by signs from without, it must come from within. For Augustine, though, the source of knowledge is not our own soul but rather the “Truth which presides over our minds within us” (*Mag.* 11.38). As for Plato, our real teacher is within us and also is eternal. For Augustine, however, this inner teacher is not of ourselves. Rather it is he who “is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God” (11.38).⁴²

What, then, are the educational consequences of these metaphysical solutions to the problem? What is the nature of human teaching? How can it best be accomplished? For Plato, the answer is that a teacher merely reminds students of what they already know. After explaining his theory of recollection in the *Meno*, Socrates attempts to demonstrate the truth of this theory by working through a geometry problem with one of Meno’s slaves. Throughout this episode, Socrates repeatedly argues that he is not giving the boy any knowledge he does not already possess but is simply asking questions in order to facilitate the boy’s recollection of the geometric truths he already knows. “You see, Meno,” Socrates says at one point, “that I am not teaching the boy anything, but all I do is question him” (82e33–4). Later Socrates repeats the claim that “I shall do nothing more than

⁴²See Wade, *On the Teacher*, 49–50 for an analysis of Augustine’s initial inclination toward Plato’s theory of recollection and later clear rejection of it.

ask questions and not teach him. Watch whether you find me teaching and explaining things to him instead of asking for his opinion" (84c8–d2). At the end of the episode Socrates again draws the educational implications that he supposedly has demonstrated:

SOCRATES. What do you think, Meno? Has he, in his answers, expressed any opinion that was not his own?

MENO. No, they were all his own.

SOCRATES. And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know?

MENO. That is true.

SOCRATES. So these opinions were in him, were they not?

MENO. Yes.

SOCRATES. So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know . . . and he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself?

MENO. Yes.

SOCRATES. And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection?

MENO. Certainly. (85b8–d5)

What we call teaching, in other words, consists of pointing students toward the knowledge they already possess within themselves in order to help them remember it. The most effective pedagogical approach for bringing about such learning (i.e., recollection) is to use Socratic dialogue—that is, to ask questions that lead or point students toward the truths the teacher wants them to learn.

Augustine's explanation in *De Magistro* of what teaching is and how it is best brought about echoes what we find in Plato almost verbatim, though again Augustine puts it in Christian terms. A human teacher, he argues, cannot impart knowledge through the use of words. What the teacher can do, however, is point students toward the truths that can be known through the inner teacher. Thus Augustine claims, "The utmost value I can attribute to words is this. They bid us look for things, but they do not show them to us so that we may know them" (11.36). If words are spoken the meaning of which we already know, then "we do not learn, but are rather reminded of what we know" (11.36).⁴³ If, on the

⁴³This is an echo of Augustine's claim at the beginning of the dialogue that, "I think there is a kind of teaching, and a most important kind, which consists in reminding people of

other hand, we do not know the meaning of the words, then “We are not even reminded, but are perhaps urged to inquire” (11.36). The teacher, then, is not one who imparts knowledge but who, as for Plato, prompts and directs students toward their own process of inquiry. As Augustine explains, “We may be bidden to listen [to the inner teacher] by someone using words” (11.38). In the final paragraph of the dialogue Adeodatus similarly claims he has learned from his father that “By means of words a man is simply put on the alert in order that he may learn” (14.46).⁴⁴

In *De Magistro* Augustine does not give a full-blown argument for the pedagogical value of Socratic dialogue based on his understanding of what it means to teach. It is instructive, however, to note the parallels between his claims at the end of the dialogue about what he has accomplished and Socrates’ claims at the end of the slave-boy episode about what he has demonstrated. Augustine says to Adeodatus that, “I should like you to tell me what you think of my whole discourse. If you know that what I have said is true, and if you had been interrogated at every point, you would have answered that you knew it to be true. You see, then, who taught you; certainly not I, for you would of your own accord have given the right answer each time I asked” (14.46). Augustine’s claim, in other words, is that Adeodatus, like the slave boy, has not been taught anything but rather can affirm of his own accord the truths toward which Augustine’s questions point. That is to say, the function and value of Socratic dialogue is for Augustine, as it was for Plato, to provide students with the questions that will lead or point them toward the truths that the teacher wants them to learn.⁴⁵ As Wade explains, “The method that other men use in admonishing us to seek the interior truth is the method of question and answer. Augustine had learned this method from the Platonists and Neo-Platonists, and, although he rejected their theory of reminiscence, yet he still retained their method of teaching and considered it even more compatible with his theory of illumination than their theory of reminiscence.”⁴⁶

something” (1.1). Cf. William Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 69: “Augustine argues that we do not really learn realities outside us, but are reminded interiorly of forgotten truths. This theory of knowledge as ‘remembrance,’ while akin in some ways to Plato’s, is also quite different. Augustine came to deny Plato’s hypothesis that learning is remembering something from a past life. For Augustine, knowing is a matter of inner illumination; Christ is the true teacher teaching truth deep within us.”

⁴⁴Cf. Topping, *St. Augustine*, 50, 51: “Within the process of learning, all that words accomplish, and at their best, is to remind us to direct our attention to the things themselves. . . . So, teachers do have a function after all. Their aim is, like Socrates’ aim, to present the right questions and the right objects before the mind and senses of the student.”

⁴⁵See Topping, *St. Augustine*, 49: “Like Plato, for Augustine learning is primarily an interior recollection prompted by dialectical discussion.”

⁴⁶Wade, *On the Teacher*, 63–64.

As a final note, Augustine's pedagogical plundering of Plato with regard to the nature of human teaching and the use of Socratic dialogue is not only instructive theoretically but also can be of practical benefit for classical liberal arts educators who value Socratic dialogue as a pedagogical tool. Many contemporary classical educators employ and praise the merits of Socratic dialogue. In some neo-classical education circles, it even is viewed as an *essential* characteristic of so-called "classical pedagogy." Almost none of these advocates, however, accept Plato's metaphysical beliefs about the nature of the soul and its knowledge upon which the merit of Socratic dialogue is based. Augustine's account of learning, on the other hand, provides an explanation of and justification for the value of Socratic dialogue on the basis of a spiritual and metaphysical framework that classical educators may find more palatable than Plato's transmigration of souls. Rather than humanistically pointing us toward ourselves as the self-referential source of truth, Socratic dialogue within the Augustinian framework points us toward our dependence on illumination by the divine for whatever knowledge we may possess.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, then, Augustine's *De Magistro* is an important text that offers numerous valuable insights. It articulates key developments in Augustine's thought regarding central Augustinian doctrines such as his theory of signs and his understanding of the inner teacher. It also clearly articulates Augustine's philosophy of education regarding the nature of human teaching and the pedagogical value of Socratic dialogue. In so doing, its appropriation and retooling of Platonic educational philosophy provides an instructive example of how Augustine believes we should "plunder the Egyptians." While this dialogue is unfortunately often overlooked among the other works in Augustine's expansive corpus, *De Magistro* is an instructive dialogue that can be of great benefit for both Augustine scholars and educational practitioners alike.

Demonic Deliberation as Rhetorical Revelation in *Paradise Lost*

Phillip J. Donnelly

ABSTRACT: Classical education includes an apprenticeship in the art of rhetoric. It also gives a central place to the study of major works of literature, philosophy, and theology. There is often, however, an assumed disconnection between the art of rhetoric and the study of Great Texts. This disconnection undermines students' ability to hear the voices of these texts as conversation partners in ongoing debates. This article illustrates how historically-based rhetorical-poetic reading enables us to hear the voices in a given text and to consider how they work together. The argument first outlines some modern assumptions about the relation between poetry and rhetoric. The second part explains what rhetorical-poetic reading involves when approaching John Milton's epic, *Paradise Lost*. The final section focuses on the second book of Milton's poem, establishing how layered persuasive purposes constitute the fabric of the work and what the poem reveals through its curious dramatization of demonic deliberation.

One central feature of classical liberal arts education is an apprenticeship in the art of rhetoric. By being introduced to the study of rhetoric *as* a liberal art, students are able to encounter rhetoric as something more than a name for other people's sophistry or even for their own powers of verbal manipulation. Rather, by understanding rhetoric as the knowledge of causes regarding how to make something (an "art" in the Aristotelian sense), they can appreciate how this knowledge-based skill in making persuasive discourses can bring life-long benefits. At the same time, classical education also gives a central place to the interdisciplinary study of major works of imaginative literature, philosophy, and theology, understanding these works as contributions to centuries-long conversations about how humans should order life together. These texts and the conversations in which they participate are not reducible to abstract ideas;

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nor are they simply a catalogue of virtuous heroes and evil villains; nor are they merely aesthetic artifacts upon which we must project our own fears or desires. Rather, each one has its own combination of voices, and our first challenge as readers is to learn how to listen. Together, these texts perform and participate in a debate regarding the ways that knowledge, action, and enjoyment prove to be inseparable in practice. Curiously, however, these two aspects of liberal arts education—that is, the study of rhetoric and the study of Great Texts—are often assumed, in the classroom and in the curriculum, to be unrelated or, at least, related only by accident. Such a presumed disconnection between the study of rhetoric and the study of Great Texts is, I suggest, a missed opportunity. Because rhetoric gives attention to logical appeal but also to *ethos* and *pathos*, it concerns not only questions of truth (mediated by logical validity) but also ethical action and enjoyment. As a result, rhetorical categories are crucial for the kinds of interdisciplinary conversations that arise from the study of Great Texts. Without such an interpretive dynamic, students' encounters with these writings will tend toward either the downloading of some general detachable content (whether moralistic or socially subversive) or else the embalming of artifacts whose individual particularity gives them no legitimate way to speak in the present. The purpose of this article is to illustrate how historically-based rhetorical-poetic reading can help students to hear the voices at work in a given text and to consider how they work together for an overall imaginative effect.

One difficulty, however, is that many teachers of literature are trained to presume that the arts of rhetoric and poetry are fundamentally distinct, if not opposed. As a result, the argument here begins by explaining why such a presumption is not warranted. This requires some rehabilitation of the presumed meaning of the terms "rhetoric" and "poetry." The second part of the article explains in more detail what such an historically-based rhetorical-poetic reading involves when considering John Milton's biblical epic, *Paradise Lost* (1674). The final section of the argument focuses on the second book of Milton's poem, showing how the layered interaction between persuasive means and ends constitutes the very fabric of the work. Ultimately, however, we shall consider the effects that arise from the poetic work considered as an integral whole, asking what the poem shows readers through this curious dramatization of demonic deliberation.

In his Oxford volume on *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, C. S. Lewis famously observed that Renaissance literature "was written and read by [those] to whom the distinction between poetry and rhetoric, in its modern form, would have been meaningless."¹ Lewis goes so far as to suggest that the taste for rhetoric is probably the single greatest difference between Renaissance English literary sensibilities and those of the present. This is not to say that Renaissance

¹C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), 61.

writers did not distinguish between rhetoric and poetry. The modifying phrase, “in its modern form,” turns out to be crucial. Renaissance writers did indeed make the distinction between rhetoric and poetry, but they did so on a different basis from the modern version of that distinction. As Lewis later explains in his *Preface to ‘Paradise Lost,’* for a Renaissance writer like Milton, “poetry aims at producing something more like vision than it is like action.”² In other words, “rhetoric” can be understood in a narrow sense as an emphasis on deliberative persuasion (regarding a particular action in the future); whereas the goals of poetry, by contrast, are revelatory or demonstrative, in that it aims to shape not a particular action but a person’s “total response to the world” through the imagination.³ By way of clarification, I would add that, because rhetorical purposes in general may be either forensic, demonstrative, or deliberative, much confusion can arise from the fact that “rhetoric” is often used in a narrow sense to indicate only deliberative persuasion.⁴ Poetry, however, can also be understood, I suggest, as a species of demonstrative persuasion that consists of fictive material (imagined agents, actions, and objects). At the same time, as Lewis notes, even when the overall aims of a given poetic text are revelatory or demonstrative, rather than deliberative, the imagined content may nevertheless consist of persuasive activities, including deliberative persuasion, that are set inside the larger demonstrative goals of the poem. In this sense, what I am proposing here is not a merely rhetorical reading of a poetic text but a specifically “rhetorical-poetic” reading, in that the attention to inset layers of persuasive agency inside a work of imaginative literature does not imply that the purpose of a given poetic work is ever reducible to a deliberative end (“rhetoric” in the narrow sense).⁵ The poetic

²C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to ‘Paradise Lost’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 53.

³Lewis, *English Literature*, 54.

⁴In what follows, the argument here assumes the traditional definitions of the three kinds of rhetoric that are each defined by the focus of their respective ends: forensic rhetoric aims to persuade others regarding individual particular actions in the past; demonstrative rhetoric aims to show or reveal the character of a general action, a general entity, or a particular entity; deliberative rhetoric aims to persuade others regarding an individual particular action in the future. See, for example, Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1358b. As I explain in *The Lost Seeds of Learning* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2021), 154–58, on any given occasion a combination of different kinds of persuasive ends may be nested inside one another. The crucial point here is that the difference between, for example, demonstrative discourse that uses fictional material and forensic discourse that uses fictional material is the difference between imaginative writing (poetry in a broad sense) and merely false testimony (lying).

⁵The need for this clarification—especially for some twentieth-century critical traditions that remain widely influential—is well illustrated by Marshall McLuhan’s article, “Poetic vs. Rhetorical Exegesis: The Case for Leavis Against Richards and Empson,” *Sewanee Review* 52 (1944): 266–76. McLuhan argues explicitly against the application of what he calls “rhetorical exegesis” to poetic texts. His argument depends, however, on three mistaken beliefs that continue to animate popular and academic perceptions: 1) the assumption that

end remains imaginatively demonstrative, or revelatory, but it often achieves that poetic effect through the combination of voices who are engaged in a variety of interactive local persuasive actions. This combination of voices includes the voice of the narrator, a voice that may have more authority than some of the characters but which does not necessarily encompass the text's overall effect. The problem, however, is that modern assumptions about poetry, as well as rhetoric, may nevertheless prevent us from conceiving of rhetoric and poetry as sharing any relation at all.

Those who currently teach the study of poetry, or imaginative literature, whether at the high-school or college level, may notice a constellation of deeply held assumptions that students typically bring to their studies. Most notable are the assumptions that: 1) by "poetry" contemporary speakers typically mean "lyric poetry" (as distinct from narrative poetry that would recount some action outside the self); 2) such poetry is presumed to proceed directly from an emoting or cogitating self and, as a result, often does not distinguish clearly between the voice of the author and the voice of the speaker in the poem; 3) poetry consists primarily, if not exclusively, of expressions (whether feelings, thoughts, or images) that proceed from an interior subjectivity; 4) such expressions make no attempt to persuade anyone else of anything in particular (a poem may evoke some cognitive or emotive response in readers, but such reactions have no necessary relation to the thoughts or feelings expressed by the poet); 5) consequently, any attempt to understand the relation between poetic means and ends, indeed to impute any end whatsoever to a given poem, in this view, is to betray its essentially atelic (purposeless) character.

While each of these assumptions might arguably gesture toward some aspect of poetry's plausible appearance, taken together they constitute a powerful disabling force in the self-understanding of modern culture. The problem is not simply the tendency to forget that poetry can also tell stories, rather than only express emotions, ideas, or images. The deeper problem is the assumption that all imaginative literature (fictive discourse, whether in prose or verse) is ultimately self-contained (if not self-centered and solipsistic) rather than communicative. This vision also tends to assume that, because poetry is not explicitly deliberative, it has no purpose whatsoever—rather than recognizing that a revelatory or demonstrative purpose through the enjoyment of something for its own sake is nevertheless a purpose. This problem would be more obvious if modern culture

all rhetoric is reducible to deliberative persuasion (about particular actions in the future) (268); 2) the failure to recognize that the revelatory or contemplative effects of poetry are indeed a species of demonstrative persuasion (distinguished from other demonstrative persuasion by its fictive subject matter) (271); 3) the belief that attention to persuasive actions inside a given poem or fictive work is irrelevant (or even contrary) to comprehensive critical judgment of the work as a poetic whole (273–76). The ensuing argument of this essay shows why each of these beliefs is mistaken.

did not tend to presume that all purposes are necessarily instrumental. Considered together, these assumptions might be described as the post-Romantic vision of poetry. Their influence can be so profound that any attempt to articulate an alternative can seem unintelligible, if not merely pernicious. Nevertheless, I suggest that an alternative does need to be ventured. What is at stake is nothing less than our assumed vision of ourselves, as human speakers who are not merely tools, our vision of the world, as having worth in itself, and our sense of the prospects for human agency in that world.

In noting the characteristic modern understanding of the disjunction between poetry and rhetoric, Lewis was also indicating a change in the overall status of rhetoric since the Renaissance. In making that observation, Lewis is referring not only to the changing assumptions regarding oral communication that resulted from the printing press and the shift to a typographical culture. While that shift is indeed part of the change Lewis identifies, the changing importance of rhetoric is not exclusively, or even primarily, concerned with the differences between degrees of orality and literacy that resulted from the rise of mechanical print culture. The deeper issue is that modern sensibilities no longer consider all discourse, all language use, whether oral or written, whether historical or fictive, as persuasive in character. This is not to suggest that all discourse is reducible to deliberative persuasion but to emphasize that our language use is persistently interpersonal and purposive.⁶ More recently, in light of the extensive research on the history of rhetoric that has been done since Lewis wrote, R. W. Serjeantson notes that “Renaissance writing is often governed by conventions derived from formalised

⁶As noted above, the use of the term “persuasion” can be equivocal in a manner that can be confusing because it is sometimes also used as a synonym for deliberative persuasion in particular. By contrast, I use the term “persuasion” here to indicate the inter-personal and purposive character of discursive practice in general. In this sense, my usage aims to bring into question the presumption that discourse can function without recourse to an agent or a purpose. In effect, attending to the persuasive character of language use reminds us that a given utterance may have a forensic, a demonstrative, or a deliberative end—but it will have some end. This would be in contrast to the way that the term, “persuasive,” or “rhetorical” can also be used in the narrower sense to indicate only deliberative persuasion. I make this point in order to clarify that, by emphasizing the connection between poetry and rhetoric (in this broader sense), I am *not* implying that all poetry (not to mention all discourse) is necessarily deliberative. To be clear, the interpersonal and purposive character of rhetorical discourse is also at work in those supreme instances of Renaissance rhetoric that we find, for example, in the soliloquies of Shakespearean drama—“interpersonal” can include that self-addressed discourse called “thinking” specifically because it is spoken by an agent to oneself as if one is another person. Likewise, even when such self-addressed speech is not deliberative, it is nevertheless purposive, whether forensic (with respect to a particular past event) or demonstrative (with respect to revealing the general character of some person, thing, or action). For an account of how rhetoric relates to the other verbal arts (grammar and logic), see note 23.

arts of argument of which the art of rhetoric is the most pervasive.”⁷ Making explicit reference to such “conventions” could, of course, be taken as a sign of incompetence or immaturity in a writer; nevertheless, “Renaissance readers were highly conscious of the different forms of logical and rhetorical argument,” as “evident not only from the innumerable handbooks of those arts that formed a staple of the curriculum of the grammar-schools and the early years of a university education, but also from the printed and manuscript analyses that survive of classical, biblical and vernacular literature.”⁸ In a similar vein, Peter Mack’s *History of Renaissance Rhetoric* shows that one of the major effects of rhetorical education in the Renaissance was to bring rhetorical categories to the reading of poetic or literary texts.⁹ In order to suggest what such an understanding of poetry might look like in practice, the argument here focuses on a well-known episode from book two of *Paradise Lost*, commonly referred to as the “Parliament of Hell.” Ultimately, such a rhetorical-poetic reading of Milton’s poem illustrates how the art of rhetoric provides insight regarding the interaction between public deliberation and verbal imagination.

At the most basic level, Milton’s biblical epic seems to be concerned with three main topics (among others): 1) the entrance of evil into human history; 2) whether the divine allowance of such an action can be understood as “just”; 3) the possible illumination of these first two topics by narrating the fall of an angelic being later known as “Satan.” In the critical literature on Milton’s poem, the character of Satan has historically gotten considerable attention.¹⁰

⁷R. W. Serjeantson, “Testimony: The Artless Proof,” in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gain Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181.

⁸*Ibid.* The representative bibliography provided by Sylvia Adamson, Gain Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber, eds. in *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 291–94, provides a useful sampling of the considerable volume of historical scholarship on Renaissance rhetoric completed during the decades between Lewis and Serjeantson.

⁹Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 58–76.

¹⁰See, for example, Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), for a twenty-first century version of the famous argument (which reaches back to the Romantics) that interprets the character of Satan as the moral hero and God as the moral villain of *Paradise Lost*. Forsyth is participating in a tradition that includes the likes of William Empson’s *Milton’s God* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961). Empson’s argument was directly answered by Dennis Danielson in *Milton’s Good God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). William Blake’s way of describing the issue was to say that Milton was “a true poet [of Liberty] and of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (“The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 35). As I have argued elsewhere, this critical debate regarding the meaning of Satan’s character in *Paradise Lost* arises because Satan dramatizes nothing less than the presumed modern self-understanding of authentic subjectivity (Donnelly, “John Milton: *Paradise Lost*,” in *Finding a Common Thread: Reading*

Nevertheless, because *Paradise Lost* is ostensibly concerned with the appearance of divine justice in the events of the specifically human fall and Satan's role in that fall, the narrative focus in book two raises an obvious question. The epic begins "in the middle of things" by recounting what happens immediately after Satan and his companions are cast from heaven into hell. After regrouping, the fallen angels, who have become demons, attempt to deliberate formally together about what they ought to do in response to their situation. These deliberations take up roughly the first half of book two of *Paradise Lost*, which leads to the question: why does the narrative devote so much attention to something like the depiction of demonic persuasive activity and specifically this kind of deliberative persuasion that we encounter in book two? At one level, the passage might be construed as part of Milton's larger attempt to politicize the depiction of the angelic fall,¹¹ or as part of his satirical treatment of human political corruption.¹² Without denying those arguments, I suggest that this passage also dramatizes the political difficulties that arise from the attempt to limit deliberations about the public good to matters of instrumental judgment. We can begin to perceive those difficulties by considering in more detail the character of rhetorical-poetic reading and specifically how Milton's text known as *The Art of Logic* bears on such reading practices. We can then begin to discern how this mode of reading leads to insights regarding *Paradise Lost*. In effect, the epic presents speeches by the fallen angels in book two as dramatic treatments of the political consequences that follow from insisting on the public obscurity of divine justice. Ultimately, I suggest that the narrative poses for readers not simply the task of discerning the difference between virtue and hypocrisy; rather, it invites readers to imagine how a political discourse might preclude such a distinction from even appearing.

Because the designation "rhetorical" has been applied to a wide variety of critical approaches, I should clarify my use of the term here. "Rhetorical-poetic reading," as I use it here, does not refer to the formalism of so-called New Crit-

Great Texts from Homer to O'Connor, ed. Robert C. Roberts, et al. [South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press 2013], 221–29); in effect, because Satan assumes the modern definition of liberty, modern readers will tend to find his expressed sentiments compelling and may not appreciate the extent to which the epic dramatizes the limitations of such a view of liberty. For the purposes of the present argument, one need not resolve the debate about Satan but simply grant that *Paradise Lost* is not likely recommending to readers that they worship Moloch, Belial, or Mammon, thereby raising the question of what larger poetic or revelatory purpose the debate seems to serve.

¹¹David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 433–55.

¹²Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 177–233.

icism,¹³ nor to reader-response criticism,¹⁴ nor to the mere tracking of specific rhetorical figures or schemes.¹⁵ Nor is it merely postmodern sophistry in a deconstructive mode.¹⁶ Instead, I propose to draw on the work of the historian, Peter Mack, who has written extensively on Renaissance rhetorical education. Mack contends that, for early-modern texts informed by rhetorical traditions, we best understand their persuasive elements when we consider the dynamics of characterization and narrative action that shape the drama surrounding moral maxims that we notice embedded in a given text (and not necessarily articulated).¹⁷ My proposal is this: Milton sought to provoke readers to distill maxims for themselves, rather than have them handed to them. In doing this, Milton was following what he understood as the practice of ancient epic poets, like Homer and Virgil. In Mack's account, early-modern rhetorical education encouraged people to read epic narratives in a particular way. In effect, rather than emphasize the fragmentary character of Renaissance rhetorical reading that might be oriented toward the composition of commonplace books,¹⁸ Mack contends that the emphasis on reading for moral maxims needs to be understood in light of the careful

¹³Cf. Boris Eichenbaum, "The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'" trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, in *Russian Formalist Criticism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 99–139; and Cleanth Brooks, "The Formalist Critics," *Kenyon Review* 13 (1951): 72–81.

¹⁴For example, Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), and *Is there a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹⁵Cf. William Pallister, *Between Worlds: The Rhetorical Universe of 'Paradise Lost'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), and the essays on a variety of Renaissance texts in the volume edited by Adamson et al., in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*.

¹⁶See, for example, Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," *Diacritics* 3, no. 3 (1973): 27–33; and Stanley Fish, "Rhetoric," in *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 471–502. Cf. Robert Danisch, "Stanley Fish is not a Sophist: The Difference between Skeptical and Prudential Versions of Rhetorical Pragmatism," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 5 (2012): 405–23.

¹⁷See Mack, "Rhetoric, Ethics and Reading in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Studies* 19, no.1 (2005): 1–21. In contrast to Thomas Fulton, I do not maintain that Milton simply rejected all use of maxims in principle; rather, what Milton rejected was the attempt to provide readers with pre-fabricated *sententiae* that functioned as substitutes for thinking. Cf. Thomas Fulton, *Historical Milton: Manuscript, Print, and Political Culture in Revolutionary England* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010): 50–61. In some respects, the kind of work that most closely resembles the approach that I take here is exemplified by Brian Cummings in *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 421–31. Cummings tends to focus, however, on the operation of discrete grammatical functions rather than the relation between such verbal elements and the character of a larger persuasive whole that may gesture toward or impinge upon a world beyond itself.

¹⁸See, for example, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

attention that was also given to the understanding of texts as persuasive wholes.¹⁹ In self-conscious contrast to the scholasticism that they rejected, Renaissance teachers of the verbal arts emphasized the importance of distilling and considering moral aphorisms within the complex rhetorical contexts of the entire works in which they occur.²⁰ Such reading included not simply identifying proverbs (or well-known maxims) but the active formulation of new maxims that distill dramatic action or discursive argument. This characterization of Renaissance reading practices draws from the historical work done by Brian Cummings, as well as Mack, but also the research on Renaissance rhetoric represented by Sylvia Adamson and others. The fact that Milton was the beneficiary of precisely such a rhetorical education has been thoroughly established.²¹ Rhetorical-poetic reading is therefore not simply a matter of cataloging either rhetorical devices or explicit maxims; rather, such reading involves the active discernment of dramatically interrogated maxims that would otherwise remain obscure or implicit.²² This is the kind of transformative engagement of the heart and mind that, I suggest, Milton seeks to provoke in readers.

At this point, we should note briefly how Milton's work on logic fits into this account of rhetorical-poetic reading. During the years between Milton's first publication of *Paradise Lost*, in 1667 (in ten books), and the publication of the twelve-book version of the epic in 1674, he also published (among other things) an introductory logic text, written in Latin, that he had probably composed initially in the 1640s. The full title of the text, as published in 1672 is *Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio ad Petri Rami Methodum concinnata*, translated into English as *A Fuller Course in the Art of Logic Conformed to the Method of Peter Ramus*. Why would Milton think it so important in the last few years of his life to make sure that this introductory logic text get published?

To begin answering this question, we need to appreciate first that Milton interprets an "art" in general as any ordered body of knowledge regarding how to make things. In the case of the verbal liberal arts—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—that knowledge concerns specifically how to make things that consist of words.²³ In *Of Education* (1644), Milton describes logic and rhetoric in relation

¹⁹Mack, "Rhetoric," 3.

²⁰Ibid., 4–12.

²¹See, for example, Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1–86.

²²This is why such rhetorical reading is not simply a matter of mimicking the pedantic marginalia that Fulton correctly identifies Milton as rejecting in *Historical Milton*, 50–61.

²³In what follows, I use "verbal liberal arts" to refer to the first three of the traditional seven liberal arts, commonly known as the "trivium" (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) as distinguished from the four mathematical liberal arts known as the "quadrivium" (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy). What each art in the trivium is concerned to make using words varies in each case: grammar concerns the making of utterances and the manner in which those utterances gesture; logic concerns the making of arguments based on valid

to the verbal fine art of poetry. Having outlined the study of grammar and ethics, Milton notes that students should come “lastly” to the study of rhetoric, or what he calls “those organic arts” which form the ability “to discourse and write perspicuously, elegantly, and according to the fitted stile of lofty, mean, or lowly”—and then he adds:

Logic therefore so much as is useful, is to be referr'd to this due place withall her Heads and Topics, untill it be time to open her contracted palm into a gracefull and ornate Rhetorick. . . . To which Poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before among the rudiments of Grammar; but that sublime Art which . . . teaches what the laws are of a true *Epic* poem, what of a *Dramatic*, what of a *Lyric*, what decorum is, which is the grand master-piece to observe. (*Of Educ.* 402–3)²⁴

This passage is revealing in several ways, but two of Milton’s claims are especially important: 1) that the purpose of the art of logic is ultimately fulfilled in the activity of persuasion; 2) that the art of rhetoric provides the material for an even more exalted or “sublime Art” known as poetry.²⁵ Milton also clarifies that by the term, “poetry,” he does not mean simply the skill of writing in verse; rather, he construes it more broadly as a species of imaginative writing. In Milton’s account, the art of such imaginative writing should be studied after the art of rhetoric (“subsequent”) even though such poetry is “more simple, sensuous, and passionate” than rhetoric, in the same way that rhetoric is more graceful than logic. “Decorum,” in this respect, is “the grand master-piece to observe” specifically because it involves the most powerful union of discerning attention to matter, form, audience, and discursive purpose—in this sense, poetry is the supreme form of demonstrative or revelatory persuasion. To be clear, to call poetry “persuasive” does not imply that poetry must always be instrumental or have an explicit deliberative goal. Rather, those most exalted yet deeply implicit demonstrative ends served by the rendering of fictive events in poetry are precisely what distinguishes it from the customary deliberative or forensic rhetorical attention to actual events and explicit purposes. Nevertheless, in the educational traditions

inference; rhetoric concerns the making of persuasive discourses oriented toward engaging the whole person. For a fuller account of how the three verbal arts are related, see especially chapters one, three, and six of Donnelly, *Lost Seeds*.

²⁴John Milton, *Of Education*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 2, 1643–1648, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

²⁵This paragraph and the next two are indebted to Phillip J. Donnelly, “Homer Writes Back: Rhetorical Art and Biblical Epic Justice in *Paradise Lost*,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Bible and the Arts*, ed. by Stephen Prickett (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2014), 461–62.

that Milton inhabits, the verbal arts of grammar, logic, rhetoric, and poetry were understood to share not only the material of words (*verba*) but also the purposive quality of such discursive material. In this sense, the characters inside a given poem may understand themselves to be practicing deliberative persuasion, but their purposes are, in turn, part of a larger, if more obscure, demonstrative end served by the poem as a whole through its combination of voices.

Milton indicates the tradition of logical instruction in which he participates when he mentions the “Heads and Topics” of logic. The “topical logic,” or “place logic,” tradition derived ultimately from the writings of Aristotle and Cicero, as mediated through Boethius.²⁶ However, by the sixteenth century, topical logic had come to represent for Renaissance humanists an alternative to the way that Scholastic logic emphasized the detailed study of the syllogism and the character of valid inference. The Renaissance versions of topical logic had incorporated the “common topics” of rhetorical invention. The traditional first task of the orator was to “invent,” or discover, arguments to support a given claim. The common “places,” or topics, for discovering such rhetorical arguments included definition, comparison, relationship, circumstance, and testimony. Renaissance humanist logic texts include these rhetorical common topics. For example, Milton’s *Art of Logic* considers how the “definition” of a given thing can be a source of “argument” (310–17). The notion of “argument” at work here is broader than strict validity, extending to “showing, explaining, or proving” (220). This is the sense in which Virgil uses the term, in observing that “Fear argues degenerate souls” (*Aen.* 4, quoted in Milton, 220). This is also the sense in which Milton uses the term “argument” to identify the plot summaries that he adds to each book of *Paradise Lost* in the 1674 edition. He designates each plot summary as an “argument” in the sense that any plot of fictive action is a demonstrative showing (or arguing) *that* a given event happens inside the fictive world of the poem. In this way, Milton understood “argument” to include much more than strict logical validity. In effect, such topical logic texts oriented the study of logic toward the broader activity of persuasion. Milton clearly understood that such argument, in this broader sense, was intrinsic to rhetoric and to poetry.

Within this tradition of Renaissance topical logic, Milton’s *Art of Logic* specifically follows the writing of Peter Ramus. Because of the influence of

²⁶See Boethius, *De Topicis Differentiis*, trans. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978). For an historical account of the reception of Boethius through the late medieval logical tradition, see the essay “Dialectic in Ancient and Medieval Logic,” by Eleonore Stump appended to *De Topicis Differentiis*, 205–36. As it happens, Boethius is explicit about the distinction between “Dialectical Topics” and “Rhetorical Topics” (*De Topicis Diff.*, 4.1205C). The Renaissance logic handbooks, following Agricola and Ramus, however, seem to combine these two kinds of topics. For more details regarding Ramism and the topical logic tradition, see Donnelly, “Logic,” in *Milton in Context*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 349–55.

Walter Ong, Ramist logic has long been viewed primarily as dividing logic from rhetoric—further implying that such a division pre-figures the modern fact-value distinction.²⁷ Such a view, however, is more misleading than helpful. In practice, the teaching of Ramus “was based on an alliance between rhetoric and dialectic, on reading classical literature, and on focusing on what was practical for students.”²⁸ As Milton, following Ramus, clearly indicates, he understands rhetorical and poetic figures as rooted in the common topics of logical invention. For example, the discussion of the logical topic “comparison” includes the rhetorical figure of “metaphor” (*Logic* 284–85). Similarly, the discussion of the logical topic of “definition” includes the rhetorical figure of “description” (*Logic* 310–13). Rhetorical figures were thus understood as extensions of the common topics of invention, in accord with the matter, the occasion, the audience, and the ends of a given discourse. In this sense, the *Art of Logic* implies an art of rhetoric and an art of poetry, even as it insists on the independence of poetic arrangement from Ramist method of logical arrangement (*Logic* 395).

Milton understood rhetorical categories not only as a means of composition but also as a mode of reading. Through training in topical logic, Renaissance humanists learned how to use the four Aristotelian causes as heuristic devices for understanding their own writing as well as that of others.²⁹ The four causes, for example, are traditionally identified as the “material cause,” “efficient cause,” “formal cause,” and “final cause.” Milton’s *Art of Logic* explicitly uses the four causes as a source for discovering arguments—that is, for giving a verbal account of a given thing’s coming into being (*Logic* 223). To apply the four causes heuristically to texts, involves asking questions about things such as the relationship between persuasive topic (matter), the author and implied reader (aspects of efficient cause), or between genre (form) and a given persuasive effect (final cause). In considering the operation of the four causes in reading texts, there are two considerations that seem especially important: 1) the most helpful insights typically arise from the interaction among the causes, whether through considering how a particular arrangement (form) serves a given persuasive goal (final cause), or considering how a particular cause may be neglected (or over-emphasized) within some critical discourse; 2) with respect to final cause in particular, our understanding of many texts can be improved by asking about how a variety of persuasive purposes can be nested inside one another—whether a forensic,

²⁷See Ong’s introduction to Milton’s *Art of Logic*, trans. Walter Ong and Charles J. Ermentinger, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol 8, 1666–1682, ed. Maurice Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 158–59. Cf. Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

²⁸Mack, *Renaissance Rhetoric*, 136.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 58–75.

demonstrative, or deliberative purpose.³⁰ For example, a forensic argument about a particular event in the past can serve a further purpose of revealing someone's character (demonstrative claim); likewise, a demonstrative claim about the way things are generally might also serve a further deliberative purpose regarding future action. In this way, the rhetorical orientation of Renaissance English education directly shaped the way that people read not only excerpts but entire texts. This is how Milton was trained as a reader: to attend to the explicit or implicit claims in a given passage while considering those claims in relation to one another and in relation to the larger revelatory aims of the whole poetic discourse. In the case of the second book of *Paradise Lost*, as we shall find, this inset layering of persuasive purposes is crucial to remember in order to keep in mind both the distinction and the connection between the deliberative purposes of the fallen angels and demonstrative effects of the poem.

In considering *Paradise Lost*, one further important rhetorical feature of book two is the use of what I call *allos topos* discourse (Greek for "other place"). This is a key feature of Milton's poetic subject matter. *Allos topos* discourse involves the use of an imagined other place in order to offer political, social, or moral insight regarding the present place of implied readers. In one sense, this mode of discourse is at least as old as Homer's shade of Achilles, who speaks from that other place called Hades, but additional other places could also include Dante's Paradise, Shakespeare's Denmark, or best of all, Thomas More's "no place"—also known as "Utopia." I suggest that *Paradise Lost* participates in this tradition of *allos topos* persuasion—by using a variety of other places—including Hell, Heaven, and Eden. The epic does this, I propose, in order to offer readers opportunities for recognition and indirect inquiry that would otherwise not be available. In this sense, *allos topos* discourse in Milton's hands becomes a kind of "mythic" discourse. By mythic I mean not something merely falsifying or perniciously ideological. Rather, I use it in the sense that Plato seems to use the word—as in the myth about the ring of Gyges or the myth of Er (*Rep.* 359a–60d; 614b–21b)—as a necessarily fictive but analogically potent story that may reveal some aspect of reality (or its corruption). An analogically potent story is the kind that offers multiple opportunities for readerly recognition at a variety of levels at the same time. In effect, an *allos topos* narrative is a specific kind of demonstrative persuasion that seeks to reveal or "show" to readers something through the otherness of the fictive world that is evoked by that verbal making. The heightened sense of

³⁰For a more detailed account of how the four Aristotelian causes can serve as heuristic interpretive aids, see chapter three in Donnelly, *Lost Seeds*.

difference between fictive place and the place of implied readers uniquely permits specific kinds of recognition that might not otherwise appear.

One of the most notable features of *Paradise Lost* is that it seems to take an extraordinary amount of time to reach the climactic events in book nine. Even if we allow for Milton's concern to use this long narrative prelude in order to help readers interpret the events of the human fall, we still might reasonably ask, "Why does he include this particular dramatized infernal debate that takes up half of book two?" Is there something more than political satire at work here? Milton could plausibly expect his seventeenth-century English readers to appreciate that he is not proposing Moloch worship, for example, as a path to happiness. Why then does he present speeches by these kinds of characters? I suggest that this particular context, this infernal *allos topos*, allows him to dramatize a kind of metaphysically perfected hypocrisy. In order to see this clearly, we need to notice first how the debate unfolds and then how the narrative explicitly frames the beginning and end of the debate. In light of that framing, I suggest that the narrative invites readers to consider the important differences between the perspectives of the characters and that of the narrative voice in order to appreciate why we are being presented with this explicit dramatization of hypocrisy.

Satan initially sets before the fallen angels two options: either "open Warr or covert guile" (*PL* 2.41).³¹ Although ostensibly limited to two options, the rhetorical occasion is nevertheless deliberative, in that the debate involves arguments regarding individual particular actions in the future. The first to speak is Moloch, who favors "open Warr" (2.51); as he elaborates his argument, however, he makes it clear that he has little hope of victory and cannot even be sure whether annihilation or further suffering would be the result of such action. Lest readers have any doubt, the narrator identifies the advice as based on "desperate revenge"; earlier, Moloch had already been identified as "the strongest and fiercest Spirit / That fought in Heav'n; now fiercer by despair" (2.43–44). As the narrator goes on to explain, Moloch is now even more fearless, not because he is courageous but because he has lost all care (2.48–50). In effect, he exemplifies not simply despair but also specifically the kind of wrath (ferocity) that may appear to others as a courageous desire for justice (understood by the demons as revenge). Something similar happens in the case of each demon who gives a speech in this infernal parliament. Each vice appears in the guise of a particular virtue. The next to speak is Belial, who offers a contrasting proposal that they should seek at least to minimize pain of suffering under such tyranny. Again, however, the narrative voice makes it explicit that Belial "counsel'd ignoble ease, and peaceful sloth / Not peace" (2.227–28). The third speaker is Mammon, who rejects both open war and the quest for merely passive peace as "vain." Instead he proposes that they

³¹ Parenthetical citations of *Paradise Lost*, by book and line number, are from Roy Flanagan's edition of *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

should get busy and make hell into a place that is better than heaven—“through labour and indurance” (2.262). As the narrator goes on to explain, however, Mammon’s proposal meets with approval specifically because of a twofold fear of pain and a desire to found an empire to rule heaven. The narrator has also already told us about Mammon’s infatuation with gold and riches (1.682). In this way, the epic implies that what looks like diligence, in this case, is actually motivated by cowardice and greed. Thus, the infernal parliament in book two of *Paradise Lost* does not simply show readers the evils of wrath, sloth, and greed, for example. Instead, it models how wrath can look like courage, how sloth can look like a desire for peace, and how greed can look like diligence. The narrative shows (rather than tells) that each vice does not simply appear as a vice but as a characteristic virtue.

In this respect, the deliberative arguments presented by the demons can function for readers outside the action as dramatized demonstrative arguments—that is, as showing or revealing each vice’s characteristic hypocritical appearance. There are, in this sense, three layers of persuasive purpose at work in this passage. At one level, there is the explicit deliberative purpose of each fallen angel who speaks. At a second level, there is also the explicit demonstrative purpose of the narrative voice in showing the true character of each demonic speaker. At a third level, however, the demonstrative effect remains implicit: it goes beyond the narrator’s evaluation in each case, requiring the reader to identify the connection between each vice and its characteristic appearance. The inset purposes can be outlined as follows:

- 1) a) Moloch’s explicit deliberative purpose: to argue for open war and risk destruction.
 - b) The narrator’s explicit demonstrative claim: Moloch is ruled by fierce vengeance.
 - c) The implicit demonstrative poetic effect of the passage: “Wrath may seem like courage.”
- 2) a) Belial’s explicit deliberative purpose: to argue for peace.
 - b) The narrator’s explicit demonstrative claim: Belial is ruled by sloth.
 - c) The implicit demonstrative poetic effect of the passage: “Sloth may seem like a desire for peace.”
- 3) a) Mammon’s explicit deliberative purpose: to argue for diligence in building.
 - b) The narrator’s explicit demonstrative claim: Mammon is ruled by greed.

c) The implicit demonstrative poetic effect of the passage: “Greed may seem like diligence.”

In this way, each segment of the episode can be distilled to a rhetorically situated moral maxim. At the same time, the passage is not reducible to these maxims because the episode does yet more than model a kind of perfected hypocrisy. If we consider also the framing of this debate, we can appreciate how the voice of Satan also adds another voice to the episode which further transforms that third layer of implicit demonstrative poetic effect.

The entire debate is framed, at its beginning and end, in terms that directly evoke an instrumentalized political discourse. What I mean by “instrumentalized political discourse” is simply a condition in which the participants in deliberative persuasion understand that public success requires that they not appeal openly to an account of the good that transcends political regimes. In opening the demonic deliberations, Satan says that:

Where there is no good
 For which to strive, no strife can grow up there
 From faction; for none sure will claim in Hell
 Precedence, none whose portion is so small
 Of this present pain, that with ambitious mind
 Will covet more. With this advantage then
 To union and firm Faith, and firm accord,
 More then can be in Heav’n we now return
 To claim our just inheritance of old. (*PL* 2.30–38)

With respect to Satan’s immediate persuasive goal in this passage, at one level, he is simply arguing that to be ambitious in Hell is to covet more pain—in doing this he is setting the stage for his own later self-promotion as the kind of hero who risks the suffering that others are unwilling to endure. In this respect, the infernal debate is a parody of the heavenly council that appears in book three. At another level, however, the opening and closing lines also bear implications that go beyond Satan’s immediate and explicit deliberative purpose. These implications are not part of Satan’s intention, but they are readily available as part of the larger demonstrative effect of the passage, when considered as a whole. The beginning and closing lines of the passage (2.30–32 and 2.35–38) show that Satan assumes, as a matter of course, that there is no good for which they can strive together. That is the initial premise of his argument. In effect, Satan claims that Hell allows for greater political unity than Heaven does because the demons seek “no good,” no higher purpose or object of desire that would cause

ambition or faction. As readers know from the first book, Satan has already declared that it is “better to reign in hell than serve in heaven” (1.263) and that he has already judged that desire to reign as “worth ambition” (1.262).³² Later, Satan, while alone, will claim that evil is his “good,” or goal (4.110), but the public character of the statement in the infernal parliament is, I suggest, crucial to its larger significance in the poem. The narrative is emphatic about the public character of this disavowal. The explicit premise of Satan’s political argument (that there is no good beyond their social arrangements) is a central feature in what are known as social contract theories of justice. In short, such an account assumes that notions of justice arise from agreement among persons and does not depend on any moral order that transcends political arrangements.³³ Quite apart from Satan’s deliberative intentions, what the narrative shows readers through his actions is that the ensuing quest for justice depends on a “good,” or purpose, that must be generated only by mutual agreement—it must be so because they have rejected any “good” that would transcend such intra-political ends.

Satan’s pronouncement thus establishes the context for the ensuing speeches that make up the debate: the explicit task before them is to deliberate between the alternatives of open war or covert guile. Each alternative is understood to be a means in service to the goal of revenge that they imagine justice to be. As the ensuing speeches reveal, however, the demons construe even that goal of “revenge-as-justice” to be an instrumental means to something else; whether they express attitudes indicative of wrath, sloth, or greed, the demons effectively identify those ends (rather than revenge) as their de facto “good.” In this way, beyond the deliberative goals of the characters involved, the larger demonstrative effect of this episode is to model the operation of an instrumentalized political discourse.

³²In a later soliloquy, Satan will ask that evil become his “good,” or purpose (4.110); however, that claim is not part of the public deliberative argument here. In the soliloquy in book four, the poem arguably dramatizes the personal and psychological incoherence that arises from internalizing the social contract theory of justice that is publicly advocated here in book two.

³³To be clear, as I explain elsewhere, there is an important distinction that needs to be made between two kinds of “contractarianism”: 1) the belief that the legitimacy of a given regime depends on the consent of the governed (a contractarian theory of political sovereignty); 2) the belief that justice itself arises only from intra-human agreement and has no basis in a reality beyond a given civil authority (a contractarian theory of justice). I suggest that in English-speaking traditions of political philosophy much confusion arises from the fact that John Locke arguably blurs this very distinction. See Donnelly, “Religious Toleration and Social Contract Theories of Justice,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Toleration*, ed. M. Sardoč (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 11–18. With respect to *Paradise Lost*, it should be noted that the social contract theory of justice assumed by Satan is not uniquely modern. Rather, it is as ancient as the Greek sophists and finds explicit formulation in the character of Thrasymachus as he appears in Plato’s *Republic*, for example (358e–59a). Cf. Donnelly, “Religious Toleration,” 12–14.

After the debate is finished, the narrative voice offers a striking apostrophe:
 O shame to men! Devil with Devil damn'd
 Firm concord holds, men onely disagree
 Of Creatures rational, though under hope
 Of heavenly grace. (*PL* 2.496–99)

At one level, these lines simply point out, in the voice of the narrator, that demons are better than humans at calculating rational self-interest, and so demons are more faithful to the kind of political concord that the social contract involves. The passage also, however, implies something more: at the level of larger demonstrative effect, beyond the voice of the narrator, the passage as a whole suggests that the practice of politics based on the mere calculation of self-interest treats humans as if they are without hope of redemption. As we later learn in book three, the hope of redemption is explicitly identified as the feature that distinguishes humans from demons (3.120–34). In other words, a social contract theory of justice assumes that the human condition is reducible to the demonic condition.³⁴ Again, as I have noted, the narrative voice is not to be confused with the voice of the author or simply “the correct answer.” Rather, the ultimate persuasive ends of a given passage or text arise from the interaction between the dramatized deliberation and the narrative voice when understood together. By considering the interaction among the voices (including the narrator’s voice as one among others) in terms of their overall persuasive effect, such rhetorical-poetic reading avoids both the tendency to reduce the text to a single voice in the text and the contrasting tendency to infer interpretive despair from such a multi-voiced text.³⁵ The key point to appreciate here is that the distinction between virtue and hypocrisy in the case of each of the three deliberative demonic speeches in *Paradise Lost*—that particular distinction—appears to readers but not to the characters inside the action. The hypocrisy is presented openly to readers only when the narrative voice names the vices for what they are. At the same time, the gap between the self-understanding of the characters and the assessment by the narrative voice is not explicitly noted by the narrator; that gap and its significance regarding how each vice may appear as a virtue must be inferred by readers through consideration of the passage as a poetic whole.

³⁴Curiously, this is a particular point of connection between Immanuel Kant and Milton that Sanford Budick does not consider in his book, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Budick possibly considers the connection too obvious to bear noting; nevertheless, *Paradise Lost* does seem to anticipate Kant’s claim that a social contract theory of justice is adequate to govern a society of demons who are privately vicious but publicly constrained. Cf. *PL* 2.496–99 with Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, trans. David L. Colclasure (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 90–91.

³⁵The author is grateful to Long Chen and one of the anonymous reviewers for helpful questions prompting this clarification.

By hypocrisy, I mean the practice of virtue for the sake of some benefit that is extrinsic to the virtue itself. In effect, if virtue is practiced for the sake of something else, what a person really seeks is that external benefit. In that case, all one really needs is the mere appearance of virtue. By contrast, from the perspective of the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*, that distinction between virtue and its mere appearance for the sake of something else is not available—in effect, they simply assume that virtue is always for something else. Indeed, the distinction cannot appear to them because their political discourse precludes making the distinction: as Satan has explained, there is no supra-political good for which to strive, therefore the very notion of a “virtue in itself” that could be distinguished from any “mere appearance” of virtue disappears. For the demons, all virtue is assumed to be instrumental. Their explicit goal is to answer a deliberative question: “Should we use war or deception to get revenge?” but that deliberative goal is nested inside the larger demonstrative goal of the entire narrative, with respect to readers outside the action. We can now begin to discern that demonstrative goal more clearly: by dramatizing this deliberative debate, the poem shows that the distinction between virtue and hypocrisy disappears if there is no acknowledged good beyond political regimes.

This is not, however, the end of the episode. The demonic debate does not end with Mammon; rather it ends with Beelzebub’s reiteration of Satan’s initial proposal that someone should undertake to investigate “another world” (2.347) about which they had only heard prophetic rumor—with a view to corrupting this new creation, as an act of revenge (or getting justice). On the surface, there seems to be a disconnect between the debate and the resulting resolution. I suggest, however, that Milton presents the internal validity of the logic here as implacable: in effect, given the demons’ assumed definition of justice as revenge, and their defeated condition, the proposed course of action appears as the only way to achieve a “justice” (revenge) that is not merely the self-contained appearance of such justice. Thus, at one level, the poem implies that even fallen angels cannot live long without some version of hypocrisy—that is, without pretending some kind of virtue among themselves. However, the deeper point is that Beelzebub’s proposal seeks to transcend that unavoidable hypocrisy precisely through an act of revenge (justice) that would not be a mere appearance (as the other proposals would be). In this way, the debate dramatizes how, even within a group that has limited its shared sense of “good” to instrumental purposes (upon which they agree), there persists a desire for something beyond the immediate political frame of a given regime.

By way of conclusion, I draw attention to what exactly this kind of historically-based rhetorical-poetic reading shows us about this passage in *Paradise Lost*. The poem situates a moral maxim within an unfolding action that ultimately shows (demonstratively) more than its characters tell one another for the sake of deliberative persuasion. The passage involves four basic elements:

- 1) A proposed maxim for consideration: “Mutual agreement can establish a merely political justice (understood as revenge).” (This is Satan’s initial framing comment distilled into a maxim.)
- 2) Explicitly dramatized deliberative persuasion in response to the question, “Which action—force or deception—will best achieve such ‘justice’ (revenge)?” (This is the explicit question that the demonic debate attempts to address.)
- 3) What the dramatized deliberation reveals about the initially proposed maxim: “If justice arises only through mutual agreement, then there is no distinction between virtue and the mere appearance of virtue.” (This demonstrative effect becomes apparent only through the difference between the demonic perspective and that of the narrative voice—through nesting of persuasive ends. The deliberative ends of the characters are framed by the demonstrative evaluations of the narrative voice that, in turn, gives rise to a further demonstrative effect beyond the voice of the narrator that arises from the combination of voices.)
- 4) The explicit answer to the question (2) coincides with what the deliberation (3) ultimately reveals: namely, that the attempt to achieve a “justice” that goes beyond mere appearance requires investigating “another world” known only by speech. This coincidence is enacted by Beelzebub’s proposal at the end of the debate.

Ultimately, the dramatization of this infernal parliament offers, I suggest, an opportunity for a specific kind of recognition. That recognition occurs, however, only if readers keep clearly in view the difference in perspective between fallen humans and fallen angels, as stated in the epic: namely, that fallen humans have hope of possible redemption while the fallen angels do not (3.120–34). In this way, the infernal debate dramatizes the political condition of those who have no hope of redemption. Does this mean that the passage offers satirical recognition only for those who happen to believe in a strict Calvinist doctrine of double predestination? Not necessarily. There may be other opportunities for recognition as well. As it happens, many people in modern culture, regardless of metaphysical or anti-metaphysical commitments, recognize that we inhabit an instrumentalized political discourse. The need to refrain from any public appeal to a human good that would be greater than the regimes that we inhabit may often seem obvious. What this episode reveals is a connection for all who inhabit such a culture: a connection between this instrumentalized view of politics and the inability to distinguish, in principle, between virtue and hypocrisy. There is also, however, a corollary: that is, if people do, in practice, distinguish between virtue and hypocrisy, their practice may reveal that they do, after all, inhabit a discourse that is not merely instrumental. In either case, the poem offers such opportunities for

recognition not by means of syllogistic argument but by means of an *allos topos* or “other place” discourse. By offering such recognition, the passage offers, not the conclusion of a deductive argument, but an occasion for reflection on, and maybe even participation in, something human but also something more than human—something that may include but is not reducible to the appearances of political life. In this way, a rhetorical reading of this episode from *Paradise Lost* suggests how early-modern texts can be read in a way that gives genuine voice to the historical otherness of such writings, without reducing them to dead artifacts or occasions for mere self-projection.³⁶

³⁶Although much revised and expanded here, a Chinese-language version of the arguments in the latter two sections of this article appeared as: 弥尔顿的《逻辑之艺》作为诗歌之艺：对《失乐园》第二卷的修辞学解读 in 基督教文化学刊 42 (2019): 168–87. Used with permission.

The Cave and the Quadrivium: Mathematics in Classical Education

Jeffrey S. Lehman

ABSTRACT: While classical schools today typically exhibit a carefully considered approach to the linguistic arts of the *trivium*, the equally important mathematical arts of the *quadrivium* have received relatively little consideration. This being so, mathematics is often approached in ways that are not distinctly classical. This article seeks to establish the importance of the quadrivial arts as a means of ascending from lower to higher things. Though most know Plato's comparison of a lack of education to being imprisoned in a cave, relatively few are familiar with the role the quadrivial arts play in ascending from the cave. Because the mathematical arts cultivate and direct the imagination, they enable students to move beyond sensible particulars to the formation of forms and figures by the mind. Thus, the mathematical arts help free us from an undue preoccupation with lower things and direct us toward the pursuit of knowledge and what truly is.

What place should the study of mathematics have in classical education? Most classical schools rightly emphasize the linguistic arts of the *trivium*—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—but few have thought through (much less implemented) the mathematical arts of the *quadrivium*—arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy—in a meaningful way. This is not to say, of course, that classical schools do not study mathematics; rather, it is simply to point out that the classical liberal arts of mathematics have little, if any, influence on the way mathematics is considered and taught in most classical schools. Are these quadrivial arts, in contrast to those of the trivium, simply outmoded today? If so, why? If not, how might they inspire and be incorporated into the curricula of classical schools? To answer these questions, we must first begin by getting a clear sense of what the quadrivial arts are, as well as what they are not. To do

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so, we will turn to Plato's *Republic*, one of the fountainheads of education in the Western tradition.

Book seven of *Republic* contains two of the most remarkable passages in all of Plato's dialogues. The first, the image of the cave (514a–521b), compares the effect of education (and its lack) on the human soul to the experience of being shackled in a subterranean prison. The second passage, the mathematical plan of studies described immediately after the cave image (521c–531e), is presented by Socrates as the remedy for man's imprisoned condition, the means by which he is able to be liberated and to ascend to the full light of the sun. Ironically, while the image of the cave is arguably the most remembered passage in Plato's works, the mathematical means of ascent—the proposed solution to our predicament—often goes unnoticed. In what follows, let us take a look at these two passages, focusing principally on the way Plato (through Socrates) presents a vision of these mathematical studies as distinct yet related means of ascent from lower to higher things.

MEDITATIONS ON THE CAVE IMAGE

Part of the delight of the cave image stems from its inexhaustibility. The more we reflect upon the image together with what precedes and follows it, the more we find to wonder about. Thus, in these comments on the cave we will not attempt to plumb the depths of this image in any comprehensive way (if that were even possible); instead, our purpose is to focus attention on those aspects of the cave image that best prepare us to receive the mathematical plan of studies that follows in book seven. With this purpose in mind, let's see what we can find.

Socrates presents the image of the cave as a likeness to “the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature” (514a).¹ Socrates calls on Glaucon (and us, the readers of the dialogue) to exercise our imagination:

Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They've been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Also behind them, but on higher ground, there is a path stretching between them and the fire. *Imagine* that along this path a low wall has been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers above which they show puppets. (514a–b; emphasis added)

After Socrates describes people along this low wall who use statues of men and animals to cast shadows on the cave wall in front of the prisoners, Glaucon

¹Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992). All quotations of Plato's *Republic* are from this edition.

comments, “It’s a strange image you’re describing, and strange prisoners,” and Socrates replies, “They’re like us” (515a).

I have conveyed the kernel of this passage for two reasons. First, notice the significant place of images and the imagination in the tale. Rather than draw everything out for Glaucon, Socrates exhorts him repeatedly to *imagine*—to take an active part in creating this image of the soul in its lack of education *in his mind’s eye*. This active engagement of the imagination is crucial to the ascent that follows.² Second, as strange as it sounds to Glaucon (and to us!), this image is meant to bear a true likeness to our own benighted condition without education. What exactly is so disturbing about the image? Of course, no one would wish to be physically bound, but the prisoner’s predicament is far worse than simply a loss of freedom of movement. The chains are themselves an image of an even more coercive force, one that leaves the prisoners in the dark about what really *is*. As Socrates points out, the prisoners “would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts” (515c). Another way of putting it is to say that they mistake images for the more substantial realities of which they are images. Because the prisoners cannot “turn around” to see the machinations of the puppeteers, they take the shadows to be things themselves and thus are unaware of the true cause of what they see.

After giving us a clear image of the soul in a state of ignorance, Socrates describes what happens when a prisoner is freed and ascends out of the cave. “I suppose,” Socrates remarks, “that he’d need time to get adjusted before he could see things in the world above. At first, he’d see shadows most easily, then the images of men and other things in water, then the things themselves. Of these, he’d be able to study the things in the sky and the sky itself more easily at night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon, than during the day, looking at the sun and the light of the sun” (516a–b). Having been habituated to see only the images right in front of him, it takes time and effort for the former prisoner to embrace his newfound freedom. Furthermore, his ascent to knowledge has a certain order to it: first, he comes to see shadows for what they really are—namely, as shadows and not the things of which they are shadows; then, he apprehends the reflections of men and other creatures in water, able in time to discern the difference between these reflections and that of which they are reflections. In each

²As D. C. Schindler rightly notes in “Truth and the Christian Imagination,” “the imagination is in truth far more than a mere aesthetic faculty, conventionally understood. The imagination is, if not the center of the human being, then nevertheless that without which there can be no center, for it marks the point of convergence at which the soul and body meet. . . . It lies more deeply than the sphere of our discrete thoughts and choices because it is the ordered space within which we in fact think and choose” (522). Indeed, “The imagination is where the world can have a sort of spiritual home in us, and for that reason is what allows us to have a home in the world” (521). “Truth and the Christian Imagination: The Reformation of Causality and the Iconoclasm of the Spirit,” *Communio* 33 (Winter 2006): 521–39.

case, perceiving the “lower” thing—whether a shadow or reflection—becomes a means of truly coming to know a “higher” thing. Fundamental to this ascent is the ability to perceive an image as an image. As Socrates puts it, the one who ascends from the cave of ignorance into the light of knowledge is able to “know each image for what it is and also that of which it is the image” (520c). Contrary to a common caricature of Plato’s thought, he is not a dualist who exalts the intelligible realm at the expense of the sensible realm. Moreover, he does not seek to do away with images, as if one could use the images as a ladder to reach higher things and then kick the ladder away once the ascent is accomplished. Rather, perceiving images as images is vital to the process of coming to know; both the movement from image to the thing itself and the movement back again from thing to image are necessary for teaching and learning.

The one who perceives an image as an image recognizes at least three things: 1) the image, 2) that of which it is an image, and 3) the necessary relation between the two. Thus, when we come to realize that an image is an image *of something*, we attain some awareness—however partial, perspectival, and incomplete—of what lies beyond the image. This insight regarding images sheds light on comments Socrates makes about “causes” in this passage. For instance, in the quotation from 516a–b above, Socrates says that the one making his ascent will proceed from a study of “the things in the sky and the sky itself . . . at night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon” to eventually “looking at the sun and the light of the sun” during the day. Significantly, the ascent described here ends with the sun, presented elsewhere in *Republic* as an image of the good (beginning at 506d). What is more, “at this point [the aspirant to knowledge] would infer and conclude that the sun provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is *in some way the cause* of all the things that he used to see” (516b–c; emphasis added). Note well that the one who successfully ascends to the contemplation of the sun is then able to look back at what has come before and see that “in some way” these lower things are caused by the sun. A moment’s reflection reveals that what is true of the sun on a grand scale is also true of lesser things. In other words, just as the sun is the cause of lower things in the visible world, so also is every “thing itself” the cause in some sense of its own image. To give a simple example, the tree (together with the sun, of course) is the cause of the tree’s shadow. The ascent to higher things is paired with a subsequent descent back to lower things, rendering them more intelligible in the process.

Before turning to a treatment of the mathematical plan of studies that follows the image of the cave in book seven, a few general comments about images and the imagination are in order. We live in a culture saturated with images. Through cell phones, the internet, television, printed images, and other media, the average person is presented with myriad images every day—far more images, one could argue, than at any previous time in human history. Given this unprecedented inundation with images, one might expect that the imagination would flourish.

Instead, for most of us these images simply overpower our imaginative power, leaving us glutted with images and yet starved for the kind of nourishment that would make our imagination strong and healthy. Like the people chained in Plato's cave, our imaginations are enthralled by appearances; and those with enthralled imaginations are much easier to manipulate and control. One key factor leading to the impotence of imagination today is the absence of any serious discipline or formation of the imagination. To be a passive recipient of empty and deceptive images is one thing; to be an active former of true and beautiful images is another. This is where the quadrivial arts come in.³ Let us return to book seven of Plato's *Republic* to begin to see how these mathematical arts can form the imagination, thereby making possible the ascent to higher studies.

IMAGINATION, MATHEMATICS, AND ASCENT

Once the interlocutors have completed their account of the cave and discussed its implications for the education of rulers in their ideal city, Socrates poses the following question: "Do you want us to consider now how such people will come to be in our city and how—just as some are said to have gone up from Hades to the gods—we'll lead them up to the light?" (521b–c). After Glaucon's hearty affirmative response, Socrates continues: "This isn't, it seems, a matter of tossing a coin, but of turning a soul from a day that is a kind of night to the true day—the ascent to what is, which we say is true philosophy" (521c). This reference to "turning the soul" underscores a distinction made earlier in the account of the cave, namely, the difference between a "stamping" and a "turning" education. First mentioned in book two, the stamping education is described by Socrates as suitable for the young: "You know . . . that the beginning of any process is most important, especially for anything young and tender? It's at that time that it is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress upon it" (377a–b). As a signet ring may be impressed on molten wax, leaving the form of the ring embedded in the receptive material, so the education of the young is compared to impressing the malleable minds of students with an external teaching, placing it *in* their minds from without. Though the stamping image of education is not challenged in book two, Socrates suggests in book seven that a stamping education attempts the impossible: "Education isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes" (518b–c). Given this critique, one might wonder whether there is any place for such education in the broader scheme of teaching and learning. Addressing this question is clearly beyond the scope of

³Although the term *quadrivium* is Latin, not Greek, and does not occur in extant literature until centuries later in the *De institutione arithmetica* (*On Arithmetic*) of Boethius, the mathematical plan of studies in Plato's *Republic* is clearly the inspiration for many, if not all, of those who would develop the quadrivium from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages and beyond.

this article; for now, suffice it to say that the turning education commended in book seven is clearly presented as superior to the stamping education of book two. And more to the point, Socrates identifies such turning education with the ascent made possible through the mathematical plan of studies he is about to describe. After briefly reminding us of the basic training in gymnastic (for the well-ordered body) and music (for the body *and* the soul) advocated earlier in book two (beginning at 376e), Socrates then proceeds to outline the mathematical studies that will enable the ascent.

The first mathematical study mentioned is number and calculation, “that inconsequential matter of distinguishing the one, the two, and the three” (522c). Socrates remarks that arithmetic is a “common thing that every craft, every type of thought, and every science uses and that is among the first compulsory subjects for everyone” (522c). While common and compulsory in some form, Socrates is at pains to point out that arithmetic as it is customarily studied and used is *not* conducive to the ascent and freedom he envisions. He contends that “no one uses it correctly . . . as something that is really fitted in every way to draw one towards being” (523a). Socrates here makes a distinction among sense perceptions: some “summon” the understanding to look into them, others do not. “The ones that don’t summon the understanding are all those that don’t go off into opposite perceptions at the same time. But the ones that do go off in that way I call *summoners*—whenever sense perception doesn’t declare one thing any more than its opposite, no matter whether the object striking the senses is near at hand or far away” (523b–c; emphasis in original). For an example, Socrates asks Glaucon to consider his fingers⁴—“the smallest, the second, and the middle”—and then Socrates explains:

It’s apparent that each of them is equally a finger, and it makes no difference in this regard whether the finger is seen to be in the middle or at either end, whether it is dark or pale, thick or thin, or anything else of that sort, for in all cases, an ordinary soul isn’t compelled to ask the understanding what a finger is, since sight doesn’t suggest to it that a finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger. (523c–d)

Once Glaucon agrees, Socrates turns to the various opposites that are present in our perception of these same three fingers—bigness and smallness, thickness and thinness, hardness and softness, etc. Anyone who attentively considers the matter realizes that perceiving a finger *as one finger among many* involves something more than mere sensation. In other words, to count fingers first requires some ability—however imperfect—to judge what counts as a finger. Without some inchoate knowledge of the nature of things, a knowledge that passes beyond

⁴For a similar reading of this passage, see Eva Brann, *The Music of the Republic: Essays on Socrates’ Conversations and Plato’s Writings* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004), 221ff.

the opposite sense perceptions we typically receive when perceiving multiple instances of the same kind of thing, we are unable to engage in “that inconsequential matter of distinguishing the one, the two, and the three.” In order to do so, our imagination must be able to submit its objects to reason so that they can be judged by it. Socrates explains:

Reason it out from what was said before. If the one is adequately seen itself by itself or is so perceived by any of the other senses, then, as we were saying in the case of fingers, it wouldn't draw the soul towards being. But if something opposite to it is always seen at the same time [e.g., bigness *and* smallness, thickness *and* thinness, hardness *and* softness, etc.], so that nothing is apparently any more one than the opposite of one, then something would be needed to judge the matter. The soul would then be puzzled, would look for an answer, would stir up the understanding, and would ask what the one itself is. (525d–e)

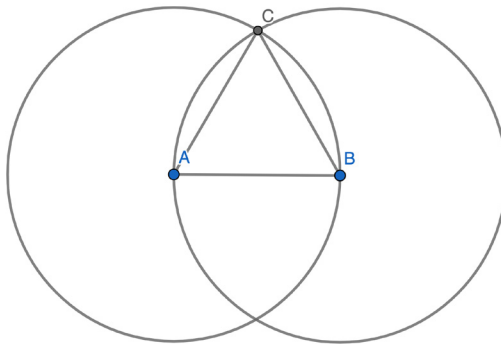
On the one hand, it is obvious that the imagination receives something from the senses in order to form images. The imagination's ability to faithfully capture what it receives from the senses is absolutely essential to the possibility of retaining any awareness of what we have sensed in the past. On the other hand, the imagination is not—at least, it should not be—the slave of the senses. Instead, the images of our imagination are themselves considered and judged by our understanding. This twofold ability of imagination—to receive from the senses and to serve the understanding—makes possible the “turning away” from the merely sensible and toward what is truly intelligible.

In order to see this a bit more clearly, let's consider the second mathematical art presented by Socrates, namely, geometry. As was the case with arithmetic, in his account of geometry Socrates is keen to distinguish what he is talking about from what those who practice geometry typically say about it. Speaking of these practitioners, Socrates claims, “They give ridiculous accounts of it, though they can't help it, for they speak like practical men, and all their accounts refer to doing things. They talk of ‘squaring,’ ‘applying,’ ‘adding,’ and the like, whereas the entire subject is pursued for the sake of knowledge” (527a–b). Notice the difference between the two geometers in terms of purpose: the one who practices geometry for the sake of measuring parcels of land, determining heights or perimeters of buildings, etc., always engages in geometry for practical ends—that is to say, his knowledge is for the sake of something else; the one who pursues the kind of geometry Socrates has in mind seeks knowledge for its own sake. This difference in end also implies a difference in the role of imagination. For the practical geometer, the imagination need never pass beyond the senses. After all, the objects created by practical geometry, once produced, will occupy the same sensible world where his measurements began. Thus, there is no need for the practical geometer to trouble himself with considering the nature of geometrical objects in themselves. The practical geometer as practical geometer is not (and

should not be) bothered by the fact that, try as he may, he cannot draw a line that is absolutely straight, or create a circle whose radii are exactly equal. Doing so would take him beyond the practical, workaday concerns of land measurement, building construction, and the like.

The geometer of Socrates has fundamentally different ends and therefore employs different means. It is precisely the geometrical objects themselves that concern him. Thus, he wants to know what a point is, what a line is, what a circle is, and so on. Furthermore, when he does his “constructions” he wants to be able to form geometrical figures and solids not in the sand or on a whiteboard but, ultimately, in his imagination. The constraints of the sensible realm that limit the practical geometer do not limit him. Although the liberal art of geometry clearly owes its origins to practical geometry, by abstracting from the sensible realm and its conditions the liberal art of geometry can effectively turn away from a total immersion in the sensible realm in order to see what can be known about geometrical objects in themselves and for their own sake.

Perhaps an example would be helpful here. Let’s consider the first proposition in Euclid’s *Elements*, the greatest introduction to geometry ever written. In this proposition, Euclid sets out to construct an equilateral triangle on a given straight line (AB). In order to do so, he first uses the straight line AB to describe two circles. He then draws straight lines from one of the points of intersection (C) to create the lines CA and CB, as in the diagram below:



Given that all the radii of a given circle are equal to one another, Euclid proves that AC and AB must be equal to one another; for the same reason, BA and BC also must be equal. Since two things (AC, BC) are each equal to the same third thing (AB, which, of course, is the same as BA), those same two things (AC, BC) must be equal to one another. Thus, all three lines (AB, BC, CA) are equal, and we *know* that Euclid has constructed an equilateral triangle, ABC.

This simple proposition clearly illustrates the difference between the two types of geometers and their respective geometries. If the geometer of Socrates

(and Euclid) were using an actual straightedge and compass to construct his lines and circles, he obviously could never prove this proposition. For the purposes of practical geometry, on the other hand, a line that is *for the most part* straight and a circle whose radii are *approximately* equal is sufficient. If greater accuracy is needed, the practical geometer can try to avail himself of tools and procedures that would fit the bill. But for the one who engages in the liberal art of geometry, any deviation from strict equality among the radii will make the proof absolutely break down, since the argument only follows if the radii are in fact equal. Thankfully, he is not strictly speaking constructing the figure in his diagram, but rather in his imagination. So while our geometer uses diagrams to illustrate what he is attempting to prove, such diagrams are never meant to instantiate the truths in question. Rather, the diagrams serve simply as mediators between minds—the one teaching the proof, the other(s) learning it.

QUADRIVIAL STUDIES AND THE FOOTHILLS OF PHILOSOPHY

At this point, let's stop and take a retrospective glance at the ground we've covered. This article began with a few general questions about the nature and status of the quadrivial arts. In order to make headway on these questions, we examined two passages from book seven of Plato's *Republic*. Our examination of the cave image drew attention to the importance of images and the imagination in making an ascent from the cave of ignorance into the light of knowledge. Recognizing an image as an image was vital to the movement upwards. And the imagination, while clearly tied to and reliant upon sensation, also served higher purposes. In our brief consideration of two of the quadrivial arts, arithmetic and geometry, we caught a glimpse of how these mathematical studies could help to bring about a turning away from unreflective immersion in sensation and a turning toward higher things. Central to this turning was the way in which the imagination could aid the understanding, being used by the understanding to help it render judgments about things that transcend sensation and point toward intelligible things. Finally, in considering geometry we saw the imagination at work, not merely receiving images but actually constructing geometrical objects under the direction of the understanding. These objects, though inspired by our encounter with the sensible realm and in some sense rooted in that realm, nevertheless transcend that realm and direct us toward still higher things.

Earlier in the article, we noted that Socrates identified a training in these mathematical studies with "the ascent to what is, which we say is true philosophy." A remarkable claim, to be sure. Even more remarkable, though, is what Socrates says of them a little further on. While discussing the quadrivial plan of studies, Glaucon makes a passing comment about the "usefulness" of the study of astronomy: "a better awareness of the seasons, months, and years is no less appropriate for a general than for a farmer or navigator" (527d). Socrates replies:

You amuse me: You're like someone who's afraid that the majority will think he is prescribing useless subjects. It's no easy task—indeed it's very difficult—to realize that in every soul there is an instrument that is purified and rekindled by such subjects when it is blinded and destroyed by other ways of life, an instrument that is more important to preserve than ten thousand [bodily] eyes, since only with it can the truth be seen. (527d)

In distinct yet intimately related ways, the quadrivial arts serve this very purpose: to purify and rekindle the mind's eye so that it may see the truth. In doing so, the quadrivial arts lead us through the foothills of philosophy; they help us begin the journey, pointing us in the right direction, perfecting our intellectual vision so that it is well-suited for the philosophical way of life. Through a renovation of the imagination, these arts can assist in freeing us from an undue preoccupation with and attachment to lower things. Through them the philosophical soul begins its ascent to the things themselves and what truly is.

SUGGESTED READINGS ON MATHEMATICS IN CLASSICAL EDUCATION

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What is a Liberal Art?

Christopher Schlect

ABSTRACT: The term *liberal arts* is widely used but seldom defined. While casual usage allows license for flexibility, academics should exercise care with terms that probe the vitals of their calling. This paper proposes a workable definition of liberal arts. It draws upon historical usage to address several concerns that figure into such a definition: it clarifies what an art is, it differentiates arts from sciences, it distinguishes liberal arts from other arts, and it also distinguishes liberal arts from humanities. Alternative definitions may also be viable, but only if they duly recognize historical usage and differentiate the term liberal arts from terms related to it.

What is a liberal art?¹ The term is so common that we seldom consider what, exactly, we mean by it. If we parse the term's usage in American research universities, we find a catch-all label that includes a wide array of provincial interests. The University of Texas at Austin (UT) offers a typical illustration. How is the term *liberal arts* used across the wide expanse of Longhorn Nation? UT's College of Liberal Arts, like everything in Texas, is big, comprising no fewer than forty major fields of study. Included among these liberal arts are African and African Diaspora Studies, American Studies, Asian Studies, Asian American Studies, Asian Cultures and Languages, French Studies, Italian Studies, Jewish Studies, Latin American Studies, Mexican American and Latina/Latino Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and more. Thus far we might infer that, in Texas, the liberal arts entail the study of a particular social group. But the term is more

¹I am grateful to my colleagues on the faculty of New Saint Andrews College whose input helped me develop this paper, especially Tim Griffith, Jonathan McIntosh, Brent Pinkall, and Mitch Stokes. My friends Brian Williams and David Diener also contributed important refinements.

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elastic than that, for it also includes the fields of Humanities and History—which, surprisingly, are distinct from one another. Also included within UT’s basket of liberal arts are Economics, Psychology, and Sociology, which many would classify as social sciences rather than liberal arts. Considering all the fields UT classifies as liberal arts, it is hard to discern what attributes they share that identify them as liberal arts.

Perhaps we can gain clarity about the liberal arts in Texas by considering which fields fall outside that designation. This brings us to UT’s College of Natural Sciences, where we find fifteen major fields of study. They include Biochemistry, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Public Health, Nutritional Sciences, and Textiles and Apparel. UT also places Mathematics and Astronomy among the natural sciences, not the liberal arts. This is curious because educators in earlier eras included these two fields among the traditional seven liberal arts. Graduates from the University of Texas’ College of Liberal Arts hold a degree bearing the liberal arts name, but I am not sure what sort of learning such a degree represents.

Other large universities slice their academic pies differently. Some, like the University of Maryland, have organized a College of Arts and Humanities. Are *arts* the same as *humanities*, or does the word *humanities* point to domains of knowledge, or to intellectual skills, that the term *arts* does not capture? Other institutions, such as the University of Oregon and the University of Colorado, have Colleges of Arts and Sciences. How are *sciences* different from *humanities*? In what ways, if any, does a *College of Arts and Sciences* differ from a *College of Arts and Humanities*? Suppose I wanted to study history: would history look different if I pursued it under the auspices of a College of Arts and Humanities versus a College of Arts and Sciences? When we pair the term *arts* with other terms of the trade, do these pairings pull the meaning of *arts* in different directions, or does the term *arts* remain stable regardless of what other terms we pair with it?

American research universities are chillingly prodigal in their use of terms such as *arts*, *liberal arts*, *sciences*, and *humanities*. Insofar as these terms arise in casual, everyday conversation, we can forgive imprecision. But specialists within a guild should take greater care with terms that probe the vitals of their trade. How much more should we expect of a guild that trades in scholarship? Indeed, those of us who direct curriculum and pedagogy ought to know what we mean when we use the term *liberal arts*.

The US Department of Education bears witness to this muddle. The Department organizes various degree programs into sixty-one different classifications, one of which is “Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities.” According to the Department’s data, there are 4,642 degree programs that fall within this category in colleges and universities across the United States.² Such a

²Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Education Statistics, accessed August 3, 2022. <https://ies.ed.gov/>.

broad designation testifies to the wide range of meanings we now associate with the *liberal arts*, *sciences*, and *humanities*.

Perhaps one reason for our confusion arises from the varied usage of the term *liberal arts* through the ages. We traditionalists who draw inspiration from great educators in the past find that history confronts us with a wide array of visions for liberal education. Plato's Academy in Athens differed substantially from Quintilian's school of rhetoric in Rome; neither of these ancient schools closely resembled the monastic schools of the early Middle Ages, and these, in turn, differed again from cathedral schools run by scholastics. If we want to classify all these schools as standard-bearers for "the traditional liberal arts," we may be forced to stretch our own idea of liberal arts with the same elasticity we find in the term's usage across Longhorn Nation.

History offers no stable consensus on a definition of the term liberal arts, nor on which arts are, actually, the liberal ones. But we do encounter a fairly robust conversation about the liberal arts, a conversation involving many voices across millennia. While these voices differ with one another, they contribute to a cogent and fruitful conversation that began in the ancient world. The Roman educator Varro promoted nine liberal arts, and his countryman, Vitruvius, believed there were eleven. A canon of seven emerged in the fifth century when Martianus Capella constructed a delightful myth about the origins of learning. Martianus' seven were grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. He departed from Varro and Vitruvius when he jettisoned medicine and architecture from his curriculum. Cassiodorus retained Martianus' canon of seven when he founded a school for scribes in southern Italy, but he insisted that they serve other essential fields of study, including theology, scripture commentary, church history, and even medicine. Cassiodorus deemed these essential for study, but he distinguished them from the liberal arts. Isidore of Seville elevated Martianus' seven liberal arts to a privileged place in his broad encyclopedia of learning. Later, Hugh of St. Victor, who deeply admired Isidore's work and quoted him approvingly, slotted Martianus' seven arts into a much broader curriculum composed of some twenty different arts. Hugh classified three of Martianus' seven (grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric) as logical arts, and the other four he assigned to a different class, the theoretical arts, which also included physics and theology. By the time we come to the learned Italian educators of the quattrocento—Vergerio, Piccolomini, Bruni, and others—we find them less interested in listing which arts warrant study than in identifying which authors, and which particular works, are worthy of study. Apparently, these humanists felt no need to identify a canon of liberal arts, let alone seven of them. Vergerio elevated letters and arms as the most important of the liberal arts, whereas other humanists subordinated their reflections on the liberal arts to their larger concern for *studia humanitatis*, the

humanities. As we have seen, great educators of the past, from Plato to Vergerio, have weighed in on the liberal arts. While they all joined the same conversation, they did not all express the same views.

Which of the arts are the liberal ones? How do these arts relate to one another, and to other fields of learning? We who identify as “classical educators” claim we have history on our side, and we too embrace differing notions of the liberal arts. One popular formulation highlights the trivium (grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric), treats them as essentially pedagogical, and insists that they follow a specific sequence. On this view, the arts of the trivium are methods of learning rather than domains of knowledge. This view relegates the arts of the quadrivium—mathematics, geometry, astronomy, music—to the margins.³ A different proposal assigns an equally essential place to the arts of both the trivium and the quadrivium—which together make up “the seven liberal arts.” According to this view, each of these seven arts represents a field of knowledge rather than a method of learning, and they do not require a particular sequence. These seven arts comprise everything that can possibly be taught; even computer science and biology find their place within the purview the seven liberal arts.⁴ We also encounter a third formulation of the liberal arts among the ranks of classical educators. This view assigns an important but more modest role to the seven liberal arts. These arts are fields of knowledge, but they do not comprise everything that can be taught. Instead, they are situated within a broader framework of education that includes other key elements like gymnastic, music, philosophy, and theology.⁵ Proponents of classical education who align with one or another of these formulations can locate precedents in the past to substantiate their ideas, but they justify their claim to tradition only by picking and choosing some precedents and, necessarily, overlooking others. What they gain in coherence and practicality comes at the cost of being selective with history. This should come as no surprise, for most of today’s classical educators are adapting historical insights to contemporary circumstances; we are not staging a reenactment. Despite the differences we encounter among the various formulations of the “traditional liberal arts,” at least each formulation achieves a measured coherence and a partial footing in history. The same cannot be said for the education we find in today’s big box-store universities. Their vision for the liberal arts—if it can

³Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning: A Paper Read at a Vacation Course in Education, Oxford, 1947* (London: Methuen, 1948); Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991); Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise, *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home* (New York: Norton, 2016).

⁴Robert Littlejohn and Charles T. Evans, *Wisdom and Eloquence: A Christian Paradigm for Classical Learning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

⁵Kevin Clark and Ravi Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian Classical Education, Revised Edition* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2019).

even be called a vision—lacks both an internal coherence and any meaningful connection to the past.

We who are educators should be clear about our ideas on education, and we should be just as clear with the vocabulary we use to represent those ideas. We who are *classical* educators, we who esteem the past, will invariably defer to some voices from history more than others; if we gave all an equal voice, cacophony would result. What follows, then, is one attempt at sounding clarity. Different institutions of classical learning may adopt different formulations depending on how they align with various authoritative voices from the past that still speak to us. The key is to settle upon a coherent formulation so that educators, students, and others can understand what a given institution means by liberal arts and the ancillary ideas that cluster around them.

What do we mean by liberal arts? Here is our concise formulation. The liberal arts teach us how to learn—how to freely gain knowledge and understanding. Insofar as they are arts, they produce something, in this case, the ability to learn. Because they are liberal arts, they liberate us not only from ignorance, prejudice, and provincialism but also from servile dependence on the tutelage of others. The liberal arts, then, are particularly important for leaders, who themselves must be guides. Moreover, I would argue the liberal arts are not value neutral but, like all arts, are rightly ordered to the love and worship of the triune God. What follows is an exposition of this brief statement and how it aligns with the heritage of classical education. Such exposition involves, first, clarifying what we mean when we classify such pursuits as arts, which allows us to then distinguish arts from sciences. Next, we differentiate various kinds of arts in order to indicate how liberal arts differ from other arts, and also from the humanities.

WHAT IS AN ART?

Before we can distinguish which arts are liberal and which are not, we need to settle what an art is in the first place. What is an art? An art joins reason to practice in order to produce something. Thus, art is productive reason.

Let me illustrate. Imagine someone producing a loaf of bread. She does this by applying a particular process to certain materials. Now suppose this same individual adds memory to her experience: by adding memory, she can now repeat the same process and produce another loaf of bread. Thus, by joining memory to her experience, she develops a habit of producing bread. At this point she makes bread not by chance, nor by luck, but by her skill. We can now refer to her as a baker.

Suppose another individual observes our baker and does what the baker does. By imitating the baker, he too produces a loaf of bread. If he also adds memory to his practice, he becomes capable of repeating the process; eventually, he too becomes a baker. The first individual became a baker by joining memory to her own direct experience, and the second became a baker by joining memory to

the observations he made of the first baker—the first by experience, or by trial and error, and the second by imitation.

These illustrations present the activity of baking as a skill, a habit, a notion, or a knack. It is not an art—at least not yet. But once reason enters the picture, then baking is elevated to an art. The art of baking arises when someone identifies precepts that explain why and how bread is made—why it is that whenever someone applies this process to those ingredients, she invariably produces bread. Aristotle explains, “Now art arises when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgment about a class of objects is produced” (*Met.* 981a).⁶ Accordingly, elsewhere he defines *art* as a “reasoned state of a capacity to make” (*EN* 1140a).⁷ When we define art as productive reason, we simply echo Aristotle, who classified arts as intellectual virtues. Put another way, art is reason that informs how to do something.

This definition of art—as productive reason—allows us to distinguish the term from other terms related to it. Whereas the term art refers mainly to the precepts by which something is produced, the term craft indicates the act of producing. Art points to the theoretical or the preceptive aspect of production, and craft indicates the act of production itself. But art is no mere theory, for art cannot be decoupled from practice—arts are ordered to making, to producing, to acting upon something in order to yield an effect. The Puritan and scholar William Ames captures art’s orientation to activity in his definition of art, claiming, “Art is the idea of *εὐπραξία*, *eupraxia* or good action, methodically delineated by universal rules.”⁸ Art is the *idea* of good action, and craft is the action itself. A

⁶Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Works of Aristotle, Volume 1*, trans. W. D. Ross, vol. 8 of *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952). Aristotle’s notion of art influenced educators for centuries. Consider, for example, Hugh of St. Victor, who echoes Aristotle: “But when men considered that use can be transformed into art, and what was previously vague and subject to caprice can be brought into order by definite rules and precepts, they began, we are told, to reduce to art the habits which had arisen partly by chance, partly by nature—correcting what was bad in use, supplying what was missing, eliminating what was superfluous, and furthermore prescribing definite rules and precepts for each usage” (*The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor [New York: Columbia University Press, 1991], 1.11).

⁷Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Works of Aristotle, Volume 2*, trans. W. D. Ross, vol. 9, *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952). Aristotle elaborates: “Now since architecture is an art and is essentially a reasoned state of capacity to make, and there is neither any art that is not such a state nor any such state that is not an art, *art* is identical with a state of capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning. All art is concerned with coming into being, i.e., with contriving and considering how something may come into being which is capable of either being or not being, and whose origin is in the maker and not in the thing made” (1140a).

⁸William Ames, *Technometry*, trans. Lee W. Gibbs (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), Thesis 1.

thing produced by means of art—for example, a sculpture or a loaf of bread—is appropriately termed either a work of art, a work of craftsmanship, or an artifact.

Because arts are a form of reason, they can be broken down into precepts. Consequently, arts can be taught. Aristotle says of artists,

thus we view them as being wiser not in virtue of being able to act, but of having the theory for themselves and knowing the causes. And in general it is a sign of the man who knows and of the man who does not know, that the former can teach, and therefore we think art more truly knowledge than experience is; for artists can teach, and men of mere experience cannot. (*Met.* 981b)

Arts are best taught by means of theory, imitation, and practice; and it is the presence of theory that makes an endeavor an art. If there is no preceptive element—in other words, if what you know is known only by imitation or by experience—then you do not possess an art. It may be a habit, or perhaps a knack, but it is not an art. Because arts involve reason, they can be taught.

While arts can be taught, there is yet a difference between teaching an art and practicing one. Excellent practitioners are *technicians* or *artists*, for they have mastered an art. However, it is possible for one to excel as a technician and still be a poor teacher of the art. Indeed, many artists are better practitioners than those who excel at teaching the same art, just as the best athletes do not necessarily make the best coaches. It is teachers, more than mere practitioners, who lead in artistic pursuits, for teachers excel at guiding others into possessing the art themselves. While the old adage, “those who cannot do, teach,” is a bit of an overstatement, it does have a ring of truth to it. Because art is a type of reason, all arts can be taught, but not all great artists make great teachers or great leaders in their artistic pursuits.

ARTS AND SCIENCES

Having defined the term art, we may now distinguish art from science. By making this distinction we sharpen our understanding of what an art is, and consequently, we will sharpen our understanding of the term *liberal arts*.

You will recall that arts are ordered to making, to production, or to good action. This means that every art entails a maker who does the making, a producer who does the producing, or an actor who does the acting. Thus the precepts of any art describe human behavior. This human element is captured in the reason aspect of our definition of art. Humans have a unique capacity to reason, thus only humans can be artists, for only humans are capable of deploying theory (or precepts) to the service of their productivity.⁹

⁹Here I distinguish humankind from other created beings. Of course, there is an important sense in which God is an artist. Yet we acknowledge that God’s reason is unlike human reason in some important respects, much like God’s productivity differs from human

This human element explains why the precepts of any art can vary: they are flexible. The precepts of an art are not unchanging laws. This brings us to the key difference between arts and sciences. The truths in the sciences are necessary and invariable. Arithmetic and geometry, in their purest, abstract forms, are examples of sciences.¹⁰ Consider that the sum of two and two is always four, and the sum of two supplementary angles is always 180° . These are necessary, unchanging truths. The precepts of an art behave differently. Consider precepts in the arts of grammar and rhetoric. Because the precepts of these arts describe human language and human persuasion, they undergo change and vary from situation to situation. Whenever we speak of “rules” of grammar and rhetoric, which are arts, we understand such rules can sometimes be broken. We can discuss the proper ordering of nouns and verbs in a sentence, or the proper arrangement of ideas in an oration, but this is a rather different sort of propriety than, say, the proper ordering of $10 \div 2 = 5$, and the proper ordering of $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ for any right triangle. Rules of an art are “rules of thumb,” arising from human judgments, whereas the rules of a science are inflexible.¹¹

productivity in many ways. For one helpful reflection on this matter, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1987), 18–49.

¹⁰With the important qualifier, “in their purest, abstract forms,” I indicate a Pythagorean notion of these sciences, which limits their scope to disembodied objects of pure intellect. See, for example, their treatment in book seven of Plato’s *Republic*. However, arithmetic and geometry become arts when they are ordered to the description, understanding, and manipulation of the physical world—that is, when they are ordered to making, to producing. The descriptive type of geometry, which is an art, differs from the science of “pure” geometry in that the former aims to measure physical objects and routinely involves tools and instruments. “Pure” geometry, on the other hand, considers intelligible objects exclusive to the intellect—objects such as lines that have length but no breadth, and planes that have length and breadth but no depth. Such objects are governed by universal and unchanging laws and, following a distinction expressed by Aristotle, Cassiodorus, and Hugh of St. Victor, they are not subject to judgment or opinion. However, when arithmetic and geometry are ordered to production—that is, when they are treated as arts, they might go by other names, such as drafting, surveying, architecture, and the like. And when arithmetic and geometry are treated as the foundation of such pursuits, they become *liberal* arts, for they open to further knowledge. In this paper I embrace the Aristotelian distinction between art and science because it supplies definitional clarity in a conversation about curriculum. Aristotle’s distinction between art and science is helpful here, but like most distinctions between theory and practice, its helpfulness is limited.

¹¹Cassiodorus explains that “an art involves working in an accustomed state with things that have the possibility of being other than they are; a discipline [or science], however, is concerned with those things that cannot turn out differently or other than they are,” (*Inst.* 2.3.20) and, “Disciplines [or sciences] are those pursuits that are independent of opinion and therefore never deceive; they are called disciplines because they are obliged to observe their own rules” (*Inst.* 2.3.22). Cassiodorus, *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning* and *“On the Soul”* trans. James W. Halporn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004). See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b–1141a, Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* 1.1, Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 2.1.

A science is a body of knowledge. To learn a science is to become informed, to master a collection of facts; whereas to learn an art is to become equipped to do, to act, to produce, to create. Now it is possible to extract the theoretical elements of an art and consider them in isolation, treating them as matters purely for contemplation, apart from the work of producing. For example, a student can learn about painting without learning to paint, and he can learn about rhetoric without learning to persuade. These students gain a body of knowledge, so they are becoming scientists—but they are not necessarily becoming artists, for the knowledge they gain is not ordered to production. However, those who are artists usually do attain a body of knowledge—that is, they learn some science—as they grow in their artistic proficiency. We point to an essential difference between a science and an art when we differentiate between *learning about something* and *learning how to do something*.

ARTS AND VALUES

Thus far we have clarified what we mean by art, and we have distinguished art from science. Now we further refine our idea of what an art is by considering the ethical dimension of art.

Arts are bound up with values. All arts are ordered to productivity, but not all production is good production. Arts, properly understood, are ordered to the production of something worth producing, something good. Thus the reason that informs an art's productivity is reason that discerns what is good, and it directs an art to a good and proper end. This is where values come into the picture. Arts are never value neutral. To take just one example, consider the art of medicine.

Medicine is indeed an art, for it is a type of productive reason—reason that is ordered to the production of human health. But what is healthy and what is unhealthy? A practitioner of the art of medicine might take a scalpel and cut into a patient, thereby wounding the patient's body. If the physician does this in order to remove a cancerous tumor, most of us recognize that the benefit of removing the tumor outweighs the cost of inflicting the wound. Considered by itself, a wound inflicted by surgery is a setback to health; but in view of the fact that it is necessary to remove a life-threatening tumor, surgery becomes a means toward achieving greater health.

Some surgeries are not so straightforward, however. What about a surgical procedure that terminates a pregnancy? Some claim that such a procedure could serve the cause of health; whereas others consider it inimical to health insofar as it ends a human life. Or consider various applications of plastic surgery. We might imagine a plastic surgeon performing surgery on a burn victim, repairing damage to the victim's face. But the same surgeon could apply his art to another patient, narrowing the healthy nose of a healthy woman, or augmenting her breasts, in order to satisfy her vanity. And again, what about a surgery that removes a patient's healthy reproductive organs in order to change that patient

from a man to a woman, thus pursuing an end other than bodily health? Are each of these applications of the medical art performed in the service of health? The same artistry might promote health according to one value system, but harm according to another.

No art is value neutral. Art is productive reason, but one person may consider a particular action as productive, whereas another person may regard that same action as destructive. One person's productive reason is another's destructive madness. Here I am simply pointing to the fact that values reflect the ends to which arts are employed. In Aristotelian terms, all arts have a *telos*, or a final cause. A clear-minded approach to any art must take the art's ultimate purpose into account. A thoughtful Christian brings his Christian values to bear upon his approach to the arts, as will a thoughtful Platonist, Hindu, and so on. Puritan William Ames captures this notion in the way he defines art as "the idea of *good* action." If art is the idea of action that is good, we should acknowledge that there are competing notions of what goodness is.

Arts, from a Christian point of view, will produce artifacts, or products, that honor God and duly regard how he designed the world. Augustine rooted these norms in the two greatest commandments: that we love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength; and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. "The person who lives a just and holy life is one who is a sound judge of these things," he wrote. "He is also a person who has ordered his love, so that he does not love what it is wrong to love, or fail to love what should be loved, or love too much what should be loved less (or love too little what should be loved more), or love two things equally if one of them should be loved either less or more than the other, or love things either more or less if they should be loved equally" (*doc. Chr.* 1.59).¹² The one who has rightly-ordered loves is one who loves God first, loves neighbor second, and whose love for neighbor is ordered to one's ultimate love for God. For the Christian, then, every human endeavor—including every artistic endeavor—is, fundamentally, an exercise of service and love offered up to God. Here again we recognize that the liberal arts, like all arts, are not value neutral.

Because arts invariably draw upon value systems, teachers and institutions bring clarity to their work and focus to their missions whenever they identify the system of values that directs their instruction in the arts.

TYPES OF ARTS

We have settled what arts are, and we have distinguished arts from sciences. We have also noted that arts implicate values. Now we are ready to consider the different varieties of art.

¹²Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Mechanical arts are arts that are ordered to the production of useful objects. Thus the art of baking produces bread, the art of carpentry produces shelters and furniture, the art of cobbling produces shoes, the art of smithing produces metal tools and other metal implements, the arts of weaving and sewing produce fabric and clothing, and the art of farming produces crops. These arts, and others like them, are mechanical arts.¹³

Fine arts are arts that are ordered to the production of objects that exist for their beauty. The art of sculpting produces statues, the art of flower arranging produces bouquets, the art of songwriting produces songs, the art of embroidery produces decorative pillowcases and tapestries, etc. These are all fine arts. Fine arts produce objects that we appreciate simply for what they are, as ends in themselves. We do not value such objects for their capacity to accomplish something else. In this respect they are final, and thus we refer to the arts that produce such objects as fine arts.¹⁴ Many educators classify the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, theater, and dance as fine arts.¹⁵

Now we finally arrive at the liberal arts. What distinguishes the liberal arts from other arts is this: liberal arts are ordered to the production of knowledge. Hugh of St. Victor explains that the liberal arts are arts “to be mastered by those who were to be educated . . . [they] so excel all the rest in usefulness that anyone who had been thoroughly schooled in them might come to a knowledge of others” (*Didasc.* 3.3). Those who are properly schooled in the liberal arts are equipped to take up other domains of knowledge—whether sciences or other arts. Cassiodorus noted that the liberal arts enable students “to reach the entrance of the disciplines through open doors” (*Inst.* 2.3.19). This harmonizes with Quintilian’s formulation: “what else do we aim at by teaching them except to ensure that they do not always need to be taught?” (*Ora. Ed.* 2.5.13).¹⁶

¹³See Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, trans. Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1996), chap 2, 11–14; see also Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, 2.20–27.

¹⁴The Latin *fine* indicates terminal or end, so the opposite of *fine* is “beginning” and not “rough” or “coarse.” In the Christian tradition, no art is final in an ultimate sense; the fine arts—as with all arts and, for that matter, all human endeavors—are ordered to doxology. See Augustine’s discussion of “things to be used” and “things to be enjoyed” in book one of his *On Christian Teaching*.

¹⁵My usage of the term “fine arts,” designating a class of disciplines or fields of study, follows a fairly recent convention. The term gained currency in academic discourse with the rise of programs and degrees in “fine arts” around the turn of the twentieth century. My brief treatment here follows that convention. For a more thorough presentation of this usage, see Sidney Colvin, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. “Fine Arts,” 1911.

¹⁶Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education, Books 1–2*, trans. Donald A. Russell, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

It was the Romans who coined the term *artes liberalis*. The term first appeared in Cicero's early work on invention.¹⁷ This Latin antecedent lies back of our English term *liberal arts*. As the term suggests, the Romans indicated a class of arts that they associated with liberation or freedom. Here they borrowed from the Greeks who came before them. Greek and Roman intellectuals had disparaged human activity that served the material necessities of food, clothing, shelter, and procreation. Thus the liberation they associated with the liberal arts was freedom from having to perform subsistence work. Aristotle had suggested this notion of freedom when he used the Greek terms liberal and illiberal to distinguish the occupations of freemen from those of the vulgar. Freemen, he said, occupy themselves to be "fit for the practice and exercise of virtue," whereas craftsmen occupy themselves with "paid employments" that "absorb and degrade the mind" (*Pol.* 1337b).¹⁸ Many Roman teachers followed Aristotle, and Greeks like him, when they characterized the liberal arts as the arts taught exclusively to freemen. Consider Seneca the Younger, who wrote the following to his friend Lucillus:

I respect no study, and deem no study good, which results in money-making. Such studies are profit-bringing occupations, useful only in so far as they give the mind a preparation and do not engage it permanently. One should linger upon them only so long as the mind can occupy itself with nothing greater; they are our apprenticeship, not our real work. Hence you see why "liberal studies" are so called; it is because they are studies worthy of a free-born gentleman.¹⁹

Seneca identified the liberal arts by distinguishing them from arts taught to slaves and other laborers—craftsmen and practitioners of the various trades. The liberal arts are liberal precisely because they free students from the supposedly base pursuits of subsistence work and wage labor.

Some Greek and Roman intellectuals linked such pursuits to the body, which they saw as a source of corrupting passions. Some Christian thinkers followed suit. Their way of thinking associated liberal arts with disembodied activity—activity that is purely spiritual or mental, intellectual rather than practical. On this view, the liberal arts are defined not so much on the basis of a social distinction between freemen on the one hand and slaves or craftsmen on the other, but more upon a metaphysical distinction between spiritual or intellectual pursuits associated with the mind over against physical pursuits associated with the body. We find

¹⁷Marcus Tullius Cicero, "De Inventione," in *De Inventione, De Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica*, trans. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library 386 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 1.25.35.

¹⁸Aristotle, *Politics*, in *The Works of Aristotle, Volume 2*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, vol. 9 of *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952).

¹⁹Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library 75 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), Letter 88.

this association in some historical formulations of the liberal arts, formulations that aim to separate liberal arts from practicality, as though practicality is base or vulgar, a lower-order concern that virtuous humans should try to escape as they pursue supposedly higher-order concerns about matters that are universal and unchanging—and thus immaterial and disembodied.

Some medieval educators rejected such dualism. Their theological convictions about creation and Jesus' incarnation led them to assign dignity to the material world. Consequently, teachers such as Hugh of St. Victor and Bonaventure refused to disparage the mechanical arts. Bonaventure wrote, "we shall see there the Word begotten and incarnate, that is, the divinity and the humanity and the integrity of all faith" (*De red. art.* 12).²⁰ These and other Christian teachers reject dualism because it undercuts the inherent goodness of the material world, a world which God declared to be "good" at creation. Dualism undermines the inherent dignity of work that was part of the original vocation Adam and Eve received in the garden. The early Protestants carried this tradition forward when they celebrated the divinely endowed creational goodness of material reality. Whereas eating is bodily nourishment, the reformers taught that eating is freighted with deep spiritual meaning. Clothing and shelter adorn and protect the body, and at the same time they are lofty, even heavenly adornments. And while sex is a bodily act of pleasure and procreation, they also held that sex carries eternal dignity. And so the reformers refused to disparage these good bodily and material things that some presentations of the liberal arts had disparaged. Martin Luther cut through the Greco-Roman distinction between liberal and servile, spiritual and material, when he famously set forth his theological notion of the priesthood of all believers. "A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man," he wrote, "are consecrated priests and bishops, and every man should by his office or function be useful and beneficial to the rest."²¹ Like Hugh, Bonaventure, and the protestant fathers, our notion of the liberal arts need not be grounded in a dualism that sets matter against spirit, nor in a class distinction between lordly status and servile vocation.

What, then, do the liberal arts liberate us *from*? If not from materiality, and if not from subsistence work—as some formulations would have it—then from what? Because the liberal arts are productive of knowledge, they liberate us from our own ignorance and prejudice. But even more uniquely, one who has been properly schooled in the liberal arts is liberated from his dependence

²⁰See also Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, 2.20–27.

²¹Martin Luther, "Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," in *Reformation Theology: A Reader of Primary Sources with Introductions*, ed. Bradford Littlejohn and Jonathan Roberts (Moscow, ID: Davenant Institute, 2017), 139.

upon teachers. The liberally educated person is equipped to obtain knowledge on his own. He has a capacity to take responsibility for his own productivity in learning. He can be a producer in his own right, a truly free maker of his own knowledge. His productivity in learning is original to himself, not a mere extension of his tutor's productivity. Thus a liberally educated individual enjoys a unique kind of freedom—a freedom from teachers—which enables him to serve others freely: originally and not derivatively. Thus he is equipped to lead and to shape the culture he inhabits.

This distinctive of liberal arts finds its roots in the Christian tradition. Once again, Hugh of St. Victor is a case in point. As we noted earlier, Hugh wrote that the liberal arts “excel all the rest in usefulness that anyone who had been thoroughly schooled in them might afterward come to a knowledge of the others by his own inquiry and effort rather than by listening to a teacher” (*Didasc.* 3.3).

From the liberal arts as your starting-point, Hugh says, you can carry yourself forward in your own learning; from these arts you can go anywhere else, to any field of knowledge. We follow Hugh's suggestion by proposing this as a key attribute that differentiates liberal arts from other arts. Our formulation departs from the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and Seneca, insofar as they disparage the material world and subsistence labor. But we retain another key dimension of liberality, which we also find in ancient formulations, and which Hugh of St. Victor makes explicit, when we say that the liberal arts liberate us from teachers.

This notion of liberality does not exclude teachers, and it certainly does not suggest any radical notion of independence. Indeed, a liberally educated person continues to learn from teachers, and even relies on them. But he no longer depends upon any one teacher, nor upon a particular school of teachers, to initiate and direct his learning for him. A liberally educated person becomes the master over his own progress in learning. He is equipped to advance his learning at his own direction rather than at the direction of another. This means that, for the liberally educated person, the whole world of teachers is opened up to him. He is equipped to summon entire libraries of teachers, and their writings, to his service. He has the fullest and most complete access to the greatest teachers—to teachers like Plato and Aristotle, Tertullian and Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, Luther and Calvin; Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare; Locke and Hobbes; Hume and Kant; Newton and Einstein. His teachers include the scholars he hears at conferences or meets with over coffee. A liberally educated person is equipped to learn even from his own students, and from young children, just as he learns from other sources.

We distinguish a liberal art from other arts when we note that its precepts are ordered to the production of knowledge. One trained in liberal arts is equipped to overcome his own ignorance, and to do so on his own initiative and direction. The liberal artist can be his own teacher by enlisting other teachers into his service. He produces what he knows by taking command of how he comes

about knowing it. He is equipped to close in upon his own knowledge. This distinguishing feature finds its way into our definition of liberal arts, for such arts liberate a student not from the material world, nor from subsistence labor, but rather, *from servile dependence on the tutelage of others*.

LIBERAL ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Finally, for clarity's sake, we should differentiate the liberal arts from the humanities. The program of study known as the humanities emerged in fifteenth-century Italy—the quattrocento—and extended from Italy across much of Europe. This curriculum aimed to cultivate virtue, a priority these educators, the humanists, carried forward from educators in the classical and medieval eras. What set apart their program had to do with the way virtue is formed. Humanist teachers believed that students become virtuous through their immersion in the best writings of classical antiquity. Such writings are important not only for the information and ideas they contain, but also for their style and manner of presentation. While we can trace this notion back to some earlier teachers in the classical world, the humanists elevated it to an organizing principle of instruction. Thus they insisted that students read whole works, in their original languages, for, they believed, a great author's style is part and parcel of his substance. As Pier Paolo Vergerio stated, "whatever is written in an undistinguished way is not given credibility and cannot long endure."²² Not only did this conviction shape education, it fueled advances in philology and textual criticism.

The humanists reached back to the Greek and Roman past in order to saturate students with the best examples of virtue and eloquence, examples that promote imitation. Vergerio explains,

What way of life, then, can be more delightful, or indeed more beneficial, than to read and write all the time for moderns to understand things ancient; for present generations to converse with their posterity; and thus to make every time our own, both past and future? What excellent furniture books make! As we say; and as Cicero says, What a happy family books make! Absolutely honest and well-behaved! A family that does not fuss or shout, that is nether rapacious, voracious, or contumacious, that speaks or remains silent as it is bidden, that always stands ready to execute your very command, and that you never hear saying anything you don't want to hear, and that only says as much as you want to hear.²³

²²Pier Paolo Vergerio, "The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig W. Kallendorf (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), chap. 36.

²³*Ibid.*, chap. 37.

Humanists like Vergerio maintained that whenever students read a classic work, in its original language, they encounter the writer's charisma: an eloquent author, though long dead, leaves an imprint upon later audiences who read his words. When students read many great authors, they learn to discriminate between virtues and vices in their own pursuit of moral and stylistic excellence. And when they read old stories about great deeds of the past, they participate vicariously in a hero's achievements. They can also encounter the consequences of folly. By this mimetic process, students take up virtue and build up their resistance to vice.

The humanists of the quattrocento differentiated themselves from their scholastic predecessors in important ways. Because scholastic teachers mined texts primarily for the ideas they contained, they had been comfortable teaching from compilations, summaries, and Latin translations of Greek works. But humanist educators refused to divorce form from content and insisted that students read whole works (not selections), as originally presented (not summaries or synopses), and in their original languages (not translated into Latin from its source language). When scholastic teachers mapped out a curriculum, they listed what topics or subjects students should consider, whereas humanist teachers listed specific authors and works students should read. When the humanists did list subjects, they did so as a way of grouping various writings into broader genres. Thus, their program of *studia humanitatis*, or humane studies, included grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. Scholastics, on the other hand, organized subjects according to a systematized taxonomy that broke down philosophy into its constituent elements: the formal divisions of knowledge. Scholastic teachers enjoined students to learn virtue as they wrestled with great ideas, whereas humanist teachers enjoined students to learn virtue as they imitated charismatic examples. In other words, humanist instruction was primarily mimetic, whereas scholastic instruction was primarily analytical.²⁴

Educators today who adopt the *humanities* label provide instruction from a particular collection of historical ideas and literary works that are formed by a particular set of cultural values. The more educators become aware of the culture that governs their own instruction, the better they can remain true to their mission. Which culture's heritage does humanities instruction promote? Options abound. The Italian humanists of the quattrocento embraced the classical culture of Greco-Roman antiquity. Some humanities programs locate themselves within the wide cultural stream of Western Civilization. Still others extol the modern multicultural forged by global commerce and cross-cultural interactions. Institutions that offer humanities instruction should clarify which

²⁴Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance," in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, *Storia e Letteratura* 54 (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984), 553–83.

cultural heritage they identify with. This, in turn, will inform which body of writings they adopt for instructional use, and how those writings might serve as examples, guides, or warnings.²⁵

A FINAL CALL FOR CLARITY

We educators, like those in many professions, use a dedicated vocabulary to describe the work we are called to. Unfortunately, the meanings of many key terms of our trade have descended into ambiguity. We use terms like liberal arts, sciences, and humanities with too little reflection about what, exactly, we mean by them. In this paper I have sought to overcome this besetting ambiguity by laying out clear definitions and their derivation from historical usage. The definition of liberal arts presented here reflects the unique commitments of my home institution, New Saint Andrews College:

The liberal arts teach us how to learn—how to freely gain knowledge and understanding. As *arts*, they produce something, in this case, the ability to learn. Because they are *liberal* arts, they liberate us, not merely from ignorance, prejudice, and provincialism, but also from servile dependence on the tutelage of others. The liberal arts, then, are particularly important for leaders, who themselves must be guides. Moreover, the liberal arts are not value-neutral, but, like all arts, are rightly ordered to the love and worship of the Triune God.²⁶

Other educators might adopt a different formulation than ours; indeed, historical usage supports a range of ways to construe liberal arts. The same can be said of related terms such as arts, sciences, and humanities, which I have also addressed in this paper. My aim is to urge educators—especially classical educators—toward greater clarity. Definitions matter. We who provide liberal arts instruction have a duty to make clear what the liberal arts entail, and what we mean by the term. This duty is especially pressing in today's educational environment that is dogged by muddled categories and imprecise terminology. When we define the terms we use to refer to the instruction we provide, we set ourselves up to be more faithful to our own mission.

²⁵At New Saint Andrews College, where I teach, our undergraduate degree is in “liberal arts and culture.” The term *liberal arts* in this name indicates that we aim to teach our students how to freely gain knowledge and understanding. The term *culture* highlights the humanities element of our program, denoting a heritage with which we identify. New Saint Andrews is committed to the reformed tradition of confessional Protestantism.

²⁶This statement has been formally adopted by New Saint Andrews College and regularly appears on course syllabi.

Teaching Students to Feel Pleasure and Pain at the Wrong Thing: The History of Grades and Grading

Brian A. Williams

ABSTRACT: Despite their ubiquity and widespread acceptance in contemporary education, formal grading systems are relatively recent innovations in the history and philosophy of education. Far from innocuous tools which aid the student's academic development, grades and grading systems developed as *ad hoc* tools for ranking students against one another in academic competitions. This article examines the history of assessment, grades, and grading in light of the longer tradition of education and suggests alternative practices that could better orient students toward the true, good, beautiful, holy, healthy, and beneficial. By understanding how and why contemporary approaches to grades developed, classical educators will be equipped to mitigate the unintended and often unseen adverse consequences grades have on their students. Ultimately, this article seeks to liberate teachers and students to pursue the intrinsic goods of learning over against the fleeting and extrinsic rewards of making the grade.

THE PROBLEMS WITH GRADES

Academic institutions are sites of profound human formation in which a student who journeys from kindergarten through college will spend seventeen of the most formative years of her life. The normative practices that characterize these places will help her gain knowledge, learn skills, and prepare for gainful employment, but they will also form her affections and condition how she relates to herself, her peers, and the world outside her mind. In the words of sociologist Christian Smith, academic institutions are examples of “social worlds . . . thickly webbed with moral assumptions, beliefs, commitments, and obligations” that become embodied in rituals, practices, and policies, and which inform a

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student's "assumptions, expectations, beliefs, aspirations, thoughts, judgments, and feelings."¹

One of the normative practices in contemporary educational institutions, classical or otherwise, and one that embodies an implicit commitment to competition and rank, is the attempt to quantify or translate learning and academic achievement into a single number or letter. Because this practice was unknown to educators before the nineteenth century, contemporary educators cannot consult the long tradition of liberal arts education for insight into the nature and use of grades nor to understand whether academic competition and ranking helps students achieve the ends of liberal arts education, namely, their integrated intellectual, moral, aesthetic, spiritual, physical, practical, and social formation.² The longer tradition did not use grades, nor were grades designed to help students achieve these ends. This ought to give classical educators pause and, given their relative institutional freedom, provoke them to evaluate the ongoing utility and necessity of the grading system, especially during the years before a student's grade point average (GPA) begins accruing in secondary school.

In what follows I first raise some concerns with grades and grading, narrate a brief history of the practice of grading and grading systems, and then briefly identify practices that could mitigate the adverse effects of grades on students. I devote space to the historical development of grading systems in order to explore how and why our current practices emerged, what they were designed to accomplish, and how consistent they are with the longer tradition of education. Contrary to many assumptions, our system of grades and grading are not the result of sustained pedagogical prudence or careful deliberation. They are late-modern *ad hoc* tools designed to efficiently rank students against one another in competitions for scarce prizes.

I am not the first or only person to question the value of grades and grading. Isadore E. Finkelstein and Mary Smallwood³ wrote booklets in 1913 and 1935, respectively, questioning, in Finkelstein's words, the astonishingly "blind faith that has been felt in the reliability of the marking systems."⁴ Similarly, in 1930, the great Black classicist and educator Anna Julia Cooper concluded,

¹Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8. See also James Davison Hunter, *Death Of Character: Moral Education In An Age Without Good Or Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 16–26; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23–30.

²These seven areas of formation orient students, in turn, to the true, good, beautiful, holy, healthy, beneficial, and neighborly.

³Mary Lovett Smallwood, *An Historical Study of Examinations and Grading Systems in Early American Universities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935).

⁴I. E. Finkelstein, *The Marking System in Theory and Practice* (Baltimore: Warwick & York, 1913), 1.

we have been so ridden with tests and measurements, so leashed and spurred for percentages . . . that the machinery has run away with the mass production and quite a way back bumped off the drivers. I wonder that a robot has not been invented to make the assignments, give the objective tests, mark the scores and—chloroform all teachers who dared bring original thought to the specific . . . needs of their pupils.⁵

Similarly, the educational theorist Alfie Kohn has questioned the usefulness of grades in multiple articles, editorials, and books, arguing that grades and external rewards, contrary to expectations, actually demotivate student learning.⁶ Other studies question how grades might influence a child's "academic self-esteem," which refers to how readily and deeply a child identifies as a "student," thinks herself "smart," or regards school as a place she belongs or enjoys. This identification seems to start uniformly high but diminishes in and after grade 3—often when grades are introduced—and diminishes most sharply in ethnic minorities, for whom lower grades more quickly and strongly reinforce negative cultural stereotypes about academic ability, and whose lower grades have in some studies been correlated with implicit and explicit teacher biases.⁷

Grades are not the only feature of a school that can negatively impact students, but the following list identifies several ways that grades often do. Grades:

- train students to love an extrinsic end ("good grades") rather than the intrinsic goods of learning;
- increase likelihood students will restrict their learning to what can and will be graded;
- decrease wonder, delight, and interest in what is being learned;
- increase competition and envy;
- decrease motivation to enroll in difficult courses or pursue projects that might harm one's GPA;
- increase temptation to cheat, because cheating make little sense without grades;

⁵Anna Julia Cooper, "The Humor of Teaching," in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, ed. Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 35.

⁶See Alfie Kohn, "The Case Against Grades," *Educational Leadership* (November 2011); Alfie Kohn, "From Degrading to De-Grading," in *What Does it Mean to be Well Educated?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

⁷See, for example, Dario Cvencek et al., "Self-Concepts, Self-Esteem, and Academic Achievement of Minority and Majority North American Elementary School Children," in *Child Development* 89, no. 4 (July/August 2018): 1105: "For example, compared to majority students, minority students are more likely to encounter negative stereotypes about their ability and intelligence, a scarcity of positive academic representations or role models, and teacher bias regarding perceptions of their classroom behavior."

- decrease student motivation to challenge oneself or pursue excellence if satisfied with a mediocre grade;
- increase anxiety and depression;
- decrease likelihood students will read a teacher's meaningful assessment of their work if both are delivered at the same time;
- increase the temptation for teachers to replace meaningful assessment with a less meaningful letter or number;
- decrease the granularity and usefulness of a teacher's assessment;
- increase the pretense of objectivity;
- decrease the extent and depth of useful communication between school and parents;⁸
- force the teacher to adopt the role of a judge delivering a verdict on past action, rather than a coach or master craftsman offering assessment and instruction useful for future improvement;
- decrease the chance students will pursue serious learning after graduation when that learning will no longer be exchanged for a scarce prize like a good grade;
- increase the tendency for older students to become rational consumers bargain hunting for the highest grade at the lowest cost.

These last two dispositions easily lead students to regard knowledge and understanding as the *means* for acquiring grades, which thus come to be seen as the end or *telos* of education. This happens when we treat grades and GPAs as valuable commodities or academic currency that students bank to trade in and trade up for other things like self-esteem, parental approval, honor from peers, college placement, scholarships, and eventually a degree. If most students are asked what they want to “get out of” a class, they will answer “a good grade.” Parents and teachers reinforce this attitude every time they ask a student “how are your grades?” instead of more meaningful questions like “can you tell me about what you are learning?”; “what are you struggling to understand?”; “what do you think about that book?”; “what are you glad to have learned?”; or “what do you still have questions about?” Instead, students are asked, “how are your grades?” By doing so, teachers and parents communicate that grades are what they care about, what students should care about, and what the school is designed to produce. Likewise, teachers, parents, students, and schools treat grades like currency the school pays students in exchange for their academic labors, which students bank for the sake of future withdrawals and purchases. And though

⁸I am grateful for this insight to Robyn Burlew of Veritas School, Richmond, VA.

grades lose their value and become worthless once a degree is handed over, the damage endures in students who were led to value the accumulation of “grade currency” over everything else.

So it appears that grades, grading, and GPAs can order a student’s affection toward the wrong things. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle rightly asserts that it is important to learn virtue from an early age and that virtue is bound up with learning to feel pleasure and pain toward the right things in the right way at the right time and for the right reasons. Conversely, vice is bound up feeling pleasure and pain at the wrong things in the wrong way for the wrong reasons.⁹ Therefore, he claims, we should “educate the young by steering them with pleasure and pain” because “what is most conducive to virtue of character is to enjoy what one ought” (*EN* 1172a19–25). If educators habituate students to feel more pleasure from getting good grades and accruing grade currency than wonder, learning, and wisdom, and if students come to attach their self-esteem and shame to their grades and GPA, then the system of grades and grading potentially nurtures students toward vice, inhibits their flourishing, and thus undermines the express purpose of a classical liberal arts education. That this can happen implicitly is the point of Christian Smith’s contention that people internalize the moral assumptions and beliefs embodied in the practices of thickly webbed social worlds like schools. If grades carry these negative effects, educators are right to ask about their origin, purpose, and utility.

MEDIEVAL TEACHING LICENSES AND LEAVING EXAMINATIONS

As we consider the historical development of grading systems—including the awkwardly overlapping four-point grading scale, A–F letter grades, and 100 percent scale—one question we need to ask is *cui bono*: whose good are grades designed to serve?¹⁰ We can identify at least three agents whose ends grades could serve. First, there are intrinsically educational ends like student learning,

⁹Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002). See 1099a7–22; 1104b5–1105a17: “Hence it is necessary to be brought up in some way straight from childhood, as Plato says, so as to take delight and feel pain in those things in which one ought, for this is the right education.” On the importance of forming youthful habits of virtue in Plato’s educational writing, see Mark E. Jonas and Yoshiaki Nakazawa, *A Platonic Theory of Moral Education* (New York: Routledge, 2021), especially chapters two and three on the importance of habits and avoiding youthful “encrustations.”

¹⁰For additional aspects of the history of grades and grading systems, see Christopher Healy and Stuart Rojstaczer, “Where A Is Ordinary: The Evolution of American College and University Grading, 1940–2009,” *Teachers College Record* 114 (July 2012):1–23; Jack Schneider and Ethan Hutt, “Making the Grade: A History of the A–F Marking Scheme,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (May, 2013): 201–24. For a good overview of various contemporary critiques of grades and grading, see Lorin W. Anderson, “A Critique of Grading: Policies, Practices, and Technical Matters,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 26, no. 49 (April 2018): 1–31.

intellectual formation, character development, and the nurturing of wonder and the intellectual appetite. Second, there are institutional ends like accurately ranking students against one another, enlarging class sizes, efficient “feedback,” and performance tracking. Third, there are the transactional ends of the multi-tiered educational system, aimed at efficient communication, coordination, and movement of students within and through an interlocking national and international network of primary, secondary, and tertiary schools.

We will begin our story in the thirteenth century but move quickly into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The importance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in particular becomes clear in light of descriptions of grades as “a crucial expression of the modernist impulse”¹¹ and a representative of “the eclipse of traditional authority by bureaucratic rationalization.”¹² When historian Christopher Stray summarizes how ranked grading enabled one famous examination to accurately identify, and publish the name of, the lowest scoring student, he describes it as a celebration of “the competitive system itself, dominated by a ranking procedure of unparalleled intensity and precision.”¹³ None of these descriptions of grades and grading should sound particularly promising to classical educators wary of industrialized bureaucracy, economic instrumentality, and toxic competitiveness.

As we will see, the history of grades is bound up with the history of universities, the history of examinations, the granting of diplomas, and social changes like compulsory schooling, child labor laws, immigration, school access for women and minorities, mobility, the G. I. Bill, the Vietnam War, and the recent consumerist approach to education. The following short section can do no more than sketch the basic evolution of grades and grading both because of space limitations but also because grades and grading did not develop in a linear way nor did they emerge from a single institution or educator. Instead, their emergence and adoption was haphazard, experimental, and diffuse, all of which reveal their *ad hoc* and improvisational nature.

¹¹Schneider and Hutt, “Making the Grade,” 202. This article is a good overview of the topic and contains a useful collection of early twentieth-century concerns about the inadequacy of grading systems and their adverse effects. However, the article’s reference to the “European model” of competitive grading that was “largely used for pedagogical purposes” overstates the situation since there seem to be little to no “pedagogical purposes” served by the competitive grading system either in the article or in the historical record. The article references “motivating students,” but it seems clear that grading systems were not designed for this purpose nor that this intent was broadly “European.”

¹²William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 14.

¹³Christopher Stray, “The Shift from Oral to Written Examination: Cambridge and Oxford 1700–1900,” *Assessment in Education Principles Policy and Practice* 8, no. 1: 39.

The story could begin in multiple places, but one possibility is the University of Toulouse in the thirteenth century.¹⁴ The history of medieval universities like Toulouse began with cathedral schools like the one that educated Alcuin in York, palace schools like the one Alcuin took over at Aachen under Charlemagne, and abbey schools like Hugh's school at St. Victor outside Paris. Cathedral and palace schools were designed to train boys to be literate priests for the church and civil servants for the king's court. Students were taught a version of the trivium and, if promising, the quadrivium. In 1079, Pope Gregory VII issued a decree requiring the proliferation and regulation of cathedral schools. By the next generation, cathedral schools were producing independent and itinerant scholars, most of whom would migrate toward royal or cathedral towns where there was a demand for literate persons to serve in the cathedral and the king's court. This is the story of the University of Oxford, which grew where it did in part because Henry II, whose father had been educated at the cathedral school of Laon, built Beaumont Palace in the cathedral town of Oxford, bringing church and court together, both of which required educated personnel.

These independent scholars eventually formed guilds or corporations like other trades, partly to regulate prices on tuition, rents, and vellum. The young "scholar," the teaching "bachelor," and the "master" or "doctor" roughly correspond to the "apprentice," "companion," and "master" of the trade guilds, respectively. Because *universitas* was a fairly common term for a corporation or body, universities began as the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, the corporation—or guild union—of teachers and scholars. And from these guilds in Bologna, Paris, and Oxford the world's first three universities, arguably, began.

After a "town vs. gown" riot in Paris, Pope Gregory IX issued the papal bull *Parens scientiarum* (1231), which conferred an independent status on the University of Paris and removed it from the supervision of local civil and religious authorities. Among other things, it meant the university could issue "teaching licenses" to graduating students without those graduates being examined for theological orthodoxy by non-university agents like cathedral school chancellors or bishops. This was followed in 1233 by another papal bull insisting that anyone

¹⁴The standard source for information on the medieval universities, subsequently corrected in some particulars, is Rashdall Hastings, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895). See especially "The Organization of the Studium" and "The Universities of Medicine, Arts, and Theology" in vol. 1: 206–53. See also Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100–1215* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985); Peter Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Olaf Pedersen, *The First Universities: Studium Generale and the Origins of University Education in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Lynn Thorndyke, trans., *University Records and Life in the Middle Ages* (New York: The Norton Library, 1944).

formally allowed to teach in the University of Toulouse (which Pope Gregory IX had founded) must be allowed to teach at any other university (*jus ubicunque docendi*) without having to undergo further examinations. Other universities soon sought the same privileges for their teaching licenses.¹⁵

The teaching license was essentially a shorthand form of communication validating the scholar's achievement and abilities, confirming that he had been assessed and found capable of practicing the scholarly trade. In other words, his apprenticeship was complete and he should be accepted as a full member of the scholar's guild. The license was necessary because, unlike a furniture maker whose cabinets and chairs might validate his abilities, the scholar could not produce anything to verify his abilities other than a teaching license. These official teaching licenses were eventually called "diplomas," meaning "folded piece of paper," because traveling scholars would fold and carry their licenses from one university to another.¹⁶

As teaching licenses became increasingly important, so did the "leaving examinations" that students had to endure before receiving a license. This final examination included a series of oral disputations on set questions with other students and professors.¹⁷ It was the most significant of a student's three assessments: 1) the daily oral examination and assessment by one's teachers; 2) the private examination and assessment of a graduating student by representatives of the faculty; 3) the final public lecture and disputation with other students and university scholars.¹⁸

We should note that though students were tested and assessed during the "leaving examination," they were not graded or ranked against one another. This is a crucial distinction: assessment is fundamental to education, but ranked grades are not. The former implies "sitting alongside" (*assidere*), helping students learn, while the latter implies "ranking against," establishing a hierarchy among them. Like the apprentice carpenter or stonemason, the medieval student was released to practice his craft when he had mastered it to a level comparable to and determined by other masters. This absence of grading and ranking seems to have endured until at least the eighteenth century. There was no "grade point average" or class rank, neither were there "valedictorians" or "salutatorians" at commencement ceremonies.¹⁹ And, as is still the case in many European schools,

¹⁵Many students attended university to secure valuable political and commercial contacts rather than a teaching license or degree.

¹⁶Similarly, a "diplomat" is one who also carries a "folded piece of paper."

¹⁷Humorously, the regulations at some universities required students to swear not to seek physical revenge if the leaving exam went poorly, and professors to swear not to summon students for exams in the middle of the night.

¹⁸See Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 97.

¹⁹Despite their Latinate names, these competitive commencement honors are relatively recent—and decidedly American—inventions. While "firsts" are notoriously elusive, it seems Jonathan Edwards may have been the first undergraduate to have offered a valedictory

colleges, and universities, early commencement ceremonies emphasized the university, the course of study, and the graduates' responsibilities and privileges, but not individual students or academic ranking. We should not miss the significant point: no educator at any level from the ancient Greeks through the Medieval era through the Renaissance thought that ranking students against one another or translating their intellectual achievements into numbers or letters served a pedagogical purpose or educational end.

THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF GRADES

Starting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several developments contributed to the rise of the now-ubiquitous grading systems. First, examinations moved from oral to written. Second, schools began to competitively rank students in order to award scarce prizes, which encouraged more precise forms of assessment. Third, exams move from "leaving exams" taken just before graduation to end-of-year exams, to end-of-semester exams, and then to the innovative decision to let individual teachers determine when exams would be given in each class. Fourth, increased enrollment in schools and the desire for an efficient means of communication between schools led to the development of new techniques for quantifying assessment with simple numbers, letters, and words.²⁰

One of the first steps seem to have been taken at the University of Cambridge in its famous Senate House Exams for honors B.A. candidates. During the eighteenth century, partly under the influence of Sir Isaac Newton (Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge until 1701), and partly due to the increasing availability of cheap pen and paper, this "leaving exam" developed into what became known as the Mathematical Tripos examination.²¹ The advent of inexpensive writing materials enabled the exam to introduce more complex mathematical questions that could be written down and computed on paper.²² Prior to this, the examinations had been conducted exclusively through oral disputations, small group questions, and individual interviews, and included questions in moral philosophy, natural philosophy ("natural science"), as well as mathematics. After this, the oral components largely became the means by which students were

address in 1720 at Yale. Though typically reserved for one of the masters of the college, Edwards was selected for this honor. Even so, it appears the term "Valedictorian" was first used at the College of William and Mary, when the top Latin student was chosen to give a "valediction," that is, literally, the "goodbye" speech, at the commencement ceremonies of 1772. Likewise, a "salutatorian" gives a "welcome" speech at commencement, from *salutatorius*, "pertaining to a greeting." Harvard (beginning in the 1760s) and Yale (beginning in 1815) also invited students to speak at commencement, but these students were selected by faculty and graduates rather than automatically by cumulative grade point average.

²⁰See, among many sources, Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 112–17; 132–34.

²¹"Tripos" for the three-legged stool on which students sat.

²²See John Gascoigne, "Mathematics and Meritocracy: The Emergence of the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos," *Social Studies of Science* 14, no. 4 (November 1984): 547–84.

seeded for the main event, the written exams, which became almost exclusively mathematical and increasingly competitive. Eventually, the Tripos developed into a multi-round tournament, in which losers dropped out and winners progressed through increasingly challenging problems.²³

By 1753 at least, examinees were ranked into four groups: the top performers called “wranglers,” hearkening back to the verbal wrangling of oral disputations; the second class was “Senior Optimes”; the third class, “Junior Optimes”; and everyone else, the *hoi polloi*, who became known as “polly-men,” and, finally, ‘Pollmen’.²⁴ Around this time, the Tripos exams also began individually ranking students in the top two categories, and publishing the names of at least the top ten. In addition, many of the top “wranglers” were offered positions within the university, and the top “wrangler” was apparently awarded a lifetime stipend from the University’s endowment.²⁵ This increased the stakes because students now competed for fame and a scarce commodity. Furthermore, examiners suffered an increased temptation to show partiality toward students from their own colleges within the university. All these in turn increased the need for more precise and objective means for scoring and ranking.

Though sources are sparse, one suggests that these more precise means may have been first introduced by Professor William Farish (1759–1837). He was the Tripos “senior wrangler” and recipient of the Smith’s Prize in Mathematics in 1778, Mathematics tutor from 1792, and Professor of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy from 1794, all at the University of Cambridge.²⁶ His 1837 obituary in the *Christian Observer* notes the telling detail: “He was the means of introducing into the University of Cambridge the system of classifying the candidates for a degree according to the number of marks obtained at their examination.”²⁷

²³The rise of academic competition and “meritocracy” also seems to have emerged from a desire to challenge the traditional significance, even within universities, of the aristocratic oligarchy. However, aristocratic students were exempt from the Tripos.

²⁴W. W. Rouse Ball, *A History of the Study of Mathematics at Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889), 170; Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 110; Stray, “Written Examination,” 86.

²⁵Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 110; Stray, “Written Examination,” 86; Gascoigne, “Mathematics and Meritocracy,” 553, 561.

²⁶See Keith Hoskin, “The Examination, Disciplinary Power and Rational Schooling,” *History of Education* 8, no. 2 (1979): 135–46.

²⁷Anonymous, “Obituary of Rev. William Farish,” *Christian Observer* 429 (1837): 611–13. Professor William Farish’s interests resembled his father’s, the Rev. James Farish, a vicar and natural philosopher who, among other things, is the source for our knowledge of Benjamin Franklin’s experiments to calm turbulent water with oil. Farish and Franklin’s mutual friend, Dr. William Brownrigg, forwarded Franklin a letter from Farish in which he describes his own attempt to replicate Franklin’s experiment. Brownrigg describes Rev. Farish as an “old friend, a worthy clergyman at Carlisle, whose great learning and extensive knowledge in most sciences would have more distinguished him had he been placed in a more conspicuous point of view.” In the letter, Rev. Farish expresses doubt about the

Though not explicitly named, this almost certainly refers to the Tripos given its prominence in the degree examinations, and it would be unsurprising given that Farish's academic work, despite being Professor of Chemistry, was almost exclusively in theoretical and applied mathematics.

However, several urban myths exist about Professor Farish and the invention of grades. One of these claims that he invented grades in order to increase his own financial compensation. This widespread story claims that Farish adopted letter grades (A, B, C, D, E, F) from a local shoe company that used them to rank the relative quality of its shoes. Because using simple letter grades decreased the time Farish had to spend on any one essay and exam, he could increase the number of students in his classes, and because he was paid per student, so the story goes, he could increase his salary. Several websites refer to him as the "world's laziest teacher," and several books and articles repeat these claims, each of which reference the others, all without a historical source.²⁸ Fortunately for Professor Farish, this story is almost entirely fabricated.

First, during Farish's time at Cambridge, students did not write essays and the only exams given were leaving exams (including the Tripos). Second, attendance at Farish's classes was optional, and the number of students who attended never influenced his pay. Third, as for his supposed lazy and acquisitive character, bent on rationally maximizing his profits, Farish was also an active abolitionist, organizer of the Cambridge Auxiliary Bible Society and the Missionary Society, and vicar of two of the poorest parishes in Cambridge—hardly the lazy, money-grubbing teacher of the urban myth.

The only truth to the story seems to be that Farish may have begun assigning numerical scores to written Tripos Examination questions, possibly in order to overcome the potential bias mentioned above and to provide a more accurate

reports of Franklin's experiments: "I suspect all of a little exaggeration." Another acquaintance of Rev. James Farish wrote that he "possessed more knowledge in several parts of learning than the generality of scholars possess in any one." See "To Benjamin Franklin from William Brownrigg, 27 January 1773," <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-20-02-0021>. See also Joost Mertens, "The honour of Dutch seamen: Benjamin Franklin's theory of oil on troubled waters and its epistemological aftermath," *Physics Today* 59 (January 2006): 36–41.

²⁸These stories may simply be embellishments of Neil Postman's passing reference to Professor Farish in *Technopoly* as the inventor of quantitative grading. Postman relies on Keith Hoskin's "Examination," whereas Hoskin's source is William Farish's obituary in the *Christian Century* mentioned above. The websites that repeat this erroneous story are numerous, but it can also be found in Kay Cheng Soh, "Grade point average: what's wrong and what's the alternative?" *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 33, no. 1 (February 2011): 27–28; Thom Hartmann, *Thom Hartmann's Complete Guide to ADHD: Help for Your Family at Home, School and Work* (Nevada City, CA: Underwood Books, 2000); and Susan P. Giancola, *Program Evaluation: Embedding Evaluation Into Program Design and Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2020), 32.

means for scoring and ranking competitors. However, many subsequent teachers do resemble the fictitious Farish, assigning grades because number or letter grades are easier and faster than other feedback, and because they have too many students to mentor, too many assignments to assess meaningfully.

Before leaving the Tripod, we should note that the system of scoring and averaging individual questions in order to produce precise final scores—regardless of whether it came through Farish—was 1) designed to *rank* students who had 2) freely entered a *competition* against one another, in which 3) everyone competed by taking the *same* exam that 4) centered on *mathematics*. Each of these points is significant for the accurate ranking that quantified grading was designed to facilitate. However, the system designed within these extremely narrow parameters has obviously come to be used indiscriminately for all manner of disparate examinations, subjects, and contexts that have nothing to do with competitive ranking. Furthermore, they have been imposed upon students of all ages, whether competitive ranking is helpful or harmful.

The next step came when universities adopted this basic method of scoring individual questions and exams and began examining students at the end of every year in order to determine who would receive scarce prizes, fellowships, and scholarships in the next. Harvard had adopted this practice at least by 1865. Then came examinations at the end of each course, retaining the graded ranking system even when it was disconnected from prizes. From there, professors were allowed to give examinations whenever they saw fit—a new practice allowed at Harvard at least by 1883. So the method designed to rank and compare students endured, even when accurate ranking and comparing became irrelevant and impossible.

Shortly before these developments in the United States, eighteenth-century Prussian grammar schools had developed a new technique that reinforced reductive assessment. These are the same schools that impressed the American educational reformer and Massachusetts Secretary of Education Horace Mann. The Prussians had made schooling compulsory in 1763, and under Horace Mann's influence, Massachusetts followed suit in 1852. Compulsory schooling significantly increased the numbers of students in school and pressured schools and teachers to develop new techniques for tracking their academic development. One of these new techniques was the frequent evaluation of student progress and performance, which was reduced to a descriptive word or two, entered on a grid, and sent home to parents. This was the precursor of the "report card," originally called a "Censur-Tabell" or "Schul Tabell." Students were not yet receiving letter grades, but they were receiving one-word evaluations for each academic subject and expected behavior.²⁹ For example, academic performances could be described as "good," "fine," and "decent," or "stupid," "mediocre," and "small." Behavior was "pious" or "disobedient." And "general abilities" were described in simple

²⁹Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 119–22.

terms like “more memory than judgment,” “slow in ability,” “simpleminded,” “speculative,” and so forth.³⁰

One implication is that communication from the school to parents about the progressive academic and moral formation of their children becomes generic and limited to shorts words that could fit within the confines of a small grid. It is not entirely clear that in the case of grade card grids “something is better than nothing.” The individual report card may have been an improvement over another model, however, in which students of various ages and abilities were subject to daily and weekly examinations that resulted in reorganizing the seating chart according to student performances. The top performers literally moved their desks to “the head of the class” and the low performers moved to the back. The idea was that daily public competition and ranking—two recurring themes of this modern story—would extrinsically motivate students to perform their best. One can imagine that it did motivate the few top students who were capable of making it to “the head of the class,” while also, of course, turning learning into a competitive sport that encouraged the vices of pride among some and despair among others. Instead, Mann, following the Prussian model, advocated for written examinations and monthly report cards that would accrue over time like “a merchant’s ledgers” for his accounts, similar to the later “grade point average.”³¹ So we inherited individually scored examination questions and competitive academic ranking from Cambridge and the report card from the Prussians.

The history of grades eventually passes through the private journal of Ezra Stiles, the seventh President of Yale University (1778 to 1795). In his journals, President Stiles records the details of his private and professional life, including which year of students he examined in which subjects on which days. In a journal entry from December 1, 1782, he notes that at the request of a number of students, he began teaching Hebrew, and that he ranked the students into three divisions, presumably on the basis of their abilities.³² This seems to have been rather standard pedagogical practice. However, in his journal from April 5, 1785, Stiles recorded that he examined fifty-eight seniors in Latin and Greek, and in his “college memoranda” about that examination, he notes that he ranked them

³⁰Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 120. It is unclear when and where grades began being used in grammar schools generally, but Schneider and Hutt cite two examples from the U. K. that suggest ranked grading may have been used there haphazardly in the early nineteenth century (“Making the Grade,” 204–5).

³¹Schneider and Hutt, “Making the Grade,” 206.

³²Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, vol. 3, *January 1, 1782–May 6, 1795* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 48. He also notes that on this day, there were 218 students present for some event: “the greatest number ever together at once in an American College.”

according to results into one of four named categories: “Of these 58, 20 Optimi, 16 2nd Opt[imi], 12 Inferiores (Boni), 10 Pejores.”³³ Here begins the four-point grading scale. By 1813, Yale had apparently translated Stiles’ four categories into cardinal numbers, 1–4, and used them to represent how well graduating students did on their final examinations. By 1819, Yale was using quarter points, so 3.25 and 2.5 and so forth, and extended this system to track underclassmen. These marks were recorded in the faculty’s “Book of Averages”—the beginning of the cumulative GPA.

It is worth noting that the cumulative average was kept secret from students precisely in order to avoid the competitiveness the university expected would occur if students knew their grades. In fact, as Lyman Bagg explains in his 1871 reflections on his time at Yale, the “merit marks” between 1–4 that were given for each recitation, were recorded in code using “a peculiar system of notation, known only to the officer, so that if by chance a student should get hold of the score-book of his division he would not be able to make out very closely the significance of the hieroglyphics contained therein.”³⁴ If a student fell below a certain average, his “division master” would warn him that he needed to improve, or if he applied to know his grade point average, Bagg reports that he would be given “some such general information as that he is doing well, or very well, or improving, or falling off a little, or doing poorly.”³⁵ Though secret throughout a student’s career, the ranking was used at graduation to determine commencement honors, when it was revealed to each student individually. Thus Yale’s Book of Averages functioned like Horace Mann’s academic “merchant’s ledger” and began the four-point scale and the cumulative GPA.

By the second half of the nineteenth century grades had become increasingly normative, even though there was no uniform system of symbols, numbers, letters, or words for efficiently translating and communicating academic accomplishment. For example, Yale moved from a four-point scale to a nine-point scale to a scale between 200 and 400 points, before returning to the original four-point scale derived from President Stiles. In the 1830s, when Henry David Thoreau was at Harvard, a “Scale of Merit” established by President Josiah Quincy scored everything in multiples of eight, which would accrue daily over a student’s entire four years. In his 1888 *Harvard Reminiscences*, Andrew P. Peabody explains that Quincy instituted the scale in order to “reform the unmethodical way in which college rank had been determined.”³⁶ In this system, “a student’s daily record” would “constitute his due and fitly earned place in the scale of rank or merit.”³⁷ Marks could also be lost for moral or behavioral infractions (and in 1820s and

³³Ibid., 154.

³⁴Lyman Hotchkiss Bagg, *Four Years at Yale* (New Haven: Charles C. Chatfield, 1871), 584.

³⁵Ibid., 578–9.

³⁶Andrew P. Peabody, *Harvard Reminiscences* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888), 29–30.

³⁷Ibid., 30.

'30s Harvard there were many, including drunken riots, brawls, cannon fire, brothel-visitations, and, of course, skipping chapel). According to Peabody, "this blended ratio of scholarship and character" determined a student's rank and his eligibility for endowments and honors. Even though Peabody was charged with keeping the records, President Quincy would examine them on a weekly basis "as if the most momentous interests were at stake."³⁸ According to Peabody, this system remained relatively unchanged for at least three presidents after Quincy. The maximum that could be earned over a student's four years at Harvard was somewhere between seventeen and twenty-nine thousand points or more, depending on how various essays and examinations were scored. Thoreau, who had a troubled relationship with Harvard, apparently left with a little over twelve thousand points.

These examples reveal that the systems of quantified grading were *ad hoc* improvisations that neither naturally emerged from nor were intrinsic to education. They were not designed to motivate students or to nurture their love of learning or intellectual formation. Instead, they were designed to serve the administrative ends of efficient tracking, simple communication, and competitive ranking.

By 1890, Harvard had abandoned Quincy's Scale of Merit, but began tracking student performance in each class by slotting them into one of five groups labeled A to E—the beginning of letter grades. Students were not ranked individually, but were ranked by group within each class.³⁹ By 1896, Harvard had an elaborate system for calculating the ratio of students' letter grades in order to determine who would graduate *cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *summa cum laude*—honors Harvard invented in 1869 and 1880. However, accurate ranking became impossible after Harvard's President Charles Eliot introduced the college credit-system in the 1860s and '70s. This system, which replaced the core curriculum model and allowed students to earn individual units of "college-credit" for each course they elected to take, was endorsed by the National Education Association in 1894 and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching around 1910.⁴⁰ Because students no longer took the same sequence of courses, which meant that one student's program of study could be more or less difficult than another's, Eliot recognized that university-wide commencement honors would be impossible. He acknowledged that the university can only "provide academic honors at graduation for distinguished attainment in single subjects."⁴¹ However, even though it became impossible to rank students' aca-

³⁸Ibid., 31.

³⁹Smallwood, *Early American Universities*, 51.

⁴⁰The high school equivalent of the college-credit hour is the "Carnegie Unit." See Ellsworth Tompkins and Walter H. Gaumnitz, *The Carnegie Unit, Its Origin, Status, and Trends* (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Bulletin No. 7, 1954).

⁴¹Charles William Eliot, "Liberty in Education," in *Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1898), 145.

ademic achievements against one another across the same university, the system designed to do so endured and now ranks one student's GPA against students from other academic institutions, courses of study, majors, and professors.

However, Harvard may not have been the first to translate academic performance into letters. The 1778 "moderator's book" from Cambridge's Tripos Examinations recorded the results of the oral disputations in mathematics and moral philosophy that were used to seed students for the final competition. The book from this particular year uses the notations "A+, A, and A-" to denote excellent performances, "E+, E, and E-" for good ones, "a+, a, and a-" for fair ones, and "e+, e" for mediocre ones.⁴² It is not clear how these were used or combined for determining where students would be seeded in the final tournament, and it may be that they were simply shorthand notations to remind the moderator of a student's performance when he was involved in the seeding process. Neither is there any evidence that this use of letters influenced subsequent practices like those at Harvard a century later. Though the presence of letter grades in the 1778 "moderator's book" is interesting, it is Harvard's practice that becomes influential.

In sum, we inherited scored exam questions from Cambridge, the four-point scale and GPAs from Yale, and letter grades and graduation honors from Harvard. As an aside, this allows us to recognize the outsized influence possessed by institutions like Yale, Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge, whose practices influence the culture and experience of nearly every other academic institution.

For all the relative significance of Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale, the system of correlating letter grades with individual assignments, rather than to groups of students, and to aligning them with the 100% scale seems to have begun with Mount Holyoke College. In 1896, again in order to provide a useful system for ranking students, Mount Holyoke combined letters, percentages, and adjectives that resemble the Prussian "Schul Tabell":

A = 95–100% Excellent

B = 85–94 Good

C = 76–84 Fair

D = 75 Passed

E = below 75 Failed

A year later Mount Holyoke modified the numbers slightly and added "F" for anything below 75%. After 1896, letter grades become increasingly ubiquitous and entrenched, and by the early 1900s, the letter grade system had spread into primary and secondary schools, as evidenced on millions of Prussian-inspired

⁴²Ball, *Mathematics at Cambridge*, 171–72.

grade cards from the twentieth century.⁴³ Even so, the 1971 report of the National Educational Association records that as late as 1971, only sixty-seven percent of primary and secondary schools nation-wide used letter grades.⁴⁴ It is hard to put a date on the end of the “E,” but it seems to have started disappearing around 1930, with the dreaded “F” much more easily standing for “Failure.”

SOCIAL PRESSURES

The urgency to assess students with simplistic but efficient letters and numbers was solidified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when school populations boomed. For example, whereas in 1870, 7.6 million students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States, representing 57 percent of five-to-seventeen-year-olds, by 1930 there were 25.4 million, representing 81.7 percent of the same age group.⁴⁵ Causes for the dramatic increase include compulsory schooling, child labor laws, girls and minorities coming to school, massive European immigration, and the increasing economic advantages of education. After World War II, the G.I. Bill dramatically swelled numbers in colleges and made high school and college attendance newly normative. For example, in 1939 approximately 1.5 million students were enrolled in post-secondary education; by 1969 that number had jumped to 8 million.⁴⁶ Increased class sizes increased the need for efficient techniques to organize, assess, and track achievement, and to communicate that achievement between schools laterally as increasingly mobile students changed schools, and vertically as more and more students moved up into high school and college.

The influence of social contexts on the use of grades can also be seen in the fluctuation of grade distribution over decades. According to the analysis of Christopher Healy and Stuart Rojstaczer, “in 1960, as in the 1940s and 1950s, C was the most common grade nationwide” and “D’s and F’s accounted for more grades combined than did A’s,” but by 2009 “A” was “by far the most common grade awarded on American four-year campuses . . . even on campuses with students of modest academic caliber.”⁴⁷ They also demonstrate that during the Vietnam War, grades were disproportionately awarded at the upper end of the scale, and suggest that professors may have inflated grades to ensure students did

⁴³In 1902, Professor Herbert Mumford of the University of Illinois seems to have borrowed this grading system for standardizing the market classes and grades of cattle and beef, resulting in “Grade A” sirloin, and so forth. See Herbert Mumford, Bulletin 78, *Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station: “Market Classes and Grades of Cattle with Suggestions for Interpreting Market Quotations.”*

⁴⁴National Education Association, “Reporting pupil progress to parents,” *Res Bulletin*, October, 1971, vol. 49:81–83.

⁴⁵Thomas D. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (National Centre for Education Statistics, 1993), “Table 8,” 34.

⁴⁶Ibid, “Table 23,” 75.

⁴⁷Healy and Rojstaczer, “Where A Is Ordinary,” 5–6.

not drop out and become eligible for the draft. Similarly, though grade averages fell after the Vietnam War, the proliferation of top grades exploded in the 1980s and '90s without any improvement in academic attainment. This occurred as colleges began treating students as “consumers” and education as a “product” sold by the college. Like any business, colleges want to attract and retain happy consumers, and high grades keep students happy. Similarly, colleges began using student evaluations in these years and tying them to the retention, salary, tenure, and promotion of faculty. Higher grades produce happy consumers, who write favorable teaching evaluations, which increase a professor’s chance for tenure and promotion. Unfortunately, recent research suggests that student evaluation scores are rife with bias and have little correlation with the quality of teaching and learning in a classroom.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we return to the three parties who could be served by the *techné* or modality of quantified grades and grading: students, individual institutions, and the vertically tiered education system.

First, the student. No one, it seems, argues that letter or number grades serve the pedagogical function of forming students intellectually, morally, aesthetically, spiritually, physically, practically, or socially. Nor does anyone suggest grades are intrinsic to or especially useful for helping students nurture a posture of wonder, a creative imagination, intellectual appetite, depth of inquiry, verbal eloquence, intellectual honesty and humility, moral and spiritual seriousness, physical health, sensitivity toward beauty, concern for truth, or love of God, country, and neighbor.

At best, grades give the students an overly simple way to understand their proximity to or distance from the aggregate of knowledge, skills, or dispositions that their teachers expect them to develop. But it is not clear that quantifying this or reducing it to a number or letter is useful. If it were, we might expect coaches, for example, to grade their players at the end of every drill or practice, employers to grade employees at the end of the day, or master craftsmen to assign a number grade to each part of a piece of furniture made by their apprentices.

⁴⁸See Robin Wilson, “New Research Casts Doubt on Value of Student Evaluations of Professors,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 16, 1998); P. B. Stark and R. Freishtat, “An Evaluation of Course Evaluations,” *ScienceOpen Research* (September 29, 2014); John W. Lawrence, “Student Evaluations of Teaching are Not Valid,” *American Association of University Professors* (May–June 2018); Justin Esarey and Natalie Valdes, “Unbiased, reliable, and valid student evaluations can still be unfair,” *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 45 (2020): 8, 1106–20. Political scientists Mirya Hollman, Ellen Key and Rebecca Kreitzer maintain a list of similar studies at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/14JiF-ft—F3Qa-efv2jMRFRWUS8TaaT9JjbYke1fgxE/edit>.

They do not, because doing so would not help players, employees, or apprentices know where or how to improve.

Similarly, using a single letter or number to communicate formative and summative assessment to a student's parents or guardians significantly diminishes the granularity of that communication, leaving parents and guardians with little to no knowledge of how to help their student, especially when that letter grade has been negatively affected by non-academic behavioral factors like poor attendance, tardiness, or turning in work late. For example, a "C" in English might mean that a student understands some things quite well and other things quite poorly, but the letter grade itself does not help the parent or guardian know where the student's strengths and deficiencies lie. In addition, the student might have consistently produced outstanding work in English, but also consistently turned her work in late—a character or behavioral fault not made apparent by an adverse academic grade.

One could argue that grades increase student motivation by dangling extrinsic rewards, like gold stars, though one entirely detached from the learning itself. It is a reasonable conjecture, and one suggested by some educators, but the persistent findings of Alfie Kohn and other educational researchers not only suggest that intrinsic motivation is longer lasting, but that grades demotivate students from pursuing what is most important, namely learning.⁴⁹ Instead, grades motivate good students to pursue "good grades" and demotivate others who either think "good grades" are unattainable or who are content with their "average grades." Grades were not developed to motivate students, and even when they do, they often motivate students simply to outperform their classmates. This risks capitalizing on either their pride or their insecurities, or both, and tempts them to predicate their well-being on being "better than" their fellow classmates. Finally, if "because it will be graded" is the only incentive a teacher can give student for doing an assignment, then it is likely a poor assignment or the teacher a poor pedagogue. And if modern institutions use grades to motivate students, it is instructive to note that many of the institutions that originally designed them intentionally kept them secret from students.

Second, the records indicate that grades were primarily developed to help institutions easily, efficiently, and accurately rank students against one another in a context of competitive scarcity. However, that this is neither intrinsic to education nor academic institutions is clear from the fact that universities existed for seven hundred years, examining and assessing students, but not ranking them with grades. This distinction between assessment and grading is essential for

⁴⁹See Kohn, "Degradings"; "Against Grades"; and "Rewards Are Still Bad News (25 Years Later)," *New York Times*, October 28, 2018. See also Anderson, "Critique of Grading."

contemporary classical educators. To question the utility of grading and ranking is not to question the validity of assessment.

Third, grades could be seen as a simplistic *lingua franca*, designed for the most simplistic and efficient communication from a school to an admissions team at a selective university or program, a hiring committee, or a Human Resources Department. However, it is impossible to know how a 3.86 GPA from one institution compares with a 3.32 or 4.1 from other schools with different teachers, curricula, assignments, examinations, course requirements, and so forth. Therefore, it is worth considering whether the medium of letters and numbers is adequate to carry the meaning that the systems assumes and many claim. Morse code and Twitter may be fine for some things, but they are entirely inadequate for communicating Dante's *Commedia*, a love letter, a political debate, or Bach's Cello Suites.

In sum, grades were designed so that a school could competitively rank its own students against one another, which can be done accurately to a limited degree when students study the same curriculum and sit for the same examinations. When schools began grading students in this way, they used grades as a type of academic currency that could be traded in and traded up for scarce resources or prizes. Grades did not naturally emerge from the learning experience nor because they nurture student learning nor because they positively effect intellectual, moral, affective, or spiritual formation. Instead, their cumulative effect is a problematic disordering of students' loves, to use Augustinian language, or a training in learning to feel pleasure and pain at the wrong things, to use Aristotelian language. Both of these undermine the formation of virtue and lead to the problems identified in the article's opening. But when there is nothing to purchase with the academic commodity, as in kindergarten through most middle schools, or when receiving one's doctorate, then grades serve little purpose.

However, students are in an inter-locking system that trades on grades, at least from high school through graduate school. As they move up, resources like acceptance letters and scholarships become increasingly scarce, and so classical educators wrestle with how to use grades in order to enable students to move up through the system without allowing grades to undermine the actual intellectual, moral, spiritual, and practical goods and ends that educators think important.

However, given their relative independence, classical educators and institutions have more freedom than their public-school counterparts to develop practices that diminish the significance of grades and ranking in the souls of their students and parents, even if they still pay out grades to students who trade them in for seats at selective institutions of higher learning or increased financial scholarships. Several classical schools have decided to remove grades from their grammar schools altogether, and to minimize their impact on middle and high school students. Below I enumerate several practices schools have adopted to

obviate the adverse effects of grades on both students and parents, even if these do not fully resolve the difficulties:

- explain to parents how and why grades and ranking do not foster students' intellectual, moral, aesthetic, spiritual, physical, practical, and social formation;
- equip parents and teachers to ask students meaningful questions about their learning, rather than merely inquiring about grades;
- instruct students not to discuss their grades with other students, and ask parents to reinforce this;
- consider whether reducing formative and summative assessments to a single letter or number is conducive to the education of students in K–8 and, if not, consider discontinuing their use in these years, since their college-relevant GPA will not be tracked until high school;
- with younger students, replace simplistic grades with narrative subject area reports that describe aspects like the student's focus, work ethic, general character, and specific knowledge or skill that needs improvement;
- assign ungraded, and therefore low-stress, essays, quizzes, and exams, especially early in a semester, solely to help students learn and not to generate grades;
- separate assessment from grades by returning narrative assessment with a student's work, but waiting several days to deliver the letter or number grade on that work;
- require upper school students to petition the faculty or an administrator in order to gain access to their grades, and to see them only in consultation with the faculty, or perhaps their parent or guardian.
- replace the GPA with "mastery transcripts" that report on students' progress in specific areas of knowledge, skills, and character;⁵⁰
- approach assignments and assessments the way coaches approach practice, treating assignments like forward-looking drills designed to help students improve;
- if a letter or number is placed on an assignment accompanied by useful assessment, place the letter or number inconspicuously at the bottom of the last page;
- if a letter or number does accompany an assignment, consider using only letters without "+" or "-" or a few select and carefully explained numbers,

⁵⁰See the Mastery Transcript Consortium at <http://www.mastery.org/>.

e.g., 100, 94, 84, 74, 0, given that all grades, especially numerical scores, are approximations;⁵¹

- deliver assessments of major work orally to individual students;
- allow older students to have a voice in their grade for major assignments, or even the course, by supplying rubric for self-evaluation, discussed in personal consultation with the teacher;
- desist using class rank and GPA-based honors like “valedictorian” and “salutatorian,” or replace these with faculty-determined honors for graduates who best embody, e.g., the true, good, beautiful, holy, healthy, beneficial, and neighborly, or some other set of goods or virtues.

These are just a few of the many ways classical schools and educators are diminishing the significance of grades and graded ranking in the educational experience of students and parents, recognizing that grades and ranking are practices that form the school’s thickly webbed social world within which students are formed. Freedom from grades allows teachers and professors to help students look to the future rather than to the past, becoming like coaches or master craftsmen guiding young apprentices as they learn the craft or trade. This allows assessment to contribute to the student’s holistic well-being, helps them come to love learning as a basic human good, and avoids harming them in order to serve the convenience of teachers and efficiency of institutions.

⁵¹These suggested numbers come from Joshua Gibbs, “A Medieval Catechism,” *Circe Institute*, <https://www.circeinstitute.org/blog/medieval-catechism>.

*How to Think Like Shakespeare:
Lessons from a Renaissance Education*

by Scott Newstok

Princeton, NNJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. 185 pages, \$14.95

Reviewed by Nathan M. Antiel

Save for his baptismal day, the date of his death, and that he bequeathed his “second best bed” to his wife, we know enticingly little about the life of William Shakespeare. Recognizing that the plays are as elusive as the playwright, T. S. Eliot once observed: “About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.” The past few years have seen a flurry of publications that propose daring new ways of being wrong about our most familiar yet obscure author.

Maggie O’Farrell offers a profound meditation on marriage, motherhood, loss, grief, and the theater in her elegant novel *Hamnet* (Knopf 2021), and the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams dramatizes what a young, Catholic Shakespeare might say about life and art, faith and words in a series of intimate conversations with the soon to be martyred Edmund Campion in the title play of *Shakeshafte and Other Plays* (Slant 2021). In anticipation of the 2020 election, James Shapiro’s *Shakespeare in a Divided America* (Penguin 2020) traces the Bard’s influence on the American political landscape from the Revolution to today, and Emma Smith’s *This is Shakespeare* (Pantheon 2020) homes in on the meaningful ambiguity of the plays, the way meaning is directed by casting, delivery, and staging.

The interesting scenarios and clever arguments in these texts necessarily rely on speculation, which makes for exciting reading. The sheer absence of speculation, however, is part of what makes Scott Newstok’s excellent new book *How to Think Like Shakespeare: Lessons from a Renaissance Education* stand out. With crisp, lapidary prose, Newstok writes authoritatively about the educational norms and practices that helped shape Shakespeare’s mind.

Thankfully, the worst part of Newstok’s book is the title. It is not a flimsy contribution to the burgeoning self-help-made-parasitic-on-a-canonical-author niche: nowhere will you find the claim that Shakespeare will save your life. Nor does Newstok attempt to reduce Shakespeare to milky platitudes—though he playfully cites a management book that repackages Polonius into vapid business

maxims. Here, Polonius' "This above all: to thine own self be true, / And it must follow as the night the day / Thou canst not then be false to any man" is dumbed down into an actionable principle: "Trust and integrity are critical in business . . . once one's reputation for integrity is lost, one's effectiveness is lost." Embarrassing—but measure what matters.

With a wink and a nod, Newstok offers nothing of this ilk. *How to Think Like Shakespeare* is very much not a "how-to" book. You'll find no easy answers, no paradigms, and no five-step-methods here. Instead, Newstok approaches his task indirectly. Ultimately, this makes Newstok's argument more persuasive, even if more off-putting to those Gradgrind administrators who will feel duped by a book seemingly advertised as a Shakespeare-on-teaching how-to complete with lesson plans, learning outcomes, and ideas for exit tickets. O, brave new world that has such teachers in it—Huxley's premonition has, somehow, usurped Miranda's vision.

In short, the book centers on thinking. Because Shakespeare's habits of mind were forged in the classroom, the book is more broadly about how education might cultivate or hinder one's ability to think. Though primarily concerned with Renaissance education, Newstok doesn't shy away from critiquing our "just plain wrong" contemporary approaches to the classroom, learning, and pedagogy.

Each of the fourteen, "deliberately short" chapters centers on a unifying topic but frequently breaks off, like Hamlet's soliloquys and thought itself, in any number of directions. This accounts for the book's energetic pace and mercurial nature—it is, by turns, learned and personal, colloquial and academic. The chapter headings echo Montaigne—"Of Thinking," "Of Fit," "Of Stock"—and range from topics as diverse as craft, place, attention, conversation, and freedom. That each chapter *is* an essay—that is, etymologically, an "attempt" or "trial"—is another nod to Montaigne: Each essay seeks to offer "not only an exploration of thinking, but an enactment of it." As Newstok essays the contours of a Renaissance education, he demonstrates with verve the effect it's had on his own thinking. Put otherwise, the book is Newstok's essay at thinking—and it's a sterling attempt.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of Newstok's writing, of his attempt at thinking, is his prolific use of quotation. Indeed, "quotations come *'quick as thought'* as Homer used to say"—perhaps a rococo way to get at Homer by way of Hannah Arendt. But the quotations aren't mere flourishes. Because he wants to think like Shakespeare, Newstok thinks alongside other thinkers. The way the book proceeds invites the reader to do the same.

You'll find yourself thinking with the likes of Aristotle and Augustine, Matthew Arnold and W. H. Auden, Francis Bacon and Niels Bohr, C. S. Lewis and Claude Lévi-Strauss, chapter by chapter. Moving freely between historical periods and across educational disciplines, Newstok constantly engages a dizzying array of thinkers. No surprise, perhaps, as Shakespeare was himself a literal Renaissance man, but given the hyperspecialization academia now requires, it has become

increasingly rare to find living Renaissance men. In the introduction alone, Newstok makes amiable bedfellows of Einstein, Mary Wollstonecraft, Heraclitus, Alfred North Whitehead, Gwendolyn Brooks, Goethe, Theodor Adorno, Mary Oliver, and, of course, Shakespeare. This achievement, in no small part, stems from a Renaissance practice.

The first chapter, “On Thinking,” introduces commonplace books, ubiquitous in Shakespeare’s day, where students made a habit of transcribing moving or important passages. The value here, beyond the obvious, is that “[b]y compiling commonplace thoughts of others, we can better shape our own words to become, well, less commonplace.” Interestingly, Newstok reveals that in the first quarto—the so-called “bad quarto” of 1603—Polonius’ bromides appear as suggested entries for readers’ commonplace books. Set off by quotation marks, they’re proffered as choice bits to be copied and memorized. This all helps contextualize Newstok’s impressive use of quotation. In a certain way, *How to Think Like Shakespeare* almost *is* a commonplace book itself. The writing itself demonstrates the results of a well-kept commonplace book. Regardless, it’s clear that Newstok can think with and through the thoughts of Shakespeare, et al., in part because he’s adopted this practice himself.

While we haven’t found any of Shakespeare’s commonplace books, Newstok quotes lines from Sonnet 77 that evidence Shakespeare was well-versed in the practice:

*Look what thy memory cannot contain,
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain,
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.*

You don’t have to look far in the poems or plays to see that Shakespeare’s writing is littered with borrowings, playmates or children nursed from others. He and his characters often think through the thoughts and words of others.

By way of example, at the start of chapter eight, “Of Imitation,” Newstok challenges the reader to identify which lines come from Shakespeare: *Ye elves of hills, of brooks, of woods alone, of standing lakes* or *Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves*. A nigh impossible task. The first comes from Arthur Golding’s rendering of Ovid, the translation Shakespeare knew; the second from *The Tempest*. So while commonplacing helps him think and write with others, Newstok also shows us how the exercise helped Shakespeare do the same. Though creative writing teachers obsessed with all things new and ill-defined notions of “originality” would either disallow this as plagiarism or lambast it as stifling “creativity,” thinkers in the Renaissance would have agreed with Voltaire’s formulation: “originality is nothing but judicious imitation.” Eliot goes further: “Immature

poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.”

Another Renaissance practice Newstok discusses in “Of Imitation” is called double translation. Here, students were tasked with translating a passage from Latin into English only to be asked to carry it back into Latin at a later time. The goal was not merely to capture the thrust of the passage but, importantly, to retain the unique style and voice and diction and cadence of the original author. A successful double translation exercise becomes all the more impressive, then, because even when Catullus and Cicero and Caesar reflect on the same topic, they sound so very different. How to render *that* into English? And how to render that back into a Latin recognizable as Ciceronian? While students today could perform double translation in foreign language classes, it could also be done in English.

Imagine the value of students learning to sound like Shakespeare, Dickens, and Yeats. Better yet, imagine poets took precedence over top forty and playlist algorithms in shaping what our students think about and how they sound. They’d begin to notice how form and content reinforce or undermine each other. They’d search for and delight in the *mot juste*, recognizing that language isn’t merely a tool for expressing ideas but the very means of discovering them. Most importantly, students would learn to inhabit and love their own language. They would learn how to think through language by carefully imitating the language and thought of others. How vastly superior to anything contemporary pedagogues have on offer.

Ultimately, Newstok claims that by submitting to the educational disciplines and exercises common in the Renaissance, Shakespeare achieved the freedom to think. Perhaps, that’s why Shakespeare has assisted so many others into thought, in contradistinction to the Common Core’s essential questions about grade-level appropriate readings which inevitably quash thought and the desire to know. In the midst of this meditation on freedom through submission, Newstok sets forth James Baldwin’s relationship with Shakespeare’s language as recounted in *Notes of a Native Son* and “Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare.”

Though the young Baldwin bucked at Shakespeare, considering him “one of the authors and architects of my oppression,” Baldwin the writer recognized the sobering fact that Shakespeare helped create and free him, enabling him to come to possess his own language and thus his own experiences.

My quarrel with the English language has been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I began to see the matter in quite another way. If the language was not my own, it might be the fault of the language; but it might also be my fault. Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it.

While living in France, Baldwin moved from imitating his native tongue to inhabiting it. Thus it comes as no surprise that Baldwin began to find himself

in and through Shakespeare. This is where Renaissance education leaves the page and incarnates itself into life. Though Newstok refrains from articulating it, the implication is that the careful study of Shakespeare combined with the willingness to submit yourself to the right kind of educational practices has the potential to liberate the reader in a similar way. I daresay *How to Think Like Shakespeare* testifies to the fact that it liberated Newstok. So maybe it's not such a bad title after all.

The book explores assumptions about education, recounts practices of a by-gone age, and calls on Shakespeare's plays throughout. It will be of interest to any reader or teacher of Shakespeare—and it should be of interest to any serious reader or teacher. Watching Newstok think with Shakespeare is inspiring, and he proves an amiable guide. In addition to the well-crafted arguments and expositions of various educational exercises, Newstok points the reader in numerous profitable directions. I've not been so excited to talk about footnotes since reading David Foster Wallace. One unexpected gem led me to Paul Lockhart's *A Mathematician's Lament*, a potent critique of how math is taught in schools, which I heartily recommend to anyone interested in the topic. Unlike Wallace, Newstok didn't put everything in the footnotes. Instead, he appends a further reading list called "Kinsmen of the Shelf," because though *How to Think Like Shakespeare* has to end, learning how to think never does. The book moves at a clip, is short enough to read in a weekend and dense enough to be worth many rereadings. Newstok will help you learn how to think, and he certainly offers you any number of new ways to be wrong about Shakespeare.

*Teach Like a Champion 3.0:
63 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*

by Doug Lemov

Jossey-Brass, 2021. 560 pages, \$34.95

Reviewed by John Peterson

The release of the third edition of Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion* offers an occasion to reflect on the unexpected role the book has played in the classical education world. Many classical teachers have found this handbook of teaching techniques, now twelve years old, of immense practical value. At the same time, most are uneasy about its assumptions and purposes, and object to many of its recommendations. How can we account for this disparity? The answer to this question only raises further questions about the relation of classical education to the modern world.

At the outset, one must note the book's subtitle: "63 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College." This immediately marks the work as conventional and utilitarian and, therefore, questionable in the eyes of classical educators. Indeed, Lemov is no guide for classical teachers on those very things which constitute classical education—asking fundamental questions, forming virtue, passing on culture, and pursuing ends beyond college admission. For instance, in one revealing portion of the text, where Lemov is explaining that lesson objectives ought to be "measurable," he writes that a teacher should aim to make students "feel, think, or believe" something in particular. So too, he claims that students are not "accountable for accepting the judgments and tastes of others." In contrast, these are commonly held goals among classical educators. The book will not, therefore, illuminate the classical teacher regarding the ends of education. Yet it may be instructive about means. This raises the question: can a work of modern education, defective in its understanding of ends, still teach us about means? Or is the focus on means at the expense of ends itself corrupting, and is the work therefore irredeemable for classical education?

Teach Like a Champion is, indeed, a thoroughly modern work of pedagogy. Nowhere in its pages does there appear to be such thing as "classical pedagogy." The modern discipline of education routinely distinguishes between pedagogy and "content." This distinction is so foundational that modern education could hardly exist without it, because it purports to teach pedagogy rather than content. Pedagogy consists of techniques for delivering any content whatsoever within

particular conditions and constraints: these students, this place, that time. If pedagogy were not distinct from content—if, that is to say, the content taught itself, or taught its own means of teaching itself—there would be no need for pedagogy and, by extension, no need for the modern discipline of education.

Rather than distinguishing between pedagogical technique and content, the classical tradition going back to Aristotle unites these in its conceptions of art and virtue. Art and virtue both involve knowledge and action, but in different ways. There are many different kinds of arts, but each includes principles and a technique or process informed by those principles. For instance, a shoemaker knows the different kinds of shoes and their respective purposes, as well as the parts of the shoe, and he knows how to make these and put them together. A painter knows about form and composition, light and perspective, and other elements of painting, and he knows how to use these to produce a unified piece on a canvas. The liberal arts are like this in that they contain both principles and direct their application. However, they are unique in that their application is not separate from and external to the artist. They do not produce distinct artifacts, except incidentally; the practice of the liberal arts produces knowledge, intellectual virtue, and ideally moral virtue in the practitioner. Especially, but not exclusively, in the medieval conception of the liberal arts, the knowledge contained in the arts is understood to have an inherent relation to the order of the soul. For instance, by practicing the arts of grammar, rhetoric, or geometry, we come to have knowledge not only of the order of the world, but of ourselves as part of that order. We come to see the intelligibility and orderliness of the world, and also of ourselves as capable of knowing the world, not as violent handlers and manipulators but as receptive and grateful stewards and heirs. In this way, the student of the liberal arts may become well-ordered, coming to possess not only intellectual but also moral virtue. Knowledge and action are thus connected in virtue and the liberal arts. The other arts, by way of contrast, produce artifacts distinct from and external to the artist.

Nevertheless, of both liberal and non-liberal arts, we may ask: what place is there for pedagogy or “the art of the teacher”? Does the teacher instruct in some craft? If so, he teaches the principles and practices of the craft, guiding the pupil through the application of the one to the other. Does the teacher instruct in the liberal arts? If so, he teaches the knowledge of the discipline and provides the pupil with models for emulation. But in either case, the teacher focuses on the art that the student must learn rather than on the student himself. The art itself directs the teacher’s guidance and provision.

But surely, someone might reply, there is a knack or skill to this guidance in the art and the provision of models. Even if so, it would be strange to call this skill an “art.” Is the artifact produced by this “art” the knowledge or skill the student comes to possess? This, however, is not the result of the teacher’s efforts but the student’s, because even though the teacher has demonstrated some particular

art, the student has had to practice and learn it. I suspect that in speaking of “teaching as an art,” we usually mean that the teacher forms an environment around the student, that is, shapes the conditions and restraints that will affect the student’s learning, rather than that the teacher forms the student himself. The teacher does aim to affect the student, but indirectly, through conditioning, by altering his environment in such a way that he will be more likely to learn, to choose the correct answers, and to exhibit the desired behavior.

Lemov does in fact use the language of “art” in this way. He writes that “great teaching is an art,” and like an art, requires the use of tools. Accordingly, he uses the analogy of a sculptor and his mastery of the chisel. But if the chisel is one of the pedagogical tools or techniques of the teacher, what is the stone? Is it the student, or something else? If it is the former, we must ask in what way the teacher shapes or forms the student with his tools and techniques. Here, it is useful to contrast art and virtue further. Aristotle writes that “chance and art are concerned with the same things” (*EN* 1140a), i.e., with things that could be otherwise. The fine artist can make whatever he wants; his art is not limited by his knowledge of or commitment to the good or nature. The shoemaker can make a cheap and ill-fitting shoe, the painter an ugly painting. However, virtue is not arbitrary. It cannot choose to act poorly, but only manifests good and noble action. The teacher of virtue, therefore, looks to the specific excellences of the human being and aims to bring these about in students by giving them models for emulation. The teacher perhaps teaches an art, but his efforts would not properly be called artistic. By contrast, the teacher-as-artist is skillful at bringing into being any result in the student, whether it is a knowledge or skill, by using pedagogical tools to condition the student’s behavior.

This distinction between “teaching as an art” and “the teaching of the arts” helps to explain the importance of pedagogy to modern education. The modern discipline of education relies, as most modern disciplines do, on method. The modern usage of this word, originating with Bacon and Descartes, indicates a systematic and stepwise process by which new discoveries can be made and desired effects produced without reference to first principles or knowledge of the whole of a subject. Method is the modern miracle: a great, equalizing technology which overcomes two perennial obstacles: first, the greatness of mind and effort needed to master any art; and second, the limitations on the possibility of any one individual’s efforts and understanding. Anyone can follow the steps of a method, and to great effect, without understanding or even considering the principles of an art or the ends being pursued. The individual following a method contributes a small part to a common enterprise without needing to conceive or direct that enterprise. We find the emphasis on method not just in modern science, but in philosophy and, indeed, in education. When Lemov says that teaching is an art, and that anyone can teach “like a champion,” he reflects the emphasis on method in this sense.

In this light, consider the modern conditions and constraints of education. These include large classrooms with many students who must learn multiple subjects concurrently on a prescribed and accelerated timeline punctuated with standardized tests. Their performance on these tests, in turn, will greatly affect both the course of their lives and the assessment of their teachers' and their schools' performance. This environment is already the product of the modern world, premised on the expectation that through method we can overcome inequalities and scarcities on an industrial scale in order to achieve some kind of justice and equality for all, here, in the form of universal, public education. This is the context of Lemov's handbook for teachers, "a tool box for closing achievement gaps," for actually accomplishing what "a thousand well-intentioned programs could not."¹ The promise of the work, and of modern education generally, is that inequality and scarcity in education can be overcome through the employment of the proper methods. Natural differences in intelligence and talent, and the inevitable distinctions of class and income that have typically made for great disparities in access to and time for education, need no longer be limits because of method.

Whether or not the fulfillment of this promise is possible, it is nevertheless the case that the institutions of modern education are meant to achieve it, and classical education as a modern movement must accommodate, in varying degrees based on circumstance, these expectations. For instance, classrooms in schools that aim to be more or less classical must accommodate large numbers of students, must in certain cases meet state standards for the teaching of prescribed knowledge and skills, and in general must include students raised in an egalitarian spirit who have modern sensibilities and face pressures from sources alien to the classical tradition. *Teach Like a Champion* will be instructive and helpful for teachers precisely where it is modern, on means or techniques in education.

This is not to say that it is only helpful because of modern conditions; it may be that in focusing on administration and rule in the classroom it includes useful, and even perennial, lessons about politics that are applicable to classroom teaching. It is able to be a guide for classical teachers because, for the most part, its treatment of these techniques is not corrupted by its shortsightedness or simplistic approach to ends. The classical teacher can roll her eyes at the book's regular reference to college as the goal of education and still learn a great deal about how to be effective as a teacher in a modern classroom. For instance, in Lemov's technique, "Reject Self-Report," he asks teachers to consider what is likely to happen, given human nature, when a class is asked, "Everyone understand that?" or "Any questions?" You don't need terms like "group dynamics" to grasp that, given this invitation, students will be less likely to voluntarily admit

¹These phrases appear in the second edition but have been removed from the third.

their confusion than if you ask, “What questions do you have?” *Teach Like a Champion* is full of useful advice like this.

It can therefore be a guide to what one might absurdly call “modern classical pedagogy.” From it you can learn that teachers must not only keep before students’ eyes the ideal and the goal of learning, but must also establish the conditions that are necessary for this learning to take place. They must plan, implement, and maintain classroom systems and routines. In doing so, they will put an order in place that students can trust, allowing them to expend effort intelligently and confidently, without guesswork and social distraction. The classical teacher can learn from Lemov the value of attending to results, about the usefulness of measuring, and the importance of not mistaking student engagement for student learning. Lemov claims the teacher is a kind of ruler, must control appearances, should not expect students to always understand her purpose, and should not assume that student desire and understanding will always be evident to her. With lessons like these, Lemov’s work goes beyond merely modern and institutional concerns to provide, in a backward and workmanlike way, insights into human nature that will be immediately familiar and potentially useful to the classical classroom teacher.

*Lost in Thought:
The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*

by Zena Hitz

Princeton University Press, 2020. 240 pages, \$16.95

Reviewed by Jesse Hake

What is the highest human good, and what idols most threaten it today? Zena Hitz answers both questions in *Lost in Thought*, a forthright and winsome case that our contemplation of God is the highest good and our devotion to utilitarianism and activism its greatest threat. While not using the language of idolatry herself, Hitz is relentless in her identification of political ends as chief among the pantheon of false gods in American culture, and she even-handedly points out the totalizing visions spun on both sides of our nation's political aisle.

It is not that Hitz rejects practical and political engagement. Insisting that "there is a difference between service and corrosive forms of activism," she stands within the Augustinian tradition that seeks to order our ends within a larger hierarchy. Covering essential territory for classical educators in clear and concise language, Hitz claims that "learning matters for its own sake, because human beings are essentially knowers, or lovers, or both," and she insists that if contemplative life "is not left to rest in its splendid uselessness, it will never bear its practical fruit."

Inviting not only all political camps but also those with various religious commitments, Hitz relates her own conversion to Christianity in direct terms without insisting that every reader recognize the end of learning and contemplation leads to God. Growing up in a Jewish home that fostered a great love of learning but with no religious practice, she explored Judaism before embracing Christianity. She eventually left a tenure-track position teaching philosophy at a prestigious university to explore a monastic vocation and took up a life of reading the classics within the small community of St John's College in Annapolis, Maryland. While defending contemplative life within the inhospitable context of American culture, Hitz not only shares her journey into Christianity but is explicit about her intellectual commitments: "I follow a tradition originating with Plato and Aristotle that distinguishes types of desire by their final end."

Within this framework, Hitz provides two primary means of rescuing our contemplative formation from our idols of utilitarian outcomes or political power, thereby allowing contemplation to foster a fuller humanity: 1) self-examination,

in which she beautifully unpacks Augustine's *Confessions* as her exemplar, and 2) the creation of art, in which she offers Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels as an example. She makes her case with such a pithy vigor that it has sparked a viral live chat with rapper M. C. Hammer as well as numerous reviews in a wide range of periodicals including *Touchstone* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Her case for the contemplative life has been questioned by critics who claim she rejects political life too completely. Defending herself in an essay for *Public Discourse* (July 21, 2020), Hitz writes:

I do sometimes call the world “the social and political world,” but by this I do not condemn all social and political life. After all, not only do I argue that intellectual life involves withdrawal from the world, but also that it nurtures communion—that is, forms of community not based on competition. . . . The figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues is very much embedded in social and political life, but he operates by a different set of values. His “unworldly” concerns give him the courage to stand up to the Thirty Tyrants and finally to the Athenian people, even in the face of death.

Not only does Hitz advocate for political action in its place, but she is also forthright about the deep Catholic convictions that led her to this conclusion. In retelling her own story in *Lost in Thought*, she relates a vision of suffering in this world that clearly calls for a response:

Under the new aspect of faith, the tensions in me seemed to stretch out to the bounds of the world and to pull at sharp hooks anchored in the depths of my inner life. I began to see that human suffering was not limited to special events and that it could not be ended by reversing particular policies. There was no need to wait for disasters to strike: they were omnipresent, as was responsibility for them. Suffering was a cosmic force, an ever-present reality, Christ crucified at the heart of the world and suffusing it up to the edges. I tried to stop shifting the suffering of others out of view, as had been my constant habit. I began to seek it out, to force myself into regular contact with it.

Without falling into political advocacy, Hitz takes for granted a line of political and economic thought that should be familiar to teachers and students in schools and homes committed to the Christian and classical tradition of education: the social teaching and economic distributism of Catholic thinkers as diverse as G. K. Chesterton, Pope John Paul II, Dorothy Day, and Alasdair MacIntyre. While broadly compatible with multiple political camps in the contemporary American landscape, these Catholic thinkers represent a distinct and deeply grounded approach to political thought in the modern age. These approaches identify human flourishing within extended family units and local communities as the highest social good, and educational endeavors committed to this “human scale” (to use

a Wendell Berry term) find it easier to keep learning primarily directed toward each person's enjoyment of contemplation for its own sake.

In her commitment to uphold no final end for humans beyond the contemplation of God (whether or not fully recognized as God initially by all), Hitz even rejects the popular case for "viewpoint diversity" (as advocated by Jonathan Haidt, for example, although Hitz does not name anyone in particular):

In reaction to the widespread ideological narrowing of education, old-school small-*l* liberals promote viewpoint diversity, the civil exchange of differing opinions. Even this school celebrates the same false god as the others: opinionating, the holding of a viewpoint. Forming an opinion has as little to do with inquiry as correctness has to do with knowledge of truth. Thus the promotion of viewpoint diversity is nearly as superficial and dehumanizing as the forms of indoctrination it means to replace. When we debate a given topic, we devise yet more effective rationalizations for what we already believe. A debate rarely spurs an earnest launch into the depths of things—not, at any rate, with the effectiveness of a good book, a fundamental human question, or an intense and open-ended conversation. A selection of viewpoints does not imply nor can it replace the virtue of seriousness.

By linking a virtue such as "seriousness" with her insistence that the pursuit and enjoyment of truth take precedence over learning to defend a diversity of truth claims, Hitz is pointing to perhaps her boldest theme: the intellectual life as, necessarily, a form of asceticism. This non-negotiable focus on the enjoyment of thought for its own sake shows up in terms of an intentional withdrawal:

For intellectual life to deliver the human benefit it provides, it must be in fact withdrawn from considerations of economic benefit or of social and political efficacy. This is the case in part because, as the little human things testify, a human being is more than an instrument of personal or public benefit. . . . Withdrawal from the world is also necessary because intellectual life is, as I have said, an ascetic practice.

Not many books with a broad appeal to contemporary Americans will also explain and advocate for a tradition of ascetic practice, but *Lost in Thought* does not shy from the task. Parents, teachers, and upper school students from diverse backgrounds and walks of life will find a delightful yet uncompromising case for how "free adults who undertake sustained and serious inquiry are not made from scratch—they are cultivated on trust."

Of course, Hitz is far from alone in her concern for how to restore our ability to cultivate free adults through a reprioritization of contemplation. Many authors such as James Williams (*Stand out of our Light*) and Neil Postman (*Amusing Ourselves to Death* and other titles) suggest that the one human capacity most

threatened by the modern world is our capacity for attention or contemplation. Josef Pieper actually connects this capacity to leisure, *scholé* in Greek, from which we get our word “school.” This prioritizing of contemplation runs through all Christian traditions. For example, in addition to the Catholic theologian Josef Pieper and Orthodox educator Devin O’Donnell (*The Age of Martha: A Call to Contemplative Learning in a Frenzied Culture*), the Protestant theologian Hans Boersma has written widely on this in books such as *Seeing God* and *Heavenly Participation*. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647 teaches, “the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

One legitimate critique of *Lost in Thought* is that Hitz does not connect her work more fully with the many other thinkers who have defended contemplation before her. That list may be far too long to enumerate. However, thinkers such as Josef Pieper and Wendell Berry whispered to me between the lines of her book, and I’m sure that Hitz could have suggested more by way of further reading. While acknowledging her debt to a specifically Platonic and Aristotelian tradition and clearly not wanting to write a technical book, Hitz also could have given a little more background for the term “intellectual” (on which she relies heavily). For example, this term makes the most sense when the underlying Greek term *nous* is connected with our intuitive capacity to see intangible realities (as with the “single eye” that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 6:22).

However, I should probably not ask for more at the end of a book as complete and satisfying as *Lost in Thought*. Hitz has achieved the wonderful task of expounding and defending a specifically Christian and Western tradition of intellectual life in a way that is fully alive and engaged with a host of contemporary voices. She demonstrates to us all that this conversation across the ages is far from dead. It turns out that we have many companions among a great cloud of quiet souls—those willing to withdraw, to observe, to read, and to create despite the constant murmurings of our restless day and age.