

# Principia



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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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## Editor's Introduction: *Principia*, Tradition, and Classical Education

*Principia* exists to host ongoing scholarly conversations between academics and practitioners about classical education: its defining characteristics, constitutive causes, similarities and differences with other models of education, the circumstances of its past and future development, and the authoritative thinkers and practitioners who shaped it and could shape it still.<sup>1</sup> Conversations like these, along with the quarrels, questions, and clarifications that permeate any real conversation about serious matters—across the dinner table or the ages—are, of course, endemic to traditions. This is manifested in the three frescoes Raphael painted in the Vatican's Stanza della Segnatura: the *School of Athens* (*Scuola di Atene*), the *Parnassus* (*Il Parnaso*), and the *Disputation of the Holy Sacrament* (*La Disputa*), depicting the traditions of philosophy, poetry, and theology.<sup>2</sup> Together, they illustrate the dialogical nature of tradition, no less ours than others.

In the center of the well-known *School of Athens*, Plato cradles his *Timaeus* while his student Aristotle carries his *Ethics*, and they contend with one another about the orienting *telos* of philosophy: is it the “vertical” of the transcendent forms above or the “horizontal” of the immanent world within? And are the two philosophers the focal point of the fresco, or the dialectical conversation that fills the space between them? Around them, clusters of scholars, teachers, and students from different eras consider distinct arts of inquiry within the liberal tradition. Zoroaster, Ptolemy, and Protogenes discuss astronomy; Averroes, Pythagoras, and Permenides pursue arithmetic and music; and Socrates leads Alcibiades and others through some withering dialectic likely about justice. In the *Parnassus*, the scene centers on Apollo playing a contemporary lyre (a *lira da braccio*), surrounded by the nine muses and, beyond them, small knots of discoursing poets from antiquity to the Renaissance. Homer sings his epic flanked by Virgil and Dante in conversation. Below are Sappho, Ovid, and Horace, and across from them, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Ariosto, all locked in lively exchange.

<sup>1</sup>Many will recognize here the five common topics of invention.

<sup>2</sup>These three are complemented by a fourth fresco depicting justice and the virtues, along with four ceiling rondels that represent each of the four frescoes.



Similarly, the *Disputation* draws theologians, poets, and churchmen from across time into one animated scene. Piles of recently consulted books fall off the steps, while others are actively being written, read, and in St. Augustine's case, marked with a finger for future reference. We see Boethius, Aquinas, and Dante (poet in one fresco, theologian in another), along with Ambrose, Gregory the Great, Bonaventure, and others. Unlike the *School* and *Parnassus*, this company debates a single question that concentrates the conversations and the scene: the nature of the eucharistic sacrament. And even though the triune God and the company of heaven observe the debate, and the Holy Spirit animates it, the theologians on the ground are left to deliberate how best to understand and describe the presence of Christ in the host.

Much more could obviously be said about each fresco, but together, they represent an inescapable aspect of tradition, namely, that important matters are worth debating, and achieving unanimity on complex ideas or practices by end-of-day Friday is neither necessary nor, in many cases, possible. So in each scene, friends at leisure eagerly pursue the true, good, beautiful, and holy, united by their shared pursuit even if not their shared conclusions.

Clearly, as the frescoes suggest, people who are both intellectually and morally virtuous often disagree with one another about complex matters, so when that happens, either in history or today, we accept it as part and parcel of pursuing a significant project in common with others. Alasdair MacIntyre, whose ideas about tradition drew from the nineteenth-century educator John Henry Newman, considers this a defining feature of tradition: "a tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of both internal and external debates."<sup>3</sup> This aspect of traditions is also suggested by Edmund Burke's claim that tradition is an extended partnership across space and time: "As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."<sup>4</sup> Along with Raphael's frescoes, this view of tradition as a partnership across time recalls Bernini's famous sculpture in Rome's Galleria Borghese of Aeneas fleeing burning Troy, carrying his father Anchises (hence, the past) and leading his son Ascanius (hence, the future) toward the new land they hope to build together. Here, the present inhabits a tenuous space, bearing the weight of the past along with a duty to the future.

However, this conversation and partnership can take multiple forms. Aristotle had to discern how best to respond to Plato, Bonaventure to Boethius,

<sup>3</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 12.

<sup>4</sup>Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, (London: John C. Nimmo, 1887), 3:359.

Aeneas to Anchises. As do we to all of them. One option would be to accept rather obsequiously everything the preceding generation has handed us, thinking it perfect and inviolable, and another would be to reject that inheritance entirely, assuming it to be irrelevant to the contemporary moment or inadequate to contemporary needs. Jaroslav Pelikan, who also learned how to think about tradition from Newman, explains:

We do well to recognize as infantile an attitude toward our parents that regards them as all-wise or all-powerful and that is blind to their human foibles. But we must recognize no less that it is adolescent, once we have discovered those foibles, to deny our parents the respect and reverence that is their due for having been, under God, the means through which has come the only life we have. Maturity in our relation to our parents consists in going beyond both a belief in their omniscience and a disdain for their weakness, to an understanding and a gratitude for their decisive part in that ongoing process in which now we, too, must take our place, as heirs and yet free.<sup>5</sup>

We see both the infantile and the adolescent at work in our cultural, ecclesial, and political traditions. For its part, *Principia* hopes to help educators in the classical tradition avoid these postures by encouraging the maturity Pelikan advocates and supporting a grateful and discriminating classical progeny that, not unlike Raphael and Bernini, piously receives the endowment from the past while being willing to develop it in new ways for the present. But that requires relevant research, debate, and dialogue with the past and with one another as thoughtful interlocutors engaged in a common project. *Principia* hopes to encourage these charitable and constructive conversations in its pages and, by extension, within the respective academic institutions of our readers.

This issue of *Principia* fosters conversations around several important topics, offering not a series of final words, but rather good words that invite additional good words from others. Amy Richards' opening article, "Strange Vocations: Anthropology, Disability, and the Heart of Classical Education," challenges our paradigms for educating students with special needs, teasing out two implicit anthropologies, one "open" and one "closed," that animate divergent practices in the contemporary educational world. Drawing on Wendell Berry's concept of the "Great Economy," Richards develops the concept of "doxological classrooms." As she writes, "Such classrooms are founded in praise—praise of the Great Economy within whose scope we can understand our human vocations, including strange vocations that highlight the beauty of Providence, whose workings break open our illusions of control in order to open us out into the fullness of our humanity through relationship." Though previous generations of classical educators may not have developed a coherent, practical vision for educating all students

<sup>5</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 54.

classically, especially those with unique physical or intellectual needs, Richards' article endeavors to advance a conversation that does just that.

Amy Richards' article is followed by Erik Z. D. Ellis' "The Historical Semantics of the Contemporary Classical Education Movement." In it, Ellis extends my opening reflections on tradition to examine terminology frequently used to define the relation between the contemporary moment and the past, including "renaissance," "renewal," and "recovery." Though his article does not investigate the term "movement" at length, it too seems ripe for assessment. Is contemporary classical education a "movement" or simply the latest moment in a long, ever-developing tradition?<sup>6</sup> For his part, Ellis develops his reflections around two concepts whose essence will be familiar to most classical educators, even if the terms are not: the "kataleptic" and the "analeptic." According to Ellis, classical education's attempt to bring vertical "cosmic order down from heaven to earth might rightly be called *katalepsis*," whereas the horizontal "mimetic and emulative recovery of historical practice" might be called *analepsis*. Ellis argues that a coherent and comprehensive extension of the tradition will require educators who attend to both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of this work, and he compels us to consider how well we are doing and describing either in the present moment.

The latter three articles introduce readers, perhaps for the first time, to scholar-educators who shared a common vision with contemporary classical schools, and whose works illustrate the long conversation that has perpetuated the holistic vision and practice of liberal education. These three articles also demonstrate that though the current expansion of classical schools began around 1980, they did not begin *ex nihilo* but drew on a long tradition of intellectual reflection that continued well into the twentieth-century about the significance of traditional liberal education for both the individual and society.

Our third article, "Educating the Virtuous Citizen: A View from the Renaissance," comes from the generous willingness of James Hankins and Harvard University Press to share a chapter from Hankins' new book, *Political Meritocracy in Renaissance Italy: The Virtuous Republic of Francesco Patrizi of Siena* (Harvard University Press, 2023). This piece introduces a central figure of the Italian Renaissance, but one likely unknown to most readers: Francesco Patrizi of Siena (1413–1494). Hankins judges Patrizi to be "the first Western political philosopher since antiquity to devote sustained attention to the question of how

<sup>6</sup>I have long questioned the value of calling the contemporary practice of classical education a "movement," since that designation usually implies a short-term effort focused on cultural, political, or economic change, after which the so-called movement necessarily dissipates, e.g., the suffragist movement, temperance movement, hippie movement, civil rights movement, labor movement, anti-apartheid movement, and so forth. Whenever one of these movements achieved its end or ran its course, the movement *qua* movement ended. We hope that not to be the case with the tradition and practice of classical education, hence my hesitation with the appellation "movement."



a republic devoted to liberty and equality could uphold meritocratic principles in government—how it could ensure that its rulers and political class generally were public-spirited, well-educated men of virtue and wisdom.” According to Hankins, part of Patrizi’s answer to this question “involved a revival of classical education both in the family and in public schools.” Patrizi represents one of those educators from the tradition who shares our contemporary concerns and supports much of our contemporary practice.

In our fourth article, Christopher Beckham introduces readers to another largely unknown educator, and one closer in time than Patrizi: William C. Bagley, Professor of Education at Columbia University’s Teachers College until 1939. In his article, “Defending Intellectual Work in Schools: William C. Bagley’s Approach,” Beckham judiciously places Bagley in conversation with his contemporary, the influential educational theorist John Dewey, and examines Bagley’s 1909 essay “Education and Utility.” According to Beckham, Bagley regards education as preparation for a whole life, and considers traditional forms of education superior to progressive ones for accomplishing that end, and especially for developing the “nimble mind” needed to navigate the personal, professional, and political challenges students will face throughout life. Though Beckham does not make the connection explicit in this article, these debates resemble the influential debates happening at the same time between Anna Julia Cooper, W. E. B. DuBois, William Sanders Scarborough, and Booker T. Washington, debates that together anticipate the trajectory of education in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In Bagley’s assessment, traditional liberal arts education that trained the mind to observe, evaluate, investigate, and discover better prepared students for what lay ahead and better prepared society to flourish. Beckham summarizes Bagley’s concerns: “If schools set aside books, reading, and the basic social arts of communication and computation as being too intellectual, and of limited value because they did not feature enough action on the part of students, then real consequences for society ensued.” Beckham notes that because Bagley was a champion of “democratized liberal education” in public schools, he might be concerned were classical education only available in private schools, but might be encouraged to see the rise of classical charter schools that make classical education more accessible to a wider public.

Whereas Christopher Beckham’s article largely focused on intellectual formation in dialogue with William C. Bagley, in our final article, “An Epistemological Rationale for Classical Education,” Jon Fennel and Timothy Simpson explore the integration of intellectual and moral formation in dialogue with the educator Harry S. Broudy and philosopher Michael Polanyi. Their concern is largely to avoid subjecting education, classical or otherwise, to a narrowly defined assessment and accountability regime that systematically ignores the holistic formation of human persons, including especially the tacit knowledge possessed by the generative memory and moral imagination. According to Fennel and Simpson,

“It is Polanyi’s theory of tacit knowing that provides the epistemological framework for the suggestion that we may learn to use general education associatively and interpretively even while forgetting much of the content studied in school. Though forgotten, it is not any less effective or influential in our comprehension of the world. General education, then, is useful—though not in the ordinary sense of the word—because it makes both our world and our selves intelligible to us.” Besides Broudy and Polanyi, the authors draw on Plato, Aristotle, MacIntyre, and others to demonstrate that tacit knowledge includes the allusionary store of an associative memory and the properly ordered loves of the moral imagination, both of which are essential to human formation and neither of which can be properly accounted for by contemporary systems of assessment and accountability.

These five articles, and the book reviews that follow, clarify and perpetuate several lines of inquiry important to classical educators about which they may come to different provisional conclusions. As I suggest above, classical education must needs be a dialogical partnership between past and present, scholars and practitioners, judicious adults and their parental forebears. Raphael’s frescoes, Bernini’s sculpture, and the ongoing tradition remind us that, however passionately we debate the nature and work of classical education, thoughtful and charitable conversations are essential to furthering our understanding and practice of the True, Good, Beautiful, Holy, Healthy, Beneficial, and Neighborly. If *Principia* can encourage and host some of those conversations, it will have played its part well. On behalf of the editors, we invite you to join the ongoing conversations within!

Sincerely,

Brian A. Williams  
General Editor

# Strange Vocations: Anthropology, Disability, and the Heart of Classical Education

*Amy Gilbert Richards*

**ABSTRACT:** Every vision of education relies on an inchoate anthropology—an implicit understanding of what it is to be human. This article seeks to bring the anthropologies implicit in modern and classical visions of education to light. Uncovering their respective understandings of freedom and disability reveals why we should accept the anthropology implicit in a classical vision of education. This understanding of anthropology through the lens of disability leads us to the heart of classical education by illuminating the strange vocations both of persons with disabilities and of classical educators. Further, it has important implications for the practices of classical schools in welcoming students with disabilities and learning differences.

Underlying every vision of education is a picture of what it is to be human—an anthropology. Yet our anthropologies frequently go unexplored in educational theory as it grapples with more tangible questions of curriculum and pedagogy. But it is only when we bring our inchoate anthropologies to light that we can examine what we are really trying to teach children to be and to do. Note that this ordering—to be and to do—reverses the focus of modern education. For in modern education, according to Stratford Caldecott, “We have been educating ourselves for *doing* rather than *being*.”<sup>1</sup> This prioritization of doing over being exposes the crux of the differences between the underlying anthropologies of modern and classical educational practices. However, it is only when we focus

<sup>1</sup>Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2012), 11.

Amy Gilbert Richards is Affiliate Professor and Chair of Philosophy and a Faculty Fellow in the Master of Arts in Classical Teaching (MAT) in the Templeton Honors College at Eastern University. She is completing a monograph tentatively titled *Strange Vocations: On Disability and Classical Education* (Classical Academic Press).



on being through the lens of disability that we can see these differences and their consequences clearly and thereby work towards articulating an adequate anthropology.<sup>2</sup> Further, this reflection on disability's role in anthropology, I argue, demonstrates that we cannot consider our approach to disability as a secondary issue in the growth of the classical renewal in education.

### ENCLOSED VS. OPEN ANTHROPOLOGIES

The truth of Caldecott's claim becomes evident when we examine common practices of modern education, whether in its industrial or its progressive/romantic modes. In the former, we see the reduction of the child to her capabilities for future production of various kinds, and an almost exclusive focus on developing the skills needed for success in the modern-industrial marketplace. In the latter, we see a focus on the nurturing of a unique, individual self emerging from the child's actions. In this progressive/romantic mode, the purpose of education is to assist the child in her individual "self-actualization," with the role of the teacher as a kind of midwife not to truth but to "authenticity" as expressed via outward action.

While these two modern modes of education aim at seemingly contrary goals—success in the marketplace vs. creative self-expression—in reality, they share the same focus on *doing*, albeit expressed in different keys. In the industrial mode, the focus on doing is straightforward, as industrial education defines success in terms of students' productive capacities. In the progressive/romantic mode, however, the focus might seem at first glance to be on the students' unique *being*. Those working in this mode often speak as though the child possesses an inner self to which he is obligated to be true and from which all of his actions ought to flow. However, when we press on this picture, we see that since such a self defines itself for itself, there is nowhere for this inner being to reside except within the sum of the individual's doings—including his act of self-definition.<sup>3</sup> The self resides, in a sense, in its own performance.

<sup>2</sup>Right at the outset, I want to recognize the importance of the personal dimension in any discussion of disability. As Henri Stiker says, "People struck by disability, and their circle of family and friends, are among us . . . and among our readers. Every effort at theorizing also enters into a relational context, into a communication. . . . Thus, respect for our intended readership . . . is a part of the approach, and not simply part of the accompanying ethics." See Henri Stiker, *A History of Disability*, trans. William Sayers (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 2. Stiker's connection between philosophical treatments of disability and a knowledge that can only emerge through relationship resonates deeply with my own treatment of disability in this paper.

<sup>3</sup>There is also a deeper irony here. The "authentic" self is increasingly defined by choices readily available in the consumer marketplace. Thus, a person feels "authentic" when he is choosing from identities ready made for him by corporate forces. Here, we see the alliance between the industrial and progressive/romantic modes of education: the latter defines its "authenticity" through choices provided to it by the former, but in unique combinations. Both modes abjure the true human *telos* as understood through the open anthropology we will articulate below. For an analysis of this

The goals of industrial and progressive/romantic education together make a kind of two-sided coin of production and performance—with each side focused on doing in a particular mode. Both modes can affirm Sartre's thesis that "There is no reality except in action. . . . Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing less than his life."<sup>4</sup> Indeed this claim could serve as a manifesto for the prioritization of doing over being. Given this shared affirmation, it is perhaps unsurprising that the industrial and progressive/romantic modes of modern education often exist unselfconsciously side-by-side in many contemporary schools, which switch between these modes with ease, seemingly unaware of any tension between them.

The reason for this easy coexistence becomes even clearer when we realize that both modern modes of education share what I will call an "enclosed anthropology"—an understanding of what it is to be human in which human beings are not responsible to or for any "givens" beyond the scope of their own choice and action. An enclosed anthropology sets human beings within a horizon that is not open to anything beyond itself. In such an anthropology, the *telos* of education is the individual's ability to engage in a kind of "unencumbered striving"<sup>5</sup> towards self-chosen ends—whether of wealth (the aim of industrial education) or of self-actualization (the aim of progressive/romantic education). Given their focus on doing, all enclosed anthropologies can also be described as anthropologies of accomplishment, wherein control over circumstance is the epitome of human achievement and meaning.

Standing over against both the industrial and progressive/romantic modes of modern education and the enclosed anthropology undergirding them is the classical model of education. In this model, the goal of education is the recognition of and movement towards a human *telos* which human beings themselves do not determine. In other words, to use Wendell Berry's term, classical education begins with the recognition that we are part of a "Great Economy" that is not of our making but to which we are responsible. Berry outlines four principles of the Great Economy, which he thinks we need to understand if we are to act rightly in the world:

1. The Great Economy "includes everything; in it, the fall of every sparrow is a significant event. We are in it whether we know it or not and whether we wish to be or not."

phenomenon, see Matthew Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015).

<sup>4</sup>Jean Paul Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism," in *Essays in Existentialism*, ed. Wade Baskin (New York: Citadel Press, 1965), 47.

<sup>5</sup>I draw this phrase from Kate Taylor, "Sex on Campus: She Can Play that Game, Too," *New York Times*, July 12, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/fashion/sex-on-campus-she-can-play-that-game-too.html>.

2. Everything in the Great Economy “is joined both to it and to everything else that is in it . . . [it] is orderly.”
3. “Humans do not and can never know either all the creatures that the [Great Economy] contains or the whole pattern or order by which it contains them.”
4. Even though “we cannot produce a complete or even an adequate description of this order, severe penalties are in store for us if we presume upon it or violate it.”<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, this description of the Great Economy contains both a cosmic picture and a moral conclusion. The cosmic picture places human beings within a horizon that opens out onto eternity, making it an “open anthropology.” The moral stance flowing from such an open anthropology can be described as a kind of cosmic piety, which “entail[s] that every person born into the world [is] born with a divine obligation; we [are] all born into a morally defined cosmic order and [are] thus obliged to live in a way concomitant with that moral order.”<sup>7</sup> Such an open anthropology placing us within a Great Economy can take many forms. The anthropologies of the Greco-Roman classical world—the birthplace of classical education—were “open” in the relevant sense, as are, of course, religious anthropologies that define human life in relation to a Transcendent order.<sup>8</sup>

Classical education, in requiring as its soil a cosmic piety towards an order that both transcends and defines the “little economies” in which we find ourselves, thus begins with a devotion to a reality which human beings do not create. This devotion, this cosmic piety, includes within itself the call to activate our unique human potential for *knowledge* of the Great Economy itself and of our little economies in light of the Great one. As Iris Murdoch says, “It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is.”<sup>9</sup> This first task is followed by a second—to *act* in light of this vision. Together, these two tasks form the core of the human vocation and thereby the goal of classical education. We understand this core most fully when we see that these two tasks form the two dimensions of prudence, which

<sup>6</sup>Wendell Berry, “Two Economies,” in *The Art of the Commonplace*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 220. Note that “the Great Economy” is Berry’s term, but he uses it as a more neutral name for the initial term proposed by a friend of his as adequate to contain a true understanding of the human condition: the Kingdom of God.

<sup>7</sup>Stephen Turley, *Awakening Wonder: A Classical Guide to Truth, Goodness, and Beauty* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>8</sup>In what follows, I will draw most deeply—if usually implicitly—on a Christian “open anthropology,” which acknowledges not only a Transcendent order but a personal Creator. This it shares, of course, with other monotheistic religions. Where it goes beyond a bare monotheism is in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. I believe these doctrines beautifully illuminate the deepest truths of the Great Economy, but, in this essay, I shall draw only on the distinction between enclosed and open anthropologies rather than on a specifically Christian understanding of the latter.

<sup>9</sup>Iris Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts,” in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 375.

Aristotle claims is, in a sense, definitive of the whole of virtue.<sup>10</sup> The formation of virtue grounded in the opening of ourselves to the illumination of transcendent Reality is the vocation given to us by the nature of our being.

The idea of a vocation—a calling—can only emerge within an open anthropology, for only the Transcendent could issue such a call. Thus, we see that an open anthropology is an anthropology of relationship. For in an open anthropology, we are always already in relationship—with the Creator (or the Transcendent order), with our fellow human beings, and with the natural order as a whole. Given these “givens,” the scope of our choice and action are, to a large degree, prescribed for us, and our task is not to strive for successful independence from all responsibility that is not self-imposed, nor to create our own “authentic” selves through our action, but to respond to our human calling—our vocation—which comes, as noted above, from without, from the structure of the Great Economy. Because we have a nature that we do not choose, our *telos* is determined not by the choices we make through our doing, but by the givenness of our being. Classical education’s goal, therefore, is to assist us in responding to this call. It seeks to train us toward prudence by guiding our seeing and its translation into doing as we unfold our being through time. In other words, it seeks to help us become what we already are, rather than to define ourselves through our actions.

### FREEDOM, ENCUMBRANCE, AND DISABILITY

Despite the foundational differences between enclosed and open anthropologies traced above, one thing on which both anthropologies agree is the centrality of freedom to our humanity. However, the views of freedom endemic to each anthropology have radically different consequences for how we understand the relationship between human nature and “encumbrances” such as disabilities. In this way, disability serves as a crucible in which any anthropology must be tested. And it is by uncovering the view of disability endemic to an enclosed anthropology, I argue, that we can see most clearly its inadequacy and thereby the inadequacy of any educational model which flows therefrom.

In an enclosed anthropology, to be free is to be free *from* outside interference—whether of nature or of other people. This type of freedom seeks to transcend the limits of nature through technocratic control and to circumscribe our responsibilities within the scope of our individual choice.<sup>11</sup> In such a picture,

<sup>10</sup>See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144b18–32. As Josef Pieper notes: “The precondition for every ethical decision is the perception and examination of reality. And yet this perception makes up only the first half of prudence; the other half consists in “translating” our knowledge of reality into decision and action. We are thus able to state: prudence is the art of making the right decision based on the corresponding reality—no matter whether justice, courage or temperance is at stake.” See Josef Pieper, *An Anthropology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 52.

<sup>11</sup>Note that this is the picture of personhood implicit not just in our educational system but in the very structures of our government. The idea of political responsibility arising solely through

we are most fully human when we can engage in the unencumbered striving towards self-chosen ends highlighted in our discussion above. But, in offering us such an anthropology of accomplishment, enclosed anthropologies tell a troubling story about those persons who are not and cannot be self-sufficient and productive—the very young, the very old, and, perhaps most especially, those with profound disabilities. For in order to remain consistent with their own tenets, they have to say, in essence, that such persons are less than fully human. If a person is encumbered—through physical or mental limitations—then her worth is thereby diminished. If there are things she cannot *do*, then the very purpose and goodness of her *being* is put into question. Having relationships with such persons—or becoming such a person—leaves us, precisely, encumbered. And if unencumbered striving towards success really is our key goal, such persons are seen, almost inevitably, as burdens to be borne or problems to be solved.

Timothy Basselin pinpoints the issue when he says, “We as a society still are not sure what to do with the disabled, still are not sure if they are whole people or if they need to be fixed first.”<sup>12</sup> This “fixing” can take one of two forms: medical or social. These two forms lead to eponymous models of disability. Though the medical and social models of disability are often taken to stand in opposition to one another, like the industrial and progressive/romantic models of education examined above, their opposition turns out, on closer examination, to be ephemeral. For they are ultimately grounded in the same cult of control emerging from an enclosed anthropology of accomplishment, which subsequently undergirds the industrial and progressive/romantic models of education.

In the medical model, we approach disability as something to be cured through technological intervention. Such a model identifies and locates the “problem” of disability firmly within the individual, who is measured according to the standard of independence and accomplishment outlined above. The medical model’s “solution” to disability, then, is the use of our technological ingenuity to “fix” the individual as much as possible through the means of medical treatment. In an educational context, we see this in the practice, for instance, of medicating students with ADHD so they are better able to function like so-called “normal” students—i.e., to sit still for long periods of time.

In the social model, the “problem” of disability is taken to be social structures and attitudes that inhibit persons with disabilities from full, autonomous participation in modern life. The “solution,” within the social model, lies in cham-

social contract assumes this enclosed anthropology. For further exploration of how the liberal democratic ideal of personhood and its attendant political and social structures is problematic from the perspective of disability, see Stanley Hauerwas, “The Politics of Gentleness,” in *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness* by Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 81–89.

<sup>12</sup>Timothy Basselin, *Flannery O’Connor: Writing a Theology of Disabled Humanity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 14.



pioneering societal interventions that normalize disability and create opportunities for disabled people. In an educational context, the approach might be to switch classroom tasks frequently in order to mirror the preferred pace of an ADHD student, never leaving long periods of silence or requiring sustained work.<sup>13</sup>

Before moving forward, it is important to acknowledge the partial truths captured by both of these models. For a person suffering from paralysis, for instance, innovative wheelchair technology developed according to a medical model can be a great good, allowing her to travel to places that would otherwise be closed to her. In like manner, when she arrives at these places, a social-model-inspired ramp ensures that she can enter easily, demonstrates that she is welcome, and facilitates the good of her presence for the communities therein that might otherwise remain closed to her. If there were not implicit sense in these models, if they did not speak powerfully to pieces of our human experience with disability and the kinds of challenges it presents, they would not be so pervasive! However, upon closer examination, neither of these models alone nor both together offers an adequate understanding of disability. For both ultimately ground themselves in the ideal of unencumbered autonomy. In both of these models, anything that cannot be controlled—anything we *suffer* rather than *do*—will be “censored,” rejected as useless, indeed opposed as an evil, always and in every way to be avoided.”<sup>14</sup> And so, through medical or social interventions we attempt to cure or solve—that is, *control*—the limitations imposed by disability. What we cannot do, within either of these models, is to accept disability and the difference that it will not let us avoid. We cannot see disability as part of a vocation, however strange and remarkable.

This is why both the medical model and the social model of disability fall short—though they both contain important truths. Both of these models have, ironically, similar inclinations in the end: to claim powers for human beings that do not properly belong to them. The danger of the medical model lies in its confusion of caring with curing. When we confuse these two things, we often conclude that those who cannot be cured are not worthy of our care. The danger of the social model is twofold. First, it denies (or often comes too close to denying) that there is power to nature itself, and refuses to let us name impairment

<sup>13</sup>Note that such a strategy would operate on a common stereotype of ADHD, which can be generalized in a way to all people through our fragmented patterns of attention stemming from our technology use. ADHD students are, in reality, capable of laser-focus for long periods of time on a particular question or problem that interests them. A better name for ADHD, suggested by Edward Hallowell and John Ratey, would be “Attention Variability Syndrome.” See Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey, *Delivered from Distraction: Getting the Most out of Life with Attention Deficit Disorder* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 179. For more on technology, education, and attention, see Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 211–48.

<sup>14</sup>John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life: Evangelium Vitae* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1995), 42.

as what it is so that it can be seen clearly. Second, it imagines that through the correct social interventions or manipulations, we can create a world without sin or suffering. It claims we can fix the plight of people with disabilities short of the eschaton without the grace of God through collective action here and now. Thus, the dangers of both models open a clear path toward tyranny.

Flannery O'Connor traces this trajectory from tenderness to tyranny quite clearly:

Busy cutting down human imperfection, they are making headway also on the raw material of good. Ivan Karamazov cannot believe, as long as one child is in torment; Camus' hero cannot accept the divinity of Christ, because of the massacre of the innocents. In this popular pity, we mark our gain in sensibility and our loss in vision. If other ages felt less, they saw more, even though they saw with the blind, prophetic, unsentimental eye of acceptance, which is to say, of faith. In the absence of this faith now, we govern by tenderness. It is a tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced-labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber.<sup>15</sup>

O'Connor here paints in vivid strokes the truth that "a culture that deems itself able to save itself from suffering is a culture that will necessarily marginalize and even demonize those who suffer, or those it believes are suffering, and will ultimately find a way to eliminate them."<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of an enclosed anthropology, people with disabilities bring to light the fears of those (temporarily) "abled" in body or mind. What we consider "disabling" thus leads us to the heart of what kinds of limitation and loss—and thus, conversely, what kinds of freedom and gain—we consider most important. Persons with disabilities unmask our illusions of control, such that we are "suddenly faced with an unaccustomed bit of the *real*" that cannot be connected to autonomous action and which thus belies the myth that we are able to make ourselves.<sup>17</sup> Not wanting to adjust to this reality, we find ways to censor or eliminate it—through the gas chamber, whether imposed or chosen, if no other means can be found.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Flannery O'Connor, "Introduction to A Memoir of Mary Ann," in *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 227.

<sup>16</sup>Basselin, *Flannery O'Connor*, 32.

<sup>17</sup>Stiker, *A History of Disability*, 6.

<sup>18</sup>If a focus on the possibility of certain understandings of disability leading to the gas chamber seems like hyperbole, consider that we are less than a century out from the Nazi regime's explicit campaign to kill people with disabilities. And, lest Americans congratulate ourselves for opposing this view, recall that in the twentieth century, the US had explicit laws permitting, and in some cases requiring, eugenic programs, including forced sterilization of people with intellectual disabilities. And, lest we twenty-first-century people congratulate ourselves, consider that in many Western countries, the abortion rate for children prenatally diagnosed with Down Syndrome is upwards

We need not draw the dangers of an enclosed anthropology and its attendant understanding of freedom so starkly as to end in the gas chamber, however, to see how an untethered tenderness pervades and distorts our understanding of disability and the possibility of strange vocations. For we often try to eliminate difference not by direct extermination but through the seemingly compassionate goal of making people fit in. This issues in what Thomas Reynolds calls the “cult of normalcy.” As Reynolds argues, “Strangeness disrupts the predictable world and so disorients us, making us conscious of the extent to which we are vulnerable.”<sup>19</sup> When we have no context for this vulnerability, no overarching narrative of a Great Economy through which to understand our own weakness and lack of control, those whose weakness and difference cannot be hidden—such as persons with disabilities—threaten “to spoil the fabric of a community’s mutually reinforcing sense of the good,” which is grounded in the possibility of control. In the presence of disability, then, “[t]he predictable world is thrown into relief,” and communities develop a cult of normalcy as a protective strategy to safeguard their ability to control their own situations. This reinforces their perceived ability to achieve a vision of the good wherein autonomous choice determines success along the axes of accomplishment. What is considered “normal” is then defined as what everyone should reasonably want, and those unable to achieve it are either assimilated—made to pass as normal as much as possible—or excluded.

Strategies for passing are as diverse as disabilities themselves, and are generally aimed at creating as much autonomy as possible so that persons with disabilities are able to shed as much of their encumbrance as possible. From various walking aids or wheelchairs for those with physical disabilities to training in the practices of social convention for the neurodivergent, so-called “normalization” devices abound. And, indeed, these devices and strategies themselves are often used to great good, as in how the mobility of a wheelchair might broaden the life of a paraplegic. To take another example, the calming strategies taught to certain children with, say, Autism Spectrum Disorder or ADHD can often mitigate their very real internal struggles and offer them a way to channel their gifts and handle their challenges more effectively. However, despite the potential for good of some of these normalization practices, very often we develop such devices or encourage their use as much to hide disability from the outside observer as much as possible as to help the disabled person. Or, perhaps more accurately, we seek to hide the dependence, discomfort, or work—the encumbrance—that employing such a normalization strategy creates for the person living with it.

of 90% (in the US, data suggest that this rate is about 70%). Consider as well increasing pushes to expand access to euthanasia in many places in the Western world, often using criteria that would define the lives of many people with disabilities as “excessively burdensome” and therefore prime candidates for assisted suicide. Our hiding of these practices in sanitizing language and claims to compassion represent just the kind of threat O’Connor articulates.

<sup>19</sup>Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 55.

The price exacted by the use and maintenance of passing strategies is generally hidden from public view. For instance, the planning and labor involved in caring for one's prosthetic and the limb to which it attaches or the hidden toll of suppressing one's natural desire to "stim" are not generally known costs of the life of an amputee or a person with autism.<sup>20</sup> Such tasks form the "invisible labor" of disability created by the cult of normalcy, labor from which persons with disabilities and those who care for them are expected to shield the majority as much as possible in order to maintain the illusion of the possibility of autonomy.<sup>21</sup> Note as well that people who are—through choice or circumstance—unable to pass are often hidden by society through strategies of segregation and congregation wherein people with similar conditions are sorted and then congregated by group outside the everyday workings of society.<sup>22</sup> The encouragement to pass and the impulse to segregate and congregate people with certain conditions show up starkly in our educational practices in particular.

In bringing the cult of normalcy into view, we see the *telos* towards which an enclosed anthropology of accomplishment leads us. In its attempt to maintain the cult of control needed to sustain the illusion that we are able to create ourselves through our actions, it ends up in a compassion that leads to cruelty. Placing ultimate value on freedom from encumbrance leaves us enslaved to our own desires and blind to a vision of nature that acknowledges a *telos* of community rather than independence. In this way, the experience of disability shows up as an inadequate understanding of human persons grounded in their capacities for doing, rather than in the nature of their being.

### STRANGE VOCATIONS: FREEDOM AND DISABILITY REIMAGINED

If this is the unpalatable *telos* towards which the freedom endemic to an enclosed anthropology leads us, how can we maintain that freedom is central to our humanity? Only by seeing that part of our vocation, part of our *being*, is to take up the particular circumstances of our lives with all of the powers of our freedom. In this way, we can serve as sub-creators, as stewards of the natural order who find joy and purpose in tending to our own particular, often unchosen, little

<sup>20</sup>"Stimming" is shorthand in the ASD community for "self-stimulating behavior" such as rocking or hand-flapping. When people with ASD are overwhelmed, or even simply excited, they often express this by stimming. While stimming can be very helpful for people with ASD in regulating their central nervous system, others can find such behavior distracting or distressing, especially when they do not understand it, and thus people with ASD are often encouraged to suppress such behavior whenever possible.

<sup>21</sup>I draw this phrase and concept from Eva Federer Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>22</sup>On segregation and congregation, see the work of Wolf Wolfensberger. A brief description of the phenomenon can be found in his "A Brief Overview of Social Role Valorization," *Mental Retardation* 38, no. 2 (2000): 105–23. Examples of such segregation and congregation would be nursing homes and institutions for people with intellectual disabilities.

economies within the Great one. Such a vision of our vocation leads us, in the face of disability, to admit the possibility of *strange vocations* within the human story, the possibility of a genuine call to live a kind of life that stands out from the rest of humanity and offers distinctive perspectives and gifts.<sup>23</sup> Allowing for such a possibility leads us directly away from anything resembling the cult of control that characterizes a modern, enclosed anthropology.

The possibility of such strange vocations points us towards a conception of freedom that does not shy away from the encumbrance necessary for genuine community. In such a true freedom, rather than being free *from* the encumbrance of relationship, we are, rather, free *to* give ourselves to the other. As St. John Paul II claims, “every man is his ‘brother’s keeper,’ because God entrusts us to one another. . . . in view of this entrusting . . . God gives everyone freedom, a freedom which possesses an *inherently relational dimension*. This is a great gift of the Creator, placed as it is at the service of the person and of his fulfillment through the gift of self and openness to others.”<sup>24</sup> It is this relational dimension of freedom that connects freedom to the human *telos*, for our proper end is not to strive through mastery of nature to live as we choose, but rather to give ourselves freely to God and to one another in love. Our freedom, therefore, does not free us from dependence on others, but rather from the tyranny of seeking accomplishment rather than relationship—with God, other persons, and the world.<sup>25</sup>

Note that when we give the gift of self, we resist the desire to control what we love. In fact, the attitude of control is always opposed to the attitude of love. Or, perhaps better, when we take up our vocation of self-gift, we direct our impulse to control inward towards the self rather than outward towards the other. Through *self-mastery*—rather than mastery of nature or of other people—we freely offer ourselves for the good of the other. This requires what I will call “telic attention,” an attention to another person which always keeps in view our mutual place in the Great Economy, our *telos* of self-gift, and our capacity—indeed, our need—to participate in the eternal.<sup>26</sup> Telic attention directs us towards the *whole* away from which all technocratic thinking must abstract through fragmentation and reduction. It recovers the vision made possible by “the blind, unsentimental eye

<sup>23</sup>I draw the phrase “strange vocations” from St. Augustine, with thanks to Brian Brock for highlighting it. See Brian Brock, *Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 30. For the original passage, see Augustine, *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 1.32.

<sup>24</sup>John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, 37.

<sup>25</sup>See also Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 107.

<sup>26</sup>In the Judeo-Christian tradition, this would be expressed as our possession of the *imago dei*. Indeed, according to St. John Paul II, the *imago dei* itself must be understood in terms of the communion of persons through self-gift for “alone, man does not completely realize [his] essence.” See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 182 (14:2).

of acceptance” of strange vocations noted by Flannery O’Connor above. Such acceptance allows us to set aside our resistance to acknowledging both human limitations and the perhaps surprising range of strange vocations to which—often through these very limitations—people may be called.

To accept those to whom we are called to give ourselves as they are, especially when they break the comfort of our conception of “normal,” is not an easy road. The self-mastery required to maintain telic attention, the cost of genuine freedom, is real and makes us vulnerable. As Reynolds notes, “This is what makes love so difficult, indeed traumatic: its gesture of giving hinges on letting go of those things by which we domesticate and manage reality so as to feel ourselves secure and in control.”<sup>27</sup> Or, as Father Zosima more memorably puts it, “love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams.”<sup>28</sup> And yet, when we risk opening ourselves to these “unaccustomed bits of the real,” we find our horizons widened. We receive the strange vocations of others for the wonders they are, and we open ourselves to the ways in which we need to respond to their vulnerability with our own, rather than trying to control them in order to normalize them and make ourselves more comfortable. Through the “blind, unsentimental eye of acceptance,” we are no longer permitted the illusion of believing ourselves omniscient, self-sufficient masters of our own destiny.

Having expanded our horizon, we are now freed to rethink the nature of disability. To do this, we must first release the rough and ready assumption that disability is easily understood and thus easily assimilated into our preexisting categories—especially the categories of brokenness and fixing, either of individual persons (the medical model) or of systems (the social model). The need to reject these habitual ways of thinking about disability came home to me most clearly in reading Hilary Yancey’s memoir *Forgiving God: A Story of Faith*. In this beautiful book, Yancey, then a graduate student in philosophy, narrates her journey of coming to mother and to try to understand her son Jack, who was born with a cleft palate, one eye, one ear, and needing round-the-clock care to breathe through a trach tube and eat through a feeding tube. She offers the following reflection on the meaning of disability:

Disabilities are hard to understand. They change and build and break down and utterly undo and complete lives. I don’t know much about what Jack’s life will be, and if I am honest, it is his to tell me what it is like, not mine to know. I can slip the trach tube in and out; I can swipe a sterile cotton tip applicator across the empty eye socket; I can kiss that small bit of extra skin. But I must wait for Jack to show me his life, to invite me inside it. And we must all wait,

<sup>27</sup>Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 117.

<sup>28</sup>Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brother Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1976), 49.

I think, to be invited in, and take off our shoes, for we stand in the presence of another human life and it is sacred, a creation, and a gift.<sup>29</sup>

It is too easy, she insists, to see Jack's conditions simply as marring his life, as obstacles to be overcome. Rather, she sees them as *part of* his embodied life, which demands from her an awed acceptance of her role in his strange vocation.

Part of this acceptance is an openness to a kind of wonder, wonder such as Yancey experiences when Jack offers her his first, radiant smile. Even though she later allowed surgery to repair his cleft—acknowledging the difficulty raised even in this term for the surgery—Yancey demands that we see that:

Jack's life is not good *despite* his cleft. I want to make that clear, so clear you can see to the bottom of it. Jack's life did not start out good, get bad, and somehow come out good despite the bad. . . . [This is] a shorthand for incomprehension, for that lack of imagination we run into over and over. . . . Saying that Jack's life is good despite his cleft, his one eye, his one ear, his craniofacial microsomia, is too cheap. Because that first smile was the most gorgeous thing I have ever seen in my life, gorgeous because, not despite.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, if we insist on a narrative that sees only a bad thing to be fixed—either through medical or social means—we miss the invitation to see more fully, to participate in the beauty of the strange vocation before us and widen our horizon to account for it.

Notice here how the openness of tenderness towards her child shifts Yancey's perspective in quite a different way from the transposition of tenderness into tyranny of which O'Connor warned in the passage quoted above. It is not accidental, I think, that this essay bears the stamp of many works written by authors who are parents of children with disabilities, learning differences, or neurodivergence—Yancey, Reynolds, and Brock all fall into this category. Some might argue that their personal investment in the questions at hand distorts their perspective. But I would argue, rather, that they have unique insight into the ways in which the strange vocations of their children ought to reshape our understanding of our humanity. The family is the school of love through which we learn to practice the unheroic, painstaking, and long-term attentiveness to the particulars of people and place not possible when our horizon is bounded by the quest for control. Our most intimate, often *unchosen* relationships reveal in a special way the nature of our being, and they open out in turn to broader communities within which we can find the only robust alternative to an individualist, technocratic mindset. When we offer ourselves as gifts to one another, the horizon opens, allowing us to receive something as glorious as Jack's smile, as unexpected as the insights of a vibrant ADHD student, as deep as silent commu-

<sup>29</sup>Hilary Yancey, *Forgiving God: A Story of Faith* (New York: Faith Words, 2018), 146.

<sup>30</sup>Yancey, 144–45.

nion with someone whose only gift can be his being, and to receive these things as strange, wondrous vocations which are part of the fabric of human nature that we are not “better off without.”<sup>31</sup>

I think we can hold the above to be true even as we acknowledge and mourn the suffering and loss often attendant on our experience of disability. We can affirm the goodness of the being of persons with disabilities even as we name and mourn the losses that they—and we—suffer because of their disabilities. But an acknowledgment and mourning of suffering, when placed in the context of the Great Economy, is not the whole of the picture—and thus the medical and social models of disability predicated only on relieving various forms of suffering without attending to their meaning will always remain radically incomplete. Because these models of disability do not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the human vocation, they cannot properly name the true dimensions of human loss and suffering. And, perhaps most importantly, they cannot illuminate the insight and surprising beauty opened through the unfolding of strange vocations even and perhaps especially amidst such suffering. It is here that I find myself drawn again and again to the quote with which I open my course on disability and classical education:

The disabled person, with all the limitations and suffering that scar him or her, forces us to question ourselves, with respect and wisdom, on the mystery of man. In fact, the more we move about in the dark and unknown areas of human reality, the better we understand that it is in the more difficult and disturbing situations that the dignity and grandeur of the human being emerges.<sup>32</sup>

Telic attention to persons with disabilities—attention which sets them within a Great Economy whose eternal horizon means that there will always be elements of our situation that lie beyond our comprehension—complicates even our experience of suffering. Acknowledging the mystery unveiled through such telic attention leads us more deeply into the truth and the possibilities of redemption contained therein. Such possibilities cannot appear when we restrict ourselves to the confines of an enclosed anthropology.

### CLASSICAL EDUCATION FOR ALL LEARNERS

What, then, does this deep dive into anthropology through the lens of disability have to say about the ways in which we go about educating for being rather than doing—or, perhaps better, for being that infuses all of our doings, setting them

<sup>31</sup>Note that this holds even if certain parts of humanity’s experience of disability can be traced back to the Fall. God redeems even what is fallen, and thus even things which would not have been in a prelapsarian state potentially have a prophetic power in our present world.

<sup>32</sup>St. John Paul II, “Message to the Symposium on the Dignity and Rights of the Mentally Disabled Person,” Vatican Website, January 5, 2004, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2004/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20040108\\_handicap-mentale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2004/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20040108_handicap-mentale.html).



in the horizon of eternity? It is here we see the power of the classical vision of the *telos* of education: to activate our particular human potential to seek the true, do the good, and admire and make the beautiful in relationship with one another.<sup>33</sup> And what educational practices allow us to pursue this *telos*? The longstanding classical response to this question is: the teaching of the liberal arts rooted in cosmic piety and crowned with philosophy and theology. This response, however, brings us back around to the challenge of disability. For it is in light of this classical commitment to the liberal arts, philosophy, and theology that many people yield to the temptation to claim that classical education is not appropriate—or even possible—for all students.

Not all students—so the argument goes—can master the liberal arts, much less the abstract disciplines of philosophy and theology. If this is the case, then it might seem that there are some students for whom a classical education is impossible and thus imprudent. In attempting to educate such students classically, we ask them to do something they are incapable of achieving—or at least of achieving at a high level—while simultaneously denying them training in the functional skills they need to navigate the workplace or achieve the highest level of quotidian functioning possible. Furthermore, in the process of trying to offer these students an education which is beyond them, we disrupt and delay the learning of other students.

We need to hear these objections in the most charitable light. For demanding students do something that truly is impossible for them is indeed cruel. And there are some children for whom the advanced practice of the liberal arts and sciences will be extremely challenging if not impossible. Further, the ability to care for oneself and others to the degree to which one is able is often a laudable, humanizing goal. However, while on the surface these arguments for not offering some students a classical education seem to draw on common sense and demonstrate compassion for students with disabilities and learning differences, in reality this view stems from at least two assumptions that should give us pause: first, that the treasures of truth, goodness, and beauty in our human inheritance are only for certain people. And secondly, that there are persons for whom doing is more important than being, or whom we ought to require to achieve a certain level of doing before we may nurture their being. This assumes that an education towards our human *telos* is *earned*, based on our mastery of certain practical skills. Note that this focus on doing over being was precisely the practice we rejected in our turn from modern to classical education. In reclaiming it here for students with disabilities and learning differences, we nullify our turn away from it for all. For, as Cheryl Swope points out in her wonderful book *Simply Classical: A Beautiful Education for Any Child*:

<sup>33</sup>I draw this formulation from the program philosophy of the Eastern University's MAT in Classical Education.

The humanity of the child with special needs—*the humanity of any child*—must determine the education he receives. Some suggest that as many as one in four children have special educational needs. Each of these children is a *human being*, created in the image of God. Shall we assign all of these students to a menial, servile education and deny them the riches of a beautiful, humane, liberating education? And, worse, shall we base our deterministic placements on early testing, with no regard to what the child might be able to overcome with the aid of an excellent teacher?<sup>34</sup>

Having experienced the American special education system from the inside, Swope sees the ways in which we make just such assignments in our schools. And she also sees that the classical education renewal often does not carve out explicit space for students who learn differently, or who are limited by various kinds of disabilities.

Swope here argues that it is only when we *begin with* our common humanity that we see the need to extend classical education to all students. An open anthropology of relationship takes this argument further, as it claims that *only when we consider human vulnerability through the lens of disability and difference can we come to a proper understanding of our common humanity at all*. If I am correct to extend her argument in such a way, this implies that if we fail to orient our hearts towards students with disabilities and learning differences, we risk presenting *all* students with a curriculum that offers a misleading understanding of truth, an incomplete narrative of the possibilities of goodness, and a picture of beauty that fails to witness to the ultimate beauty of shared vulnerability. Thus, the revelatory and prophetic voices of these strange vocations speak to both the content and the pedagogy proper to classical education—proper to an education of our *being*.

In light of this claim, note that we need to conceive of how we serve students with disabilities and learning differences in ways that challenge the medical and social models of disability that assume such students need to be fixed. Swope is again instructive:

We do not seek the dramatic. We do not propose a cure for disabilities. We seek only to educate children with physical, mental, or learning differences with the same moral instruction, academic content, and humanizing influences inherent in classical Christian education. In doing so one step at a time and one student at a time, we can teach all children not only to climb, but also to benefit from the view.<sup>35</sup>

These children do not need to be fixed before being offered an education befitting to their humanity. Rather, they are to be welcomed now and as they are. For the purpose of education is not to gain control of certain content and skills for later

<sup>34</sup>Cheryl Swope, *Simply Classical: A Beautiful Education for Any Child*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Memoria Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>35</sup>Swope, 98.

use, but to enter into relationship with the real in order to see and then to serve in our little economies in light of the Great Economy. Characterized by telic attention, this type of education seeks to draw all students towards the fullness of their being, fostering their participation in our common humanity through their particular vocations, strange though they may be.

In order truly to shift our focus from doing—even the “doing” of the skills of the liberal arts—to being, we need first to root out those places where rigor has replaced vigor in our classrooms.<sup>36</sup> While the pursuit of excellence is indeed key to a classical understanding of education—indeed, excellence is the root meaning of virtue!—our understanding of the shape of such excellence must be grounded in our anthropology. And in the open anthropology of relationship for which I argue above, this excellence must account for the power of strange vocations to break open our horizons. Note that such an anthropology requires us not just to find ways to “include” students with disabilities in what we are already doing—for such inclusion presupposes a prior exclusion.<sup>37</sup> The very notion of inclusion perpetuates a cult of normalcy whose goal is assimilation. Indeed, a “community’s marginality is implicitly underscored by the request for inclusion itself. If disability can be theorized as essential to our definition of what constitutes the human, then the *integrable* must take a back seat to the *integral*.”<sup>38</sup> So, how do we recognize all students as integral to classical education? We start by forming not “inclusive classrooms,” but what I call “doxological classrooms.” Such classrooms are founded in praise—praise of the Great Economy within whose scope we can understand our human vocations, including strange vocations that highlight the beauty of Providence, whose workings break open our illusions of control in order to open us out into the fullness of our humanity through relationship.

Please note that I am not here contending that every classical school must always accept every student. A particular classical school (at a particular time) may not be the best fit for a particular student with disabilities or learning differences. I am arguing, however, that in order to remain true to the anthropology implicit in classical education, classical schools must view increasing their ability to support—and thereby to welcome—students with the strange vocations of

<sup>36</sup>This contrast between rigor and vigor originated with Dr. Christopher Perrin, and came to me fourth-hand in a beautiful instance of classical learning synergy from Dr. Perrin to Jessica Hooten Wilson to the teachers at Naperville Christian Academy to Sarah Kwilinski to me. Many thanks to all links in this chain for introducing me to this illuminating contrast! Though I do feel obliged to confess a slight frustration that the word “rigor” has been forever ruined for me by the recognition that its root meaning of “stiffness” stifles any notion of the vitality necessary to any form of education of which I would want to be a part!

<sup>37</sup>Many thanks to Sarah Kwilinski for this illuminating phrasing of the point!

<sup>38</sup>David Mitchell, foreword to *A History of Disability*, by Henri Stiker (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019), xxi.

disabilities and learning differences as central to rather than a distraction from their mission.

Once we articulate and endeavor to live into an educational model whose goal is to welcome all students first into a classroom and then into an extended membership of mutual care and service, we begin to grasp the strange vocation of the classical teacher. For, like the person whose difference from others is not amenable to passing the litmus tests of the cult of normalcy, the classical teacher—and the classical school—stands as a challenge and a contradiction to the assumptions of our present culture. By refusing a pragmatic approach to education, we also witness to a reality larger than ourselves, towards which all human beings are called. By practicing and initiating others into cosmic piety, by seeking to expand our own and our students' horizons to see beyond our present circumstances and understand ourselves and our world in the light of the Great Economy, we resist the temptations of the cult of control that characterize an enclosed anthropology and the modern educational models that flow therefrom. We are swimming upstream. As classical educators, we need to embrace our own strange vocations—which unfold within an explicit commitment to an open anthropology of relationship and the welcome of all students that it requires—if we are to have any hope of speaking to our age, or of having anything worthwhile to say. In this way, disability leads us to the heart of classical education.

# The Historical Semantics of the Contemporary Classical Education Movement

*Erik Z. D. Ellis*

**ABSTRACT:** As contemporary classical education continues maturing as a pedagogical tradition, an institutional reality, and an academic tradition, the need has grown to clarify the nature of the project and to understand how it relates to the past. The classical education movement, which seeks to encourage human flourishing by studying and imitating the past, uses an unstable terminology to describe itself. Some speak of a “Renaissance,” others work toward what they call a “Renewal,” and still others conceive of the project in terms of a “Recovery.” In using these terms, contemporary educators and writers, knowingly or not, reenact historiographical debates about the nature of Western culture and embrace differing opinions about the meaning of the term “classical” and consequently, about what period or periods of the past are worthy of imitation. This article seeks to clarify the history of these terms, delineate how the process of cultural emulation works, and encourage classical educators to come to a deeper appreciation of the past as they chart a course for the future of their disciplines.

Historians currently speak of the “Renaissances before the Renaissance.”<sup>1</sup> The corrective is helpful, but it does little to elucidate how the agents of these alleged Renaissances conceived of themselves. There is much evidence that

I am grateful to my colleagues in the education department at Hillsdale College and Brian Williams for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

<sup>1</sup>The seminal source in this field is Warren Treadgold, ed., *Renaissances before the Renaissance: Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985). My friend and mentor Christophe Rico is convinced that we are witnessing the beginnings of a “Sixth Renaissance.” However many there were, we know too much, now, to keep maintaining that there was only one.

Erik Z. D. Ellis is Assistant Professor of Education at Hillsdale College.



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they had a sense of what they were about, formed groups that shared goals, and tracked whether they had reached them or not. There is, however, little evidence for their use of the term “Renaissance.” In fact, the cycle of cultural efflorescence, decay, and renewal proved to be so common that it raises the question of whether one ought ever to speak of a Renaissance, let alone several Renaissances before the Renaissance.

These groups were dedicated to preserving a living though enfeebled tradition. Always small and usually adjacent to but not inhabiting seats of power, they sought to emulate rather than restore a past golden age.<sup>2</sup> Although darkness did reign for a time at the end of antiquity in parts of both the East and the West—and even in the leading centers of Rome and Constantinople—the light of tradition was never entirely snuffed out everywhere. Indeed, in those times, the points of light farthest from the historical centers seemed to shine the brightest. St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai, under Muslim domination but guaranteed toleration and independence by the Prophet himself, preserved the most ancient examples of Christian art and writing. Through practice, the monastery kept these arts in flower while iconoclasm and *agraphia* ran ruin through the Empire.<sup>3</sup> At the western extent of the Empire’s old borders, beyond the reach of civilization, a Syrian archbishop of Canterbury taught the grandsons of heathen Anglo-Saxon pirates to read the Bible and the church fathers in Greek.<sup>4</sup> The students of their students evangelized the Old Saxons on the continent and became the standard bearers for a renewed form of the ancient learning, lore masters with a license from the new emperor in the West to spread the Gospel and Latinity.<sup>5</sup>

The reality was certainly unlike the stories about the *saeculum obscurum* told by Poggio Bracciolini and Stephen Greenblatt. Most retellings of this foundation myth for the Renaissance (as opposed to the several Renaissances) and thus also for modernity breathlessly describe how Poggio happened upon a tattered, ancient manuscript of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*. The unique surviving witness of that eccentric philosophical epic from Rome’s golden century, the manuscript had lain, abused and ignored, by its monastic owners, for centuries.<sup>6</sup> This telling

<sup>2</sup>Charlemagne, Leo VI, and his son Constantine VII are examples of sovereigns who participated in and patronized massive projects of cultural renewal.

<sup>3</sup>For this peculiar story, see Joseph J. Hobbs, *Mount Sinai* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), 158–61. Fr. Justin, the *bibliothekarios* of St. Catherine’s, first related the tale of St. Catherine’s perseverance to me.

<sup>4</sup>For an entry into this fascinating world, see Michael Lapidge, ed., *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>For an evocation of this period of history, see James E. Cathey, “The Historical Setting of the *Heliand*, the Poem, and the Manuscripts,” in Valentine A. Pakis *Perspectives on the Old Saxon “Heliand,”* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2010), 3–33.

<sup>6</sup>Stephen Greenblatt’s account in *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: Norton, 2011), 44, has become widely accepted. Despite its special pleading and manifest errors that have

maintains that Poggio's act of reading and copying this manuscript resurrected, singlehandedly and almost instantaneously, the dead spirit of antiquity, which cultural decay and religious change had banished for a millennium and a half. While the story is designed to appeal to contemporary classicists and modernists, a medievalist will be quick to point out that the manuscript Poggio discovered (and stole) was not the work of ancient Roman scribes he imagined it to be. It was, in fact, the product of the Benedictine monks who labored so diligently in the centuries following the reign of Charles the Great to transfer the literary remains of ancient Rome, committed theretofore to moldering and nearly disintegrated papyrus, onto high immortal parchment codices.<sup>7</sup>

When the facts are known, Poggio's hatred of monkish industry is revealed to be a heinous and unfortunately influential instance of profound ingratitude. Despite the corrective work of medievalists over the last century and a half, this story and the grand narratives built on its foundation are too useful to be discarded.<sup>8</sup> Around the middle of the nineteenth century, classical languages and the classical liberal arts became objects of scientific inquiry rather than participatory traditions.<sup>9</sup> In order to know the past more exactly, scientists had to make an object of the tradition that they intended to analyze and then ensure that they stood apart and back from it, lest their empirical objectivity be corrupted by allegiance, prejudice, or affection.

Such preservative action was met a generation or so later by a conservative reaction.<sup>10</sup> While conservation, rather than preservation, is closer to what our pre-modern and early modern forebears practiced, neither truly captures what they were about. They did not seem to think that the tradition needed saving. They believed that what they knew theoretically and actualized through practice constituted a stable tradition of wisdom, a carefully curated collection of perennial things. Despite the cyclical irruption of war, famine, and cataclysm, these things must be remembered. Because they were natural and their home

been well documented by John Monfasani and Laura Saetveit Miles, among others, the book won prestigious awards and has its own Wikipedia page.

<sup>7</sup>For an up-to-date stemmatic reconstruction, which shows a flurry of activity between 800 and 900, see the diagram in David Butterfield, *The Early Textual History of Lucretius' "De Rerum Natura"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 32.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Homer Haskins first spoke of the "renaissance before The Renaissance," in *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927).

<sup>9</sup>The revolutionary changes were apparent in higher education decades before they began to be felt in the schools. Such changes are often complete only a century after they have begun to be implemented. For an account of the seminal stage of this transition, see Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 237–39.

<sup>10</sup>The transition from Latinity and Hellenism (the study and practice of Latin and Greek) to Classical Philology (the historicist science of classical antiquity) can be conventionally dated to 1795, the publication of F. A. Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum*.

was in the mind of God, they were destined to be rediscovered every time fools forgot them or worked for their destruction. They might be discarded by foolish men, covered in ash and ruin, but these perennial things could not be destroyed because they were real.

What were these conservators doing, and what did they believe they were doing? Two groups working across Latin and Greek in the Byzantine and Frankish continuations of the Roman Empire during the ninth and tenth centuries demonstrated a common project of renewal and shared a common vocabulary to describe it. In Latin Europe, there were those who flourished around the time of Charlemagne.<sup>11</sup> They sought *renovatio* rather than renaissance, for what they hoped to renew had merely grown old. Decay is not the same as death, and that which is in its decadence may yet, through discipline and hard work, be brought back to youthful vigor. So, squads of Celtic and Germanic monks, in foundations far flung from the ancient urban centers of the Mediterranean, served a Frankish Caesar who wanted to rebuild Rome once again. As better students of history than many of their enlightened successors, these monks knew that Rome had been sacked many times, its libraries burned, its morality debased, and its buildings ruined—but they also knew that it had just as many times been rebuilt, never as it had been, and often better.<sup>12</sup>

It is at this point interesting to note a general feature of cyclical cultural renewal: *renovatio* requires an *exemplum*. Since the fifteenth century, we have been taught that Rome's golden age was the reign of Augustus, but this opinion was not the only or even the most common—even during the Renaissance. Petrarch spent much of his life, which spanned the second half of the fourteenth century, pining for the glory days of the Second Punic War, and he did as much as he could with his pen to support a failed effort to call the Roman Republic back into being.<sup>13</sup> Augustus himself complained bitterly of the luxury and softness of

<sup>11</sup>Andrew Louth's *Greek East and Latin West: AD 681–1071* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 139–66, provides a characteristically global perspective in his discussion of the ninth- and tenth-century renaissances in both empires. He is careful in his treatment of the Carolingian *renovatio* to describe the project as a recovery.

<sup>12</sup>For the urban history of medieval Rome, see Hendrik Dey, *The Making of Medieval Rome: A New Profile of the City, 400–1420* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). This work supplements Richard Krautheimer's *Rome: Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Augustus' autobiography, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, includes twenty instances of the root *aed-* (build/building) in its brief text. Suetonius, *Aug.* 28, famously tells us that the emperor “had received a city of brick and left behind him a city of marble.” Much closer to our own time, the Savoyard kings and the would-be emperor Mussolini rebuilt Rome in their own image. For the interaction of this later phase of Rome's palimpsestic urban landscape, see Alison E. Cooley, ed. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 50–55.

<sup>13</sup>Petrarch's unfinished masterpiece, the *Africa*, was a byproduct of this effort. The classic treatment is still Mario Emilio Cosenza, *Francesco Petrarca and the Revolution of Cola di Rienzo* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1913). For Petrarch's own assessment of the affair, see *Familiares* 7.7.



his contemporaries, commissioning Horace and Virgil to present first-century Romans with examples of agrarian and military virtue, reaching beyond the city's founding to tell tales of the origin of the Latin race and the golden reign of Saturn in Italy, long before there were Romans or Latins. For the Franks who lived in the century before and after Charlemagne's coronation in 800, who had liberated Rome from barbarian Lombards, and, though barbarians themselves, had restored it to Roman rule, the exemplum par excellence was Justinian, the last Latin emperor and the last undoubted Roman who could claim dominion over lands stretching from Spain to Syria.<sup>14</sup> When they built their transalpine Rome, these Franks looked to Justinian's Christian basilicas rather than the fora, palaces, and sports complexes of Augustus and his successors, which the teaching of a half millennium has taught us are the best examples of *Romanitas* in stone.<sup>15</sup> Unlike Poggio and Petrarch, scholars like Alcuin and Theodulf did not claim that the tradition had died, but that it needed renewal and regeneration.<sup>16</sup> They hoped to do for Christendom what Boethius, Cassiodorus, Benedict, and Justinian had done: to conserve what was most valuable from the past, to re-present it to their contemporaries, and to transmit it to future generations.

These sixth-century predecessors of the Carolingians could be said to have been doing the same thing as those who labored in the fourth century to effect a lasting synthesis of the Greco-Roman tradition and the Christian faith. They were of course following those in the second century, whom we call the "silver age" poets and historians, living in the era of the Five Good Emperors, who worked to canonize and imitate the classics of the late republic and early principate in the last century BCE and first century CE. These in turn relied on Hellenistic, Alexandrian models, who were modeling themselves on the golden age of Athens. Going forward from this Carolingian Renaissance circa 800, we have an Ottonian Renaissance at just about the same interval, followed by Twelfth-Century, Italian, and Northern Renaissances. It should be clear to us, as it was clear to them, that the tradition was vital, rather than dead; but like any living thing, the tradition went through periods of growth and decay and needed tending and nourishment to remain in flower.

<sup>14</sup>Janet Nelson, "Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World," in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 52–87, is an excellent and well-illustrated introduction to the cultural dialogue between the pairs Roman–Christian, Roman–Barbarian, and Kingdom–Empire in Frankish culture from Merovingian to Ottonian times.

<sup>15</sup>For the Frankish appropriation of the Roman architectural heritage, see Kenneth John Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture, 800–1200* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 50–54.

<sup>16</sup>For the long-lasting influence of the Carolingian project of cultural renewal, see Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 350–59.

What of the Greek-speaking Romans who lived east of the Franks in Constantinople? They too seem to have understood their Greek-accented synthesis of Rome and Jerusalem as a thing lost or misplaced rather than dead. Like the Franks, they looked to Justinian as the model for cultural renewal. They knew that the legal code that bore his name had been the boldest act of creative destruction in Roman constitutional history.<sup>17</sup> In the same preface by which he enacted his code, he abolished all pre-existing Roman legal *corpora*, ensuring their oblivion as well as their obsolescence.<sup>18</sup> The Byzantines, or as scholars are beginning to call them, Medieval Eastern Romans, seemed always to be blessed with a surfeit of riches and cursed with the lack of sufficient resources to preserve or make use of them. Imperial anthologizers, confronted with rooms full of scrolls and no practical means of marshalling the manpower or material to copy them, had to resort to selection and abridgment.<sup>19</sup> Unable any longer to staff or maintain well-stocked libraries, they needed textbooks and encyclopedias rather than *opera omnia*. So, from the great mass of antique and Christian literature, they went about recovering what they thought was best and of lasting value. Like Boethius, they knew they could not recover it all, so they had to make sure that the portions that they did secure were truly worth the trouble.

That we can read ancient Greek literature today is likely due to the work of a tenth-century Byzantine scribe. Whether of his own initiative or as a member of one of Constantine VII's research teams, it is almost certain that he decided that a particular text, among dozens or hundreds of other candidates, was worthy of making the final journey from papyrus to parchment in order to raise up the next generation of Roman administrators in the arts of eloquence, morality, and government. His goal was to keep the *Res Publica Romana* alive despite the loss of Rome, Africa, and Asia Major.<sup>20</sup> To take one staggering example, we know from scattered testimonia and medieval encyclopedias that Aeschylus wrote something like ninety plays in his lifetime. From this banquet, Alexandrian and Byzantine scholars could only take the choicest morsels, producing student editions that preserved the seven of Aeschylus' plays that they considered best. Though exceedingly popular in antiquity, we possess only these seven today, and

<sup>17</sup>See Zachary Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture and the Roman Legal Tradition*, 867–1056 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1–15 and 38.

<sup>18</sup>For Justinian's transformation of access to the law and his subsequent status as the almost unique source or *auctor*, see Wolfgang Kaiser, "Justinian and the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*," in David Johnson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 119–48. What the emperor claimed in theory in his preface became fact as *iuris prudentes* discarded their old compendia in favor of Justinian's much more comprehensive and convenient *Codex*.

<sup>19</sup>For the purpose of this scholarly activity and a reconstruction of the working methods of its agents, see András Németh, *The "Excerpta Constantiniana" and the Byzantine Appropriation of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 54–87.

<sup>20</sup>See Németh, *The "Excerpta Constantiniana"*, 187–96.

despite searching the ancient trash dumps of Egypt for more than a century, it is unlikely that the sands will yield up more than fragments of the remainder.

Since the Byzantines were Greek-speaking Romans, they inherited that language's articulate and subtle use of prefixes as well as a cast of mind almost always more theoretical than practical. As Justinian had done with his code, and as Roman emperors had been ever wont to do, Constantine VII explained his idea of cultural renewal not in a philosophical treatise, where modern scholars might look for it, but in the preface to a manual of imperial ceremony.<sup>21</sup> Casting aspersions upon the imperial house that his own dynasty derided as iconoclasts, Constantine explained that the Roman way of doing things had been neglected, even if not forgotten, and that the heirs of Rome need to be reminded of their traditions. Since he wrote in Greek, his understanding of memory was not as a mere act of the mind, but rather a participation in cosmic *anamnesis*.<sup>22</sup> In both its Platonic and Christian valences, the anamnestic act of memory banished the temporal and made possible the irruption of the eternal.<sup>23</sup> Through mimesis of the past, the tenth-century heirs of Rome sought to ensure peace and prosperity in the present and prefigure the eschatological kingdom of God.<sup>24</sup> By more perfectly doing what their predecessors had done, they hoped to bring about a participated instantiation of perfect forms of church and state. New Rome acted, then, as the middle term between the old Rome and heaven, operating horizontally through time and vertically from earthly antitype to cosmic prototype.<sup>25</sup>

This process of bringing cosmic order down from heaven to earth might rightly be called *katalepsis*. For the mimetic and emulative recovery of historical

<sup>21</sup>Herbert Hunger brought this fact to the attention of the scholarly community with his *Prooimion: Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengen der Urkunden* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1964). For text, commentary, and extensive introductions, scholars may now consult G. Dagron, et al., eds., *Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, Le livre des cérémonies* (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisations de Byzance, 2020).

<sup>22</sup>For a brief consideration of the development of culture following the "Triumph of Orthodoxy," see Robert Taft's chapter, "The Middle-Byzantine Synthesis," in his *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 67–77.

<sup>23</sup>Plato expounds a theory of recollection and its relation to epistemology in the *Phaedo*. Christ's words in Lk. 22:18–20 established for his followers a mimetic ritual practice that elided temporal distinctions and united the Old and New Testaments with the eschaton through an act of memory. The Byzantines, as Greek-speaking Christians, drank deeply from both sources.

<sup>24</sup>The preface is excerpted in Deno Geanakoplos, ed., *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 21. The basic text on Byzantine political theology remains Hélène Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie Politique de l'empire Byzantin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975).

<sup>25</sup>I discuss the similarities between Constantine VII's theory of historical recovery and St. Maximos' explanation of liturgical participation in cosmic prototypes in "Performing Acclamation in Tenth-Century Byzantium: *De Cerimoniis* between Roman Practice and Christian Theory," *Studia Patristica* 130 (2021): 403–23.

practice, the term *analepsis* is useful.<sup>26</sup> In turn, *kataleptic* and *analeptic* describe the two axes across which Greek-speaking Roman Christians sought to unite their contemporary thought and action with the historical and eschatological exempla of Rome and Jerusalem. In addition to the Latin-derived notion of renewal from *renovatio*, these terms help illuminate what the phrase “classical education” has meant historically and what it might mean today for scholars, teachers, and leaders who share the conviction that it provides apt guidance for navigating contemporary crises and setting the course as we move into the future. As we proceed, we will first consider classical education in its analeptic sense, that is, in its historically attested form, before moving to classical education in its kataleptic sense, that is, in the form its theorists and practitioners hope it will achieve. The reciprocal action of comparing the present across time to the actual results of the past and up to heaven to the ideal telos of our efforts should improve both our practical mimesis and our theoretical knowledge of what classical education is and what it ought to be.

### WHAT WAS CLASSICAL EDUCATION?

Considered in its final cause, classical education is the pedagogical regime that produces a *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, which I render, “a virtuous person skilled in persuasion.”<sup>27</sup> One might even say that classical education is the form of education that conduces to the mastery of language and the practice of virtue. This mastery and practice is transmitted from masters to disciples by means of a tradition of learning and teaching based on the creative imitation of recognized models through exercise.

Each component of this regime needs to be examined in turn, but attention must first be paid to the core object of classical education: language. The use of the word “language” is conventional rather than precise. The Greek authorities tell us that *logos* is the object of *paideia*.<sup>28</sup> Both terms lack tidy, one-to-one equivalents in English, and at least two millennia have been spent trying to capture their meaning successively in Latin and the written vernaculars. *Paideia*

<sup>26</sup>When Byzantine historians needed to describe the process of cultural recovery, they had two choices of verb, *analambano* and *katalambano*. Usage of the first tends to denote historical emulation of the Roman past. The second tends to denote cosmic emulation of a heavenly, eschatological state. While the abstract noun forms I have used, *analepsis* and *katalepsis* (and the derived adjectives *analeptic* and *kataleptic*) are thinly attested, their verbal forms occur frequently and consistently.

<sup>27</sup>In claiming that classical education is rhetorical rather than properly philosophical, I follow Quintilian quoting Cato at *Inst.* 12.1. In *De Oratore* 1.156–59, Cicero tells us that in order to be an adequate orator, a person must know all things, cleverly putting philosophy at the service of eloquence. As to my translation of *dicendi peritus* as “skilled in persuasion,” the etymologists tell us that *dico*, *dicere* is, at root, “to show” or “to demonstrate” rather than “to speak.”

<sup>28</sup>See Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, Volume I: Archaic Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 291–93.

is easier to understand. Like Jaeger, we may say that it means both “education” and “culture,” and attempt to imagine a semantic range that covers both ideas.<sup>29</sup> More concretely, one might say that *paideia* is the comprehensive system of enculturation by which a youth is trained to seek the common good and serve the commonwealth both in the assembly and on the battlefield. The form of *paideia* that Plato and Aristotle theorized, that Jaeger described, that Popper decried, and that Adler practiced, is best suited to a small polity: to a *polis*, in fact.

A more extensive republic, like the one Rome established and Madison imagined, requires a form of education more abstract and less tied to the individual culture and temperament of a single people. It is civilizational rather than nationalistic. An essential corollary of extension is limitation. Just as the extension of a polity is enabled by the limitation of political power to important but generalized and defined spheres, so the classical model of education has striven to serve the needs of a civilization rather than of a particular nation. While we may be nostalgic for the golden age of Athens and Sparta and the single-minded *paideia* of their diametrically opposed regimes, we must recall that their conflict was existential. The victory of one *polis* entailed the destruction of the other, so totalizing regimes of education were apposite if not strictly necessary. It has been remarked that Athenian youth had no need to go to school because all of Athens was a school.<sup>30</sup> This may have been inspiring to theorists of the nineteenth century, but such totalizing systems of education, like those seen in Nazi Germany and the USSR, are worthy of suspicion after we have witnessed the practice of the twentieth century. The chaos of Greece produced a golden age whose artifacts will never tarnish. The silver age of Rome needs constant care and polishing, but we supremely undervalue the order they worked out to preserve the glories of Greece. The Romans gave us the texts of Homer and saved Aristotle from oblivion.<sup>31</sup> They established a system of education, stretching from York to Beirut, that flourished for more than a millennium after the fall of old Rome and gave Europe and the Americas a common educational framework, founded on the same principles, methods, and canon, but infinitely adaptable to a variety of peoples, times, and places.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>See Jaeger, *Paideia*, xvi–xvii.

<sup>30</sup>This romantic notion seems to have been given canonical form in W. S. Tyler, “Athens, or Aesthetic Culture and the Art of Expression,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 20 (1863): 168.

<sup>31</sup>For the Homeric “internationalization” of Hellenic culture and the Homeric vulgate, see Robert Lamberton, “Homer in Antiquity,” in Ian Morris and Barry Powell, ed. *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 43–48. For the Roman discovery (or looting) and subsequent transmission of the text of Aristotle, see Alexander Moseley, *Aristotle* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 170–71.

<sup>32</sup>The Roman achievement is too little valued. For the Romans’ establishment of the system that we still recognize as Western or classical education, see H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 292–97. While Ilsetraut Hadot, *Arts Libéraux et Philosophie dans la Pensée Antique* (Paris: Vrin, 2005) has corrected and supplemented Marrou in important ways, it remains untranslated, and its influence is limited in the English-speaking world.

Throughout the world, wherever we can discern the existence of classical language and culture, we see a common framework that, although it arose independently in a variety of places, nonetheless follows a set pattern. So, in South Asia, there is a common culture based on the study of Sanskrit, the moral code of Dharma, and a diverse yet unified philosophical and religious tradition. From that tradition came Buddhism, which, amalgamated with Daoism and Confucianism and transmitted in classical Chinese, became the common inheritance of East Asia.<sup>33</sup> And, more recently, we have the rise and consolidation of Islamic civilization, extending from Arabia to Morocco in the West and Indonesia in the East.<sup>34</sup> In every case, a civilizational system of education, based on the deep study of a classical language and a recognized canon, acts as the principle of unity for diverse peoples whose relation to one another is defined by participation both historically and presently in that system of education.

Christendom in the West once created such a system, and it successfully sustained a civilization that somehow united a fifth-century Berber bishop of Hippo, a backwater town in modern Algeria, with an eighteenth-century Aztec prince who was proud to write Latin and Nahuatl equally well from a school built on the ruins of Tenochtitlan.<sup>35</sup> The fundamental means of this education was the acquisition of Latin eloquence, carried on for more than a decade, with, as Winston Churchill said, “Greek as a treat” for the more precocious students and Hebrew reserved for the theologians.<sup>36</sup> By subjecting themselves to the language and culture of ancient Rome, writers such as Shakespeare, Johnson, Tolkien, Lewis, and Waugh became masters of English. Even modernist luminaries, like Baudelaire and Proust, and avowed enemies of the classical tradition, like Marx, Foucault, and Adorno, were products of this system, which granted them the linguistic mastery that made possible their revolutionary insights into the structure of human society and the nature of language. Through their largely successful destruction of that tradition in the arts and education, their legacy has produced a succession of followers who can read and imitate the new masters,

<sup>33</sup>For this, I am indebted to the pioneering work of Arnold J. Toynbee, whose *Study of History and Half the World* challenged students of Western civilization to take up also the study of its Eastern counterpart.

<sup>34</sup>Glenn Hardaker and Aishah Ahmad Sabki, *Pedagogy in Islamic Education* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2019), provides a concise and fascinating orientation to the history, philosophy, and practice of this important global institution.

<sup>35</sup>Stuart McManus’ *The Empire of Eloquence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1–21, provides an excellent introduction to the story of Latin’s global spread and influence in the early modern period. For those looking for an introduction to the Latin literature of the Americas, I heartily recommend Rose Williams’ *Latin of New Spain* (Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 2015) and Andrew Dinan’s *Americana Latine* (New York: Paideia Institute, 2020).

<sup>36</sup>For the full quotation, see Winston S. Churchill, *My Early Life: A Roving Commission* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 17. My Greek teacher, John Nordling, pointed me to Peter France’s *Greek as a Treat* (London: Penguin, 1994).

but whose ignorance of the tradition and fundamental distrust of language has reduced their attempts at philosophizing to mere activism.

So then, what is this *logos* that we have translated as “language”? According to the Latin authorities on liberal education, the semantic range of the single Greek term *logos* covers both *sermo* and *ratio*, which are respectively the objects of the trivium and quadrivium.<sup>37</sup> *Logos* is usually rendered as “word” in English and as *verbum* in the Vulgate’s opening of John. Why then do Latin authorities on liberal education, who were almost all Christians, tell us that *logos* means *sermo* and *ratio* and not *verbum*? It is because they knew that *verbum* was a compromise, an attempt to render the ambivalence of *logos* with a single word and resist the temptation to copy a gloss into a translation that would be used in public worship and private devotion.<sup>38</sup> They wrote for teachers who needed to understand more profoundly what the aim of their discipline was, so these authorities did not hesitate to complicate matters somewhat. The Latin *vocabulum* translates Greek *lexis*, whence our word lexicon; the Latin *verbum* is the Greek *rhema*, and the English “utterance,” the physical sign by which immaterial thought enters the material world. *Sermo* is discourse, a “speech” in English, a polished and ordered locutionary act with an audience. From *vocabulum*, through *verbum*, to *sermo*, we trace this meaning of *logos* and its correspondences with grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric.

*Logos* is also *ratio* not only as the faculty of the mind by which the intellect performs acts of inference and deduction, but also as that ratio or proportion that produces harmony in numbers, shapes, musical intervals, and the movements of heavenly bodies, and which St. John tells us was both the means and agent of creation.<sup>39</sup> In Romans 12:1, St. Paul urges the brethren somewhat perplexingly to offer themselves as *tēn logikēn latreian*, or in Latin, *rationabile obsequium*, and in most English versions, as a “spiritual worship.” This sense of *logos* is something like our own “reason,” but its theological valence points to something more profound and almost ineffable.

So *logos* has both a practical, embodied valence, and a theoretical, intellectual one. It accomplishes this because it means neither *sermo* nor *ratio* but only itself. It is cognate with our Latin-derived English words “select,” “collect,” and “elect,”

<sup>37</sup>I was first informed of this distinction by my friend and former colleague, Patricio Domínguez. A brief and well-documented treatment of the topic may be found in F. A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg, *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 267–68. Among the earliest statements of this crux in the Latin tradition is Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeian*, 5.

<sup>38</sup>For the historical and philological background, see C. A. L. Jarrott, “Erasmus’ *In Principio Erat Sermo*: A Controversial Translation,” *Studies in Philology*, 61, no. 1 (1964): 35–40.

<sup>39</sup>Stratford Caldecott’s works, especially *Beauty for Truth’s Sake* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009) and *Beauty in the Word* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico, 2012) have exerted a powerful influence on my thinking in this regard.

in every case implying a choice between alternatives. If *thelēma*, *voluntas*, “will” is common to all animals, it is *logos* that is our specific difference, our ability to distinguish, classify, compare, rank, and decide. Our task as classical educators is somehow to help our students recover this primitive unity of *logos*. Classical education must always strive to be a truly *enkyklios paideia* that encompasses the cosmos, that applies order to chaos.<sup>40</sup> But it is, in the end, preparatory and humanistic rather than truly philosophical or theological.<sup>41</sup> To its charges, classical education provides the fundamental culture that prepares them to take part in the assembly, to seek and serve the common good; and, should they have sufficient leisure, classical education enables them to undertake productive philosophizing and theologizing, without making them philosophers or theologians. It does not even give them possession of *sermo* and *ratio*; rather, it trains them in the arts of *sermocinatio*, speechifying, and *ratiocinatio*, reasoning.

### WHAT CLASSICAL EDUCATION COULD BE

How we might best provide students with the described view of the mastery of language requires an apology for sophistry, textbooks, and utility—terms generally deplored by classical educators but desperately in need of recovery and reapplication. The word “sophist” has a rather pejorative meaning in contemporary English.<sup>42</sup> This is due to our assumption of nineteenth-century prejudices inherent in the process that jettisoned the classical tradition in favor of what then was called classical philology or *Altertumswissenschaft*, the science of antiquity, but has since been rechristened “classical studies” just as theology is now in many places “religious studies” (and not without a change in the signified along with the signifier). We lost Platonism, Isocrates, and Epictetus and convinced ourselves that we had recovered the historical Socrates and established the compositional order of the Platonic dialogues.<sup>43</sup> As we analyzed the classics, we broke the tradition of synthesizing and handing on that mastery of language we had inherited from antiquity. The more we learned to view the classical tradition as an object remote from us in time and alien to us in culture, the less capable we became

<sup>40</sup>For the history of the phrase, see L. M. de Rijk, “Εγκύκλιος παιδεία: A Study of Its Original Meaning,” *Vivarium* 3, no. 1 (1965): 24–93. A prosaic translation of the term would be “comprehensive education,” but I have used the word “encompass” here because it captures the circular and diastolic movement implied by the Greek adjective.

<sup>41</sup>I appeal here to the iconographic tradition, most famously exemplified in the title page woodcut to the *Margarita Philosophica* of Erasmus’ friend and contemporary, Gregor Reinsch.

<sup>42</sup>However, see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., which cites Udall’s 1542 translation of Erasmus’ *Apophthegmata* as the earliest attestation of the term in our language. In that work, Udall explains that sophists were “men that professed to bee teachers of wisdom and eloquence, and the name of *Sophistes* was had in honoure and price.”

<sup>43</sup>For Schleiermacher’s “Quest for the Historical Socrates” and his redistribution of the Platonic corpus, see Julia Lamm, *Schleiermacher’s Plato* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 21–57.



of participating in that tradition, of imitating it, and of creatively redeploying it to meet our own challenges. This reductive objectification of the past made the analeptic recovery of the past impossible by convincing us that knowing a thing's history was to know the thing itself. In turn, our faith in the possibility of an analeptic recovery became feeble; in some cases, we lost not only the ability to recover but even the desire to recover.

There was a time before that time, when the learned were proud to call themselves *sophistai*, that is, makers of learned men. A *sophos* was not a philosopher, but rather a skilled practitioner of an art, what the Latins would later call a *magister*. They were like Solon or Pythagoras, someone who possessed practical wisdom and peculiar insight, someone with access to the gnomic and capable of speaking with an almost prophetic authority. The suffix *-tēs* informs us that a *sophistēs* was an agent, a doer not a theorist. He was a craftsman, and the product of his craft were the *sophoi*. Unlike Socrates, he gave answers. His orientation was practical rather than theoretical. He aimed at the production of good words and actions rather than the knowing of the truth in itself.<sup>44</sup> For this reason, the *sophistēs* generally preferred to draw material from the Hellenistic and Roman traditions rather than the Greek.<sup>45</sup> Where the *Iliad* presents in Agamemnon, Achilles, and Hector three rival visions of *aretē* and challenges readers to philosophize who is best, the *Aeneid* answers that question by giving only one model of *virtus*: *Pius Aeneas*. In the philosophical orientation of many of our core curricula, we have deemphasized the liberal arts in our noble desire to expose students to knowledge of the truth. As classical educators, we need to reacquaint ourselves with the Hellenistic and especially Roman traditions. Far from being hazy reflections of pristine Greek excellence, they are in themselves, as the experience of centuries has shown, the most apt texts for cultivating eloquence and morals.

The *sophistēs* trained and mastered his craft, and he set up shop to train apprentices.<sup>46</sup> He armed these apprentices with the tools of language and ran them through a comprehensive course of exercises, the *progymnasmata*, working

<sup>44</sup>Which is not to say that the post-Socratic *sophistes* saw no value in cultivating that knowledge. His task was pre-philosophical rather than properly philosophical. The skills and know how he taught his students brought them to the vestibule of philosophy, but they themselves had to step over the threshold.

<sup>45</sup>One of the great, so-called "lost classics" of our tradition is the anonymous *Tablet of Cebe*s, which is almost certainly among the most read and influential Greek texts ever produced. Following the trivium course, it acted as a *protrepsis*, or call to philosophize, much as the *Hortensius* did for Augustine, until its virtual oblivion in the nineteenth century. Keith Seddon gives us a good translation of it and Epictetus' *Enchiridion* in his *Epictetus' "Handbook" and the "Tablet of Cebe*s" (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>46</sup>John Dillon and Tania Gergel's introduction and selections in their anthology, *The Greek Sophists* (London: Penguin, 2003) serve as a good corrective to the generally negative (Platonic) depiction of the Sophists common in our teaching of Greek antiquity.

the mind as surely as the *gymnastēs* works the body.<sup>47</sup> Gorgias' failure was not in being a *sophistēs* but in imagining that sophistry was an end in itself. It was his claim about his profession and his inability to see anything beyond or higher than it that ultimately condemned him. His flattened vision of the range of human knowledge and his overconfidence in the power of language has made of him a *philosophaster*, an imitation philosopher, but that is only accidentally related to his status as a *sophistēs*. Gorgias is a warning not to be content with sophistry, with the merely trivial. But his case should not inspire a condemnation of the trivium. Grammar, logic, and rhetoric are no substitute for philosophy, but they may, even when transmitted through textbooks and imitation, lay the groundwork for the philosophical life.

The guardian of language, whether he calls himself a *sophistēs*, a humanist, a grammarian, or a classical educator, recognizes with humility that he labors in the basement of the tower of learning.<sup>48</sup> His task is essential and properly fundamental, but he cannot imagine that it is the consummation, as Gorgias did. And the philosopher will sin gravely if he imagines that he can do without those tools the *sophistēs* provides. The injunction at the Academy, "let no one enter who knows not geometry," shows that Plato expected his students to have mastered at least the majority of the seven arts before they began their study of philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Our failure to understand classical education as both propaedeutic and essential causes confusion and conflict in contemporary discussions. We tend to assume that one method of instruction is suited to all levels of students at all times while being perhaps nobly stubborn in our commitment to provide opportunities for comprehensive education to everyone at every stage of their educational experience. A proper understanding of the *ordo disciplinarum*, the disposition of individual human beings, their participation in general stages of human development, and the necessity of hierarchy and structure, is essential in reestablishing the dignity of the *sophistēs* and to retethering the philosophers to a knowledge of reality that stems from life experience and confidence in language.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup>The athletic metaphor is original and intentional. In Greek, classroom exercises were termed *askēseis* or *meletēmata*. By contrast, the *progymnasmata* were like the stretching exercises that a rhetor performed before the performance. The great historian of classical rhetoric, G. A. Kennedy, has made the corpus cheaply and widely accessible with his *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), now available in paperback.

<sup>48</sup>For the phrase and its meaning in antiquity, see Robert Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 15–31.

<sup>49</sup>This appears to be a tralacititious *doxographon* much quoted but never sourced. See Julian Barbour, *The Discovery of Dynamics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 72.

<sup>50</sup>See Augustine, *De Ordine* 1.9.27ff. See also the closing chapters of Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 2.

## THE RECENT PAST AND THE NEAR FUTURE

Some years ago, I encountered a consummate Latin philologist trained in the best German tradition from childhood through doctoral study. I explained one day that I had an interest in classical education. The surprised response from my interlocutor was “Why?” and my naive answer then was that “classical education produces virtuous people.” To this opinion I received the curt reply, “All of my grandparents had a classical education, and they were all Nazis.” It took me some time to learn the lesson taught that day, but I know now that classical education does not *per se* make students virtuous. Rather, if executed well, it gives them all the tools they need to be able to pursue virtue along with extended exposure to the millennial wisdom of the Western tradition.<sup>51</sup> The will may, of course, remain misdirected even after this training, and entire nations and civilizations can and do turn their mastery of language to evil ends. As Aristotle remarks, intellectual virtue is not moral virtue.<sup>52</sup> Although classical education is the most adequate means yet discovered of training students in eloquence and preparing them for philosophical and theological study, it does not necessarily result in virtue or even in an interest in that which is properly philosophical or theological. Good *propaideusis* is oriented towards transcendent being. Self-sufficient *propaideusis* is mere *technē* and sophistry.

From the other side, those of us prepared in the Great Books tradition have the danger of being too confident in philosophy, in the Great Conversation. A century ago, Mortimer Adler was faced with the ruin of Western civilization, of a culture that had lost faith in itself in the aftermath of a great war and had already begun dismantling itself some years before in the pursuit of positivist science and progressive education. Adler recognized that the new education was producing workers rather than citizens. He thought the solution was first to make them philosophers through the close reading of foundational texts in Socratic seminars. Since his students were adults who read the Great Books in translation, Adler had little interest in promoting the study of classical and foreign languages.<sup>53</sup> He took people who had been denied culture for more than a decade in primary and secondary schools and told them merely, “take and read.”

<sup>51</sup>St. Augustine says, in Michael Foley’s translation, “an education in the liberal disciplines . . . produces lovers more lively, more persevering, and better groomed for embracing the truth.” *On Order: St. Augustine’s Cassiciacum Dialogues* Volume 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 36.

<sup>52</sup>See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a–1103b.

<sup>53</sup>In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* (January 2, 1994), Adler implied that Gertrude Stein deserved to be hauled off to prison for asserting that “Greek ideas must be studied in Greek, Latin ideas in Latin, and so on.” While I disagree with Stein on most things, I firmly believe that Adler took far too much for granted when he laid out his plan for Great Books education, and subsequent cultural changes make our recovery of the linguistic center of the liberal arts necessary in the present.

His project lives on today in the Great Books programs in hundreds or even thousands of high schools and colleges and universities. Despite this success with teenagers and young adults, Adler's experiments in primary education did not progress much further than his famous "Paideia Proposal," and that was because Adler made a mistake common to many geniuses: he assumed that his insight was all encompassing and sufficient to solve every educational problem.<sup>54</sup> Many of Adler's heirs recognize that the increasing deemphasis of the disciplined passing on of the liberal arts over the last century in primary and secondary education has had a compounded effect that makes it difficult for those entering higher education to engage productively with the Adlerian practice of extensive reading followed by discussion in seminar. Some of them have concluded that if honors and core curriculum programs are to continue serving their purpose of putting non-specialist students in contact with the great ideas, those programs will need to find some way of recovering the arts of language that support and make possible the dialogues that fuel their seminars.<sup>55</sup>

But is it possible to imagine a more comprehensive recovery of the tradition? While grateful for the excellent and necessary work carried on by college and university educators in core texts and Great Books programs, it seems that we may need to aim to do more. Although the situation is dire in some places, with reports of literature being replaced by writing, within the classical education community, there are demographic changes that portend the institutionalization of this alternative model. Although at Princeton the classics department has recently eliminated the requirement of Greek and Latin for the major, many students coming out of classical high schools already have had three or more years at Latin. At my own institution we are now looking at ways to increase our offerings in advanced Latin and beginning Greek to accommodate this new reality. One can point to similar gains in the teaching of logic and rhetoric, which is increasingly well established in classical schools, meaning that an ever larger pool of incoming freshmen will already know how to recover a syllogism from an enthymeme or achieve a working balance among their appeals to *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

<sup>54</sup>This insight is the basis of Etienne Gilson's *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), wherein he recounts how great thinkers have repeatedly attempted to usurp the proper role of philosophy by reducing it to logic, geometry, politics, or some other partial and subsidiary science. I argue that Adler has usurped the place of the liberal arts by reducing them to philosophy, which in turn is reduced to the Great Conversation carried on by means of the Socratic seminar.

<sup>55</sup>The Association for Core Texts and Courses has been running summer programs as part of a larger project called "Reinventing and Rejuvenating the Liberal Arts in the 21st Century." Its president, Joshua Parens, made the trivium the topic of his plenary address at both the 2022 and 2023 conferences.

With a fully articulated eco-system encompassing private and public K–12, a college admissions exam, undergraduate majors and minors, and now, not a few graduate programs, it seems that the institutional mechanisms that would make such a recovery possible are in place. While the classical education movement has tended to be too narrowly kataleptic in its approach to recovery, the increasingly institutionalized nature of the movement promises a likewise increasing interest and desire in the development of common standards and best practices. Lest this drive produce results similar to those that the classical education movement was founded to remedy, the theoretical commitment to knowledge of the truth must be united to an analeptic movement to recover the historically informed and disciplined practice of training students in the liberal arts. We may hope that maintaining this two-fold focus on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of our craft will help us avoid the mechanization of the humane process of education while encouraging us to continue seeking the always imperfect and incomplete recovery of contact with that divine principle that is both the source and goal of our existence.



# Educating the Virtuous Citizen: A View from the Renaissance

*James Hankins*

## INTRODUCING FRANCESCO PATRIZI

Francesco Patrizi of Siena (1413–1494) was the most important political philosopher of the Italian Renaissance before the generation of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). He is the principal exponent of the humanist tradition of “virtue politics.” As such, he was the first Western political philosopher since antiquity to devote sustained attention to the question of how a republic devoted to liberty and equality could uphold meritocratic principles in government—how it could ensure that its rulers and political class generally were public-spirited, well-educated men of virtue and wisdom. Part of his solution to this problem involved a revival of classical education both in the family and in public schools. The book excerpt below discusses that aspect of his reforming agenda.

Patrizi belonged to the political elite in Renaissance Siena and served the city as university lecturer on rhetoric. He also served as a magistrate, diplomat, and member of the town council. After being exiled from Siena he was made bishop of Gaeta by Pope Pius II, the humanist pope, and was appointed as papal governor of the town of Foligno in the Papal State. He spent the last thirty years of his life administering his diocese of Gaeta, serving as advisor to the heir to

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James Hankins is Professor of History at Harvard University and a member of the boards of First Things, the Classical Learning Test (CLT), the Paideia Institute, and the Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education (University of Florida).



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the kingdom of Naples, Alfonso of Calabria, working on his Latin poetry, and finishing his works of political philosophy.

Though almost unknown today, Patrizi's influence in the later Renaissance, as shown by the printing history of his works, was enormous. In the sixteenth century his political writings were published more often than either More's *Utopia* or Erasmus' *Education of a Christian Prince*. Only Machiavelli's political works went through more editions. Patrizi's two great Latin treatises, "How to Found a Republic" (1471), and "On Kingship and Kingly Education" (1484), were translated into Italian, French, Spanish, and German, and epitomes of his works circulated in Latin, French, and English.<sup>1</sup>

### EDUCATING THE VIRTUOUS CITIZEN

A principal concern of Italian humanism and the Renaissance movement in general was how best to educate children and young adults for their future roles in society. Between the time of Petrarch in the mid-1300s and the decades when Patrizi was writing, the humanist movement succeeded in transforming educational practice in Europe. Scholastic education in medieval universities had been oriented to training professional lawyers, doctors, and (a small minority) theologians. Humanist education, presenting itself as an education for *ingenui*—which one might translate "free men" or "gentlemen"—was education directed at social elites, including some women as well as a few promising "scholarship boys" from the middle classes. As such it emphasized the arts of elegant speech and gentlemanly comportment. The great court schools of northeastern Italy—above all those of the Gonzaga in Mantua, founded by Vittorino da Feltre in 1423, and of the Este in Ferrara, headed by Guarino of Verona from 1429—put the study of classical literature in both Greek and Latin at the heart of the curriculum. In the Tuscan republics of Florence and Siena humanistic education was often conducted privately in the palaces of the wealthy. All these schools set a tone of high moral seriousness and piety and insisted on good character in teachers and pupils. In addition, both princes and republican elites promoted public lectures on humane authors in local universities and appointed distinguished humanists to teach rhetoric and Greek literature.<sup>2</sup>

A regular theme of humanist educational writings was the utility of humane studies to the state. The study of classical literature improved the character of the republic's future leaders and gave them the practical and theoretical train-

<sup>1</sup>Further information about Patrizi's life and works may be found on the website that accompanies the monograph: <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/patrizisiena>.

<sup>2</sup>See Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), chapter 6.



ing they needed to conduct its affairs. The cultivation of eloquence was of particular value since the best kind of leadership in a state worked through persuasion rather than force. The power of eloquence was multiplied many times when the speaker was a person of good character who could appeal convincingly to shared moral values. A city that perverted its legal system in the interests of the powerful and was constantly ratcheting up its use of surveillance, spies, police, regulations, and cruel punishments—especially when such measures were used against its own citizens—revealed itself as a failed polity. In antiquity, only tyrants employed such measures.

The best states of antiquity, the humanists believed, had not required such brutal forms of control. Humanist literati advocated immersive study of the most successful societies of the classical world—Sparta, Athens, the Persia of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, and Rome above all. Such study would set before future rulers examples, both good and bad, of how their own societies might best be reformed. While good laws and institutions were important, what was of paramount significance was the men who made and interpreted the laws and ran the institutions. If they lacked the virtues, above all practical wisdom, those institutions would fail. As both Plato and Aristotle taught, the best measure of successful rulership was the degree of virtue and (therefore) felicity found among its people. In popular republics, where all citizens might hold office, all citizens therefore needed some portion of education and virtue.

Francesco Patrizi fervently agreed with all these principles, tried to exemplify them, and was an advocate for them throughout his life. It is no surprise, then, that in his *De republica* he foregrounds the need for civic education by devoting an entire book to the subject, placed, significantly, just before his book on institutions. Patrizi was by no means the first humanist to discuss civic education, but his proposal for a humanistic reform of the university curriculum was a new departure for the movement as a whole, and a key component of his reforming agenda.

None of the four most famous treatises by humanists on education—those written by Pier Paolo Vergerio (1402/3), Leonardo Bruni (1422/26), Patrizi's patron Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1450), and Battista Guarino (1459)—had addressed the question of how citizens and magistrates in free republics should be educated.<sup>3</sup> Vergerio's and Guarino's works had been written with princely schools in mind; Piccolomini's was written for a German king; Bruni's for the daughter of a *condottiere* prince. The longest fifteenth-century treatise on education, Maffeo Vegio's *On the Education of Children and their Fine Deportment in six books* (1444), was addressed to religious parents. It modelled the education of children on the formation of St. Augustine of Hippo. However, the earliest

<sup>3</sup>All are included in Craig W. Kallendorf, *Humanist Educational Treatises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

humanist writers on princely republics—Uberto Decembrio (1422) and Tito Livio Frulovisi (1435)—had both emphasized the prince's responsibility to promote a literate citizenry, and to support the liberal arts, legal studies, and the advanced humanistic disciplines of oratory, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. In the aristocratic republic designed by the Venetian Lauro Quirini (*De republica*, 1449), literacy and moral education are prescribed for all citizens, and the *studia humanitatis*—above all history—for patricians. Quirini, however, satisfies himself with laying out general principles and does not go into much detail about the curriculum. All three of these works survive today in one or two manuscripts, and it is unlikely that Patrizi knew them. They have been printed only in modern times.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, Patrizi's discussion of the ideal curriculum for free cities was the most extensive and learned treatment of civic education in the Quattrocento. It has never been the object of sustained study, though it surely merits close attention from historians of political thought.<sup>5</sup> While many humanist works mention the benefits of liberal education to the state, Patrizi was the only author of the fifteenth century to design a curriculum expressly to form citizens and magistrates. He is the first humanist theorist to recommend that citizenship should be conditional on literacy. He is the first republican writer to advocate the regular teaching of humanistic disciplines at public expense. Perhaps inspired by the examples of the Library of San Marco in Florence (1444) and the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena (founded 1454), Patrizi was also the first republican theorist to call for the establishment of public libraries in order to nurture citizens and future magistrates in the *optimae artes*, the liberal arts and humanities.<sup>6</sup>

Like earlier humanist writers, but with greater conceptual clarity, Patrizi approaches the problem of civic education on two levels: that of the family and that of the republic. His treatment of how to nurture future citizens and magistrates is thus split between book 4, on household management, which contains a virtual treatise-within-a-treatise (4.6) on how to raise children, and book 2, which discusses the formal education of citizens and magistrates in the liberal disciplines to be supported by the state. In his educational theory Patrizi draws on the usual ancient sources popular with humanists: Quintilian's *Institutes of*

<sup>4</sup>Tito Livio Frulovisi, *De republica*, in *Opera hactenus inedita*, ed. C. W. Previté-Orton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 287–389; Lauro Quirini, *De republica libri II*, ed. Carlo Seno and Giorgio Ravegnani, in *Lauro Quirini umanista*, eds. Vittore Branco et al. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1977), 123–61; Uberto Decembrio, *Four Books on the Commonwealth: De republica libri IV*, ed. and trans. Paolo Pontù Donato (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2020).

<sup>5</sup>The only substantive study of which I am aware is Francesco Sarri, “Il pensiero pedagogico ed economico del senese Francesco Patrizi,” *Rinascita* 1 (1938): 98–128.

<sup>6</sup>Uberto Decembrio praises the Visconti for their rich palace library but says nothing about establishing public libraries. Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* mentions that Asinius Pollio was the first to found a public library in ancient Rome, “and so made works of genius the property of the public” (35.2).

*Oratory* and Cicero's *De oratore* above all, combined with (pseudo) Plutarch's essay *On the Education of Children*, translated into Latin by Guarino of Verona, and St. Basil of Caesarea's *Letter to Young Men*, translated by Leonardo Bruni. Patrizi gives more attention than usual to Vitruvius, a favorite author, excerpting several of the Roman author's remarks about how an architect should be educated. Though Patrizi himself wrote a compendium of Quintilian that had some success as a tool of pedagogy, and his patron Enea Silvio Piccolomini had relied on Quintilian almost to a fault in his own treatise on education, Patrizi's theory escapes the professional narrowness of the Roman educator's approach. As ever, Patrizi is alive to the psychological and moral effects of learning different subjects and of using different pedagogical methods. Like other humanists he wants children to learn willingly, without the use of severe punishments, and he believes that the best education comes from teachers who set a fine example and who judiciously employ praise and blame to motivate their charges. The governance of the schoolroom is thus a model for the state.

### THE ROLES OF WIFE AND HUSBAND

Since the best education is motivated by love and not fear, it is appropriate that the earliest formation of children should be the responsibility of the mother. After a chapter on the duties of the wife, stressing her special authority in all that goes on within the walls of the home, Patrizi inserts the longest chapter in the entire *De republica*, "On the Duty of Parents in Raising and Educating Children." Its disproportionate length raises the suspicion that it may have originally been intended for separate publication. Many authors have written on childhood education, says Patrizi, especially among the Greeks, but since the family is the seedbed (*seminarium*) of republics, and my book is on republics, heads of households should recognize that they do nothing more important for the state than to raise and educate children. But responsibility should be divided among husband and wife. The wife is responsible for *vivere*, the husband for *bene vivere*. The distinction between mere life and the good life, drawn silently from Aristotle's *Ethics*, means in this context that the earliest education involving the child's health, speech patterns, and general moral orientation is the wife's duty, while around the age of seven the husband should take on increased responsibility and oversee the training of a boy's mind and character through study of the appropriate disciplines.

Maternal devotion is shown by breastfeeding one's own children (a subject Patrizi discusses at great length, citing Homer, Virgil and Cicero) rather than putting them out to nurse; an inferior source of milk can lead to moral degeneration, he opines. Mothers should take great care that children learn to speak their vernacular language correctly. Mothers should not let their children listen too much to servants and others who speak the language badly. She should not let her children associate with persons of poor character. A woman who is edu-

cated, however, can contribute more than this to childhood development. Sadly, educated women are few. "Our wives these days are so torpid with laziness that it seems a kind of miracle if any of them have the least acquaintance with literature." Husbands these days are also at fault: they choose wives for their beauty and their dowries. They would do much better to follow the advice of Lyscurgus and make it a practice to prefer virtue to large dowries; such a practice would have the effect of making women more zealous for learning. Women are capable of great distinction in the disciplines, as the presence of two female members in Plato's academy showed, not to mention the examples of the poetess Sappho and the highly cultivated mother of the Gracchi, Cornelia. If you are fortunate enough to have a learned wife (Patrizi addresses the *paterfamilias*), you need not wait until the canonical date of seven recommended by Hesiod for beginning a child's formal education: your wife can begin to educate the children in Latin letters even earlier than that. She should begin with educational toys, like flashcards or wooden blocks with the letters of the alphabet carved on them (as recommended by Quintilian). She should go slowly: give them sips of learning, not full cups.

If they learn letters from their mother in their tender years, they will be readier for more challenging studies when the father takes charge of their education. Children should always show gratitude to their parents, but they should be as grateful to their fathers for their education as for their birth. It is the father's responsibility to discover where his son's abilities lie. It was a humanist principle that sons should not be forced into a profession, especially their father's profession, but should be allowed to develop their gifts whatever they might be. Patrizi gives the *paterfamilias* detailed advice on how to observe his children's moral and intellectual development and to foster their inborn virtues. *Generosa aemulatio*, noble rivalry between youths, competition for prizes in worthwhile accomplishments, are vital. Non-voluntary virtues like memory and quickness of intellect should be noted, but the true virtues, the greater virtues, are the voluntary ones formed by habit and effort. These deserve greater praise because they spring from our own efforts: virtues like courage, justice, and the like. "Some add a third genus of virtues, the intellectual virtues, like science, learning, and wisdom." If a father sees that his children have the potential for intellectual virtues—a *rei discendae sensus*, a capacity for learning—he should seek out for them the best teachers of the liberal arts. If they do not, he should put them to learn some honorable trade.

But if they have any capacity at all, by no means should a father defraud his children of the chance to learn, and he should view with equanimity the possibility that his children might excel him in their mastery of the liberal arts. An education in the liberal arts is the most valuable thing a parent can give a child.

They are called liberal because they make human beings (*homines*) free from all shameful and sordid forms of gain (*quaestus*), and from all sensual pleasure and baseness. They lead us to wisdom, than which there can be nothing more excellent for mortals, and by which we are marked out to join ourselves com-

pletely with Best and Greatest God. Virtue by itself is sufficient reward for such studies, if no other were to be offered to mortal men, but virtue always brings honor along with it like a body brings its shadow.<sup>7</sup> Indeed we observe this fact: that not only all the best men, but the worst and most depraved of thieves, give honor and praise to the virtuous.<sup>8</sup>

Virtue is charismatic and imparts a kind of invulnerable majesty to those who possess it in abundance, like Scipio Africanus.<sup>9</sup> Another model is Ulysses, who through all his perils, labors, and shipwrecks was accompanied by Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, who restored to him his fatherland, parents, wife, and children, “so that Homer might show us that Ulysses overcame all perils through learning and wisdom.”

### THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Not all fathers will have the resources to educate future citizens. But a state where all citizens participate to some extent in governance needs them to be well-educated men of good character. *Ergo* the state needs to make some provision for universal citizen education. Book 2 of *De republica* discusses where responsibility lies for producing an educated citizenry, both basic literacy and more advanced education in the liberal arts.

Basic literacy is the province of the *paterfamilias*. It is the civic duty of heads of families to make sure that their male children can read, which, given the context, must mean the ability to read Latin. Otherwise, they cannot act well as citizens.

If possible, everyone should learn their letters. . . . Not only should letters be learned, but I hardly think, in a free city, that anyone deserves the title of a free-born citizen (*ingenuus civis*) who is illiterate. For without letters, how can we master or preserve even the smallest of the arts, to say nothing of the liberal disciplines? Neither mercantile nor agricultural activities may be kept sound without letters. Letters preserve historical memory, instruct posterity, link the past with the future, and compel us always to take account of our lives as a whole. For this reason it is best to imbue youth with letters before setting them to other studies if we wish at some point to turn them into men and count them as citizens. It will therefore be the duty of the best *paterfamilias* to see with the utmost care to the education of his sons, or at least to their basic literacy. The old Greek proverb says that a man without letters is like a tree that yields no fruit. Then let them go on to practice whatever arts they seem most suited for. (*Rep* 2.1)

<sup>7</sup>Adapting a famous quotation from Cicero (*Tusculans* 1.45.109): Glory follows virtue like a shadow.

<sup>8</sup>*How to Found a Republic* (*De institutione reipublicae*), hereafter *Rep.*, referred to by book and chapter number. *Pr.* refers to the proemium of each book. The reference here is to book 4, chapter 6 (4.6).

<sup>9</sup>Patrizi quotes from Valerius Maximus (2.10.2b) a famous anecdote about how Scipio during his retirement at Linternum overawed with his personal majesty some thieves bent on robbing him.

Patrizi here claims that literacy will make even ordinary craftsmen and farmers better and more productive citizens. Being able to read will also give them a deeper sense of community by linking them, via historical memory, to their city's past. It will make them more reflective about their lives. Since citizenship is in part based on merit, and merit is based on learning, no one can be a citizen who is not literate. Literacy is thus a precondition of civic virtue.

But what of higher studies? "But when they have mastered their first elements, it will not be amiss for them to address each of the liberal arts." Does that mean that all citizens should take courses in the liberal arts? Not quite. Patrizi admits that some boys will not have the aptitude for study, and they should be set to mastering some honorable task like trade, navigation, or a craft. The cleverer sort, however, should be encouraged to undertake higher studies.

Let those who govern the state (*respublica*), therefore, undertake this task before all others: that the city's youth undertake [one of two paths in life]. Either they should give themselves up to the study of the best arts (*studia bonarum artium*)—everyone in a free city should have a particular commitment to the disciplines, for Plato says that states become blessed that are ruled by wise and learned men—or if not, since not everyone is cut out for learning, they should practice trade, navigation, or other arts useful to civil society. Each person ought to work on his own account so as to be useful to himself, his family and his fellow citizens. . . . Leisured (*otiosi*) and low-spirited youths are the poison of the state. They are prone to lust, envious of the good, grasp after others' property, and in the end turn out to be so seditious and turbulent that they threaten the state. Thus they should not be admitted to public office . . . but forced into frugality, or if that is not possible, fined heavily or exiled. (*Rep.* 1.9)

Since not all parents can afford the cost of liberal education for their children, the republic needs to supplement parental resources and provide public teachers of the liberal arts and their crown: the humanities. The city should also build a public library to provide books, as did King Ptolemy of Alexandria, for those who cannot afford a library of their own.<sup>10</sup> The ancient kings also gave out prizes for poets and orators, an admirable practice which modern cities should imitate. In short—at least in the best republic—ensuring excellence in the liberal disciplines is the responsibility of the whole community. It is also, surely, in the whole community's interest, since the young men being educated in the liberal disciplines will soon be holding public offices.<sup>11</sup>

For if we want to write about the ideal republic (*de optima respublica*) it will be our responsibility to say in which disciplines we would educate our citizen—the man whom we would make a member of our city. The city's leadership will

<sup>10</sup>*Rep.* 2.Pr. and 8.15.

<sup>11</sup>*Rep.* 3.12.

see to it that each of the disciplines will have the best teachers who will teach publicly, at public expense. For not all private citizens can feed their children and afford the expense of teachers. (*Rep.* 3.12)

This is perhaps Patrizi's most remarkable proposal in the sphere of education: that all citizens should be literate, and that the ideal city should appoint professors to teach all the liberal disciplines, so that any citizen who wished to learn them could do so, free of charge. One can find calls for universal citizen literacy before Patrizi's time: Plato made one in the *Laws* (810a–b) and the great Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi made a similar proposal in twelfth-century China.<sup>12</sup> But Patrizi was the first modern Western author to propose what is today considered a basic precondition of good democratic governance.

Patrizi's call for an educated citizenry was an inescapable consequence of the logic of virtue politics. Since (a) in republics citizens rule themselves, and (b) virtue politics conditions a state's moral legitimacy, and therefore its concord and happiness, on the virtue of those who rule it, and (c) there can be no virtue without education, it follows (d) that no republic will enjoy moral legitimacy if its citizens are not educated in virtue. It is no surprise that book 2 of *De republica* is entirely devoted to education and precedes book 3's discussion of institutions, just as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is propaedeutic to his *Politics*. A statesman cannot lead his citizens to virtue unless he understands and acts with virtue himself. Institutions cannot function well unless the citizen body is educated in the disciplines that lead to virtue and wisdom.

### A SCHEME OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Today the liberal arts are commonly regarded as luxuries rather than public goods. For most parents, the bread-and-butter studies are those believed to offer their children the best opportunities for gainful employment, studies like economics, business, communications, or computer science. For the state, the most useful disciplines are deemed to be those that make it more competitive economically or militarily with other states, especially mathematics, the sciences, and engineering. Why did Patrizi—and most Renaissance humanists along with him—take so different a view? Why did they believe that the liberal arts were not only desirable for their own sake but vital to the health of the state? Patrizi explains why in the scheme of public education he lays out in book 2. What the Sienese philosopher offers here is not just the usual trite list of the arts to be included in an *enkyklios paideia*, the traditional list of liberal subjects based on classical authorities. Instead we get an ordered scheme of disciplines, each of which is justified in terms of its public usefulness.

<sup>12</sup>Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 211–12.

Needless to say, Patrizi does not grade the public usefulness of a discipline in terms of its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product. For a Renaissance humanist, to define public utility only in terms of wealth would be depraved. In Aristotelian terms it would mean placing “external goods” (wealth and status) above the goods of the soul. For a humanist, a good education is one that allows all citizens to live the best kind of life they can live. That means a life that includes moral and intellectual excellence, contributing to the common good, and religious devotion.

Patrizi’s scheme of public education begins with a distinction between body and mind. The state should encourage its citizens to train their bodies, which fosters intellectual health, industriousness, and resolution. The gold standard for physical training in antiquity was set by the Spartans, later imitated by the Athenians, who established public gymnasia and prizes for athletic contests. Bodily exercises should not be overdone, and the young need to engage in the right kind of exercise.<sup>13</sup> Noble youths, who are the boys most likely to serve in the military, should be placed in the houses of knights to learn riding, skill at arms, swimming, leaping, and spear-throwing. The example of antiquity needs to be followed judiciously, however. We should certainly not imitate the Spartan practice of exercising men and women together in gymnasia. Women should be kept soft and at home, as nature intended. Above all, we should not imitate the Roman practice of gladiatorial games in which men were killed to entertain the crowd. This was a repulsive custom which taught cruelty and contempt for human life. “Our city, and all well-ordered republics, will not have such things, if it will heed my advice.”<sup>14</sup>

Gymnastics will provide basic training for the body. The basic disciplines for training the mind are grammar and mathematics. Grammar was invented by the Egyptians and perfected in Greece but given civic purpose by the Romans, who established grammar schools everywhere at public expense. Grammar is the basis of all other disciplines: without the capacity to read with full comprehension and to write correctly one can learn nothing else. Patrizi does not say so explicitly, but grammar here must include some exposure to the classical canon of *auctores*, as was usual in the Renaissance classroom.

Another basic study is mathematics. Under this name Patrizi includes the four disciplines of the old quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, astrology, and music, the disciplines requiring calculation and measurement. He begins his chapter on mathematics by setting out a straightforwardly Platonic view of the reality of essences (which, however, he attributes to Pythagoras). Behind what

<sup>13</sup>This theme is also pursued in one of Patrizi’s Latin poems (*Poemata* 3.4). For Patrizi’s two collections of Latin poetry, see the Patrizi website.

<sup>14</sup>In *Rep.* 9.4, however, he recommends gladiatorial contests to train soldiers for military service. These presumably would not involve public spectacles and the killing of human beings.



appears to our senses, which record mutable things, are intelligible things, which are subject to mathematical expression; by learning arithmetic and geometry we give children access to a world of certainty and reality beyond the realm of the senses. In a more practical vein, measurement is a necessary skill for almost all the plastic arts. Public deliberation requires measurement too: we must be able to calculate dates and times in order to convoke assemblies and conduct diplomacy.<sup>15</sup>

The state also needs astrology. “We can sanction public astrology in every republic by many arguments and examples.” Astrology (which Patrizi does not distinguish from astronomy) is needed in agriculture to predict the weather and the growing season, and experienced astrologers can save the republic from many dangers. Ancient examples include Anaximander, who predicted an earthquake, and Hippocrates, who warned of an impending pestilence. Pericles was able to explain an eclipse to the Athenian army, thus calming its irrational fear of bad omens, while it was Nicias’ ignorance of astronomy that led to the Athenian military disaster in Sicily during the Peloponnesian War.

In accordance with ancient tradition, Patrizi includes music under the mathematical sciences. Music is a noble science that educated people should study.<sup>16</sup> It is valued by citizens because it provides delight and relaxation from labor, but it can also serve public functions. It has the power to change moods, so it can be used to fire up soldiers for battle, as the Romans did with their war-trumpets and the Spartans with their bagpipes. The right kind of music can suppress lust in youth. Gaius Gracchus controlled the Roman mob by having a servant play the pan-pipes in the background while he spoke to them, altering the crowd’s mood to harmonize with the themes of his oratory. Music has medical uses as well: doctors have used it to heal the sick and cure the insane. In a free city the relaxation and pleasure offered by music are sufficient to justify its study, but “reason and example have taught us that music is useful to the civil man, not only for its delightfulness but to foster the intelligence and to make men readier and more eager not only for military service but for undertaking the highest enterprises.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Paul Lawrence Rose, *The Italian Renaissance of Mathematics: Studies on Humanists and Mathematicians from Petrarch to Galileo* (Geneva: Droz, 1975) discusses mathematical pedagogy in Quattrocento humanism (11–18) but does not mention Patrizi.

<sup>16</sup>Patrizi’s discussion reprises themes from his own long didactic poem on the origins of music (*Poemata* 1.4).

<sup>17</sup>See James Hankins, “Humanism and Music in Italy,” in *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse-Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 231–62, on humanist arguments for the public usefulness of music and on the musical modes most apt to support virtue and noble behavior. Many of Patrizi’s arguments and authorities regarding the history and moral use of music have parallels in Filelfo’s *Convivia Mediolanensia*, on which see James Hankins, “Vocal Music at Literary Banquets in the Italian Renaissance,” in *Basler Beiträge zur Historischen Musikpraxis* 41 (2021): 227–43.

In chapters 3 and 4, Patrizi links medicine and eloquence together as disciplines that restore health of body and mind, respectively, in the citizenry. A healthy body is a precondition of a peaceful life; and medicine, a most ancient discipline, is a divine gift. “Those in charge of the republic will take care that medicine is learned with the greatest care, and doctors are honored, both because of the discipline’s intrinsic excellence and its utility.” Eloquence, on the other hand, is medicine for the soul, and thus even more necessary. It heals diseases of soul, no fewer than those of the body, such as anger, avarice, fear, and excessive transports of joy. Thanks to its healing power eloquence is the mistress of public affairs, and a state that wants harmony and willing obedience from its citizens cannot do without it.

And if we would judge rightly, of all the disciplines none is more suited to the state (*civitas*) than public speaking (*oratoria*). [The “demonstrative” genus of oratory, concerned with persuasion] is entirely political, for all public deliberation in a republic requires persuasion and dissuasion in order to dig out the truth. On this account the orator—the good man skilled in speaking, as Cato defined him—will argue for beneficial policies, lest the people slip into false beliefs and approve policies which, after sorrowful experience, they will soon be forced to undo. (*Rep.* 2.4)<sup>18</sup>

Since the orator must advocate what is good, he must know how to find the good: he must therefore link *eloquentia* with *sapientia*. As Cicero taught, eloquence without wisdom is empty and rudderless, worthy of mockery, but philosophy without the flame of eloquence is weak and leaves human affections untouched. “We [civic leaders] will therefore see to it that in our republic many youths who are intelligent and hardworking will study the humanities.” Eloquence here is represented as coterminous with the humanities, probably because, in Italian universities, professors of rhetoric were ordinarily the ones who taught classical literature.<sup>19</sup>

Dialectic, on the other hand, discussed in Patrizi’s next chapter (2.5), is presented as a study that is useless except as a mental exercise which sharpens the mind for “certain other disciplines.” It acquires civic purpose only as a tool of eloquence. Eloquence needs dialectic in order to make more powerful arguments: “rhetoric without dialectic is unfit for war, while dialectic without rhetoric is raw and inarticulate.” Logic studied in isolation from rhetoric can be pernicious. Though logicians may briefly compel the mind by force of argument, they fail to

<sup>18</sup>The definition of the orator is from Quintilian 12.1.1.

<sup>19</sup>On the identification of the humanities with eloquence, see Patrick Baker, *Italian Renaissance Humanism in the Mirror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

convince the heart and alter conduct; that is why dialectic needs to be combined with and subject to eloquence.<sup>20</sup>

Both medicine and eloquence are presented as curative arts, disciplines that are instrumental to civic health, bringing into harmony discordant humors in the body and passions in the body politic. The two highest and best of Patrizi's liberal disciplines, poetry and philosophy, by contrast, are transformative. They teach truths that are valuable in themselves, but they are of supreme usefulness to the city thanks to their power to shape character. Poetry and philosophy are therefore the highest of the humanistic disciplines.

As transformative studies poetry and philosophy are potential rivals of religious teaching, hence their study in Christian societies could be controversial. The chapter on poetry (2.6), the longest in book 2, begins with Plato's famous exclusion of poets from the state in the *Republic*. Religious critics of the humanities had used this *auctoritas* against the study of pagan poetry in schools for well over a century.<sup>21</sup> If the greatest ancient philosopher of antiquity, the philosopher whom St. Augustine regarded as coming closest to Christian truth, thought Homer and Hesiod dangerous to public morals as purveyors of noxious myths about the gods, surely Christian educators should stay far from them?

Patrizi's reply, up to a point, follows well-worn paths of humanist apologetic. Philistine critics of pagan poetry simply do not understand how to read either Plato or the poets. Drawing on Plato's *Seventh Letter* (nowadays considered pseudonymous), Patrizi affirms that the Greek philosopher never stated any positive doctrines, so his prohibition of Homer could not be taken literally. Furthermore, Plato in the *Phaedrus* claimed that poetic inspiration was among the four divine forms of madness, a doctrine Plato advanced to show that poets were holy men and "were engaged in something divine, beyond human powers."<sup>22</sup> Finally, as Patrizi learned from Diogenes Laertius, Plato himself had been a poet in his youth and had written love poetry and tragedy. His teacher Socrates had also written hymns at the end of his life.<sup>23</sup> Philosophy was not the enemy of poetry.

Furthermore, the critics of poetry misunderstood the poets' theology. The ancient bards, when talking about the gods, expected their readers to understand that the "gods" talked about in their poetry had often been bad men raised to

<sup>20</sup>For the contrast between scholastic logic and humanist forms of persuasion, see Lodi Nauta, *Philosophy and the Language of the People: The Claims of Common Speech from Petrarch to Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

<sup>21</sup>James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990).

<sup>22</sup>*Phaedrus* 245a, a passage translated by Leonardo Bruni in his partial version (ca. 1424) of the dialogue. Bruni translated the pseudo-Platonic letters around 1427/34; see Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 67–72. See also *Apology* 22b–c, *Ion* 533d–534e, and *Laws* 719c–d, for other remarks on the divine origin of real poetic inspiration.

<sup>23</sup>Diogenes Laertius 3.29–33; for the poems Socrates wrote during his imprisonment, see *Phaedo* 57a–61c.

the stars through political influence. Poetic descriptions of the follies of the gods were in reality veiled criticisms of evil rulers, like Jove, who before his stellification had been an evil king in Crete.<sup>24</sup> The best poets of antiquity had been holy seers who transmitted theological truths in the form of poetic myths. Their real purpose was to mock worship of the pagan gods, not to endorse it. Rightly understood, their poetic descriptions of the behavior of the gods revealed the latter as all too human, undeserving of divine honors. In any case, if the anti-humanistic argument is that poets could not have known the truth of Christ before his birth, the same argument applies equally to philosophers. If critics admit that we should read the pagan philosophers because they recognized the truth of monotheism, the same could be said of the early poets, like Orpheus (for example), who wrote eleven centuries before the Trojan War. Poetry was in fact the earliest form of philosophy.

The best city will therefore not drive poets into exile any more than it would philosophers. In a rare personal comment, he explains at the end of the chapter why he should be the last person to exclude poets from an ideal city:

We have written enough and more than enough about the poets, but the sweetness of their language and the tender memories I have of them made me go on too long. Indeed, it seemed to me wrong not to protect them as much as possible, as I have enjoyed their company greatly my entire life and have written my own *Poemata* in four books. As a poet myself I couldn't bear to see poets excluded from the city I have been founding, and especially since it has been dear to my heart to hand down precepts of the blessed republic if I could. (*Rep.* 2.6)

Pagan poetry is a rich source of truth and goodness, therefore, and as such must be read in schools. Grammarians would have no learning without the poets, no models of elegant language. The fables of the poets are really moral tales, rendered far more memorable by their mythic garb and beautiful rhymed speech. The edifying myths associated with the Labors of Hercules are enough to show how poetry can teach virtue. The most valuable genre is the heroic poetry of Homer and Virgil, which should be studied and memorized. "They have left to us images of the bravest men to gaze upon and imitate, which make us readier to seek every kind of virtue and praise." Achilles was the standard of bravery for Alexander the Great, for example. Heroic poetry should on rare occasions, perhaps after great victories, be recited publicly at games or theatrical festivals. Satire, elegy, and lyric poetry also contain much to admire and imitate.

<sup>24</sup>Patrizi adapts in a negative sense Euhemerus' account of Jove, which he may have known from the fragments of Diodorus Siculus, book 6, preserved in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 2.2.59b–61a. The latter work was translated by George of Trebizond in 1448 and dedicated to Pope Nicholas V.

Distinctions, however, must be made and a degree of censorship exercised. First of all, only learned poets are to be studied in the best republic. Sometimes the satirists (Patrizi is doubtless thinking of Juvenal and Martial) are a little too frank about the vices they excoriate, but the few offensive bits can be shaved off, leaving them the most holy of poets. In other cases whole genres are to be avoided in public instruction. Patrizi has serious misgivings about the propriety of reading and performing Roman theater, despite the revival of public performances of ancient drama occurring elsewhere in Italy during his lifetime.<sup>25</sup> For Patrizi, tragedy is too violent (he is probably thinking of the gory tragedies of the younger Seneca), too mixed with despair; the tragedians spend too much time illustrating corrupt mores; their language is turgid and inhumane. They make the stupid insane and the volatile angry. “Nearly all tragedy is to be excluded from the best city.” Ancient comedy also should not be studied in public schools or performed in theaters. It corrupts morals and makes citizens effeminate, lustful, and ripe for luxurious excess. Their subject matter is all about adultery and rape. Quoting Scipio Africanus in Cicero’s *Republic*, Patrizi claims the Romans themselves would never have countenanced its performance had not custom sanctioned it. But the moral gravity of the Romans led them to hold actors in low esteem.<sup>26</sup>

To be sure, Patrizi does not intend to prohibit absolutely the study of Roman drama. He carefully distinguishes between the public culture of the city, with its schools and theatres, and the private studies of learned men. Grave scholars should feel free to study morally dubious authors in private for the sake of improving Latin expression.

Comedy should therefore be driven from theaters, but learned and well-educated men may read it inside their private dwellings if they like, paying attention to its words rather than its sense. Comedy has great elegance, and its speech is pure, polished, and fit for daily use. (*Rep.* 2.6)

Patrizi recommends Menander, Eupolis, Aristophanes, Plautus, and Terence. Cicero endorsed Terence as a model of speech, and Varro said that, if the Muses were to speak Latin, they would use the language of Plautus. But citizens in general should not devote themselves to comedy. One black mark against the

<sup>25</sup>For the revival of Roman theatre in Italy, see Antonio Stäuble, *La commedia umanistica del Rinascimento* (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1968).

<sup>26</sup>In *Rep.* 8.14, after discussing in detail how theatres should be built, he proceeds to dismiss the idea of building them in modern times: “But this account of theaters is less necessary in our times. The [ancient] plays have all been rejected and hissed off and ejected from our cities thanks to our severity of mores and holy religion. Hence it seems entirely superfluous to say more about building theatres, since the ancient theatres are in ruins and new ones are by no means to be built.” Theater building was revived in the courts and academies of Northern Italy in the early sixteenth century.

Athenians, Patrizi says, was they spent more of their money staging comedies than fighting wars.

The highest of the civil disciplines in Patrizi's ranking is philosophy, discussed in his seventh chapter. It stands highest because philosophy teaches what virtue is.

We say the best republic is that in which citizens dwell in peace and quiet and are able to do all those things that lead to happiness. Therefore knowledge of virtue will be the principle necessity for the civil man, and virtue is what philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom, offers us. (*Rep.* 2.7)

Philosophy is called the science of all things human and divine, but moral philosophy is what is most useful to citizens.<sup>27</sup> Moral philosophy brings self-knowledge, here defined as awareness of virtue's power to control ugly passions such as fear, elation, lust, and anger. Philosophy pulls these perturbations out by the roots, which is why "every excellent citizen who wishes to benefit not only himself but his household and his country should devote effort to philosophy" (*Rep.* 2.7). From moral philosophy we learn what courage is, a virtue necessary to defend the state in battle, and what justice is, the foundation of the household as well as of civil society.

Patrizi takes his reader on a tour of the history of philosophy, borrowed mostly from Diogenes Laertius, showing particular interest in the achievements of non-Greek philosophers in Egypt (who claimed to have invented philosophy), India, Phoenicia, Scythia, and Persia. He then describes the various schools of Greek philosophy. He culls the occasional saying or wise teaching, such as the excellent rule of India's gymnosophists that astrologers who make false predictions must spend the rest of their lives in silence.

Several pressing questions arise when we consider Patrizi's civic curriculum. First, why does he not prescribe the study of history? Later, in the *De regno*, he ranks history with poetry as the subject that kings and princes most needed to study for examples of magnanimous action and to inform their practical wisdom.<sup>28</sup> In the *De republica* the subject is hardly mentioned. Since the whole treatise is built on deep historical research, one is tempted to say that Patrizi doesn't mention history because he doesn't notice it, the way fish do not notice the water in which they swim. But the most likely explanation is that Patrizi, like Cicero, regards history as a branch of rhetoric. In most Italian universities of the day, the ancient historians were ordinarily taught by professors of rhetoric, along with works of poetry and philosophy, and that may be what Patrizi had in mind.

<sup>27</sup>For this comprehensive sense of philosophy, see Patrizi's early speech *De laudibus philosophiae*; information about this unpublished work is available on the Patrizi website.

<sup>28</sup>Lauro Quirini in his *De republica* had also recommended assiduous reading of history for the sake of the many examples of virtuous conduct it contains and for its capacity to extend natural memory: "Nothing is more useful for the political man than history" (159).

History only began to be recognized as a distinct *ars* in the *Actius* of Giovanni Pontano, first published in 1507.<sup>29</sup> There is another possibility, too: Patrizi may have felt that the subject needed no special support from the state, as history was already among the most popular genres of literature in the Renaissance.

The largest and most glaring omission from Patrizi's curriculum of higher studies, however, is any provision for the formal study of law.<sup>30</sup> Since law was by far the most prestigious discipline in the civic universities of Renaissance Italy, and its professors by far the most highly remunerated, Patrizi's omission of legal studies has to be deliberate, perhaps deliberately provocative. The humanist movement, going back to Petrarch and Boccaccio in the Trecento, had long been bitterly critical of legal education, which it saw as intellectually and spiritually desiccated.<sup>31</sup> Lorenzo Valla had been arrested in 1433 at the University of Pavia for disrupting a doctoral defense in law; he had attacked the candidate for teaching barbarism.<sup>32</sup> Humanists saw law as an *ars nummaria*, a money-making skill, not a liberal art. The law schools also had a pernicious effect on civic harmony, humanists charged, encouraging venality and litigiousness, and advantaging the wealthy over the average citizen. As we saw in chapter 4, Patrizi thought that the best republic should take concrete steps to prevent the legal system of the best city from being corrupted by wealth and privilege. There is abundant evidence that humanists throughout the Renaissance were jealous of the high salaries paid to law professors and the great efforts made to recruit distinguished jurists by the citizen committees that managed Italian universities.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The *Actius* with an English translation may be found in Giovanni Pontano, *Actius*, in *Dialogues*, ed. Julia Haig Gaisser, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012–2020).

<sup>30</sup>Patrizi also leaves out the study of theology and natural philosophy. In Italian universities of the period natural philosophy was studied as part of the medical curriculum, and theology was taught primarily in the *studia* of the religious orders. See Grendler, *Universities of the Italian Renaissance*.

<sup>31</sup>James Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2019), 9–11, 14, 21–23, 50–51, 202–3.

<sup>32</sup>Mario Speroni, "Lorenzo Valla a Pavia: Il libellus contro Bartolo," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 59 (1979): 453–67.

<sup>33</sup>Uberto Decembrio by contrast, writing a half century earlier, before the humanist invasion of the university, rates law highly as a study that a humanist prince should encourage (*Four Books on the Commonwealth*, 237). Tito Livio Frulovisi in his *De republica* also takes it for granted that the prince will support legal studies, though he notes that these need not be taught in every city, while every town needs teachers of the liberal arts and ethics (352). Quirini recommends that the leaders of his aristocratic republic should study history and rhetoric but says nothing about legal education (Quirini, *De republica libri II*, 159). The humanist Andrea Biglia in a speech for the opening of Siena's academic year in 1430 (a parallel text to Patrizi's *De laudibus philosophiae* of 1426) includes among the *artes liberales* all the disciplines taught at the Studio from grammar to canon law. Patrizi's pupil Agostino Dati, however, in an academic speech for the conferral of

Excessively high salaries for jurists made it that much harder for cash-poor cities to fund professorships in other subjects. Throughout the fifteenth century, as Paul Grendler has shown, Italian humanists were involved in pressure campaigns to introduce humanistic studies into public universities.<sup>34</sup> In many places, and especially at the universities of Bologna, Padua, Ferrara, Rome, and Florence, they had considerable success. In the University of Florence in 1451, the rhetoric and poetry professors absorbed a larger percentage of the budget for professorial salaries than that allotted for canon law and medicine, an unprecedented situation that discloses the high cultural prestige enjoyed by humanism in that city.<sup>35</sup> In 1473 Lorenzo de' Medici sponsored a major reform of Florence's Studio, hiving off the pre-professional study of law and medicine to a secondary university center in Pisa, while reserving the center stage in Florence for humanistic studies.<sup>36</sup> At other Italian universities of the period, one of which was the University of Siena, humanists had relatively little success in dislodging law from its dominant place in the university.

Seen in this context, Patrizi's program of civic education in *De republica* is a visionary project. It implied a major reform of the university as inherited from the Middle Ages, an institution that in Italy had been built around the professional study of law and medicine. Patrizi's project thus reveals what is surely the fullest Renaissance expression of humanist ambitions for higher education in free republics.

Of course, in the end, Patrizi's vision was never realized outside the pages of More's *Utopia*. Universities are conservative institutions, after all; law and medicine continued to hold their place at the apex of the Italian educational system well into the modern period. But the humanities nevertheless succeeded in making a place for themselves at the base of the pyramid, providing a broad foundation of general knowledge upon which more specialized, professional studies could be built. The early humanists had insisted that all those aspiring to the class of gentlemen had to be educated in the classics, but by the end of the

a doctorate in law includes law in the category of an *ingenua disciplina*, a gentlemanly discipline, and describes it as the first and most important *liberale studium*; for Biglia and Dati see Gianfranco Fioravanti, "Le 'arti liberali' nei secoli XIII–XV," in *L'Università di Siena: 750 anni di storia*, ed. Mario Ascheri (Milan: Silvana, 1991) 255–71.

<sup>34</sup>Grendler, *Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, chapter 6; David Lines, *The Dynamics of Learning in Early Modern Italy: Arts and Medicine at the University of Bologna* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), chapter 5.

<sup>35</sup>Grendler, *Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 214; Francesco Paolo Terlizzi, "Istruzione superiore tra Medioevo e Rinascimento," in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), 258–76.

<sup>36</sup>For the reform of the Florentine Studio in 1473 see James Hankins, "Lorenzo de' Medici as a Patron of Philosophy," *Rinascimento* n.s. 34 (1994), 15–53, reprinted with changes in Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, vol. 2 (Rome: Storia e letteratura, 2004), 273–316.



Quattrocento it came to be expected that lawyers, doctors, high civic officials, military leaders, and churchmen too would need solid preparation in classical literature and philosophy. Without it they could not discharge the duties of their several professions with humanity and due respect for religion and the norms of civil society. The old rivalry between the humanities and the professions stirred up in the letters and invectives of Petrarch, Coluccio Salutati, and other early humanists would eventually be composed, and a new, more fruitful system of preparing the young for their roles in society established.



# Defending Intellectual Work in Schools: William C. Bagley’s Approach

*Christopher Beckham*

**ABSTRACT:** In an era marked by change in American schools, Professor William C. Bagley (1873–1946) defended traditional education. Contra the work of educational progressivists such as John Dewey who sought to rid schools of rote memorization and book learning in favor of “learning by doing,” Bagley’s defense of the intellectual work of schools included a notion of utility that emphasized the value of library work, learning to conduct basic research as a meaningful exercise for lifelong learning, and reading books to gain general knowledge. This article begins by exploring Bagley’s vision of utility as put forward in “Education and Utility,” then examines how Bagley’s approach differed from Dewey’s, and concludes with observations about what high school students, and others, can learn from old books and through assigned intellectual tasks in schools.

In the early 1900s, a prescient professor of education named William C. Bagley (1873–1946) saw something in the emerging Progressive education movement that worried him a great deal. Consequently, he took his opportunities as a public speaker and professor to warn parents, policy makers, school administrators, and fellow professors in schools of education about the way Progressive education undermined certain aspects of traditional education. This article provides an overview of some of the dangers Bagley foresaw, traces out possible sources of his worries in the writings of Progressive educators such as John Dewey, and renews Bagley’s call to preserve the intellectual work that schools must undertake in order to benefit the common good. Bagley’s defense of traditional approaches to education appeared in an essay entitled “Education and Utility.”

Bagley published “Education and Utility” in 1909. Adapted from a speech given to the Eastern Illinois’ Teacher Association, it appeared in a collection enti-

Christopher Beckham is Associate Professor of Education at Morehead State University.



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tled *Craftsmanship in Teaching*.<sup>1</sup> Bagley was by this point a professor of education at the University of Illinois. In 1917, he moved to Teachers College at Columbia University, where he spent the rest of his career. Importantly, however, Bagley didn't only teach future teachers: he worked as an elementary school teacher, principal, and superintendent before moving into higher education. Bagley understood well the particular needs of students from his years of experience in schools. He wrote and spoke about educational theory with the intelligent, informed perspective of a school-level practitioner.<sup>2</sup>

In "Education and Utility," Bagley took up the question of what made an education truly "useful" and suggested that depended on whether it helped a person "get a living."<sup>3</sup> These terms are commonly used today, but to signify very different things. In today's parlance, "making a living" is generally understood simply to mean earning money to pay bills, and when people speak of a "useful" education, they usually mean learning things that will relate directly to their line of work: those who advocate a useful education desire to take classes that teach skills they will use day to day in their line of work to make money. Bagley has something far more robust and expansive in mind, however. Since useful was still a rather broad concept, however, he gave three clarifying guidelines. Education is useful if it taught its recipient to go through life with a spirit of patience and perseverance, provided the skills needed to do basic research, and gave young scholars a sense of craftsmanship in any work undertaken. What Bagley has in view in "Education and Utility" is an education that goes beyond mere training to perform certain vocational tasks. When he wrote of a useful education, he envisioned one that built up good character and which gave its recipient broad skills that could be deployed in a variety of career and non-career related pursuits. In doing so, he was largely defending the aims and purposes of traditional education.

Patience and perseverance, he reasoned, were needed in any kind of work, because every job has moments of difficulty and unpleasant aspects.<sup>4</sup> Daily life itself presents people with many opportunities for patience and perseverance as well. Secondly, he argued that an education that gave its recipient the ability to conduct basic research would enable that person to find solutions for life's problems by availing himself of books, journals, and library holdings. Bagley argued that human experience features many common problems and dilemmas—

<sup>1</sup>William Chandler Bagley, "Education and Utility," in *Craftsmanship in Teaching* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911), 96–122.

<sup>2</sup>For a comprehensive biography of Bagley, see J. Wesley Null's *A Disciplined Progressive Educator: The Life and Career of William Chandler Bagley* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003). Essential reading for anyone seeking to understand Bagley, Null's biography provides a nuanced examination of Bagley's life and times. Null repeatedly and convincingly portrays Bagley as a defender of universal or "democratized" liberal education.

<sup>3</sup>Bagley, "Education and Utility," 98.

<sup>4</sup>Bagley, 102.

wide reading or else mastery of the tools of library research could help uncover answers to many of these problems.<sup>5</sup> Finally, by bestowing on its recipients the spirit of craftsmanship, a useful education enabled persons to take pleasure in tasks both great and small by throwing their hearts into the work and aspiring to do their very best. As he put it, sometimes great satisfaction and reward came from simply knowing that one had performed a “job well done.”<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Bagley argued that the overall quality of an education did not merely depend upon the content of what was learned. Curricula could be adapted and changed, he supposed, so long as these three basic lessons were still transmitted. Then, in a twist that probably caught his readers off guard, Bagley went on to argue that it was not the newly emerging Progressive education that could best deliver this kind of experience. Rather, Bagley maintained, it was traditional education that was best equipped to teach these three things.<sup>7</sup> In making his case, Bagley drew on a rich stock of personal example, anecdote, and common sense to drive home his points.

While each of Bagley’s points is worthy of comment and exposition and could indeed serve as fruitful measures of the utility of an education, this article primarily explores Bagley’s second point: reading books and learning how to conduct basic research is essential for getting a living and thus makes an education useful. In identifying this criterion, Bagley homed in on a significant realignment underway in American education. He worried that some were trying to eliminate teaching reading and library use as a basic component of schooling. Bagley worried where the internal logic of educational reforms such as these would ultimately take American society.

Bagley provided an interesting anecdote to illustrate his point that American schools should not set aside teaching reading, writing, and other aspects of the liberal arts and general sciences for the sake of a narrow, strictly vocational education. He told the story of two orchardists, one of whom had been the recipient of a liberal education, the other had not. The two men discovered one growing season that their apple crops were becoming speckled from a fungus, leaving the apples with an unappealing, mottled appearance. Both men tried what had always worked before: spraying the fruit with a familiar chemical application. Only this time, the spray did not do its usual effective work. The fungus persisted. In Bagley’s words:

Now this was where the difference in training showed itself. The orchardist who worked by rule of thumb, when he found that his rule did not work, gave up the fight and spent his time sitting on his front porch bemoaning his luck. The other set diligently at work to analyze the situation. His education had

<sup>5</sup>Bagley, 107.

<sup>6</sup>Bagley, 118.

<sup>7</sup>Bagley, 107.

not taught him anything about the characteristics of parasitic fungi . . . But his education had left with him a general method of procedure for just such cases, and that method he at once applied. It had taught him how to find the information that he needed, provided that such information was available. It had taught him that human experience is crystallized in books, and that, when a discovery is made in any field of science—no matter how specialized the field and no matter how trivial the finding—the discovery is recorded in printer's ink and placed at the disposal of those who have the intelligence to find it and apply it. . . . He told his friend about this material and suggested that the latter follow the same course, but the man of narrow education soon found himself utterly at sea in a maze of technical terms. The terms were new to the other too, but he took down his dictionary and worked them out. He knew how to use indices and tables of contents and various other devices that facilitate the gathering of information, and while his uneducated friend was storming over the pedantry of men who use big words, the other was making rapid progress through the material.<sup>8</sup>

By means of an education that had featured wide reading and learning to be on familiar terms with books and libraries, the second orchardist could avail himself of a vast array of tools and resources to find a solution that the other simply did not have. Bagley concluded by identifying the essential difference between these two educations:

Now I maintain that the education which was given [the orchardist with a liberal arts education] was effective in a degree that ought to make his experience an object lesson for us who teach. What he had found most useful at a very critical juncture of his business life was, primarily, not the technical knowledge that he had gained either in school or in actual experience. His superiority lay in the fact that he knew how to get hold of knowledge when he needed it, how to master it once he had obtained it, how to apply it once he had mastered it, and finally how to go about to discover facts that had been undetected by previous investigators. I care not whether he got this knowledge in the elementary school or in the high school or in the college. He might have secured it in any one of the three types of institution, but he had to learn it somewhere, and I shall go further and say that the average man has to learn it in some school and under an explicit and conscious method of instruction.<sup>9</sup>

The liberally educated, non-specialist orchardist knew how to “get hold of knowledge when he needed it.” This was learned behavior, fostered through his liberal and, in Bagley's view, therefore useful education. The former did not, and when his quite specialized, vocationally-based training failed him, he did not know how to search out new answers. Bagley shows here that the education that teaches students how to further their own learning and conduct research can be

<sup>8</sup>Bagley, 108–09.

<sup>9</sup>Bagley, 110.

more valuable than the training that only shows students how to perform specific technical tasks without wider exploration in the field. The orchardist who lacked the liberal education was prepared only for the situations about which he had explicitly been taught, the latter for the vagaries of life itself. For Bagley, this is one of the key features of a “useful” education. “Getting a living,” according to Bagley, is characterized by a kind of intellectual nimbleness, one that includes a willingness to face problems head on and having the ability to look for answers in the accumulated learning of humankind.

Bagley’s defense of general reading, understanding how to use libraries, and how to conduct effective research—which are distinctively intellectual tasks often associated with a liberal arts education—was an important one. In 1909, when Bagley wrote “Education and Utility,” there was already underway a groundswell of opposition to traditional education in America, and Bagley saw this threat clearly. The dawn of the twentieth-century saw the methods, curricula, and goals of traditional education becoming targets of some educational reformers.<sup>10</sup> However, one particular source of opprobrium existed for the reformers: they were asking whether or not books, memory work, and textbook reading were essential to the American school curriculum.

Whereas Bagley upheld the educative value of wide reading and teaching students through books, journals, and reference works to do basic deductive research, many others were rejecting these tools—and bookishness in general—as hopelessly outdated, trapped in the past, and actually depriving students of the kind of education they needed for the modern world. As strange as it seems, the legitimacy of books, particularly older books, that might be utilized by traditionally-minded educators, had become suspect in the curriculum of the American school child. How and why did Bagley find it necessary to defend the act of reading books and learning to conduct library research in schools? What had happened in American intellectual life and in American schooling to warrant this strange necessity to defend general reading and capacity for basic research?

The answers to these questions lay in the works of several individuals, many of whom exerted considerable influence on American intellectual life and American education. However, one figure looms larger among the influencers than most others: the Pragmatist philosopher, professor, and writer John Dewey (1859–1956). Dewey, who has also been called the father of the Progressive Education Movement, promoted educational ideas that Bagley opposed in his 1909 essay “Education and Utility.” By 1909, Dewey had emerged as one of the chief critics of American traditional education.

<sup>10</sup>Among them were the American Herbartians such as Charles De Garmo, Frank McMurry, and Charles McMurry. These were followed by the Progressives, who often were linked with John Dewey. See John D. Pulliam and James J. Van Patten, *History of American Education in America*, 9th ed. (Columbus, OH: Pearson, 2007), 186–87.

By the closing decades of the 1800s, the door began to open, ever so slightly at first, for more students to attend school. Gradually, compulsory education laws were passed by state after state. Enrollments surged. At that moment, when the schools were beginning to bulge at the seams and the one room schoolhouses began to move into their sunset, John Dewey began to write about the subject of education. Dewey was a native Vermonter, born just before Civil War, who received his PhD in psychology and philosophy from Johns Hopkins University. He served briefly as a schoolteacher in Oil City, Pennsylvania, then became a professor at the Universities of Michigan and Chicago, and Columbia University in New York City. Dewey, determined to influence the American understanding of education, unquestionably did so through the steady flow of books and essays from his pen over the next several decades.

In 1902, Dewey published a series of lectures entitled *The School and Society* where he insisted that with industrial, social, and technological change affecting and confronting Americans at every turn, it was the acme of foolishness to insist that the schoolroom must somehow be insulated from change and continue to rely on outworn ideas, traditional methods, and outmoded educational purposes. In particular, Dewey regarded the intellectual aspects of schooling as being unattractive for most students:

Our school methods, and to a very considerable extent our curriculum, are inherited from the period when learning and command of certain symbols, affording as they did the only access to learning, were all important . . . The simple facts of the case are that in the great majority of human beings the distinctively intellectual interest is not dominant. They have the so-called practical impulse and disposition. . . . [O]ur social life has undergone a thorough and radical change. If our education is to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation.<sup>11</sup>

He proposed that schools must educate students for the changed modern age, with its highly industrialized aspects, through an entirely new approach. This should include a radically changed and updated curriculum in arrangements consistent with the new human situation. In *Experience and Education* (1938), he warned against heavy use of books and instructional methods relying on rote learning and memorization:

Since the subject-matter as well as the standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of the pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity and obedience. Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, and teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective communication with the material. Learning [in the traditional sense] means acquisition of what is already

<sup>11</sup>John Dewey, *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 26–28.



incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is taught as a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future.<sup>12</sup>

Dewey paints a grim picture indeed of traditional education. In place of these resources and methods, he called for a robust series of experiences for students, suggesting that “learning by doing” was the most effective way to bring about growth.<sup>13</sup>

Dewey made problem-solving the hallmark of his progressive philosophy of education. Dewey’s approach to problem-solving is geared toward the scientific and the technical, and at several turns, Dewey diminished the value of the liberal arts and the use of books as primary means of instruction while extolling what he called his “method of intelligence” and the scientific method. In *How We Think*, Dewey noted that “demand for the solution of a perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection” and “the problem fixes the end of thought and the end controls the process of thinking.” By “thinking about thinking,” Dewey concluded that the business of education is to:

cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded, and to ingrain into the individual’s working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, solutions to current problems must come from proper investigation in real time—not from reading about the problems of the past in old books that were full of “assertions, guesses, and opinions,” formed in an unscientific age

<sup>12</sup>John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 2015), 18–19.

<sup>13</sup>William C. Bagley and John Dewey were not the only theorists engaging in scholarly discussion on these matters. Booker T. Washington was opposed by W. E. B. Dubois, Anna Julia Cooper, and William Sanders Scarborough along similar lines. Washington extolled the value of industrial education in opposition to liberal arts education. Dubois, Cooper, and Scarborough argued for the benefits of classical, liberal arts education. A good summary of these differences is found in an excerpt of Washington’s *Up from Slavery* and Dubois’ “On the Training of Black Men,” in *American Educational Thought: Essays From 1640–1940*, ed. Andrew J. Milson et al. (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2010), 411–24, and 425–47. Additionally, Washington’s association with the Progressive movement is explored by Donald Generals in “Booker T. Washington and Progressive Education: An Experimentalist Approach to Curriculum Development and Reform,” in *The Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 215–34. See also Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, eds., *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) and Michele Ronnick, ed., *The Works of William Sanders Scarborough: Black Classicist and Race Leader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup>John Dewey, *How We Think* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), 27–28.

by unscientific people. In a telling passage from another of his books, *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey noted that the general public was too apt to be swayed by storytellers rather than the scientific community on important matters. In making this statement, Dewey let it be clearly known that he took a rather dim view of letting old books, even great books, be the source of understanding in the modern world.

The attempt to decide by law that the legends of a primitive Hebrew people regarding the genesis of man are more authoritative than the results of scientific inquiry might be cited as a typical example of the sort of thing which is bound to happen when the accepted doctrine is that a public organized for political purposes, rather than experts guided by specialized inquiry, is the final umpire and arbiter of issues.<sup>15</sup>

While Dewey desired that schooling would produce “that attitude of mind which is conducive to good judgment in any department of affairs in which pupils are placed,” he did so within a certain framework.<sup>16</sup> It was the scientific method that he wanted taught, and so he argued with force that schools needed to train students in inductive reasoning from the earliest ages. In *How We Think* and later books, such as the aforementioned *Experience and Education*, Dewey argued that schools could, by use of experiences, habituate students into becoming reflective thinkers who used scientific methods to solve problems. Time and again, Dewey argued that the kind of reflective thinking modern people needed could never come from traditional education with its reliance on reading books and through the use of traditional educational methods.<sup>17</sup> For Dewey, it was almost as if every problem were of a technical nature, and therefore, a technical solution derived from the scientific method could be discovered.

Dewey’s followers understood “learning by doing” to mean that vocational and technical education should be the focus of education even though, in his use of this phrase, Dewey seems to have meant that learning should include immersive activities that went beyond the textbook recitations and rote memorization of his day. Despite Dewey’s attempts to clarify in writings such as *Democracy and Education* that he did not believe all education should be vocational in nature, the bull was out of the barn, as the expression goes, by this point.<sup>18</sup> Getting it back in would prove difficult, if not impossible. Dewey’s arguments against traditional education and book learning in *How We Think*, *The School and Society*, and *Experience and Education* found a lodging place in the hearts of many educational reformers, and they took his criticisms in directions that he did not

<sup>15</sup>John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1954), 124.

<sup>16</sup>Dewey, 101.

<sup>17</sup>Dewey, *How We Think*, 79–96.

<sup>18</sup>See John Dewey, “Vocational Aspects of Education,” in *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 306–20.

intend. A bias against the liberal arts and their associated intellectual activities emerged in many school districts and teacher training colleges. One such reformer was William H. Kilpatrick, who became famous for his “project method,” an implementation of the Progressive educational philosophy. Extremely popular as an instructor at Teachers College, Columbia University, Kilpatrick became the foremost interpreter and popularizer of Dewey’s educational thought and, by his own count, taught more than 35,000 students.<sup>19</sup> Kilpatrick offered the cure for student boredom in school, and legions of teachers and administrators were quite willing to learn his methodology. By education reformer E. D. Hirsch’s estimate, Kilpatrick’s “The Project Method” of 1918 became one of the “most influential pedagogical pamphlet[s] in American educational history.”<sup>20</sup> In this pamphlet, Kilpatrick gives numerous ideas on how projects as varied as kite-making and boat building will spark greater student interest and reduce the boredom experienced from reading books and the traditional approach to schooling.<sup>21</sup>

Returning to Dewey and his objections to the traditional liberal arts education and a book-driven curriculum, these stemmed from his dislike of models of education that revolved around transmitting tradition to students. Dewey doubted that students gained much from learning the received wisdom of the past. The world had changed too much, in his view, for the great books or core texts found in much of the liberal arts curriculum to retain their ability to speak to students of the modern era. Dewey believed that absorption of too much proverbial or traditional thought tended to make students intellectually lazy, dogmatic, and unwilling to embrace change.<sup>22</sup> The empirical thinker, who looks to the past more than the present and future, he believed, was chronically prone to “aversion to novelty,” a bad disposition in Dewey’s view that hinders effective life in the modern world.<sup>23</sup>

Dewey’s *How We Think*, *School and Society*, and *Experience and Education* reveal one constant theme in his writing about education: traditional schools are ineffective. The reason they are ineffective is that they put entirely too much emphasis on reading, writing, and teacher-led discussions of books or lectures on the ideas contained in them—traditional schools, in other words, emphasize distinctively intellectual, tradition-driven tasks. The traditional curriculum was thus unsuited to the Industrial Age with its hustle and bustle and sustained, mechanized activity. Dewey argued instead for a pedagogical style that followed

<sup>19</sup>William H. Kilpatrick, “The Project Method,” in *American Educational Thought*, 511–12. Wesley Null addressed whether William Kilpatrick was a correct interpreter of Dewey’s ideas in *A Disciplined Progressive Educator*. He also related several incidents regarding William Bagley and Kilpatrick’s time as colleagues at Teachers College, Columbia. See 163–170.

<sup>20</sup>E. D. Hirsch, *The Making of Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 39.

<sup>21</sup>William H. Kilpatrick, “The Project Method,” 512–24.

<sup>22</sup>Dewey, *How We Think*, 148.

<sup>23</sup>Dewey, 148.

students' interests, centered on activities and experiences that initiated them into modern life and occupations.<sup>24</sup>

Whether he intended it or not, his writing provided the theoretical framework for what became known as the Progressive education movement. The general notions of Progressive education dominated American education well into the middle years of the twentieth-century, and in many settings, persists even now. It is a fair question, however, to ask whether those who claimed to be following Dewey were faithful to all that he had put forward in *The School and Society*. Dewey himself apparently believed that many of them had not, based on much of what he wrote in his later book *Experience and Education*.<sup>25</sup> In this book, Dewey warned that some took his call for flexibility in the classroom and a deeper consideration of student interest to unjustifiable extremes. Dewey was neither in favor of planless improvisation in the school classroom, nor an extreme child-centeredness that turned teachers into mere babysitters.

Despite the confusion over some of his ideas about relaxing some of the rigidity of the traditional, early twentieth-century classroom, one idea that remained clear in his writing was that "the distinctively intellectual interest" was "not dominant" in most people. Instead, most Americans, he explained, had "the so-called practical impulse and disposition."<sup>26</sup> Thus, Dewey argued, the schools must abandon their tired and worn-out quest to produce intellectual culture in the students through the use of readings and recitations. Instead, schools must embrace an updated agenda to educate hosts of new classes and kinds of students, and by means of a curriculum and pedagogy that was full of life-giving freedom and vitality:

While our educational leaders are talking of culture, the development of culture, etc. as the end and aim of education, the great majority of those who pass under the tuition of the school regard it only as a narrowly practical tool with which to get bread and butter enough to eke out a restricted life. If we were to conceive of our educational end and aim in a less exclusive way, if we were to introduce into educational processes the activities which appeal to those whose dominant interest is to do and to make, we should find the hold of the school upon its members to be more vital, more prolonged, containing more of culture.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup>See Dewey, *How We Think*, 38–39, 96, 189; *The School and Society*, 25–28; and *Experience and Education*, 17–23.

<sup>25</sup>Alan Ryan addresses the issue of whether Dewey's disciples read him correctly in his book *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 281–82. For example, as Dewey advocated "learning by doing," some thought this meant that merely increasing the number of activities in a classroom was all that was needed. Dewey, for his part, insisted that the intelligent planning and careful selection of what activities were educative was essential. "Activities for activities' sake" was not his goal.

<sup>26</sup>Dewey, *The School and Society*, 27.

<sup>27</sup>Dewey, 28.

Setting aside Dewey's contention that the intellectual interest is not the dominant one for most people, it is worth noting that he does not say anything about whether it should or should not be: his is an observation rather than a statement of an ideal. Once he was persuaded that other interests besides the intellectual one dominated students' outlook, his philosophical orientation therefore led him to believe that schools should cater to the students' actual interests, not some externally imposed principle. The ground-level reality was what mattered for Dewey, not some ideal pursuit that belonged to yesteryear. By stating that the intellectual interest was not dominant but doing and making, Dewey closed the discussion on this point. Once the intellectual interest was ruled ineffectual and outdated, it was time to move on. As Progressive ideals took hold, the old curriculum was largely cast aside in the name of progress. Instead of classes that were geared toward the intellectual interest (literature, languages, history, geography, etc.), classes geared toward life skills that apparently allowed for the "impulse to do and make" were offered instead. The popularity of Progressive ideas fueled a drive toward greater and greater emphasis on vocational and technical education as relevant, and the immediate application of learning became the watchwords of public education. The bookish liberal arts were deemed out of date. Given that there are only so many hours in a day, something in schools had to give. The older, traditional subjects were what were largely jettisoned. From 1900 to 1949, enrollment in industrial subjects, business courses, and home economics soared while enrollment in Latin, Algebra, and Government plummeted.<sup>28</sup> Of course, this decline cannot be entirely attributed to the influence of Progressive education. Educators who were living through the decline of certain liberal arts subjects noted Progressive education's influence but also decried certain wrongheaded, overly technical approaches to teaching the subjects.<sup>29</sup> This notwithstanding, failing to see the correlation between the rise of Progressive education and the decline of liberal arts education, with its text-rich, book-heavy curricula is to ignore what appears to be obvious.<sup>30</sup>

Having documented how Dewey's ideas contributed to the erosion of the intellectual interest in American schools, it is time to return to the thought of William Bagley. In Bagley's view, good teachers could harness learning by doing with intellectual tasks. Rather than discard books, the liberal arts, and traditional subjects, they should simply be taught better and more effectively, relying less on

<sup>28</sup>Steven E. Tozer, Guy Senese, and Paul C. Violas, *School and Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 158.

<sup>29</sup>Stringfellow Barr, "Liberal Education: A Common Adventure," in *The Antioch Review* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1955): 300–12.

<sup>30</sup>I. L. Kandel explored the erosion of traditional educational values due to the influence of Progressive ideals in his essay "Prejudice the Garden Toward the Roses?" which appeared in *The American Scholar* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1938–1939), 72–82. Kandel was an associate of Bagley's, and Kandel wrote an appreciative biography of Bagley referenced in subsequent footnotes.

rote methods of the past and instead utilizing immersive activities that centered on conducting good research and thoughtful reading. In his essay “The Possibility of Training Children How to Study,” Bagley wrote:

One of the best teachers that I ever knew taught the subject that we now call agronomy—a branch of agricultural science that has to do with field crops. I was a mere boy when I sat under his instruction, but certain points in his method of teaching made a most distinct impression upon me. Lectures we had, of course, for lecturing was the orthodox method of class instruction. But this man did something more than merely lecture. He assigned each one of his students a plat of ground on the college farm. Upon this plat of ground, a definite experiment was to be conducted. One of my experiments had to do with the smut of oats. I was to try the effect of treating the seed with hot water in order to see whether it would prevent the fungus from later destroying the ripening grain. The very nature of the problem interested me intensely. I began to wonder about the life-history of this fungus—how it looked and how it germinated and how it grew and wrought its destructive influence. It was not long before I found myself spending some of my leisure moments in the library trying to find out what was known concerning this subject . . . the point of my experience is not that a problem interest had been awakened, but rather that the white heat of that interest was not utilized so completely as it might have been utilized in fixing upon my mind some important details in the general method of running down references and acquiring information . . . This aspect of teaching pupils how to study is particularly important in the upper grades and the high school, where pupils have sufficiently mastered the technique of reading to be intrusted [sic] with individual problems, and where some reference books are commonly available.<sup>31</sup>

Bagley defended the intellectual tasks of schooling, which included learning how to research by reading well and becoming well-versed in the use of libraries. He also taught that teachers needed to spend deliberate and constructive time in the school day providing students with definite, particular instruction on how to read texts, how to master texts, and how to turn to them when unanswered questions confronted them.<sup>32</sup> Bagley understood that intellectual work in libraries, where a broad body of knowledge resided, accessible through books and other printed media, was essential for solving problems. Rather than denigrate reading, research, and a text-driven educational program, Bagley defended it as one of the approaches to education that students found most beneficial.

Bagley warned against diminishing the intellectual aspects of school work and the denigration of books and book learning up until his retirement from Teachers College in 1939. He joined with other educators who sought to shore

<sup>31</sup>Bagley, “The Possibility of Training Children How to Study,” in *Craftsmanship in Teaching* (New York: MacMillan Company), 150–51.

<sup>32</sup>Bagley, 152–53.

up the foundations of reading and traditional subject matter in schools as part of the “Essentialist Committee for the Advancement of American Education.” In 1938 he drafted a position paper articulating his beliefs about curricula that was published in the scholarly journal *Educational Administration and Supervision*. Bagley argued that:

It is by no means a mere accident that the arts of recording, computing, and measuring have been among the first concerns of organized education. They are basic social arts. Every civilized society has been founded upon these arts, and when these arts have been lost, civilization has invariably and inevitably collapsed. Egypt, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia are strewn with the ruins of civilizations that forgot how to read and write.<sup>33</sup>

In Bagley’s words, it was the intellectual work that schools taught their students to perform that ultimately had enabled civilizations to survive and flourish. Once these intellectual tasks were abandoned in the ancient schools, the societies in which the schools were situated ultimately collapsed. Bagley’s warning is thus a profound and grim one. If schools set aside books, reading, and the basic social arts of communication and computation as being too intellectual, and of limited value because they did not feature enough action on the part of students, then real consequences for society ensued.

In other writings, Bagley noted with concern the rise of dictatorships in his era—those of Hitler and Mussolini—who in 1938 were threatening the world order but had not yet caused the outbreak of World War II. Bagley worried that if American education continued to erode the teaching of reading, writing, history, civics, and the cultural heritage of the liberal West, new dictators could take advantage of this and arise elsewhere. The intellectual work that schools taught was therefore important not only for students’ flourishing but also for society at large. American democracy had been built on certain intellectual foundations. Bagley contended that if these intellectual foundations were not communicated to subsequent generations, then it would be foolish for Americans to believe that what had happened in Italy and Germany “could not happen here.”<sup>34</sup>

Bagley defined education as a process of initiating students into the basic arts of computation, calculation, and exposure to the accumulated traditions, customs, and heritage of their civilization. He therefore saw engaging in these educational tasks as the way civilization itself was sustained. He was not at all

<sup>33</sup>William C. Bagley, “An Essentialist’s Platform for the Advancement of American Education,” in *American Educational Thought: Essays From 1640–1940* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2010), 562.

<sup>34</sup>Bagley, 560. For the twenty-first-century reader, Bagley’s drawing a straight line from the decline of traditional education to the emergence of fascism and Nazism may seem a little overstated. However, one cannot fault Bagley for seeing what a real cause for alarm these movements were in 1938.

opposed to needed changes and modifications in schools, but he was not in favor of change for the sake of change. As he wrote in 1934:

There is no country in the world that has witnessed so many educational “reforms” during the past generation as has the United States. It has been one nostrum or cure-all after another. We have tried to improve the educational system by shuffling school grades into new divisions with new names; by adopting, one after another, different “methods” of teaching; by trying this and then that and then another pattern of organizing curricular materials.<sup>35</sup>

Transmission of ideals, through reading books on history or works of literature, was one of the most vital tasks of schools. It was by looking back—primarily through reading books and building up general knowledge—that humans knew best how to avoid old errors and thereby chart the best course forward.<sup>36</sup> This is something that Bagley seemed to understand better than Dewey, for he did not join with Dewey in the rising chorus against traditional education, reading, and the wide use of books, and instead continued to defend the intellectual side of American schooling.<sup>37</sup>

When Bagley passed away in 1946, American education lost one of its more ardent and outspoken defenders of traditional education. Its defenders have not all gone away, but they are a numerical minority and are not in a position of strength. A few, such as the academic turned education reformer E. D. Hirsch, have published numerous works urging American parents, teachers, and policy makers to consider restoring a traditional, knowledge-based curriculum to American schools that centers around reading in order to gain general knowledge. But Hirsch is now in his nineties and has written what he calls his “farewell book,” *How to Educate a Citizen: The Power of Shared Knowledge to Unify a Nation*. In this volume, Hirsch notes:

There is currently great disparagement for learning “mere facts” in favor of “active curiosity” and other high-sounding terms. But your ability to flourish in a society depends on your ability to communicate, to put things together, solve problems effectively, and strategize effectively. And the more relevant knowledge you have in your long-term memory, the better you will succeed in life.<sup>38</sup>

Hirsch’s statement here echoes what Bagley wrote in “Education and Utility.” Hirsch’s expression, “your ability to flourish in society,” is quite similar in meaning

<sup>35</sup>Bagley, *Education and Emergent Man*, quoted in I. L. Kandel, *William Chandler Bagley: Stalwart Educator* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1961), 46–47.

<sup>36</sup>See Bagley, “The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory,” *The Classical Journal* 34, no. 6 (March 1939): 326–27.

<sup>37</sup>Alan Ryan examined whether Dewey’s theories slighted the arts and humanities in *High Tide of American Liberalism* (143–44).

<sup>38</sup>E. D. Hirsch, *How to Educate a Citizen: The Power of Shared Knowledge to Unify a Nation* (New York: Harper, 2020), 119.



to Bagley's concept of "getting a living." Hirsch believes that a good education is one that bestows considerable knowledge on its recipients, for it is in this knowledge that one finds the tools necessary to "put things together" and flourish in life. Bagley held similar views.<sup>39</sup>

In an era of highly charged political debates, and sometimes painful divisions in American society, asking schools, parents, and students to return to the more patient educational arts of reading, writing, and research grounded in peer-reviewed, substantive library holdings is certainly needed. It is not, however, popular. And given the loud and persistent demand that schools become more focused on specific vocational instruction, unless significant numbers of heirs to Bagley's thought emerge soon, the argument for traditional education may soon completely die out in public education policy circles. By some indicators, such an emergence may already be happening, as suggested by the growth of the classical and home school education movements. Many parents and concerned members of the public have concluded that many public schools are too far gone for reform and have simply withdrawn to the private sphere where they can offer the kinds of curricula and school practices they deem best.<sup>40</sup> Were he alive to witness this, Bagley might be disappointed to see that public education is losing so many students to private education. He was a champion of the public schools and was a champion of what has been called "democratized liberal education."<sup>41</sup> However, Bagley would probably understand why many parents have decided to turn to private institutions for liberal arts education. He might be heartened that there are emerging options for those who wish their children to remain in public schools committed to traditional, book-rich, liberal arts education. In Cincinnati, Ohio, for example, area citizens partnered with a non-profit organization, St. Aloysius, and the Barney Charter School Initiative of Hillsdale College to open the Cincinnati Classical Academy in 2022. The Cincinnati school is the second public classical charter school in Ohio that is affiliated with the non-profit St. Aloysius agency and the Barney Charter School Initiative. The first was opened in Toledo, Ohio as the Northwest Ohio Classical Academy in

<sup>39</sup>Hirsch has praised Bagley in some of his books. Bagley biographer Null warns, though, that Bagley's views were at times more complex than Hirsch has made them out to be (see *A Disciplined Progressive Educator*, 8).

<sup>40</sup>See Arianna Protero and Christina A. Samuels, "Home Schooling Is Way Up With Covid-19. Will it Last?" *Education Week*, November 11, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/home-schooling-is-way-up-with-covid-19-will-it-last/2020/11>. See also "Census Bureau's Pulse Survey Shows Significant Increase in Homeschooling Rates in Fall 2020" by Casey Eggleston and Jason Fields. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/homeschooling-on-the-rise-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>. See also Clare Basil, "Classical Education is growing. Here's how to keep it that way." June 15, 2020. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/classical-education-growing-heres-how-keep-it-way>.

<sup>41</sup>Null, *A Disciplined Progressive Educator*, 144–47 and 281–82.

2019.<sup>42</sup> As Cincinnati Classical Academy puts it, they “believe in the value of books in a child’s education.”<sup>43</sup>

In closing, a personal experience might suffice as a way to further bring home the point. As I was working on this article, I saw an excellent high school performance of *Romeo and Juliet* where the students staged the play with contemporary dress and stage props but retained Shakespeare’s language. Following the play, I was a part of several meaningful conversations with one of the actors and others who attended. The discussions ranged from how parental, political, and economic ambitions can scar young lives to how long-standing verbal grudges can eventually lead to violence that spirals out of control. The discussions also touched on how, at the heart of things, love is an immensely powerful force in this world that drives all sorts of human actions. After viewing the play and having these discussions, I realized anew that the rich exposé of human nature in the themes of *Romeo and Juliet* are as relevant today as they have ever been. And yet, not all high school educators share this view on the value of reading Shakespeare for their students.

For instance, not long ago, at a meeting, I heard a highly decorated educator discuss an interesting approach to helping students reach state standard proficiency in reading college-level texts. Some students were complaining about having to read Shakespeare, so the school provided as an alternative a technical workplace manual instead. The students were happy, the teachers were happy, and the state standards were met, according to the educator. However, I wondered what was lost in the process of replacing Shakespeare with a technical manual. A little piece of civilization was. These days, the arts and humanities are already under considerable pressure in American schools. Thus, trimming Shakespeare from English class to make the reading more vocational and technical in orientation is a concession that means Shakespeare is not likely to return. It is true that William Shakespeare’s plays cannot teach the world much about computers, workplace safety, how to operate industrial machinery, or what grade of hard hat or steel-toed boots to wear. However, he can teach much about dealing with the problems of love, loss, family honor, and what unbridled thirst for power can do to people—all of which are lessons modern people need to learn as much as people centuries ago did. While it is certainly true that we are witnessing rapid technological change, unless we stop to consider the importance of retaining our humane learning, we may very well forget what it means to be human. If

<sup>42</sup>See Madeline Mitchell, “This New Cincinnati K–12 School Will Offer Classical Education with Free Tuition.” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. February 23, 2021. <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2021/02/23/new-k-12-school-cincinnati-classical-academy-set-open-2022/4554319001/>.

<sup>43</sup><https://www.cincyclassical.org/our-classical-curriculum/>. Cincinnati Classical Academy’s website notes that it is one of 25 public classical charter schools nationwide associated with the Barney Charter School Initiative.

my interpretation of Bagley's ideas is correct, I think he would agree that this approach is not a good development.

I agree with Knudt Flor, the retired CEO and president of BMW Manufacturing, who wrote a commentary in the Charleston *Post and Courier* newspaper that "today's engineers need much more than technical knowledge; they need to develop their emotional and intercultural intelligence so that they can be more collaborative and successful within a team environment."<sup>44</sup> He went on to state "my challenge to engineering programs—and all technical programs, for that matter—is to expand their curriculum in order to make students and graduates well-rounded citizens of the world. You achieve that by studying literature, history, music, the arts, culture and languages." Flor's advice is worth heeding: not only for engineers, but for all students. His sentiment shares the same spirit that pervaded the thought of William C. Bagley: the preservation of reading books and cultivating the intellectual interest in the curricula (as well as keeping a place for the other arts and humanities) is an important task for schools and colleges. It is through learning these subjects that education may remain truly useful.

<sup>44</sup>Knudt Flor, "Running BMW Taught Me Engineers Need a Liberal Arts Background," *Post and Courier*, October 4, 2022. [https://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/commentary/commentary-running-bmw-taught-me-engineers-need-a-liberal-arts-background/article\\_b474637a-43da-11ed-ab8c-df8d100c3adc.html](https://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/commentary/commentary-running-bmw-taught-me-engineers-need-a-liberal-arts-background/article_b474637a-43da-11ed-ab8c-df8d100c3adc.html).



# An Epistemological Rationale for Classical Education

*Jon Fennell and Timothy L. Simpson*

**ABSTRACT:** The primary aim of this study is to fortify classical education against influential but dangerously constricted conceptions of assessment and accountability. This effort is supported by the strikingly insightful defender of liberal arts education, Harry S. Broudy, a preeminent voice in philosophy of education during the mid to late twentieth century. The article explores Broudy's call for general or liberal education, highlighting the seminal epistemology of Michael Polanyi, upon which Broudy's call stands. Exploration of Broudy's epistemological rationale for classical education offers an occasion for reflection on the sort of person formed by such activity. The article will show that at the heart of comprehensive discussion of the ends, content, and methods of classical education, and manifest in the educational theory of Polanyi and Broudy, is a focus on shaping the moral imagination. Such shaping constitutes the character formation that is the fundamental objective of classical education.

A central purpose of classical education is to illuminate and thereby transmit the intellectual and cultural heritage of Western civilization. Its curriculum consists largely of the concepts and images, the symbols and ideas, as well as the magnificent accomplishments, that define that heritage. The purpose of such a curriculum, however, is not simply to transfer information (as important as that is) but also to form a kind of person—one that enjoys and exploits the fruits of such an education and aims to secure these same benefits for his or her own children, and for those who follow, generally. As a manifestly worthy objective, it is important to understand what makes it possible.

In the absence of such understanding, parents and educators, even those of a classical bent, may fall victim to the lure of the narrowly defined assessment

Jon Fennell is Professor Emeritus of Education at Hillsdale College.

Timothy L. Simpson is Associate Dean and Professor of Education in the Volgenau College of Education at Morehead State University.



and accountability programs that in recent decades have become prevalent in public education. The editors of *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America* observe that “Knowing that the purpose of education is to nurture the soul, classical schools struggle with the American obsession over grades, quantifiable results, and pinpoint measurement of students down to the thousandth decimal place,” and rightly perceive that “Such anxieties tempt classical school parents, students, board members, and even many administrators and teachers to change their ‘classical tune’ when it comes to assessment.”<sup>1</sup> Acquiescence to this temptation undermines the promise of classical education. In what follows we aim to protect classical education—that is, the effective initiation into, and thus transmission of, the Western heritage—from the dangers posed by contemporary conceptions of assessment and accountability. We will do this by clarifying the mechanism through which classical education successfully achieves its aims, aided by the strikingly insightful if underappreciated defender of liberal arts education, Harry S. Broudy, the most prominent voice in philosophy of education during the mid to late twentieth century. Exploring Broudy’s call for “general” or “liberal” education in light of the pioneering epistemology of Michael Polanyi, upon which it stands, will not only clarify the underlying dynamics of classical education but will also show why its rich content is essential for achieving its declared ends.<sup>2</sup>

Broudy’s epistemological rationale for classical education provides an occasion for reflection on the kind of person formed by such activity. It will turn out that the very epistemology that led Broudy to appeal so extensively to Polanyi will play a similar vital role in illuminating an educational ideal. Ultimately, a focus on shaping the moral imagination is at the heart of any discussion of the ends, content, and methods of classical education. Such shaping constitutes the character formation that is a fundamental objective of classical education. It is also, for Broudy and Polanyi alike, an indispensable element in preserving the Western intellectual and cultural heritage as well as the institutional arrangements within which that heritage thrives and upon which it depends.

<sup>1</sup>Gene Edward Veith, Jr., Andrew Kern, and Brian Phillips, eds., *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America* (Washington, D.C.: Capital Research Center, 2015), 118.

<sup>2</sup>A prolific writer who wrote on K–12 education for widely varying audiences, Broudy often used the terms “liberal studies,” “general studies,” “general education,” “liberal education,” “classics,” and “humanities” interchangeably, depending on his audience. While Broudy recognized the subtle differences between these terms, he sought to highlight their common claim that there should be a required, content-rich, common curriculum because his larger aim was to reform the conversation as a means of increasing allegiance to and support for liberal education for all. Wanting to avoid the distractions that follow from an appetite for definitional purity and preoccupation with non-essential variances, he sought to establish the common ground required to propel a movement for sorely needed reform. In this essay, we shift between terms for the same reasons, referring to classical education in a broad sense, hoping to spur growth.

## THE CONTOURS OF CLASSICAL EDUCATION

To ground the discussion to come, let us begin by reminding ourselves of what “classical education” is widely understood to mean today. Such instruction proceeds from the conviction that the human individual possesses both intellect and soul and, accordingly, the proper business of education is to train the mind as well as to improve the heart. In pursuing these ends, classical education employs methods that are tried and true. Among its central principles is the proposition that while the training of the individual child’s faculties and capacities is the primary objective, that end is best achieved through strong and unambiguous leadership by the teacher. The teacher, and the classical school as a whole, affirms the existence of standards of correctness and truth as well as of beauty and genuine significance. The reality and authority of these standards is effectively learned by the young not only through serious and sustained study of the humanities and liberal arts, but also under the influence of an ever-reinforced pedagogical atmosphere that reminds students of the existence of those standards and seizes every opportunity to demonstrate commitment to them. Since the classical school understands itself to be very much in the business of character formation, and given that the virtues are, as Aristotle reminds us, best learned through practicing them, the school establishes high expectations in conjunction with providing occasions for students to meet them.

The classical school understands that the young individual will soon be an adult citizen. Therefore, among the chief purposes of such a school is development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of responsible citizenship inextricably tied to the cultivation of a capacity for self-command (the dimensions of which are regularly encountered in an age-appropriate manner within the curriculum). The nation and its history, and respect for it, are a prominent feature of classical education in our time.

Within these general contours of classical education, individual schools, of course, vary. Thus “classical education” does not refer to a particular instance of schooling defined by one single goal, curriculum, and pedagogy but, reflecting the distinctive focus and leanings of a school’s founders and administration, comes in a variety of forms. We seek to capture the so-called “field” or “family” of classical education through the use of various relevant categories such as goals, curriculum, and pedagogy and variations within those categories.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>For an overview of the breadth of definitions of classical education, see Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (Tacoma, WA: Angelica Press, 2012); Douglas J. Wilson, *Repairing the Ruins: The Classical and Christian Challenge of Modern Education* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996); Veith, Kern, and Phillips, eds., *Classical Education*; Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian and Classical Education* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2019); and David V. Hicks, *Norms and Nobility: A Treatise on Education* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999).

Private classical schools may include religious instruction that is prohibited in classical charter schools (which, being public institutions, must leave this important aspect of character formation to the parents). Moreover, the curriculum of a classical school can vary in light of its specific mission. For example, the Thales Academy network in North Carolina emphasizes the *trivium*. True North Academy in Miami, Florida, reflecting the influence of E. D. Hirsch, author of *Cultural Literacy* and founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation, highlights its commitment to “core knowledge.” Founders Classical Academy in Texas, a Hillsdale College Charter School, is committed to a Great Books curriculum, as are the Ambrose School in Idaho and Immaculata Classical Academy in Louisville, Kentucky, both private classical schools.

These differences in focus pale, however, in comparison with what such institutions have in common.<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to envision a classical school that fails to affirm that its purpose includes inculcating virtue and wisdom, or that refrains from noting that the school exists to acquaint the young with Truth, Beauty, and the Good, to rightly order their loves, and to initiate them into the Great Conversation that is Western civilization. And, while every classical school stresses preparation for public responsibility, each also understands itself to be primarily concerned with something essential that is considerably more elevated than college and career readiness.

Contemporary classical education is a fundamental alternative to the standard public school. It would be ironic, then, if classical schools were to permit themselves to be exclusively evaluated in terms of the one-dimensional and unimaginative assessment and accountability systems that are so widely authoritative in those very institutions. Let us therefore turn to Harry S. Broudy, in whose wisdom we find genuine grounds for assessing the success of classical education.

### TACIT KNOWING AND THE USES OF SCHOOLING

After emigrating as a child from Poland and graduating from high school in Massachusetts, Broudy received his doctorate in philosophy from Harvard University in 1936. He then worked for a short time at the Massachusetts Department of Education before accepting a position at Massachusetts State College at North Adams, where he taught psychology and philosophy. Broudy remained in academia until his retirement from the University of Illinois in 1974. Following this, he was an extremely active and very productive professor emeritus throughout the 1980s. As indicated by a bibliography thirteen single-spaced pages in length, Broudy was a monumental presence in philosophy of education during

<sup>4</sup>Although classical schools across the country differ, they are generally recognizable as classical schools. One might say, borrowing from Polanyi, that they are tacitly known as classical schools. Consider the varied attendees at recent meetings of the Society for Classical Learning (SCL) (<https://sclconference.com/>), a major representative of and resource for classical education that supports a wide variety of schools.



the middle and late-middle twentieth-century. A classical realist, Broudy wrote extensively on aesthetic education and the philosophy of education, in the process introducing central concepts and to a considerable degree defining the enterprise. Throughout his career Broudy energetically defended the liberal arts in K–12 education, claiming that unless general education provides an experience with the classics or at least readiness for them, “it is a pretty poor sort of schooling.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Broudy, liberal arts education is threatened by an unthinking allegiance to the presuppositions of the “dogma of behavioral objectives” that underlies so many contemporary accountability systems.<sup>6</sup> Stemming from the “connectionist” (stimulus-response or “S-R”) theory of learning forwarded by Edward L. Thorndike, this dogma maintains that both school learnings and the uses of such learnings are specific and explicit. Moreover, under this view, “To be useful, school learnings need to be the same as those which life behavior requires.”<sup>7</sup> It forcefully asks, what are “the theoretical grounds for justifying instruction (determinate school input) for indeterminate outcomes (pupil outputs)?”<sup>8</sup> Thus, works and facts mandated for the curriculum are justified through correlation with anticipated required behaviors outside of and beyond school. Progressive education borrowed extensively from this dogma but focused on situational learning. In this case, schools should create life situations in school that mirror real life situations out of school, whereby “[t]he utility of schooling is based upon a sort of one-to-one correspondence between the content of school situations and the content of activities performed by people in life generally.”<sup>9</sup> Under this approach, the school teaches X, and the student is to retain X, replicate it during assessment, and will presumably use X later in life. The ability to retain and replicate X, then, is the mark of learning. Broudy observes that prevalent contemporary accountability systems subscribe to this schema as they focus upon and evaluate exclusively in terms of retention of explicit words, facts, and responses to situations.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Harry S. Broudy, *Building a Philosophy of Education* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), 199.

<sup>6</sup>Harry S. Broudy, “Can Research Escape the Dogma of Behavioral Objectives?,” *The School Review* 79, no. 1 (November 1970): 43–56.

<sup>7</sup>Harry S. Broudy, with B. Othaniel Smith and Joe R. Burnett, *Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 75.

<sup>8</sup>Harry S. Broudy, “Tacit Knowing and Aesthetic Education,” in Ralph A. Smith, ed., *Aesthetic Concepts and Education* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 77–106, at 79–80.

<sup>9</sup>Broudy, Smith, and Burnett, *Democracy and Excellence*, 76.

<sup>10</sup>For an historical context of grading, see John A. Laska and Tina Juarez, eds., *Grading and Marking in American Schools: Two Centuries of Debate* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1992); Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), especially Chapters 3 and 4; and Brian A. Williams, “Teaching Students to Feel Pleasure and Pain at the Wrong Thing: The History of Grades and Grading,” in *Principia: A Journal of Classical Education* 1, no. 1 (2022): 92–113.

Broudy's critical scrutiny of what he regarded as inappropriately narrow conceptions of educational assessment and accountability began at least as early as 1964, with the publication of *Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education*. And then, sometime prior to 1970, he encountered the work of Michael Polanyi, whose epistemology, with its emphasis on the tacit dimension and illumination of its role in knowing, was precisely what was required for Broudy to comprehensively justify a liberal arts or general education curriculum in the K–12 school.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, Polanyi invites us to attend carefully to our coming to know. How, for example, do we recognize the face of a friend in a crowd? To explain, Polanyi describes a triad consisting of 1) things in the world (“clues”), of which we are tacitly or subsidiarily aware, that are integrated by 2) a perceiving entity, giving rise to 3) a focally known object. In Polanyi's terms, the knowing subject “attends” from the subsidiary to the focal. There are, then, two sorts of knowledge, the connection between which is made possible by an active intelligent agent. In the case of our friend, we attend from the shape of the nose, eyes, chin, etc. to the resulting face. The meaning of these clues consists in the achieved integration, and to focus on any of the clues would make impossible the act of recognition.

The central point here is that we see with the tacit clues in order to understand the result. And what is true of perception occurs also in more abstract mental processes. Polanyi, for example, observes, “To rely on a theory for understanding nature is to interiorize it. For we are attending from the theory to things seen in its light, and are aware of the theory, while thus using it, in terms of the spectacle that it serves to explain.”<sup>12</sup> In arranging for young people to engage in systematic long-term study of science, history, mathematics, and the liberal arts, we are creating the conditions that will enable them later to see with and in terms of the principles, concepts, and distinctions of these disciplines. “What we see and hear depends in a thousand ways on the preparedness of our own mind and on our intelligent participation in making out what it is that we see and hear.”<sup>13</sup> Even when, as is typical, the details are forgotten, the impact of the general studies curriculum remains in the form of tacit categories, which Broudy labels “stencils,” in light of which the integrating mind, faced with ongoing new experience, can better understand the world—including, significantly, oneself.

<sup>11</sup>For the purposes of this essay, we accept Polanyi's epistemology and uncritically explore its implications for instruction, curriculum, and assessment. This approach is consistent with our intention to describe that epistemology and outline its implications for classical education and pedagogy more generally. For an exploration of the veracity of Polanyi's position, see Jon Fennell and Timothy L. Simpson, “A Polanyian Rationale for a Liberal Arts Core Curriculum,” in *Theory and Research in Education* 19, no. 1 (2021): 19–39.

<sup>12</sup>Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

<sup>13</sup>Michael Polanyi, “On the Modern Mind,” *Encounter* 24 (May 1965): 16.

The powerful influence of Polanyi on Broudy can be seen in Broudy's conception of the four uses of schooling. Due to the impact of prevailing accountability systems, in conjunction with widespread naïveté among lay persons as well as many school personnel, it is common to associate effective schooling with the replicative use of what is learned. This use is most noticeable in the practice of skills. In school, for example, students are expected to repeat the skill of reading and writing. Students now and in the future rely on replication of these skills for a variety of operations. We also expect students to replicate information. When did Columbus sail to America? What is a noun? Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? Where is Ukraine and what is the primary source of water in Australia? Such skills and information are useful in myriad ways. Less obviously, possession of facts is indispensable to thought—for when we think we necessarily think about some thing. Indeed, the more words that are present to mind (i.e., the greater our vocabulary and the associated referents), the larger and richer our world becomes. Mastery of facts and basic skills is, then, a central objective of liberal education. But it is far from the only one.

In addition to the replicative, a second widely recognized use of schooling is the applicative. Associated with a hunger for the immediately practical, an appetite often encountered in teacher education programs, this use of schooling reflects appreciation of the fact that the ongoing effective operations of our world depend on the application of knowledge to particular problems of practice. In this vein, for example, mathematics and physics is applied in the context of mechanics in order to solve satellite and transportation problems. This use of schooling, observes Broudy, is more complex than it first appears. He notes that one must recognize a problem and classify it before it can be solved. Doing so depends on skills of interpretation. In some cases, the problem emerges as a familiar one and thus a rote response can be routinely employed to solve it. Application in this instance becomes replication. According to Broudy, the replicative and applicative uses of schooling too often dominate reflection on the aims of education. Unsurprisingly, they therefore also dominate conceptions of assessment and accountability. But neither of these, insists Broudy, represents the most appropriate use of general education or its classical variant.

Broudy observes that if general or liberal education were to be assessed on its replicative and applicative uses a decade or so after students took their end-of-course exams, one would find that most of what was studied is either forgotten or not applied. Therefore, to regard these uses as the justification of general education leads to considerable distress. How much does the insurance agent or bus driver remember from history class? How much does the banker or police officer recall from English, geography, or biology, not to mention art, music, or foreign language? Even when taught systematically and well, and even when the curriculum is rich and mandated, which is increasingly rare in public, charter, and private schools, prevailing measures of accountability show

that what was taught is forgotten quickly—within months. We must conclude, therefore, that if tests of replication and application are the appropriate means by which to evaluate liberal education, then such pedagogy is an utter failure. Broudy, though, is undeterred. Acknowledging that much of what is taught and learned is inevitably forgotten and will never be explicitly applied, he observes, “Perhaps we are expecting the wrong benefits from [general studies] . . . Perhaps [instead] the criterion for the success of general education is *the kind of person the recipient becomes*.”<sup>14</sup>

Drawing upon Polanyi’s epistemology of tacit knowing, Broudy states that it is fitting and fruitful to understand the value of liberal education in terms of two additional and often overlooked uses of schooling. Highlighting the potential value of what has been forgotten and is no longer explicitly present to mind, these other uses reveal the dramatic shortcomings of the assessment and accountability measures that have become popular in recent decades both in school systems and legislatures.

The first of these other uses of schooling is the associative. This can take the form of loose or impromptu associations or of fixed and regular associations. In either case the association depends on an act of retrieval from an “imagic-conceptual” store that is stocked from birth by concepts, images, words, and feelings earlier encountered—for instance, in the fertile curriculum of a classical school.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult, if not impossible, to predict what clue will elicit which association.<sup>16</sup> We do know, however, that unless the image, word, or idea is in the store it cannot be retrieved, and if the store is meager then experience and cognition are comparatively impoverished.<sup>17</sup> It is useful to consider Broudy’s associative use of schooling in connection with E. D. Hirsch’s call for “cultural literacy.”<sup>18</sup> According to Hirsch, cultural literacy is

the network of information that all competent readers possess. It is the background information, stored in their minds, that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension, getting the point, grasping the implications, relating what they read to the unstated context which alone gives meaning to what they read.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Harry S. Broudy, *General Education: The Search for a Rationale* (Bloomington, IN: The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1974), 18. Emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup>“Imagic” is an adjective that is frequently used by Broudy, and he coined the term “imagic-conceptual.” Both are found throughout his writings. See, for example, “Tacit Knowing as a Rationale for Liberal Education,” in *Teachers College Record* 80 (1979): 446–62.

<sup>16</sup>Harry S. Broudy, “The Uses of School and their Evaluation,” *Capstone Journal of Education* 2, no. 1 (1981): 5–13, at 8.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy* (New York: Vintage, 1988).

<sup>19</sup>Hirsch, 2.

The background information represents “shared systems of association” that we use to make sense of what we read.<sup>20</sup> It is content knowledge from the schools, among other sources, that feeds the reservoir we tap in order to comprehend. For example, Hirsch states, “To understand the full text of Dwight Eisenhower’s Farewell Address and the historical circumstances that gave rise to it, they [readers] have to know who Eisenhower was and what a farewell address is in the American tradition.”<sup>21</sup> “Eisenhower” and “farewell address” are, in Broudy’s terms, associations necessary to grasp the full meaning of what was said as well as of the event itself.

Broudy was a passionate advocate for the arts, broadly understood, because he believed they provided a wealth of potential associations, the tapping of which yields rich and meaningful subsequent experience. But because we cannot explicitly identify in advance either the later-life meanings or the tacit items upon which they will depend, the dogma of behavioral objectives cannot provide appropriate justification for education in the arts or, for that matter, for liberal studies more generally. When the associative use of schooling is not appreciated, there can be little sympathy for a pedagogy of general education.

Where the associative use of schooling yields familiarity, the interpretative use brings order. According to Broudy, experience is intelligible insofar as it is understood in terms of categories, concepts, principles, and distinctions that may be intellectual or evaluative in nature and, in either case, may be elements of the imagination. Intelligibility and thus understanding, that is to say, depend on the controlling presence of form. To understand is to *see as* or *in terms of*. The subject matter and disciplines that define the general education or liberal arts or classical curricula are the sources of that in terms of which we see and thereby understand. The forms through which the individual interprets that which presses upon body and mind are referred to by Broudy as “stencils.” A vital product of schooling, these are useful in the deepest sense imaginable. But their operation is largely tacit. Typically, they are not subject to recall, and are not in any explicit sense applied. For that reason, their presence and operation cannot be captured by assessment mechanisms designed for the replicative and applicative uses of schooling. Yet, they are indispensable for association and interpretation—and for application, which is, says Broudy, a more robust and complex achievement than it is typically taken to be.<sup>22</sup> In referring to the assembly of such associative and interpretive resources, Broudy employs the metaphor of an “allusionary store.”<sup>23</sup> Here reside the treasures that are the precipitate of sustained exposure

<sup>20</sup>Hirsch, 64.

<sup>21</sup>Hirsch, 127.

<sup>22</sup>See “The Uses of Schooling and their Evaluation,” where Broudy notes, “Clearly the interpretive use of knowledge is presupposed by the applicative use” (10).

<sup>23</sup>Harry S. Broudy, *The Uses of Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 21–22.

to a general education or classical curriculum. That store provides the allusionary context that enables the associative and interpretative uses of schooling.

For Broudy, then, an appropriate criterion for the success of general education is the “depth and quality of the allusionary base” possessed by the student.<sup>24</sup> That is to say, general education gives rise to a kind of person. Precisely because the contents of the allusionary base operate tacitly and we scarcely, if at all, realize they are present, their functional value cannot be judged by tests of replication and application. It is Polanyi’s theory of tacit knowing that provides the epistemological framework for the suggestion that we may learn to use general education associatively and interpretively even while forgetting much of the content studied in school. Though forgotten, it is not any less effective or influential in our comprehension of the world. General education, then, is useful—though not in the ordinary sense of the word—because it makes both our world and our selves intelligible to us.

It is true that classical schools are notably successful in prompting students to retain and later display content. Our encounter with Broudy suggests, however, that such results, even when they are the product of the Classical Learning Test, are oblivious to an even more important use of schooling. We want students to learn and retain explicitly displayable facts and skills. Doing so is a legitimate and significant aim of education. But it is not the only nor most important aim of general education and, *a fortiori*, of classical education. Broudy, informed by Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowing, reminds us that much of what is forgotten continues to play a vital role in our lives. Classical education needs, then, to be careful in defining what constitutes pedagogical success so as not to undermine its own purpose and curriculum.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Much needed, and worthy of the best minds in the classical education movement, is the development of an assessment protocol appropriate for its central objectives—objectives that range well beyond the replicative and applicative uses of schooling. In such a protocol the following principles appear compelling. To begin with, properly configured assessment will focus on content and refuse to be satisfied with mechanisms that reputedly capture vaguely conceived skills. Knowledge, in conjunction with a corresponding character development, must remain the primary focus. Secondly, while of course students should be able to replicate and apply much of what they learn in school, an assessment protocol for classical education must, as well, be capable of capturing effectiveness in the even more important associative and interpretative uses of schooling. Broudy himself pointed in this direction when late in his career he developed the “Newspaper Test,” a device that revealed the presence of tacitly held knowledge in students that is the product of a content-rich education. See Harry S. Broudy, “The Life Uses of Schooling as a Field of Research,” in *Philosophical Re-Direction of Educational Research: Seventy-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, ed. L. Thomas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Broudy, “Research into the Imagic Association and Cognitive Interpretation,” *Research in the Teaching of English* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1973): 240–59; and Broudy, “The Search for Evidence,” *The Uses of Schooling*, 35–48. For a general overview, consult John G. Schmitz, “Research on Broudy’s Theory of the Uses of Schooling,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1992):

Broudy's account of the associative and interpretive uses of schooling, and the theory of tacit knowing upon which it relies, shows that success in teaching our heritage requires sustained exposure to, and rich interaction with, the principles, concepts, images, and exemplars of our civilization, and that this must be carried out in a pedagogical environment free of the constrictions of preoccupation with replicative and applicative measures of learning. A primary purpose of the classical school is to stock the allusionary store with the treasures of our heritage which, while often not able to be recalled immediately, may still largely define our view of the world and inform our understanding of it. What is more, the very process of richly stocking the allusionary store in a classical school creates an attachment to it that over time becomes a resilient bond of affection and commitment. This is not a blinding love, nor should it be, given that one aspect of the learned tradition is critical appreciation of constituent questions and issues. But the proper outcome of such an education includes awareness of the exceptional nature of that heritage marked by gratitude and humility as well as pride in regard to it. In this fashion, given that our students will become the parents and teachers of those who follow before long, a classical education, animated by the operation of tacit knowing, not only communicates the treasures of the past but also preserves them for the world to come.

### THE PERSONAL PRODUCT OF CLASSICAL EDUCATION

In considering the sort of person that classical education aims to produce, let us begin by noting that the beneficiary of a classical education possesses an "educated mind," a term used by both Polanyi and Broudy.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Polanyi, the educated mind is characterized by adeptness in what, drawing from Jean Piaget, he calls "assimilation" and "adaptation." In both operations, the tacit influence of a rich classical curriculum plays a vital role. Through "assimilation" the individual understands unfolding events in terms of categories, concepts, images, etc.—i.e., through realities and possibilities—that were learned earlier and are now subsidiarily present in the mind. These make possible a subsequent integration issuing in focal understanding. We have here the "seeing as" or "seeing in terms of" noted above. In contrast, through "adaptation" the latent or subsidiary lenses (the categories, etc.) are themselves modified in light of novel experience.

79–95.) Thirdly, if classical education consists principally of character formation, then assessment in such an environment must include evaluation of the student's character. Some progress on this front has taken place in KIPP schools via the "Character-Growth Card" (learn more at <https://www.kipp.org/approach/>), but a fully appropriate and satisfying measure of desired character development has yet to be designed.

<sup>26</sup>Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 102–4; Broudy, *The Uses of Schooling*, 2, 20, 32, 33, 57, 103, 110, and 117; and Broudy, "On 'Knowing With,'" *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society* (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1970), 89–103, at 101.

This operation will “enrich and enliven” the stored concept.<sup>27</sup> For example, an encounter with a new dog or tree, or with a new instance of courage or fortitude, will amend what was already present, even if only so slightly. In this activity the tacit dimension operates in at least two ways. First, modification of a lens due to the impact of novel experience depends on the operation of a tacit element that is not at that moment under modification. This becomes clearer when we ask ourselves several questions: What counts as something of such a nature that we need, upon encountering it, to adapt an existing concept? How do we, say, recognize something as a dog or an act of courage? How does this judgment operate and what makes it possible? Second, when we adapt, we are tacitly operating in accordance with a model of behavior, in all likelihood in accordance with an image of an exemplar, that we have learned somewhere. Of course, each encounter with the surrounding world, involves a blend of assimilation and adaptation. But in each such instance, one or the other is dominant. And, more to the immediate point, the quality and extent of assimilation and adaptation is a function of what was earlier learned, even if it has now been forgotten.

Importantly, there are also noteworthy attitudinal features to Polanyi’s “educated mind.” He states that the educated person is “clearly aware of the extent and special character of [his or her] knowledge, even though focally aware of hardly any of its innumerable items.”<sup>28</sup> This awareness gives rise to a “sense of mastery” Polanyi likens to “knowing one’s way about a complex topography.”<sup>29</sup> He then adds, “Consciousness of our education resides ultimately . . . in our conceptual powers, whether applied directly to experience or mediated by a system of linguistic references. Education is *latent* knowledge, of which we are aware subsidiarily in our sense of intellectual power based on this knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> The references to “mastery” and “power” are prominent in these passages, to which we might add a further characteristic of the educated person: confidence. Or, to phrase it somewhat differently, the product of the rich, content-laden education discussed above is a person who is thereby enabled to contend effectively with the world. Such an individual possesses confidence that he or she enjoys an indefinite and unlimited capacity to accommodate ongoing, largely unprecedented experience, which is to say, to cope with the unfolding reality that constitutes our being-in-the-world. We believe and have faith in the enduring effects of our earlier education. We know that in its richness it will serve as a reliable guide as we over time engage with the circumstances that surround and continue to impinge upon us. Because our conceptions (our categories, principles, and distinctions—our lenses or “stencils”) have served us well in the past, we trust that

<sup>27</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 103.

<sup>28</sup>Polanyi, 103.

<sup>29</sup>Polanyi, 103.

<sup>30</sup>Polanyi, 103.



they will continue to do so as we move forward into an uncharted and always to some degree uncertain future.

Unsurprisingly, many of Broudy's references to "the educated mind" are similar to what we find in Polanyi. He says, for example, that the "educated mind orders experience with the resources of the arts and the sciences,"<sup>31</sup> adding that the "educated mind thinks with the conceptual and associative resources" of the "consensus of the learned."<sup>32</sup> But Broudy makes reference as well to "educated feelings," the "educated heart," and, most significantly, to the "educated imagination."<sup>33</sup> As we look more closely at these intriguing concepts, we encounter what is perhaps the most vital and distinctive feature of the sort of person produced by a classical education, namely, what Broudy calls "enlightened cherishing."<sup>34</sup>

Before examining the fascinating and crucial relationship between aesthetic education, moral imagination, and character formation, let us clarify the connection between enlightened cherishing and character formation, the central aim of classical education. In his explication of and call for enlightened cherishing, Broudy indicates that the beneficiary of a proper education is attracted to and repelled by appropriate objects and can, if pressed to do so, intelligently defend and justify such preferences. Broudy observes that "to be human is to imagine what might be and ought to be."<sup>35</sup> As the cardinal objective of classical education is to produce a certain sort of individual, i.e., to form character, given Broudy's definition of "human," this means that classical education is in the business of cultivating an attraction to a distinctive understanding of what might be and what ought to be. We are, as individuals, best understood by what we love. As both Plato

<sup>31</sup>Broudy, *The Uses of Schooling*, 20.

<sup>32</sup>Broudy, 57. The disciplines, reflecting the consensus of the learned, "will make up the apprehensive mass or the structure of the educated mind with which the pupil will know and think" ("On 'Knowing With,'" 101).

<sup>33</sup>Broudy, 33 and 110. Later in the text Broudy notes that "the educated imagination is a necessary partner to the educated mind" (117).

<sup>34</sup>Harry S. Broudy, *Enlightened Cherishing: An Essay on Aesthetic Education* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1972). In describing this ideal and outlining the process upon which it depends, Broudy no doubt was influenced by Plato, who in *The Laws* states, "Pleasure and pain I maintain to be the first perceptions of children, and I say that they are the forms under which virtue and vice are originally present to them. As to wisdom and true and fixed opinions, happy is the man who acquires them, even when declining in years; and we may say that he who possesses them, and the blessings which are contained in them, is a perfect man. Now I mean by education that training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children;—when pleasure, and friendship, and pain, and hatred, are rightly implanted in souls not yet capable of understanding the nature of them, and who find them, after they have attained reason, to be in harmony with her. This harmony of the soul, taken as a whole, is virtue; but the particular training in respect of pleasure and pain, which leads you always to hate what you ought to hate, and love what you ought to love from the beginning of life to the end, may be separated off; and, in my view, will be rightly called education" (653a–c). Cf. *Republic*, 402a.

<sup>35</sup>Broudy, *Enlightened Cherishing*, 28.

and Broudy remind us, this in turn is established through the power of aesthetic imagery that stimulates enthusiasm for the virtues. Specifically, through a process of what Broudy elsewhere refers to as “seduction to commitment,” the objects of the pupil’s loves and revulsions are established.<sup>36</sup> Character is the product of a commitment made incumbent by the aesthetic appeal of images encountered during earlier education. The result is enlightened cherishing.

To make this vision somewhat more concrete, it is useful to recall “The Ring of Gyges” from Plato’s *Republic*. We are asked by the interlocutors to imagine that there exists a ring that, when worn, makes the wearer invisible and thereby provides an opportunity to commit crime with apparent impunity. Should one exploit the ring in order to gratify one’s every desire? Detection is impossible, so why refrain? Alternatively, moving from Athens to Jerusalem, imagine that we would have our children demonstrate a propensity to endure a degree of discomfort, even suffering, in order to benefit others—especially, let us say, the innocent. What, we wonder, would inspire someone to act in this fashion? The answer in both cases is the power of an aesthetic image, namely, that of an exalted human possibility and the stakes involved in acting one way as opposed to another. In deciding how to act, the individual, enriched by abundant acquaintance with exemplary elements of our cultural tradition, imagines a story in which he or she is the central player and responsible agent. Of the various possible outcomes, with which would he or she wish to be associated? Under the influence of enlightened cherishing there is little doubt.

A defining characteristic of classical education, necessary to its commitment to producing a certain sort of person, is the systematic exposure of the young to actions and events that exemplify, via attractive images, the principles for which it stands. The impact of these images will define the pupil’s character now and, vitally, during adult life. Such images are typically associated with literature. But, Broudy emphasizes, they are powerfully delivered by and discovered through the arts and humanities more generally understood—that is, through painting, sculpture, music, dance, etc. We should, that is to say, attend to “stories” broadly understood. Indeed, the concept of the influential aesthetic image is appropriately extended to include the behavior of teachers and other school personnel as well as to the tacit and explicit atmosphere of the school in the broadest sense—not only the classroom but also the hallway, lunchroom, and playground—and this is, or should be, a central concern of the thoughtful educator. In short, the successful classical school is expert in cultivating enlightened cherishing.

Because to be human encompasses both intellect and soul, a proper understanding of education encompasses training of the mind as well as improvement of the heart. Enlightened cherishing indicates that the training of the mind grows

<sup>36</sup>Harry S. Broudy, “Unfinishable Business,” in Peter Bertocci, ed., *Mid-Twentieth Century American Philosophy: Personal Statements* (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), 84–103, at 102.

out of the cultivation of the heart. They are not two separate enterprises, but two moments in a single education. Improvement of the heart is a consequence of learning, through systematic cultivation, what ought to be loved and reviled. That is to say, habituation, in the Aristotelian sense, is vital. Every individual cherishes or loves something. The educational task is to ensure that the pupil learns to love the True, Good, and Beautiful, while also developing contempt for the opposite. As noted by ancients such as Plato and Aristotle as well as contemporaries like Maryanne Wolf, we are not born loving the right things.<sup>37</sup> It is the place of education to rectify this condition.

The epistemological defense of classical education, then, follows from a conception of human nature in which the envisioned training of the mind emerges from a well-formed heart. Proper reasoning rests upon appropriate commitment, and students become committed to that which, being attractive, they love.<sup>38</sup> Character formation is the necessary ground for envisioned intellectual excellence.

Yet, there is a sense in which intellectual enhancement underlies moral development. Character formation is vitally dependent upon a content-rich curriculum that enables the associative and interpretive uses of schooling. But it is precisely these uses of schooling that resist capture by assessment defined in terms of explicit measurable outcomes.

In sum, it is in light of this conception of human nature and the human ideal that we argue that classical education must attend to the associative and interpretive uses of schooling. Such liberation from preoccupation with the explicitly measurable, enlivened by an emphasis on a content-rich curriculum, is essential not only to stocking Broudy's "allusionary store" but also to establishment of moral exemplars that, as "stencils" of understanding, will have a critical impact on the pupil's behavior later in life.

As Broudy was a world leader in the discipline of aesthetic education, we should not be surprised to find him boldly and unapologetically calling for "value education" and "value reconditioning."<sup>39</sup> In employing this language, Broudy is echoing a penetrating educational insight offered by Polanyi: "members admitted to a community at birth cannot be given a free choice of their premises; they have to be educated in some terms or other, without consultation of any preference of their own."<sup>40</sup> And in calling for explicit intervention in the value domain of the pupil, Broudy and Polanyi are in the distinguished company of Alasdair MacIntyre who states,

<sup>37</sup>See Maryanne Wolf, *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World* (New York: Harper, 2019).

<sup>38</sup>Our case is bolstered by C. S. Peirce's pithy observation that Logic depends on Ethics and Ethics depends on Aesthetics. See the closing pages of "The Maxim of Pragmatism."

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, *The Uses of Schooling*, 100.

<sup>40</sup>Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 72.

Morality . . . is in a very important way educative of desire. And the desires that people bring to their education are ones which they are going to have to modify, or even abandon, if they are to acquire the intellectual and moral virtues. If we treat the students' desires as given, the students' original goals as given, we are in effect abdicating from the task of educating them into the intellectual and moral virtues.<sup>41</sup>

Like these contemporaries, as well as Plato and Aristotle before them, Broudy grasps that human beings act in accordance with what they understand to be noble or base, beautiful or ugly, attractive or repugnant. If therefore we are concerned—and who, honestly, is not?—with how our fellow citizens, especially the young, act, then not only in the name of our own sense of beauty and propriety but also for the sake of our dearly held principles and ideals themselves, we are compelled to take steps to shape the aesthetic, and thereby the moral, affections of the young. To use Broudy's terms, our aim is to cultivate “cherishing” that is “enlightened.” These matters are well understood by thoughtful proponents of classical education.

What is typically not so well understood is that such character formation consists of the deliberate shaping of the moral imagination, the success of which depends upon specific, concrete educational measures. The term “moral imagination” is ambiguous: it is the name of a human faculty as well as the envisioned ideal maturation of that faculty. It refers, so to speak, both to an “is” and to an “ought.”<sup>42</sup> In regard to a particular person at a given moment in that individual's life, moral imagination is the name of a store of images—images pertaining to ideals, principles, meanings, and possibilities—in terms of which one interprets and grasps the world and, thereby, in light of which one acts.<sup>43</sup> We find both uses, though not the term itself, in Broudy; and the latter use, of course, presupposes the former.<sup>44</sup> This account of moral imagination will, for many readers, bring to mind C. S. Lewis—and for very good reason. In regard to the workings of the moral imagination, Lewis is both a penetrating theorist (*The Abolition of Man*)

<sup>41</sup>MacIntyre is quoted by Stanley Hauerwas in *The State of the University* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 127–28, n. 14.

<sup>42</sup>For extended consideration of moral imagination, see Jon M. Fennell, “What is Moral Imagination?,” *Imaginative Conservative*, April 11, 2016. <https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2016/04/what-is-the-moral-imagination.html>

<sup>43</sup>We have here, *inter alia*, what Charles Taylor refers to as the individual's “social imaginary” and “cosmic imaginary.” If Taylor is correct, and there is abundant justification for believing he is, there is nothing more important than what occupies these spaces, both for the individual and for civilization at large. For more on these matters, see Taylor's masterly *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). It is important to note that the imaginaries, and the principles and ideals of which they largely consist, are present to mind but not necessarily or even typically explicitly so.

<sup>44</sup>We do, however, find Broudy employing the phrase, “exemplars of possibility.” See *The Uses of Schooling*, 121.

and a master practitioner (his many popular stories). The “man” whose possible abolition so concerns Lewis is characterized by the ability and willingness to live in accordance with principle and ideal. There is no more effective source of powerful and enduring images of principle and ideal than the stories we hear and read in our formative years. Now, “formative years” extends over a long period—indeed, if Luigi Giussani is correct, as late as twenty years old.<sup>45</sup> One doubts, however, that we ever cease altogether to be subject to formation. Moreover, “stories” is to be understood broadly: literally for the very young, but in a more expansive sense for older children (and adults). Under this heading, as Broudy repeatedly emphasizes, we are to count the great books of our tradition as well as exemplars of excellence in behavior and creative genius as they are found not only in history and science but also in the humanities—literature, music, the visual arts, architecture, etc. We have here, of course, the curriculum of the classical school. This is a mandated course of study whose primary and central justification is its capacity to inform the moral imagination with enduring images whose influence will guide thought and behavior for a lifetime.

What, more specifically, characterizes the personhood of the beneficiary of classical education? Several attributes might be identified and described, but the following are most pertinent in this context. To begin with, the product of a classical education is greatly enriched through thoughtful acquaintance with the central and fundamental concepts, images, ideas, and symbols that define our Western heritage, from its ancient origins in Greece, Jerusalem, and Rome to its modern flowering in Britain, Philadelphia, and elsewhere. The moral imagination of such a person, the maturation of which is the primary consequence of what Broudy labels a properly stocked allusionary store, is richly infused with the story of this civilization as well as our inherited traditions. This individual will have become adept at interpreting critical events in our history, such as the founding of the American Republic, in light of that story and those traditions. If the story is taught well and responsibly understood, then the classical education student upon reaching maturity will have developed a personal attachment to it and thereby cherish the constituent treasures from which he or she so richly benefits. This person will have become cognizant of the story’s exceptional nature and thus feel both gratitude and humility in regard to it. What is more, a resourceful mastery of our story, coupled with an affection for it, will have cultivated a desire and propensity to participate in that which is unfolding. Such an individual will have developed a sense of stewardship for the story and thus act to preserve and perpetuate it. This will, however, not be zealous partisanship founded on blind allegiance. For, at the core of that story, and prominent in every aspect of the classical school, is an acknowledgement and affirmation of standards that transcend time and place. The beneficiary of classical education,

<sup>45</sup>Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001).

while committed to and appreciative of tradition, will be inspired by the search for even greater horizons and is committed to the advancement of excellence, in regard to both the good and the beautiful. Such a person will be curious and disposed to ongoing inquiry. By thus electing to play an active role in that legacy, he or she serves it while safeguarding its treasures, above all through the appropriate education of those who follow.

### CONCLUSION

Contemporary widespread interest in classical education is a welcome development. The objectives of this sorely needed movement are honorable. It would, therefore, be deeply disappointing if classical schools were carelessly to adopt the narrowly conceived systems of educational assessment and accountability that have in recent decades become dominant. Doing so would elevate replication and application to such a degree as to threaten the central objective of classical education—the proper formation of the young. If we are truly committed to transmitting our Western heritage as the chief means of developing the moral imagination and thereby the character of students, it is essential to heed the insight and pedagogical recommendations of Harry Broudy. Employing the pioneering epistemology of Michael Polanyi, Broudy demonstrates the limited domain of the replicative and applicative uses of schooling while highlighting the indispensable role and stunning power of the associative and interpretative uses of schooling. Students formed in accordance with appreciation of tacit knowing are richly rewarded with cognitive maps for understanding the world and themselves. In addition, they are instilled with evaluative stencils that guide informed appreciation and thus enable proper choice and action, which is to say good character. Broudy realistically observes that no school can guarantee the virtuous life.<sup>46</sup> Yet, a decent school assumes responsibility for imparting knowledge of what a virtuous life entails. Such a school understands that “having seen the world through the lenses of the learned and wise, one will judge other views by and with them.”<sup>47</sup> We have here the core insight underlying classical education. It is essential, if we are to succeed in this enterprise, that we understand the knowing involved, as well as the vision of human formation to which it gives rise.

<sup>46</sup>Broudy, *The Uses of Schooling and their Evaluation*, 13.

<sup>47</sup>Broudy, 13.

*Mad About Shakespeare:  
From Classroom to Theatre to Emergency Room*  
by Jonathan Bate  
William Collins, 2022. 320 pages, \$29.99

Reviewed by Nathan M. Antiel

There's a magnificent line tucked away deep in *The Winter's Tale*. Leontes has already gone mad. Seemingly mistaking his own life for Othello's, it is as though he is convinced he has been set in one or another of Shakespeare's tragedies. So Leontes determines to misread an innocent interaction between his wife and childhood friend, Polixenes. He plays Iago to himself, determined not to be fooled by appearances.

The results are disastrous as his actions write his fiction into life. He loses friend, wife, and son in the midst of what seems to be a consummate Shakespearean tragedy. Things begin to turn, however, when his infant daughter, Perdita, is stranded in Bohemia. She was meant to be exposed by Leontes' servant, but he meets a grisly fate as we inherit the most famous stage direction of all time: "Exit, pursued by a bear." Perdita, whose Latin/Italian name means "the lost one," is then found by a rustic fool who raises her as his own. So tragedy begins to give way to comedy, and a different kind of madness abounds.

Sixteen years later, the lost princess-shepherdess finds herself in conversation with Polixenes at a sheep-shearing festival. They seem to talk of flowers, whether cross-bred gillyvors—carnations—are "Nature's bastards." In reality, however, they are talking about the commerce between art and nature, about Perdita herself, who fears she is a bastard, having nothing in common with her too-common clown of a father. Polixenes advocates grafting: "You see, sweet maid, we marry a gentler scion to the wildest stock, and make conceive a bark of baser kind by bud of nobler race," and then strikes the sublime: "This is an art which does mend Nature—change it rather—but the art itself is Nature."

The debate goes back to Plato and Aristotle at least: does art imitate life, or do our lives come to take the shape of the art we love and cherish? Sir Jonathan Bate essays the question indirectly in his recent biblio-memoir, *Mad About Shakespeare*. The particular appeal of the book is that it offers a window into how Shakespeare can shape a life that has revolved around Shakespeare.



In addition to recounting his own life with Shakespeare, Bate brings us into the lives of others who have, likewise, been profoundly influenced by the bard: Samuel Johnson, Mary Lamb, John Clare, Edward Thomas, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath receive extended consideration. They were shaped by Shakespeare and, in turn, also helped shape Bate.

While these figures might not seem to have much in common aside from their mutual love of Shakespeare, Bate's title hints at the fact that—like Hamlet who claims he is “but mad north-northwest”—they all suffered from depression or some other form of mental illness. Thus the book, in addition to relating much of the story of Bate's life, aims to “test the proposition that literature in general, and Shakespeare in particular, may bring solace in the face of adversity.”

Shakespeare, of course, depicts the whole of life. It is uncanny, in a way, how he seems to anticipate your most cherished and seemingly original experiences. When we fall in love, lose a loved one, suffer betrayal or—worse—commit it, you are bound to find that Shakespeare was there first. What's unsettling is that his characters seem to experience the vagaries of your life better than you. So Bate, when his father dies suddenly during the summer vacation after his first year at Oxford, struggles to make sense of what has happened.

Indeed, there is no time to make sense, for chaos abounds: he hurries home, pausing to make excuses to his colleagues for his sudden departure, speaks with the doctor and the policeman, is asked to identify the body, calls his relations, and finally turns to comfort his mother—but what does one say, exactly?

Do we “speak what we feel, not what we ought to say”? When words matter most, we flounder. I have not the eloquence of Macbeth nor the wit of Beatrice—not even Bate's well-tempered prose. In the midst of tragedy, and in ecstatic moments as well, it is difficult to say anything. The night his father died, after all was said and done, Bate found himself writing out two quotations from *King Lear*. I suppose part of the value of being anticipated by Shakespeare is that he can teach you to feel your feelings, to inhabit your own life in a profound way. He gives you something to say as you struggle to endure the howling storm. As Bate has it, “If you're patient enough to persevere with him, Shakespeare will give you the words.”

Throughout the book we move, as the subtitle suggests, from Bate's youth in the classroom to his experience with and in the theater, finally, to the emergency room. So Bate brings us through a life, much like Shakespeare's corpus, full of moments comedic, romantic, and tragic in turn.

The memoir begins with the sudden death of his father and culminates with a heartrending account of his own frenzied experience of nearly losing his daughter. Unlike plays, our lives rarely divide so neatly across generic lines: “all the world's a stage,” but like Leontes, we often fear we've been cast in a role for which we did not audition. How often life is suddenly transformed, a seeming comedy gives way in a moment, and a terrible beauty is born. Aristotle calls this



*peripeteia*, a reversal or sudden change of direction in the course of events, and it is one of the things *The Winter's Tale* gets right. Perhaps, in “this distracted globe” there is no comedy, tragedy, history, or romance, but problem plays alone.

There are brilliant, interpretive moments sprinkled throughout the memoir. Bate brings the reader through the significance of the different birds in *Macbeth* when recalling his early experience with Shakespeare in school. And though scholarly debates about the differences between the First and Third Folio and the history of various emendations aren't exactly thrilling to the general reader, Bate quickens the understanding by examining whether Falstaff tells the young prince Hal he is “essentially mad” or “essentially made.” He thereby justifies, to my view, the purchase of yet another edition of Shakespeare: the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Complete Works*, which Bate edited with Eric Rasmussen. The texts are based on the First Folio—a prize worthy in itself here in the Folio's 400th anniversary—and with Bate as editor you're sure to find perspicacity throughout.

Though Bate had wonderful teachers, much of his Shakespeare education involved the theater. Bate's life has brought him into contact with a litany of great Shakespearean actors. He relates exchanges and conversations with Kenneth Branagh and Ian McKellen and discusses numerous performances he's attended over the years featuring Judy Dench and Maggie Smith and others, reminding the reader that as wonderful as Shakespeare is in a book, he very much wrote for the stage.

It is in hearing Shakespeare's language that he truly comes alive. And so do we. Though it is easy to envy the theatrical events Bate has attended, he tells us “the thing that really made me fall in love with Shakespeare's language was speaking it.” That is something we all can do. Like Shakespeare himself, who was all in all—actor, director, playwright, stockholder—Bate has been involved in every aspect of theatrical productions. He says of *Being Shakespeare*, the one-man play he wrote with and for Simon Callow, that “Working on the play in the rehearsal room was my best Shakespearean education since school.”

Speaking the language is key, but a significant challenge in teaching Shakespeare today is that he sounds so foreign to young ears. Students are increasingly ill prepared for the joys of the bard as fewer and fewer are brought up with the King James, poetry is almost never taught in schools or recited at home, and the invasive species of young adult fiction continues to find shallow minds fallow fields. We marry dull imaginations with duller books and make conceive a bark of baser kind. The situation is further complicated at classical schools where teachers and administrators boldly claim to teach virtue.

Notwithstanding the historical reality that many of the best in the classical tradition produced degenerate students—Plato failed spectacularly with Dionysius, as did Seneca with Nero—many seem to forget that Socrates himself doubted whether virtue could even be taught.

And yet, when we come to literature at classical schools, we find teachers readily moralizing: *Macbeth* warns us of the dangers of ambition, *Henry IV* shows us a man reformed, *King Lear* presents a “Christian worldview,” and other such drivel. By appropriating art for vague didactic moral instruction, we do virtue a grave disservice, abuse art, and do violence to the texts by stripping them of nuance and complexity, reducing them to fables or morals.

Unsurprisingly, this approach also fails to teach students how to read Shakespeare. Bate shows us a better way, not presenting the plays as offering definitive claims about reality but recognizing that Shakespeare has the “special trick of upending your expectations, making you see the opposite point of view from the one you started with.” Shakespeare, after all, wrote plays not sermons: “Sermons are intended to give answers to the meaning of life. Plays are there to pose questions.” It turns out that the best questions we can ask—both about Shakespeare’s plays and our own lives—are those that cannot always be answered. Indeed, it is in the questioning and the earnest pursuit of understanding that the art begins to work its magic.

It very well may be that reading Shakespeare can make you more virtuous, but that depends less on whether there are moral lessons in the plays than on whether Shakespeare makes you more conscious of the vagaries and complexities of life. Like life, “Shakespeare’s plays are full of surprises, both happy and sad. They give a constant reminder that *what’s to come is still unsure*. They don’t give you answers when things that you think will endure turn out not to endure. But at least they prepare you for the uncertainty.”

As we attempt to write our own lives, to do and say something meaningful in a world full of sound and fury, Shakespeare has the potential to help you make sense of the most intense scenes you find yourself in, whether they partake of tragedy, comedy, or romance. All true art does. That’s largely why Bate and his wife Paula Byrne—whose lovely and nuanced books range from studies of Austen and Waugh to elegant, exciting fiction—put together *Stressed, Unstressed*, a collection of poems that might help you find comfort during an endless night in the ICU. An organization they founded donates the book to doctor’s offices and hospitals, hoping to offer those in the grip of suffering something like what Shakespeare and Keats, Eliot and Johnson have offered them.

*Mad About Shakespeare* is a wonderful book. It manages to be funny, eloquent, personal, and scholarly. Bate welcomes you into his own life, his dreams and aspirations, fears and family history of mental illness. And Shakespeare is ever at hand, because Bate is absolutely right: “If you’re patient enough to persevere with him, Shakespeare will give you the words.” You don’t need to claim that reading Shakespeare will make you virtuous. It is enough for him to help you better understand and inhabit and endure your own life. After all, his “is an art which does mend Nature—change it rather—but the art itself is Nature.”

*Pursuits of Happiness:  
On Being Interested*

by Eva Brann

Paul Dry Books, 2020. 612 pages, \$29.95

Reviewed by Scott Samuelson

A “Johnny,” as you may know, refers to someone associated with St. John’s College in Annapolis (or its cousin in Santa Fe), renowned for its curriculum of Great Books. The teacher and writer Eva Brann has served there in various capacities, mainly as a tutor, for *seven* decades—she started there in 1957! She’s the most eloquent exponent of St. John’s distinctive brand of liberal education as well as a quirkily brilliant example of a thinker long immersed in it. If there were a Platonic form of “Johnny,” it just might be Eva Brann.

*Pursuits of Happiness: On Being Interested*, her latest in a long line of rewarding books, is a collection of thirty-eight essays old and new, some delivered as talks and others published in what she calls “those obscure and soon defunct venues I’m so fond of.” Since this exponent of being interested is incapable of writing an uninteresting essay, her big book—612 pages—is the kind that you can happily dip into again and again wherever chance or interest leads you.

At the same time, there is a loose structure to the collection that makes it possible to read the book from start to finish with added benefits. The first suite of essays deals with foundational issues of tradition, politics, and love. The next suite explores how these issues play out in the context of a good education, with special emphasis on St. John’s. The third group involves essays that embody the general enthusiasms that characterize Brann’s book in examinations of particular works—*Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost*, *Persuasion*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, among others. The final group deals with the metaphysical implications of Brann’s approach for how we think about time, the imagination, and the good itself. All in all, as essay builds on essay, the collection becomes “a philosophical introduction to the philosophical life,” to borrow a phrase Brann uses to characterize Plato’s *Republic*.

One of Brann’s many insights—the kind you get only from someone who’s been rereading the same Great Books for seven decades—is that you can open



one of Plato's dialogues to its exact midpoint and find a revelation of its core content. What's at the center of *Pursuits of Happiness: On Being Interested*? It's an essay called "On Being Interested," the subtitle of which—in case you weren't paying attention—is "The Central Essay." The soul of this book is the experience of interest.

Brann has always been good at showing us by example what it means to be utterly absorbed in thinking about things. Still, I was impressed by how she could be interesting in talking about being interested, as it's not only hard but dangerous to speak directly about what's most important. This is especially true of education: it's much easier to be a good teacher than to theorize well about education. Brann insists that interest (etymologically, "to be among and within") is not an emotion. Here's her definition: "It is truly a way of being, namely of being all there, in the here and now (among each other and our things), in the there and then (among our images and memories), and with the above and beyond (our intimations and transcendings)—whatever venue befits us."

Being interested is a curious present-mindedness, though it can look like absent-mindedness to the busy world. The curious thing is that we're so present to what we're interested in that our interest becomes tenseless, so immersed in our activity that we lose track of time even as we're tapping into what's real throughout past, present, and future. Such curiosities are, in part, what lead to Brann's culminating reflections on time and the imagination.

The interested soul is engaged in *pursuits of happiness*—the book's title. Brann reminds us that "pursuit" here doesn't mean chasing after a distant goal: it means the actual practice of happiness, as in the "pursuit of a vocation." And "happiness" here doesn't mean nice feelings but rather "the soul well at work," to use her lovely formulation. According to Brann, this is what a liberal education is: the interested soul in the active pursuit of happiness.

If you've known the joys of this kind of demanding happiness, it's unsettling to survey the current educational scene. "Souls well at work" isn't exactly what leaps to mind when you look at most classrooms. To Brann's credit, the lion's share of *Pursuits of Happiness* eschews whining about contemporary schools and instead presents a positive alternative to our sad means-to-means-to-ends theories of learning. But Brann does have one bracing essay on clear and present dangers to liberal education. Her checklist of worries includes rampant vocationalism, the professionalization of what should be an ardent common pursuit, the politicization of the humanities by left and right, the big price tag of liberal arts academies and colleges, the trendiness of moronic education-talk, and all the assessment regimes that strive to turn students into industrial products measured for quality control. Even though boredom—"the most dangerous human condition" in Brann's book—is the exact opposite of being interested, so much of what goes on in schools is designed to produce boredom and then manage the bored.

The St. John's alternative championed by the Johnniest of Johnnies has four characteristics. First, it's focused on greatness. Since the world is chockful of less than great things that must be dealt with, higher education should be focused on the inexhaustibly interesting. Second, this greatness is best encountered in books—works of literature, philosophy, math, and science that stimulate our highest powers of reading. Third, the Great Books to be studied should be part of a tradition—that is, unfolding ideas and images that have shaped our present. Fourth, the environment for the study of these works should involve truth-seeking in common. Rather than professors who lay down the truth to otherwise ignorant pupils, tutors and students alike should ask questions, form opinions, explain themselves to each other, and engage in never-quite-conclusive inquiry into whatever issues are put into play by the Great Books under discussion. To go back to Brann's definition of interest, the Johnny model involves being in the here and now among fellow learners and a common text, in the there and then of the book's language and the participants' memories, and with the above and beyond of the truths and beauties in the text's aspirations and its readers' intimations.

I have no doubt this model is a reliable mode of souls well at work. *And* it's one of the precious few kinds of liberal education to have maintained its integrity through our current squalor. But I kept wondering, as I was reading Brann's collection and thinking about St. John's, if there aren't other good modes of liberal learning that put souls well at work, that maybe even extend her commitments to the entirety of an education. Here are some questions I've been mulling over.

- Is a curriculum of relentless greatness the best nourishment for our minds? Isn't there something to be said for the complementary study of the merely good alongside the great? Can't stimulating histories and loving essays help to give form and direction to the wonderings of eccentric souls?
- Why not more of the other arts—especially the visual arts, which can also stimulate our reading powers to their highest pitch? Sure, St. John's incorporates the study of some great music, but why not even more?
- Since there are traditions of making and doing that are also choice-worthy for their own sakes (artists, cooks, mechanics, and athletes are also souls well at work), why shouldn't a liberal education incorporate some initiation into these traditions? I understand that these pursuits don't always lend themselves to the seminar model, but can't other models of engagement also tap into the deeply interesting?
- While seminars are undoubtedly pursuits of happiness in the best sense, aren't lectures and demonstrations also fine modes of education—not only as swift ways of understanding certain fundamentals but also as living models of what it means to be both educated and inspiring intermediaries between students and subjects?

Obviously, things like studying art and attending lectures aren't at all ruled out by Brann's overall vision of liberal education. Quite the contrary. Arguably, Johnnies are in a good position to do such things with verve elsewhere. But her vision is so inspiring it makes me greedy for even more than what it alone provides.

What I don't question is the thoroughgoing interestingness of Brann's latest book. The humanities may be in a crisis generally, but they're not in trouble here. These essays remind us that novels and poems are some of the most fascinating things in the universe, and that thinking about who we are and what we should be doing are among the most satisfying things we can do.

*Oliver Byrne's Elements of Euclid:  
The First Six Books with Coloured Diagrams and Symbols*

by Oliver Byrne

Art Meets Science, 2022. 308 pages, \$35.99

Reviewed by Andrew Seeley

*If Euclid failed to kindle your youthful enthusiasm,  
then you were not born to be a scientific thinker.*

—Albert Einstein

Euclid's *Elements* is a wonder of the intellectual world. A textbook of mathematics written for students, it also represents an ideal of careful, exact scientific thought, whose lucidity and certainty left a lasting impact on the minds of men like Descartes and Einstein. In fact, Einstein himself expected the generally educated audience of his *Relativity: The Special and General Theory* to have “made acquaintance with the noble building of Euclid's geometry . . . on the lofty staircase of which you were chased for uncounted hours by conscientious teachers.”

Yet many students and teachers, encountering Euclid for the first time, feel as though they “were not born to be scientific thinkers.” The full title of the 1847 edition of Oliver Byrne's version of the *Elements* seems to offer hope to those who struggle with geometry: *The First Six Books of the Elements of Euclid in Which Coloured Diagrams and Symbols are Used Instead of Letters for the Greater Ease of Learners*. Byrne, an Irish engineer, mathematician, and prolific author, produced a work of geometry that is itself a delightful work of art. According to the preface of the beautiful 2022 Art Meets Science reproduction, “The colour and forms of Byrne's original illustrations profoundly affected the world of art and design,” influencing twentieth-century artists such as Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky.

Byrne was not aiming to affect the art world, however, but to make learning the truths of geometry easier: “This work has a greater aim than mere illustration; we do not introduce colours for the purpose of entertainment, or to amuse by certain combinations of tint and form, but to assist the mind in its researches after truth, to increase the facilities of instruction, and to diffuse permanent



knowledge.” But does it make learning Euclid easier? No. In fact, Byrne did not intend his work as an aid to understanding Euclid but as an improvement on and thus a replacement for him. He believed that his use of colored diagrams and symbols resulted in a superior presentation of geometry itself.

As he explains in his introduction, Byrne’s confidence was not based on the quality of his illustrations but on what he thought was a superior understanding of the nature of mathematical learning. Modern algebra, and perhaps modern philosophy, led Byrne to judge that symbols and images were clearer and more suitable to learning than names signifying universal concepts. The introduction also reveals a number of misunderstandings of Euclid’s express goals and methods. In my view, Byrne’s recasting of geometry, though perhaps it might help some to memorize propositions, actually undermines the deep formative effects on the mind that result from learning to master Euclid’s approach. Byrne might help students cram and regurgitate for a test, but Euclid still outstrips him in his ability to engender lasting knowledge in the soul.

The differences between the two approaches comes into sharp focus when comparing a particular proposition of Euclid’s with Byrne’s re-presentation. Book I, Proposition 2 is devoted to showing how one can in effect reposition a straight line so that one of its endpoints coincides with a given point. First Euclid, as translated and presented by Sir Thomas L. Heath:

### PROPOSITION 2

To place at a given point (as an extremity) a straight line equal to a given straight line.

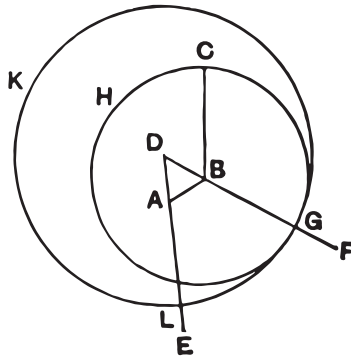


Figure 1

Let **A** be the given point, and **BC** the given straight line.

Thus it is required to place at the point **A** (as an extremity) a straight line equal to the given straight line **BC**.



From the point **A** to the point **B** let the straight line **AB** be joined; and on it let the equilateral triangle **DAB** be constructed. [I. 1]

Let the straight lines **AE**, **BF** be produced in a straight line with **DA**, **DB**; with centre **B** and distance **BC** let the circle **CGH** be described; and again, with centre **D** and distance **DG** let the circle **GKL** be described.

Then, since the point **B** is the centre of the circle **CGH**, **BC** is equal to **BG**.

Again, since the point **D** is the centre of the circle **GKL**, **DL** is equal to **DG**.

And in these **DA** is equal to **DB**;  
therefore the remainder **AL** is equal to the remainder **BG**.




But **BC** was also proved equal to **BG**;  
therefore each of the straight lines **AL**, **BC** is equal to **BG**.







And things which are equal to the same thing are also equal to one another;  
therefore **AL** is also equal to **BC**.













Therefore at the given point **A** the straight line **AL** is placed equal to the given straight line **BC**. Being what it was required to do.

Then Byrne:

*PROPOSITION II. PROBLEM.*

 FROM a given point (  ), to draw a straight line equal to a given finite straight line (  )

Draw ..... (poft. 1.), describe  (pr. 1.), produce  (poft. 2.), describe  (poft. 3.), and  (poft. 3.); produce  (poft. 2.), then  is the line required.

For  =  (def. 15.), and  =  (conft.),  $\therefore$   =  (ax. 3.), but (def. 15.)  =  =  ;  $\therefore$   drawn from the given point (  ), is equal the given line  .

Q. E. D.

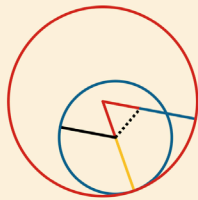


Figure 2

Byrne's text is artistically attractive, from its illuminated capital to the vibrancy of the colors employed. It immediately captures the attention. As a geometrical text, however, it is conspicuous for its lack of letters, both in the diagram and in the presentation of the enunciation, construction, and demonstration. The author believes this is the key to the superiority of his presentation, which he asserts decreases by two-thirds the time needed for the "acquisition" of Euclid's geometry and also makes it much more memorable. In articulating his approach he notes: "The letters annexed to points, lines, or other parts of a diagram are in fact but arbitrary names, and represent them in the demonstration; instead of these, the parts being differently colored are made to name themselves, for their forms in corresponding colors represent them in the demonstration." As names, they are included grammatically in the sentence structure, so that, for example, the first six images in the body are direct objects, while the seventh is a subject.

Byrne not only removes Euclid's convention of using letters to name portions of the diagram, he also eschews Euclid's practice of including universal terms as components of the names. Thus, Byrne's first figure replaces Euclid's composite name, "the straight line AB"; his second figure replaces, "the equilateral triangle, DAB." Byrne's images are not symbolically universal either, but are meant to directly re-present portions of the particular complete figure on the page—"the parts . . . are made to name themselves." Notice, for example, that the image of the triangle consists of lines with the same colors and same quality (solid or dashed) as in the main figure. The circles not only share the same colors of circumferences and radii (the radius of the red circle composed of red and yellow lines) with their originals, but also the relative sizes and the orientation of the radii.

Euclid always leads his readers to see the particular through the universal. This is reinforced by his exclusive use of words in enunciations and his regular practice of concluding demonstrative propositions (as distinct from constructions) twice—first in a way particular to the figure before him and second in the words of the enunciation (reduced to "Therefore, etc." by most editors), which are universal and thus apply to any possible figure. Byrne's systematic neglect of universality in enunciation, construction, proof, and conclusion suggests different goals and perhaps a very different understanding of the learning process and of knowledge.

Byrne desires to use a system of signs that represent their objects "with the greatest precision and dispatch." But his economy makes it impossible to construct the diagram of the figure from his presentation of the body of the proposition. Euclid describes his constructions in such a way that a drawn figure is not necessary; the student can usually draw his own. By contrast, Byrne's descriptions make no sense if the figure is not drawn ahead. Perhaps this is acceptable if learning is to be dependent upon the particular, but it is a significant departure from Euclid's practice and its implicit view of learning. Byrne's approach also

leads to inaccuracy. For example, Byrne neglects to indicate that the triangle to be constructed in Proposition 2 is equilateral. One could only deduce that by going back to the proposition referenced in connection with the construction (Proposition 1).

By eliminating letters, Byrne has eliminated the central importance of points as principles of the beginning books of the *Elements*. Euclid begins his work with a definition of "point." He never refers to that definition as justification for a step in a proposition, but the point as principle of the intelligibility of figures is present throughout. For example, Euclid always names angles by three letters, even when there is no risk of confusion (contra Byrne), for the points are principles defining lines, and lines in turn define angles. Without distinct names for points, Byrne is unable to express composed lines as wholes distinct from their parts. He cannot name line **DL** except as the yellow and red lines conjoined, and he eliminates Euclid's indefinite production of **DA** and **DB** to **F** and **G**, and his use of the circle to cut off **BG** at the appropriate length.

Byrne believes that his corrections of Euclid represent "the first improvement which plain [sic] geometry has received since the days of Euclid." His improvements are not limited to the propositions. He also reorganizes, re-presents, and adds to Euclid's foundations. Of particular interest is the transfer of Euclid's Postulates 4 and 5 to the Axioms (XI and XII), based on his view that Postulates are Problems while Axioms are Theorems. Wittingly or unwittingly, Byrne rejects what seems to be the basis of Euclid's division between Postulates and Axioms, namely that Postulates pertain particularly to plane geometry, while Axioms are foundations common to many or all quantitative sciences. This might arise from either an ignorance of or rejection of Aristotle's logic, which holds that confusing what is proper to a subject from what is common to many results in a sophistical kind of knowing—see *Posterior Analytics* 71b10 and 76a4.

That Byrne would miss or ignore this principle, and would make other alterations in Euclid's foundations, fits with his generally modern philosophical and mathematical views. His epistemological statements suggest those of Hobbes and other moderns who reduce universality to the unifying power of typical images. In this spirit, he justifies his method because it "forcibly appeals to the eye, the most sensitive and the most comprehensive of our external organs [which is pre-eminent] to imprint its subject on the mind." The language of impression and related words, rather than abstraction or conception, is found throughout Byrne's introduction. He describes the object of Geometry in Cartesian terms "to show the relative quantities of their parts," whereas Euclid's object is rather to show properties of wholes through a knowledge of parts, principles, and relations.

In another place, Byrne uses words that Euclid might: "Geometry has for its principal objects the exposition and the explanation of the properties of figure," but he immediately glosses "figure" in a way that is antithetical to Euclid's own definition (14); compare Byrne's "the relation which subsists between the

boundaries of space,” with Euclid’s “that which is contained by any boundary or boundaries.” His treatment of Postulate V is an egregious example of his neglect, or even contempt, of Euclid. His diagram does not present Euclid’s Postulate at all. It presents parallels whereas the Postulate is about lines that meet. His three alternate expressions suggest a very different understanding of the role of parallel lines in geometry, in keeping with modern mathematical thought.

Euclid is difficult for the beginner. It is often helpful to make his propositions more intuitive with visual aids, such as shading or coloring. It is good to encourage students to become teachers by presenting to their fellow students. Byrne might be helpful in this regard. But Byrne did not see his project in this light, and I believe that substituting Byrne’s texts and his methods for those of Euclid undermines the great formative effects and intellectual satisfaction that comes from submitting to Euclid as a master. The only teacher I have encountered who uses Byrne regularly with students also stated that Euclid is so often wrong as to be unusable in the classroom. It is a large question as to whether Euclid is the master geometer or whether his lack of modern algebra and ways of thinking make him an inferior teacher of geometry. But those who use Byrne’s Euclid should be aware that they are taking a stance on the question.

*The Vision of Christine de Pizan*

Translated by Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Williard  
Boydell and Brewer, 2012. 199 pages, \$29.95

Reviewed by Joelle Hodge

Augustine was instructed by Bishop Ambrose, Boethius walked with Lady Philosophy, and Dante was guided first by the poet Virgil and then by the lady Beatrice. We, too, are shaped by our teachers, whether past or present, embodied or in books. Few if any of our achievements, however, will become lasting contributions to the Western tradition. So why do we persist? If we endure working for the renewal of classical education, our legacy will more likely resemble that of the medieval poet Christine de Pizan, who, like us, took Augustine, Boethius, and Dante as her teachers. What we witness in *The Vision of Christine de Pizan* is not a masterpiece on the order of *Confessions*, *Consolation of Philosophy*, or the *Divine Comedy* but the product of a master-student who clearly sees the brilliance toward which her teachers pointed. *The Vision of Christine de Pizan*, then, is important for classical educators and students because it models the hopeful ends of the virtue and practice of *studiositas*.

An important poet of the Middle Ages, de Pizan did much to advance courtly love poetry and medieval allegory. Her *Vision* was written in 1405, and is a concise work, spanning a mere 124 pages. Her final experiment in allegory, the poem depicts one student's journey to the seat of divine wisdom. The fruits of Christine's life of study help her contemplate and navigate the world and time in which she lived. Because her world—like our own—was fraught with political, ethical, societal, and religious complexities, the vision genre allowed her to explore and synthesize her journey through French history and the political crises of the day. Present are the mythic cosmos and the virtue ethics tradition, as well as Homer, scripture, and philosophy. Readers familiar with Christine's corpus will recognize the way she employs and builds on historic texts, imitating their themes and structure. *The Vision* reveals the influence of her teachers.

Like other great medieval allegories, *The Vision's* architecture is complex, and the three interrelated levels harmonize and achieve a magnificent unity:



- 1) Primary: the history of France and the current political crisis;
- 2) Secondary: a poetic allegory that is itself made up of three tiers. These tiers interpenetrate while linking the primary to the tertiary level of the larger allegory. Each of these tiers speaks to the historical situation, offering prophetic advice to the kingdom of France:
  - i. Christine's dream-like pilgrimage through human life, beginning with the foundational chaos of the created world (book 1), which relates to the primary, historic level;
  - ii. The narrator's conversation with Dame Opinion, which reveals a fractured relationship between Dame Opinion and Dame Philosophy (book 2) and links books 2 and 3;
  - iii. Christine's biographical narrative, which unfolds in an allegorical conversation with Dame Philosophy (book 3);
- 3) Tertiary: a study in what McLeod, the translator, describes as Christine's mode of proceeding, "the rhetorical and stylistic features . . . that help promote and realize its didactic qualities."

At the primary level of *The Vision*, in book 1, Christine factually and figuratively describes the political fractures in France during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. This was a time marked by unscrupulous religious and political rulers—most obviously evident, perhaps, in King Charles VI's not infrequent bouts of insanity—and failings of the first and second estate, the religious and political leaders, respectively. These political defects influenced all strata of society and gave rise to the harsh realities experienced by the third estate, the common people.

In *The Vision*, Dame Libera personifies the third estate, thereby providing a window into France as a whole. Christine describes abuses endured by Libera: imagined in the form of three beasts, they are Dame Lust (a blind wasp with a perverse sting), Dame Avarice (a bloodsucking leech with "sharp nails like a griffin's"), and Dame Fraud (a "horrible long-tailed serpent"). Each of these beastly Ladies targeted and imprisoned the virtues who once governed the world: Dame Lust attacked Dame Justice, who carries a scale on her right side; Dame Avarice lulled Dame Chivalry, a "robust lady who was fully armed" to sleep; and Dame Fraud targeted Dame Reason, who holds a "very bright mirror." The contests between these great Ladies in the mythic cosmos reflect and reveal the chaotic, microcosmic realities of Christine's precious France.

At the secondary level, the poetic allegory of book 2 links the themes from book 1 (France's historical narrative and political crisis) to book 3 (Christine's biographical narrative). In book 2, Christine draws a line from the abuses committed by the religious and political elites directly to their willful devotion to Dame Opinion rather than Dame Philosophy. As book 2 begins, the narrator sees "a great feminine, bodiless shadow as if a spiritual thing quite strange in nature."

This is Dame Opinion, surrounded by a flock of shadows, each representing a liberal art: "grammar, the greens, dialectic, deep browns; arithmetic, rich and variegated shades; music, whites; geometry, reds; astrology the azures; theology golds; philosophy brilliant whites."

As the conversation unfolds, Dame Opinion reveals she is "superior to all their powers and stronger than all of them together. And to show that this must be true, [she often makes] even those who are wisest and most expert err and enter into such arguments that their conclusions are erroneous and damnable." She claims responsibility for stubborn hubris, and therefore causes both the nobles and the Church to "misuse chivalric deeds because they do not know or want to know the proper limits." Throughout her conversation with the narrator, Dame Opinion acknowledges her fractured relationship with Dame Philosophy.

In book 3, the philosophical allegory transforms into poetic theology. Here, through Dame Philosophy's revelation, Christine realizes that Dame Opinion has confused the story of her own life and begins to accept Philosophy's guidance, reinterpreting her own affairs and, by proxy, Dame Libera's. Through the light of philosophical certainty, she approaches Christian wisdom. McLeod's end-of-book "Interpretive Essay," argues that, "The ending chapter suggests [Christine's] mental reorientation that marks such a transformation as well as characterizing book III's consolation—compared throughout to a feeding—as a Eucharistic celebration that reenacts the fusion of human and divine, individual and God through an act of nourishment that defines and strengthens community." Book 3 also reveals that Dame Theology has been masquerading as Dame Philosophy all along. Dame Theology brings the three-book allegory full circle, revealing both a redeemed cosmic world and a redeemed Christine, all while hinting at a prophetic redemption for France.

At the tertiary level, by studying the development of Christine's mode of proceeding, we can trace the authorial evolution that structures the book. Following Dante in *Inferno*, "I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul," Christine antiphrastically declares, "I am hardly Nebuchadnezzar, Scipio, or Joseph." And yet, as the poem proceeds, she assumes each of these voices in turn. In book 1, her narrator assumes the role of King Nebuchadnezzar's apocalyptic prophet, Daniel, whose historical narrative prepares the reader for Christine's critique and advice in book 3.

In book 2, she adopts the voice of Cicero's scholarly commentator, Macrobius, who in his *Commentary on [Cicero's] Dream of Scipio*, merely hands down the words and opinions of another. Christine performs a similar role, offering limited explanations and questions of her own along the way.

In the first half of book 3, we witness Christine take on the highest authorial designation, *auctor*, when she describes her personal fates of fortune while conversing with Dame Philosophy. Here, Christine adopts a voice like Joseph's father Jacob, who shares his personal story without completely understanding the

circumstances. Jacob's lie to his father Isaac parallels Christine's initial erroneous and Opinion-influenced understanding of her life.

Finally, in the second half of book 3, perhaps in the light of her newly found humble awareness, Christine willingly relinquishes the role of *auctor* and again assumes the role of commentator, weaving together the philosophical teachings and theological explorations of *Confessions*, *Consolation of Philosophy*, and the *Divine Comedy*. Here Christine stitches together an image of the Trinity, an understanding of true happiness, and an exploration of the virtue of patience.

As with all philosophical allegory, *The Vision* assumes a reader with a significant breadth and depth of knowledge. The framing introductory and interpretive essays provided by McLeod are gifts for a reader who might not feel fully equipped to pilgrimage through this complex work. Readers will appreciate the assistance of the editors and translators as they connect important historical narratives and the liberal arts, alongside identifying various themes, symbols, scripture, and literary references.

When read as a dynamic conversation with history and historical texts, *The Vision* emerges as an enduring example of the Western Tradition and the liberal arts at work. What we witness in *The Vision* is syntopical reading at its finest coupled with a student's earnest pursuit of prudential wisdom, precisely the kind of work we want our students to be pursuing in the classroom. We watch as scholar Christine engages with the giants of the tradition, borrows from them, builds on them, and weaves in and around them, giving us an appreciation for how deeply one's soul can be shaped and formed through a path of long study. In Christine's *Vision*, we have the opportunity to be inspired as we witness a master-student apply her education toward understanding the realities of her life and times.



*The Lost Seeds of Learning:  
Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric as Life-Giving Art*  
by Phillip J. Donnelly  
Classical Academic Press, 2011. 288 pages, \$11.95

Reviewed by Jessica Hooten Wilson

Christian colleges often choose to cater to the liberal arts by offering either a course of study through the Classics Department or a Great Books track, but as early as the mid-twentieth century, the works studied in a Classics Department would have been indistinguishable from the Great Books. In fact, at Oxford University, the course of study called *literae humaniores* was nicknamed “classics” or “greats” by the undergraduates (which in 1920, included C. S. Lewis). We are only able to separate the classics from the Great Books when we misunderstand the history of education and the meaning of the words we use. This problem was amplified in my mind as I read Phillip J. Donnelly’s *The Lost Seeds of Learning: Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric as Life-Giving Arts*. Donnelly rightly diagnoses our “amputated imagination,” and prescribes a course of treatment that begins by redefining the words we use and unpacking the ancient history of ways of learning. His two-hundred page “drama of inquiry” invites the reader to consider better ways of shepherding higher education.

In 1946 an Oxford alumna wrote a letter to the head of the Department of Education in response to his recently published monograph *Total Education*. She inquired, “[I]s there not something to be said for the form of the medieval curriculum? The *first* thing you learnt was the Trivium—Grammar, Rhetoric, and Dialectic—the use of your tools. You learnt a language; you learnt how to express what you had to say; you learnt how to argue and detect flaws in other people’s arguments.” The writer was Dorothy L. Sayers, known all over England at the time as a mystery novelist and award-winning playwright. Foreseeing this modern educator’s resistance to evidence from the past in application to the present, Sayers downplays the historical source: “I do not suggest we should ‘put back the clock’ or ‘return to the Middle Ages.’ But I do suggest that when the medieval curriculum put its education in order that it may have had a method in its madness.” Her correspondent, M. L. Jacks, was intrigued and invited her to give a lecture on this thesis at Oxford in 1947, which became the widely



celebrated essay “The Lost Tools of Learning.” Following this essay, Americans began writing Sayers—as early as 1949—asking her to establish a school based on these principles. When *National Review* republished “The Lost Tools of Learning” in January 1979, it inspired the founders of the inaugural classical schools in America.

Sayers opens her address with a controversial claim, one that she hinted in her correspondence with Jacks would not be her thesis. Even so, she began by contending that the most progressive route forward is to “turn back the wheel of progress some four or five hundred years, to the point at which education began to lose sight of its true object, towards the end of the Middle Ages.” With a masters in modern languages and medieval literature, Sayers knew this area well, though she does not pretend to be a specialist in the burgeoning contemporary field of education. Rather she asks questions that should trouble any contemporary educator: why did the medieval students remember what they had learned where modern girls and boys forget most of it? Isn’t anyone else troubled by the nonsense published as journalism or the fallacies in biology textbooks? Might all these questions point to one underlying problem: we have failed to teach “the art of learning.” To correct this overarching error, Sayers proposes three ancient tools of learning: grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

Among classical education circles, the tools outlined by Sayers have become familiar, perhaps so much so that they have decreased in value. The problem she diagnosed has not been cured in the past century but rather exacerbated. However, if we are to apply the palliative of Sayers’ Trivium to our diseased education, Donnelly argues that we must amplify the treatment by exchanging the instrumental metaphor with an incarnational one. Perhaps Donnelly would say it more strongly. He suggests that Sayers unintentionally cuts the legs out from beneath her own propositions by casting grammar, logic, and rhetoric as tools, instruments to be wielded. Although she aims to transcend the utilitarian agenda of contemporary education, by employing the language of tools, she fails to impart the metaphysical and theological potency of the Trivium.

Donnelly does not merely title his book *The Lost Seeds* as a way of differentiating his version of the Trivium from Sayers’. He contends that the imagination of educators and the educated must receive a different image than that of “tool” in order to bear fruit in the lives of learners. He unveils how the myth of individual autonomy undergirds our implementation of tools as “neutral matter for human disposing,” and insists that this metaphor makes arbitrary “any given purpose” for the tool: “If tools (or things) have no purpose internal to them, then ultimately any tool (or thing) can be made to serve any purpose.” If the end of education is to extend beyond producing an individual who can wield the tools of learning for worldly success, financial accumulation, or personal gain, then we need a better metaphor of the Trivium.

Drawing from scripture and tradition as his primary sources for this metaphor, Donnelly asks us to reimagine the verbal arts as seeds. Considering the cruciform character of a seed, Donnelly proposes: "In some ways, this aspect of the seed is like a spoken word that moves between persons by means of a sound that is released and then dissipates. A seed, if it germinates, no longer exists (as a seed) once it has communicated life and a new plant has begun." This image is profoundly Christian (see Matthew 13 and Mark 4), for it imitates Christ's self-giving movement and echoes the Church's vocation to charity. The verbal arts, construed as seeds, are intrinsically communal and become teleologically eternal.

Rather than begin his exploration of the Trivium with Sayers' essay, Donnelly opens with C. S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*, another mid-twentieth century work written in response to a modern education text. Donnelly aligns the questions posed by Lewis in his book with Aristotle's four causes. Donnelly returns to these repeatedly in his own book as models for methods of inquiry: what are the material, final, efficient, and formal causes? He notes, "When Lewis asks about the intrinsic worth of what is studied, he is appealing to the content, or matter, of the action of human inquiry . . . His appeal to the goals of human learning and inquiry depends on the notion of purpose, or final cause. His appeal to the past testimonies that make present knowledge possible arises from his attention to the agents, or efficient causes, of human learning." In light of this explication of learning from 1943, Donnelly recognizes a dearth in contemporary education. We no longer ask the purpose of education any more than we think deeply about the content or agents or causes thereof.

The implications of Donnelly's argument are profound. In education, rather than asking these questions of causes or investigating effective tools from the past, we operate more within a system that appears to have always been the way that things are. This problem reminds me of an anecdote I once heard about a woman who always discarded the end of her homemade bread. When her new husband asked why, she didn't know. The newlywed called her mother, who had always done the same thing. Her mother had no reason for disposing of the bread end either, but had seen her own mother make bread this way. When the mother and daughter called the grandmother, she laughed: the grandmother had always cut off the end of the loaf because her recipe made more than fit in the pan she owned. How much of our current way of educating is not a matter of ideal methods and purposive pedagogy but ineffective habits passed down without good reason?

For instance, the twenty-first-century methods of assessment prioritize product completion rather than learning progress. If asked why they check assignments or tally grades with A, B, C, D, or F, many teachers cannot answer. Like the woman who disposed of perfectly good bread without reason, these educators ascribe letters or numbers to their students' work without considering the history of this ranking system. In fact, Americans have only been allocating

grades for a hundred and fifty to two hundred years (Harvard University started the 100-point system in 1877, with Yale University instituting a 4-point scale in 1832). Brian A. Williams traced the development of grades and grading systems in the previous issue of this journal. We need not comply with systems that do not fit the purposes of education. If our ultimate goal is Platonic—learning to love the beautiful—how is this accomplished with rubrics? If our highest end is incarnational—to worship God with our classroom conversation—how is this encouraged when we count who has spoken the most times or cited enough text to prove they read?

Readers of *The Lost Seeds of Learning* might find the text idealistic. It lacks the pragmatism of most educational resources, though Donnelly provides pedagogical reflections at the close of every chapter. Each discourse ends with a thoughtful reflection on how this philosophy can inform how we teach. Throughout the book, Donnelly offers examples from his own teaching, application to Great Texts or mathematics, and even a couple of close readings of Winnie the Pooh tales to illustrate his claims. While these attempts at application are helpful for imagining the reality of Donnelly's arguments, they are peripheral to the primary aim of the book—to refamiliarize readers with grammar, logic, and rhetoric. We have assumed for too long that we know what it means to teach the grammar of a subject, to instruct students in lessons on logic, and even to move them through their rhetoric classes to defend a senior thesis. Like his forerunners Sayers and Lewis, Donnelly wants us to backpedal centuries in order to find a more liberating way forward.

For Donnelly, grammar should be more than the building blocks of language. He wants us to move away from a subject that we dread by reimagining grammar rightly as “an interpersonal apprenticeship in the productive use of words” and a “living knowledge oriented toward making.” Donnelly vivifies grammar by emphasizing its personal reality, its life-giving force, and its end as creative. Placing persons at the center of grammar, Donnelly insists that its study is formational and thus virtuous. He highlights the need for faithful and appropriate words, the desire for truth and the consideration of audience, those persons to whom one communicates. Donnelly then walks through the four Aristotelian causes to reframe how we think of the words we use, why we use them, and for what end.

Because of its dependence on words, the art of grammar has further connections with scripture, in which word (*logos*) takes preeminence. Donnelly explicates the spiritual import of the relation between the seed and the word as seen in the Old and New Testament. Employing four senses of reading, Donnelly connects the seed of Abraham with Jesus, the seed that must be buried for others to be raised to life (John 12:24). He draws on the metaphor of the garden in both Genesis and Gethsemane, connecting the vocation of making with the cruciform character of the *Logos*. With this biblical lens, the verbal arts transcend

their pedagogical significance and become spiritual practices that move students to imitate God their Maker, Christ the Word, and the Spirit who breathes life.

One particular pedagogical reflection from Donnelly's exploration of grammar stands out—when he answers the question, “Why study math?” Within modern paradigms, we are tempted to answer by listing the utilities of math, what all we can use it for, and thus we justify its study. Donnelly exceeds this litany of utilitarian reasons, “at the risk of sounding crazy,” by suggesting “that the premodern reason for studying mathematics is still the best one for people: to help us worship God better because of what math does to us.” For longer accounts of the transformative effect of mathematics study, Donnelly points to Stratford Caldecott's *Beauty for Truth's Sake* and Kevin Clark and Ravi Jain's *The Liberal Arts Tradition*. I would add Simone Weil's essay “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God,” and Paul Lockhart's *A Mathematician's Lament*. We have to change our ways of imagining what we study and how we talk about learning for education to have its rightful end in the love of God.

Surprisingly, Donnelly does not begin his chapter on logic by quoting from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, but every Christian educator loves the scene where the professor trumps Susan's logical denial of the existence of Narnia with a logical series of propositions. Like the professor who employed logic to prove the truth of a fantastical and mythical world accessed by a wardrobe, Donnelly transcends our limited Mr. Spock versions of logic, so that we might consider this art as a ladder to worship. Donnelly explores how the dialectic becomes dialogue, then conversation, then listening prayer, and finally worship. Considered in this way, logic is not about abstract formulations but about communal engagement. It is participatory and invitational.

What Donnelly accomplishes in *The Lost Seeds* is to baptize classical education into its Christian dress. While the ancient thinkers that Donnelly considers—Cicero, Plato, Aristotle—began our instruction in grammar, logic, and rhetoric, the reality of the incarnation transfigures these verbal arts from tools into fruit-bearing seeds. One may teach rhetoric in the classical world with the intention of persuading the audience via the best means of invention, arrangement, style, and so forth. However, Christ changes *inventio* from a “quest for facts” to a “personal encounter with wisdom,” the ordering of the argument becomes more than a map, but “an itinerary or set of directions,” and style is not mere decoration but aspiration for the beautiful.

Along with the transformation of the first three canons of rhetoric, the medieval theologians thought that the fourth canon, memory, preceded the other three. Mary Carruthers, in *The Craft of Thought*, has shown how monks, such as Hugh of St. Victor, believed that memory was the storehouse of images, an ark of covenant within a person, wherein they filled themselves with knowledge of scripture, philosophy, history, and literature, that they might make something

from what they'd been given. Donnelly alludes to Carruthers' account of the orator in the Middle Ages without dwelling too much on the revolutionary way that era emphasized memory. In the medieval imagination, memory was not merely a fourth canon of rhetoric but a spiritual obligation. Those who remembered were those who avoided the destruction of Moses' warning, "If you ever forget the LORD your God . . . you will surely be destroyed" (Deuteronomy 8:19) or the blessed commandment of Jesus to "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

If viewed as spiritual realities, even the delivery of a speech becomes an opportunity for grace and virtue. Donnelly highlights the etymology of "hypocrite" from the Greek for "actor" and emphasizes the need for one's delivery of words to correlate with embodied practices. One may not stand on a stage promising one thing or promoting a certain way of being and then go out into the world to live in opposition to one's words. The delivery, too, claims a responsibility on the Christian of ethics and justice.

After expounding upon the life-giving reality of these verbal arts, Donnelly concludes with an apology for the study of Latin, which returns us to the conundrum of Classics Departments or Great Books programs in Christian higher education. If we have read Donnelly's book thoroughly, we have a way of advocating for both as places where the verbal arts and Latin are resources for students to become more like Christ. However, we need administrations and boards to consider not what incoming students think they want or what parents imagine is good for their students, but to rank first the highest purpose of education: the love of God. Then, to follow Aristotle's four causes as model questions of inquiry into the nature of good education. Perhaps to invite Donnelly to offer a lecture on "The Lost Seeds of Learning," as Sayers did so many decades ago, and be persuaded that these arts are the foundations of Christian education. If all else fails, can we just get more educators to read this book?