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The Pursuit of Wisdom in Education

by

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## ABSTRACT

Wisdom is widely recognized as a precious good. In recent times, efforts have been made to incorporate the pursuit of wisdom into schools through Philosophy for Children (P4C) and Contemplative Education programming. However, such initiatives to reform education have missed their mark in various ways. Modern scholarship has struggled to come to terms with the meaning of wisdom and its significance in the field of education. This thesis examines the importance of pursuing wisdom in schools by turning to ancient and medieval sources for clarification concerning the nature of wisdom. I argue that our current emphasis on the development of rigorous critical-analytic thinking skills, on assessment, and accountability in education have negatively impacted the ability of schools to foster an environment in which both students and teachers might pursue wisdom. I therefore recommend not evermore aggressive work and efficiency in education for the purpose of ensuring our global competitiveness, but rather the institutional promotion of periods of leisure or *scholē* in the school day in which students and teachers might begin to learn what it means to pursue wisdom as the ancients did: namely, as the practice of “immortalizing” and as “the art of dying.”

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study arises as a response to questions derived from my own experiences, aspirations, and frustrations as both a high school teacher and a student. Perhaps a good way to begin would be with a quoted reminiscence from a young student:

Jim, fourteen, looked back on his earlier school career: “I couldn’t get my teachers to take my questions and ideas seriously. I thought this was what school was going to be about. There was such a big deal about going off to first grade, but I kept waiting for us to talk about life – you know, why we’re all here, what this world’s about. The nature of the universe. Things like that. When I’d ask or say my ideas just to sort of get things going, there would be dead silence, and then the teacher would move on to spelling or something. I thought, *OK, I guess we’re getting the basic stuff this year, and then we’ll get into the good stuff in second grade. I can wait that long if I have to.* Well, second grade came and went and it wasn’t any better – maybe worse – since we didn’t even get to play as much. By fourth grade I remember thinking, *I must be an alien. These people don’t understand. I’m not a social zero, I have friends. But no one, especially not the teachers, are talking about this. School seems not to be very interested in my questions or any questions really; it is all about the answers. We’re only supposed to give them the right answer.*”<sup>1</sup>

As a high school teacher, I can testify to the truth of Jim’s suspicions about education. What we do as teachers mostly *is* about ensuring that students are able to give correct answers to very specific sorts of questions. We are beholden to ensuring that our students have worked their way successfully through a given curriculum, and we measure their success at doing so by how correctly they answer our questions, as well as the questions of our provincial masters. As teachers, we spend hours and hours at “PD days” learning to “embrace assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning,” not only so that our measurements of student learning are more accurate, but also so that such assessments can be used by students to improve their outcomes on future assessments – all this to ensure that on second or third tries they might give the right answers. As teachers, we are held to account by parents, administrators, and the government for ensuring that our students are able to provide the right answers on their standardized tests. So it is very surprising if, by the time a student comes to high school, he or she still maintains an eagerness to explore the sorts of “irrelevant” questions that Jim had when he was a little boy – at least in a school setting.

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<sup>1</sup> Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* (Novato: New World Library, 2003), 94-95.

These questions are mostly discouraged in children through years of focus on performance in response to other sorts of questions that are deemed to be the really important ones. The questions *we* ask of the students are ostensibly of much more practical significance and higher social value. In fact, the entire machinery of schools is designed to impress upon students the seriousness and significance of the sorts of answers that they must be able to provide for the specific kinds of questions we pose to them; by focusing on these mandated questions and by answering them successfully, students earn good grades; they earn accolades from their parents, teachers, and peers; they can gain admittance to the “right school” and thereby secure “a good job.” And the good job is needed to provide all the goods necessary to have the cycle repeat itself for the next generation of students who also must enter a globalized and highly competitive world of work. It doesn’t seem like Jim’s questions as a little boy have any real place in such a school system, given the sheer weight of responsibility we have foisted upon him for being productive and competitive and successful. In fact, if our current school system in Alberta is, as the government says, one of the best in the world given the scores of our students on standardized tests, then why the complaining? Isn’t our school system working just fine? And if it’s not good enough, isn’t it best improved by focussing even more strenuously on improving student performance in the areas of response measured by our focussed sorts of questions? Isn’t it the case that our manner of educating already produces, in the main, a good, competitive, highly-trained, highly-educated workforce and citizenry? What more could you want? Wouldn’t it be ridiculous to change things so that the focus of our educational efforts wasn’t on these things? This sort of success *is* what people want for themselves and for their children, after all.

Perhaps Jim’s questions and concerns *are* irrelevant from the standpoint of “getting ahead” in the world. And for this reason, perhaps nobody will ever care enough to change things. Perhaps our modern-day schools offer students all they will need to succeed in those areas of endeavour that are valued by most people. Perhaps Jim’s questions as a little boy don’t matter – or if they matter, maybe it ought to be Jim’s own private affair to pursue these concerns. Why should public money be used to help Jim pursue questions that have no practical import, and probably don’t even have an answer anyways? These all seem to be legitimate reasons to dismiss the call to philosophize with children on the public coin.

Mass education should produce mass, practical results: the bottom line is that we need more critical-analytic thinkers who can problem solve; we need to keep up with other nations competitively and innovatively in the fields of technology and science. Shouldn't our educational efforts continue to be directly focused solely into these practically-relevant areas of investment?

These are powerful arguments. However, there *are* reasons to doubt that, by themselves, more scientific knowledge, more critical-analytic skill, more technical mastery over nature, and greater successes in global competition to "get ahead" are serving us as well as we are tempted to suppose. Robert Sternberg, a psychologist and researcher who has investigated questions concerning the nature and relevance of wisdom in education, cites two quantitative-analytic studies that indicate that human intelligence levels have been steadily increasing over recent years.<sup>2</sup> And of course, all of us can simply look around and bear witness to the undeniable advances in knowledge and technology and social organization that we enjoy from day to day. Many of these fruits of knowledge and human intelligence certainly were not available to people even one hundred years ago. However, Sternberg finds no reason to rejoice in our supposed greater intelligence quotient, for even with all of our scientific and technological advances, he sees no parallel increase in wisdom. Sternberg puts the matter very well:

[H]uman intelligence has, to some extent, brought the world to the brink. Intelligence has brought us many good things, but also has brought us the nuclear weapons that have the power to destroy the world several times over as well as the addictive designer drugs that are destroying the lives of millions of people -- young and old -- around the world. Human intelligence has brought us where we are. Human intelligence, combined with creativity and practical intelligence, may have brought us the disaster at the World Trade Center that took place on September 11, 2001. The plan was creative, in its own way; it was analytically brilliant, evading the defenses of a nation; and it was practically shrewd, inflicting maximum damage for the number of people who were needed to carry it out. But the plan was not, for whatever else it may have been, wise, and the people who hatched it were not wise either. It may take wisdom to help us find our way out of a trap of our own making.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James R. Flynn, "Massive IQ Gains in 14 Nations." *Psychological Bulletin* 101, no. 2 (1987): 171-191. Also U. Neisser, *The Rising Curve*. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998). Sternberg uses the Neisser book legitimately, but the Flynn article does not demonstrate what Sternberg contends, since its conclusion is not that the rising scores on IQ tests indicate a higher intelligence quotient, but rather that the tests themselves are flawed in some way, and that they "correlate with a weak causal link to intelligence."

<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Sternberg, "Wisdom and Education." *Gifted Education International* 17, no. 3 (2003): 233-248. Nicholas Maxwell makes the same essential observation in "The Road to Wisdom" *The New Statesman* (Jan 21, 2008): 50.

Sternberg makes a good case for the importance of thinking more seriously about the role that wisdom ought to play in education. The importance of knowledge acquisition, the development of technical skill, and the fostering of critical-analytic as well as imaginative faculties is undeniable. But perhaps it is also the case, given Sternberg's good examples, that without wisdom, none of these goods can truly be enjoyed.

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## CHAPTER TWO: A SURVEY OF VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF WISDOM

In his book *The Decline of Wisdom*, Gabriel Marcel, an early French existentialist philosopher, reflects on his experiences of horror and anxiety while wandering through the ruins of inner Vienna in 1946. What bothered him most was not the physical destruction of so many irreplaceable monuments of an honourable past, “but the state of mind from which that destruction is inseparable” -- one from which all feelings of gratitude and veneration for the reality that those monuments themselves stood in honour of had been obliterated. He recounts a similar experience related to him by a friend in a town in Burgundy who was told by an American officer: “You should be grateful to us for bombing all this old stuff. Now you can have a clean new town.”<sup>4</sup> These experiences left Marcel with the sense that our modern attitudes and understandings are peculiarly opposed to wisdom and coeval, in fact, with its decline. The physical destruction wrought upon Europe was, for Marcel, but an expression of a more serious spiritual malaise: namely, our “growing impatience with what tend increasingly to be regarded as obstacles to the advent of a new world, even of a renewed humanity.”<sup>5</sup> The “impatience” of which Marcel speaks here is rooted in a mass-scale civilizational rejection of something both ancient and universal without recognition of which there can be no wisdom.

Marcel’s reflections on these experiences spur him to think deeply about the manner in which our ever-increasing base of knowledge and technological proficiencies has not only outstripped any “wisdom” we might have concerning the relative worth of these gains, but that these advances themselves and the joy we feel in exercising our great powers through them serve to cloud and distort our awareness of the importance of wisdom itself. The reason for this, writes Marcel, is that “a man who has mastered one or more techniques tends in principle to distrust what is alien to these techniques,” and “he will usually be most unwilling to accept the idea that a meta-technical activity may have value.” The “meta-technical activity” that Marcel refers to here is reflection, which he calls a “power at one remove.”<sup>6</sup> Marcel contends that the exercise of any sort of power should by rights always be accompanied by this “power at one remove,” in order that it might serve as a brake or a

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<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 11.

control against the abuse of power. However, our delight in the magnitude of the capabilities granted to us through modern technology and scientific advancement has made the imposition of such “powers at one remove” extremely unpalatable. Marcel writes:

Technical development does, taken in itself, tend to create a world which is singularly barren and as a result unfavourable to the use of powers at one remove; and let us note that these powers correspond fairly closely to what in other ages was known as wisdom.<sup>7</sup>

Simply put, wisdom has always, in Marcel’s view, acted as a counterweight to human pride or *hybris*. Where the counterweight to pride is lacking, “the techniques left, as it were, to their own weight, are moreover burdened by the weight of pride which in no sense belongs to them,” since, as Marcel points out, the techniques themselves have no intrinsic reality, but are only given a “specious reality” through the vice of abstraction in the one who uses them, takes pleasure in them and lastly “becomes their slave.”<sup>8</sup> Without wisdom to guide us, our sense of our own abilities and powers is distorted and inflated; paradoxically, we become slaves by overestimating our own worth and abilities. In the absence of wisdom – that is, when our awareness and recognition of “the universal” is debased and driven out, the place of wisdom “is taken by a system of technical processes tightly fitted into one another, whose complexity is only rivalled by the poverty of the ends it serves.”<sup>9</sup> It is precisely from within this society that all the modern authors surveyed in the following section concerning the nature of wisdom are writing; each of them is touched in his or her own way by the problem of living in a society that does not value wisdom, and is dazzled by its own technological prowess. Each of these authors, to various degrees, sees and does not see into the nature of what is wisdom.

## **I. Modern Writers on the Subject of Wisdom**

### **1. Robert J. Sternberg**

Various academics have remarked about the dearth in modern scholarship concerning the nature of wisdom.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, some efforts have been made in the fields

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<sup>7</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry for “Wisdom,” where it is remarked that, “The topic of wisdom has not received much treatment in the contemporary philosophical literature” First

of education and psychological research to resuscitate the topic. One such researcher, already mentioned, is psychologist Robert Sternberg. As we have seen, Sternberg is particularly discontent with the modern emphasis on increasing our “intelligence.” In his view, intelligence may be distinguished from wisdom in that “intelligence is not necessarily applied to a common good; wisdom always is.”<sup>11</sup> Sternberg points out that our hypertrophied concern with measuring and increasing our “intelligence” scores has caused us to lose sight of more important things: namely, that these scores do not even measure or predict our ability to effect any of the good purposes that intelligence might serve in the first place if only it were informed by wisdom:

On intelligence tests, there may be better and worse answers in the sense of certain answers being more justifiable on logical or other grounds. But there are not answers that are wiser or less wise. The concept simply does not apply.<sup>12</sup>

Sternberg voices his doubts about the likelihood that public concern for wisdom will ever supplant concern with intelligence:

Wisdom is neither taught in schools nor, in general, is it even discussed ... many people will not see the value of teaching something that shows no promise of raising conventional test scores. These scores, which formerly were predictors of more interesting criteria, have now become criteria, or ends, in themselves. Society has lost track of why they ever mattered in the first place and they have engendered the same kind of mindless competition we see in people who relentlessly compare their economic achievements with those of others. ... wisdom is much more difficult to develop than is the kind of achievement that can be developed and then readily tested via multiple-choice tests. ... people who have gained influence and power in a society

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published Mon. Jan 8, 2007. Also see Michael J. Chandler and Stephen Holliday, “Wisdom in a Post-apocalyptic Age” in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 121-141. They remark: “Despite ... what amounts to more than 2000 years of written history in which the concept of wisdom has played a central part, the notion appears to have essentially vanished from the modern scientific scene” (126). Also see Robert J. Sternberg, “Wisdom and Its Relations to Intelligence and Creativity” in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*, 142-159. He comments that “Wisdom does not have a long tradition of empirical research, and a purely cognitive view has never taken off” (151). In “Wisdom and Education” *Gifted Education International* 17, no. 3 (2003): 233-248, Sternberg also comments: “Educators need to take seriously identifying and developing wisdom. Although there has been some scholarship in the area, the amount is dwarfed by work on intelligence” (246). Also see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Kevin Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom: An Evolutionary Interpretation” in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*, 25-51. They remark that there has been little contemporary research that investigates wisdom as its own reward, or as a pleasure in its own right; all recent academic focus on the study of wisdom has concerned the results of wisdom. The authors call this a “new field of study” (45).

<sup>11</sup> Sternberg, “Wisdom and Education,” 235. In this regard, Sternberg’s view of intelligence in some way resembles the ancient notion of cleverness (*deinotes*), and his view that wisdom always is directed toward the “common good” makes it like a virtue (*arete*).

<sup>12</sup> Sternberg, “Wisdom and Education,” 240.

via one means are unlikely to want either to give up that power or to see a new criterion be established on which they do not rank as favourably.<sup>13</sup>

However, he does not give way to despair, because he sees that, implicit in the way that we think about school, lays a desire for something that resembles wisdom. He remarks that

the teaching of wise thinking has always been implicit in school curricula in any case. For example, one learns history in part so as to learn the lessons of the past and not repeat its mistakes. One learns literature in part so as to learn how to apply to one's life the lessons literary characters have learned. So it seems a reasonable proposal to make explicit what has previously been implicit.<sup>14</sup>

Recognizing that “[w]estern education in the past couple of centuries has typically focused on imparting content knowledge and developing cognitive skills in students,” Sternberg contends that “schools promote intelligent – but not necessarily wise – students.”

Moreover, “these students may have admirable records in school, yet make poor judgements in their own lives and in the lives of others.” He states that “[w]e therefore believe that school should help enhance these wise thinking skills in students.” To this end, Sternberg has designed a school-based educational program entitled “Teaching for Wisdom” that is intended to “facilitate the development of wise and critical thinking skills in middle school children through the infusion of these skills into a history curriculum based on a ‘balance theory of wisdom’.”<sup>15</sup>

Sternberg’s “balance theory of wisdom” characterizes wisdom as a consideration of competing interests that strikes an appropriate balance between all the stake holders in order to secure the “common good.” Sternberg defines wisdom as

the application of intelligence, creativity, and knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extra-personal interests, over the (a) short and (b) long –terms, in order to achieve a balance among (a) adaptation to existing environments, (b) shaping of existing environments, and (c) selection of new environments.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Robert J. Sternberg, “Teaching for Wisdom: What matters is not just what students know, but how they use it” *London Review of Education* 5, no. 2 (July 2007): 156-157.

<sup>14</sup> Robert J. Sternberg, “What is Wisdom and How Can we Develop It?” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 591 (January 2004): 165.

<sup>15</sup> Robert J. Sternberg, Linda Jarvin, and Alina Reznitskaya. “Teaching for Wisdom Through History: Infusing Wise Thinking Skills in the School Curriculum” in *Teaching for Wisdom*. Eds. M. Ferrari and G. Potworowski (Springer, 2008), 43.

<sup>16</sup> Sternberg, “Teaching for Wisdom,” 145.



According to this rather long definition, wisdom involves balancing the interests of self with those of others, and therefore the consideration of multiple points of view, as well as “establishing values.”<sup>17</sup> The curriculum developed by Sternberg to cultivate wisdom emphasizes that instructors teach “children not *what* to think, but, rather, *how* to think.” For Sternberg, this involves encouraging “reflective thinking” among the students, or “thinking about thinking” -- otherwise known as “metacognition.” Sternberg also asserts the importance of teaching both “dialogical” and “dialectical thinking.” By “dialogical thinking” he means complex problem-solving that involves the consideration and balancing of several points of view. By “dialectical thinking,” he means something like a Hegelian dialectic, or the integration of two opposite points of view -- a thesis and an antithesis -- to formulate a synthesis.<sup>18</sup> In the main, his “Balance Curriculum” is a history curriculum; it looks to historical events as case studies and challenges students in middle school to figure out the implications of events: “The idea is that, by considering history, students will not be doomed to repeat it.”<sup>19</sup>

Alongside these basic teaching strategies, all of which suggest that “teaching for wisdom is not accomplished through a didactic method of ‘imparting’ information about wisdom and subsequently assessing students with multiple choice questions,” but rather demands the active engagement of students in experiencing the “various cognitive and affective processes that underlie wise decision-making,” Sternberg offers six “procedures” for teaching wisdom. These are: (1) encouraging students to read classical literature and philosophy; (2) challenging students to engage with these readings in various ways; (3) studying not only truth but “values”; (4) emphasis on identifying the “common good” in learning situations; (5) looking always to the final end of actions and recognizing how anything can be abused; (6) encouraging teachers to be aware of themselves as role models.<sup>20</sup>

There are several areas of Sternberg’s analysis of wisdom that ought to be more carefully questioned and considered. First, Sternberg’s entire project is premised upon the

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<sup>17</sup> Sternberg, “Teaching for Wisdom,” 148.

<sup>18</sup> Sternberg, Jarvin, and Reznitskaya, “Teaching for Wisdom Through History” 44. A similar request for this sort of dialectical thinking in order to foster wisdom is made by Richard Reeve, Richard Messina, and Marlene Scardamalia in “Wisdom in Elementary School” in *Teaching for Wisdom*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Ferrari’s comments on Sternberg’s “Teaching for Wisdom” program. See Ferrari, “Developing Expert and Transformative Wisdom: Can Either be Taught in Public Schools?” in *Teaching for Wisdom*, 209.

<sup>20</sup> Sternberg, “Teaching for Wisdom,” 151.

assumption that wisdom can be taught: that wise thinking is a “skill.” There are considerable reasons to doubt whether this is in fact the case. Second, Sternberg’s elucidation of wisdom as a “balancing of interests” and as involving the establishing of “values” is unclear. In a simpler definition of wisdom that Sternberg uses when he is not specifically arguing to defend his “balance theory,” he contends that wisdom is “the power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience, and understanding.”<sup>21</sup> This definition sits well with the long-standing tradition of viewing wisdom as an excellence in the practical sphere of doing, often called prudence. However, Sternberg’s “balance theory” and his discussions of wisdom make no mention at all of what is classically termed “theoretical” as opposed to “practical” wisdom or prudence: in ancient parlance, *sophia* as opposed to *phronesis*. It seems that an entire realm of investigation concerning the nature of wisdom and its role in education is overlooked by Sternberg. His silence in this regard may have something to do with his demand that “Teaching for Wisdom” encourage students to “establish” or to create “values.” This use of the word “value” is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century invention, and it is diametrically opposed to ancient thought, wherein human beings did not create or establish the “value” of such things, but rather discovered, saw, or recognized the essential nature of things through meditative attention and love directed at seeing “the whole” or “the universal,” as Marcel calls it. Often, this deeper realization of essence or being would be cultivated through contemplation or *theoria* (which is why *sophia* is important). It seems, if we reflect back upon Marcel’s recollection standing in the ruins of Vienna, that Sternberg is like the individual who laments the loss of the buildings (i.e.: “How could we allow our science and technology to wreak such havoc upon Europe?”), but feels no sense of loss at the absence of reverence that generated the event in the first place.

## 2. Patricia Kennedy Arlin

Patricia Arlin argues, somewhat like Sternberg, that wisdom cannot be detected in student learning or cultivated in teaching practises that focus on finding the right answers -- especially to the sorts of questions asked in intelligence testing. Rather, Arlin suggests that wisdom is best sought out by asking good questions and looking for interesting and

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<sup>21</sup> Sternberg, “Teaching for Wisdom,” 145.

engaging problems. Indeed, Arlin links the asking of questions to a more ancient sort of knowing, namely, “self-knowledge” and a Socratic knowledge of one’s own ignorance. In this regard, she remarks, “Knowing what one does not know can be represented by the questions one asks.”<sup>22</sup>

Like Sternberg, this author left me with several unanswered questions and problems to ponder about her understanding of wisdom and its implications. First, I was left wondering how difficult Arlin’s pedagogic challenge to encourage questions rather than answers might be for parents, government masters, administrators, students, and teachers to bear, particularly when they expect pat answers and high test scores. For instance, to what extent do parents not want philosophers (those who aren’t wise but seek wisdom) but rather sophists (those who claim to be wise and also claim to be able to teach their children to become wise) as the teachers for their children? Don’t parents mostly want their child’s teacher to be someone who will help him or her to be a successful speaker and doer? How many would actually be concerned with making their children into questioners, particularly if their questioning negatively affected future job prospects or worldly successes? How willing are parents to acknowledge that education involves doubt and discomfort, and to affirm the importance of these experiences rather than blaming the teacher? Wouldn’t pursuing wisdom in this fashion lead to persecution of the philosopher?

A second quandary arises for me when Arlin offers up a long list of aptitudes and abilities in asking questions and finding problems that she says are a “necessary but not sufficient condition for wisdom.”<sup>23</sup> Arlin herself acknowledges the difficulty: one can be trained as a problem-finder; one can have aptitudes at finding problems and naturally driven to ask good questions; but this does not mean that one is wise, nor does it mean that one necessarily even seeks after wisdom. After reading this list, I was reminded of Socrates’ dialogue with Plato’s brothers, Glaukon and Adeimantus in the *Republic*. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates and the others are always searching for justice. Time and time again, they stumble upon “a footprint” or “a track” of justice, but they never quite find

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<sup>22</sup> Patricia Kennedy Arlin, “Wisdom: The Art of Problem-Finding” in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*, 230-243.

<sup>23</sup> These include the search for complementarity, the detection of asymmetry in the face of that which appears symmetrical and in equilibrium, openness to change: its possibility and its reality, a pushing of the limits, which sometimes leads to a redefinition of those limits a sense of taste for problems that are of fundamental importance, and the preference for certain conceptual moves. See Arlin, “Wisdom: The Art of Problem-Finding.”

what it is, tossing around definitions of justice such as “to keep one’s promises,” “to mind one’s own business,” and “that friends ought to have all things in common.” None of these definitions truly suits or encapsulates what is justice. So when I look at Arlin’s elucidation of wisdom I am left with a similar perplexity; it seems that the nature of wisdom, the precise thing that she and the others in this research review are trying to find, has escaped her notice.

### 3. Paul B. Baltes and the Max Planck Institute Group

Baltes and his colleagues remark on their dissatisfaction with the manner in which wisdom has been investigated until their method of study was applied to inquiry into its nature. They write: “Whereas philosophers provide eloquent and insightful commentaries about the nature, function, and ontogeny of wisdom, they rarely devise ways to test their proposals empirically.”<sup>24</sup> Baltes and the members of the Max Planck Institute Group therefore attempt to apply quantitative-analytic and statistical research methods to the question concerning the nature of wisdom. Essentially, their ambition is to build a model of what wisdom looks like given what people say about it. Having devised a model or paradigm of wisdom based upon these suggestions and ideas about wisdom, their aim is next to see to what extent people they interview embody the particular elements of their paradigm. Baltes and his colleagues admit that “[d]efining and operationalizing the concept of wisdom as a scientifically grounded psychological construct is not easy. Wisdom may be beyond what psychological methods and concepts can achieve.”<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, they proceed to construct their paradigm of wisdom which has become known in the literature as “The Berlin Paradigm.” This paradigm defines wisdom as

an expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics of life. These include knowledge and judgment about the meaning and conduct of life and the orchestration of human development toward excellence while attending conjointly to personal and collective well-being.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Paul B. Baltes and Jacqui Smith, “The Fascination of Wisdom: Its Nature, Ontogeny, and Function” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 1 (2008): 56.

<sup>25</sup> Paul B. Baltes, and Ursula Staudinger, “Wisdom: A Metaheuristic (Pragmatic) to Orchestrate Mind and Virtue Toward Excellence” *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (Jan 2000): 122-123.

<sup>26</sup> Baltes and Staudinger. “Wisdom: A Metaheuristic” 122. This definition is also discussed in Paul B. Baltes, and Ute Kunzmann. “The Two Faces of Wisdom: Wisdom as a General Theory of Knowledge and Judgement about Excellence in Mind and Virtue vs. Wisdom as Everyday Realization in People and Products” *Human Development* 47 (2004): 290-299.

By “the fundamental pragmatics of life,” Baltes and the others mean not only “excellence in mind and virtue,” but also “expert knowledge dealing with the conduct and understanding of life.” The developers of the Berlin Paradigm offer a visual schematic to help illustrate their conception of wisdom<sup>27</sup>:

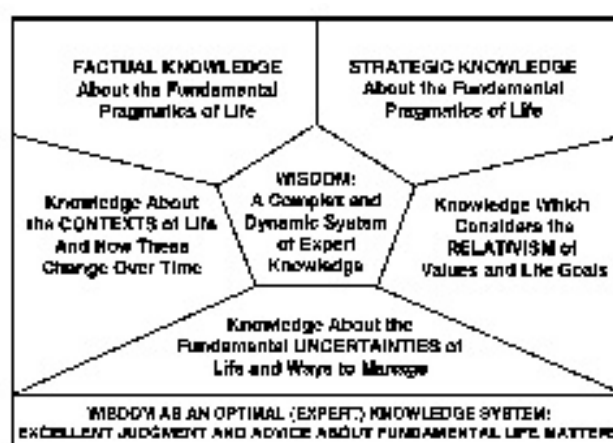


Fig. 1. Wisdom as a complex and dynamic system of exceptional knowledge (expertise) in the fundamental pragmatics of life. The family of five metacriteria, which together characterize wisdom in the Berlin paradigm, can be used to evaluate the quantity and quality of wisdom-related knowledge and behavior. (Adapted from Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes et al., 1992; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2005.)

In their explanation of this diagram of their central concept, “Wisdom: A Complex and Dynamic System of Expert Knowledge,” they state that all of the components of wisdom can be fitted into two “tiers.” In the first or top tier, they place “Factual” and “Strategic” knowledge about “the fundamental pragmatics of life.” “Factual” knowledge of these pragmatics they claim is similar to Aristotle’s notion of “theoretical wisdom” (*sophia*), whereas “Strategic” or “procedural” knowledge about these fundamental pragmatics is likened to Aristotle’s exposition of “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*). However, according to the Berlin Group, Aristotle’s divisions of wisdom into theoretical and practical categories are insufficient; as a result, they have included a second, lower tier of “post-Aristotelian philosophical perspectives on wisdom.” These “three metacriteria” are “lifespan contextualism” (in the diagram: “Knowledge about the CONTEXTS of Life and how these change over time”), “value relativism” (in the diagram, “Knowledge which considers the

<sup>27</sup> Baltes and Smith, “The Fascination of Wisdom,” 58.

relativism of values and life goals”), and “uncertainty” (in the diagram: “Knowledge about the fundamental UNCERTAINTIES of life and ways to manage”).<sup>28</sup> Having constructed this model, the researchers next seek to operationalize it by presenting people with difficult hypothetical situations that require the exercise of wisdom. Those being interviewed are encouraged to think aloud while “trained raters” evaluate their responses according to the five criteria that comprise the wisdom paradigm.<sup>29</sup>

I have serious reservations about this manner of investigating the nature of wisdom. First, at its core, the model developed by the Berlin researchers is primarily an exercise in polling opinions about what people -- in this case, psychologists -- consider to be wisdom. Their model is not dialectically tested in the classical or philosophical sense, which means that, as a model for wisdom, it is not held to the rigors expected of one who truly engages in the pursuit of wisdom.<sup>30</sup> Rather, the legitimacy of their method seems to rest upon testing whether or not their paradigm measures as “wise” those public or historical figures “who were nominated by an expert panel as being wise – independently of our own definition of wisdom.”<sup>31</sup> Perhaps it is telling that “clinical psychologists showed higher levels of wisdom-related performance” when they themselves were asked questions and assessed according to a paradigm designed by clinical psychologists.<sup>32</sup>

Second, I am a bit perplexed about the notion of trained “wisdom raters” who mechanically apply rigid criteria from a paradigm based on the ideas of a few psychologists. The process of choosing who will be found as wise and who will not raises all sorts of questions for me. Can an unwise or non-wise person tell a wise person from an unwise person? Could the “trained wisdom raters” themselves be unwise and yet still be good judges? Can the characteristics of a wise person be so readily discerned by anyone if there are clear and rigid stipulations concerning the character and qualities of wisdom? Could one even hope to isolate such qualities?

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<sup>28</sup> Baltes and Smith, “The Fascination of Wisdom,” 58.

<sup>29</sup> Paul B. Baltes and Ute Kunzmann, “Wisdom” *Psychologist* 16, no. 3 (March 2003): 131-133.

<sup>30</sup> Having read through these studies conducted by the Berlin group, if they are truly indicative of the nature of wisdom, one wonders why Socrates did not simply content himself with polling the people of Athens about wisdom, pooling the results (perhaps preserving only the opinions of the most elite Athenians of his day), and then treating those characteristics as the true measure for what is wisdom.

<sup>31</sup> Baltes and Kunzmann “Wisdom,” 132.

<sup>32</sup> Baltes and Staudinger. “Wisdom: A Metaheuristic.” The authors remark, however, that their performance did not reach “expert levels” (129).

Third, at one point the researchers group all “theories” of wisdom into two categories. On the one hand, they collect all cultural-historical, philosophical, and folk-psychological statements about wisdom under the label of “implicit theories.” These theories, they contend, articulate “how the term “wisdom” is used in everyday language and how wise persons are characterized.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, “explicit psychological theories” like those of the Berlin group, Erikson, or Piaget are said to “go beyond the characterization of wisdom and a wise person in terms of language-based descriptions,” since they “lend themselves to empirical inquiry in terms of quantifiable operationalization.”<sup>34</sup> Their division between “implicit” and “explicit” theories seems to be a way of distinguishing non-scientific from scientific theories. But it is worth asking whether or not these groupings make sense. Why, for instance, is philosophic investigation of the nature of wisdom not considered “scientific”? Does not philosophy seek to know or proceed by its own methods towards its object? And inasmuch as the empirical is what can be known and validated by attention to experience, is not philosophic investigation empirical? Perhaps the ambition to “quantify” wisdom rather than to isolate it qualitatively is the primary difference between “implicit” and “explicit” theoretization. But then the question still remains as to how one can “quantify” wisdom (ie. say how wise somebody is on a Likert scale) without first establishing dialectically what wisdom actually is.

Fourth, the notion that wisdom is “expert knowledge” about the “fundamental pragmatics of life” is mystifying. “Expert knowledge,” as far as I understand it, concerns particular objects of understanding. One can be, for instance, an expert carpenter or an expert shoemaker. In fact, the ancients often pointed out that the word “wisdom” is often used in this sense, to indicate “expert knowledge” in a specific area of skill or study or endeavour.<sup>35</sup> However, to suppose that “the fundamental pragmatics of life” are akin to such a specific area of inquiry in which it is possible to be an “expert” seems to be rather dubious. These assumptions about the nature of wisdom require more careful consideration.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Baltes and Staudinger, “Wisdom: A Metaheuristic,” 123.

<sup>34</sup> Baltes and Staudinger, “Wisdom: A Metaheuristic,” 124.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Aristotle’s introductory remarks about wisdom in the *Nichomachean Ethics* VI.vii.1.

<sup>36</sup> The problem of treating the pursuit of wisdom as though it were akin to seeking out “expert” knowledge in a particular field is treated with great humour and delight by Socrates in his discussions with some young men and small boys in Plato’s dialogue, *The Lovers*. And of course, the difficulties of assuming that philosophy, or

Fifth, I find the claim made by the researchers to have outdone Aristotle in their conceiving of the nature of wisdom a bit tenuous. Their claim to have encapsulated either what Aristotle meant by *sophia* or *phronesis* is unpersuasive, particularly when they posit the need to include three “post-Aristotelian” “metacriteria” to account for elements of wisdom not taken into consideration by Aristotle. How is it that anyone on Aristotle’s account would be considered prudent without a knowledge that life situations are “contextual”? And how is it that Aristotle would have no understanding of the “uncertainties” of life, when both *phronesis* and *sophia* are dependent upon such an awareness? In fact, why would the researchers choose to divorce either an awareness of contextualism or uncertainties from their conceptions of *sophia* and *phronesis* in the “top tier” of their model?

Sixth, the third “metacriteria” for wisdom’s “system” is “value relativism.” This idea is not amenable to any conception of *sophia* as far as I understand it, and as far as Aristotle has written about it. Baltes and the group members are open about their repudiation of the ancient conception of wisdom; they contend that there is a “plurality of wisdom as it is constructed by humans for humans,” and they state that “the idea that there is but one ‘good life’ to which all humans aspire is acknowledged as utopian.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, in their view, there is no *summum bonum* in the ancient sense, or in Marcel’s sense of a “universal” that ought to be revered and held in esteem as the source and ground of *sophia*, and as the “common good” towards which all human beings are by their nature designed to seek after in order to live a good life. Wisdom, in the view of the researchers, is a “human construct,” and the wise person is not the one who genuinely seeks beyond all opinions about wisdom for wisdom itself, but rather one who has the ability to “define and select those goals and means that are socially acceptable and desirable in human development.” Wisdom becomes, on the grounds of value-neutrality, the means of securing whatever ends are deemed culturally and socially acceptable.<sup>38</sup> So again, it is mystifying that the researchers would claim that their notion of wisdom is in any way “similar” to Aristotle’s.

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wisdom’s pursuit, ought to be likened to any other trade in which an expert may “mind his own business” is dealt with extensively (and again, with great humour) throughout the *Republic*.

<sup>37</sup> Baltes and Smith, “The Fascination of Wisdom,” 57.

<sup>38</sup> Baltes and Kunzmann, “Wisdom,” 133.



Finally, even if all of my reservations are from the standpoint of an outsider in the field of statistical analytic inquiry into the nature of wisdom, there are still other researchers from within this methodological approach that are sceptical about the value of the Berlin model. Chandler and Holliday,<sup>39</sup> for instance, voice their own concerns about Baltes' work on wisdom by referring to a problem isolated by Kekes<sup>40</sup> known as "the Polonius Syndrome." Simply put, "a fool can learn to say all the things a wise man says and to say them on the same occasions." Consequently, when the "wisdom raters" are conducting their interviews, how do they know that the man or woman sitting before them is not simply spilling platitudes like Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* rather than actually speaking from a place of wisdom? Can't the wise man and the fool say the same things on the same occasions?

#### 4. Michael J. Chandler and Stephen Holliday

Chandler and Holliday offer up several other insights about the peculiarities of our modern understanding of wisdom. Perhaps thinking of their colleagues in the Berlin Group, they write that, "[m]odernity ... has taken a rather jaundiced view of wisdom, seeing the classic quest after its meaning as a kind of fool's errand."<sup>41</sup> Among the reasons they detect for "this modern eclipse of the study of wisdom," they note the tendency to equate the whole of human knowledge with the sum of those empirical facts obtained through applications of the methods of natural science inquiry. Second, they point out that all consideration of wisdom as an "indwelling state" has been largely dismissed as metaphysical speculation. Nonetheless, Chandler and Holliday are keenly attuned in their own research to the importance of these "indwelling states." In this regard, they offer a provocative example that raises problems with the Berlin mode of "testing" for wisdom:

Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich, on his deathbed, is filled with terminal self-doubt but skilful in the performance of his official duties until the end: cheerful, worldly, sociable, clever, expert Ivan, tragically uncertain that his life was really a life worth living.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Michael J. Chandler and Stephen Holliday, "Wisdom in a Post-apocalyptic Age" in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*, 121-141.

<sup>40</sup> John Kekes, "Wisdom" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (July 1983): 277-286.

<sup>41</sup> Chandler and Holliday, "Wisdom in a Post-apocalyptic Age," 125.

<sup>42</sup> Chandler and Holliday, "Wisdom in a Post-apocalyptic Age," 129.

The problem being isolated here with regard to understanding wisdom is: do we really know wisdom based on its effects? Is wisdom the same thing as its effects? Isn't it the case that a man (Polonius) can say wise things and give off the effect of appearing wise, but in fact, be a fool? And isn't it the case that a man (Ivan) could act well and be successful by all outward measures, but inwardly be wretchedly unhappy? In the view of these authors, "the efforts of Baltes and his colleagues ... still suffer an eventual contortion back into the shape of limited technical expertise." The supposed insights of this group concerning the relation of wisdom to practical knowledge and its emphasis upon the pragmatic resolution of life issues

seems to devolve back into another only slightly modified species of other predominantly technical accounts of possible knowledge according to which wisdom amounts to no more than the simple accumulation of esoteric information or expertise, where the good life is confounded with the prudent life.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly, Chandler and Holliday are keenly aware of the vast shortcomings of quantitative or "explicit" theories of wisdom, and they have isolated something important about our "jaundiced" modern view of wisdom – namely, that in order to understand what wisdom is, we must not simply look to its appearance and its effects, but as Marcel would have us do, begin to look with some degree of reverence again towards "the universal."

## 5. John Kekes

I have treated most of the best elements of John Kekes' work on wisdom in my exposition of the Chandler-Holliday article, which draws heavily on Kekes' insights. These insights are, primarily, that one cannot simply identify wisdom in others on the basis of what they say (Polonius) or what they do (Ivan). However, the conclusions that Kekes draws from these two very genuine insights have not been explained or readily questioned.

The first of these, which differs from the opinions of the other researchers we have investigated thus far in our study (Sternberg, most notably), is that "wisdom cannot be taught." Kekes writes:

A fool can learn to say all the things a wise man says, and to say them on the same occasions. The difference between them is that the wise man is prompted to say what he does, because he recognizes the significance of human limitations and possibilities, because he is guided in his actions by their significance, and because he

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<sup>43</sup> Chandler and Holliday, "Wisdom in a Post-apocalyptic Age," 136.

is able to exercise good judgment in hard cases, while the fool is mouthing clichés. It takes time to acquire wisdom and a person must do it himself. The most a wise man can do in the way of teaching others is to remind them of the facts whose significance they should realize, if they want wisdom. The realization, however, must be theirs.”<sup>44</sup>

Kekes’ warning about claiming to be able to teach wisdom is a good one and is well-stated; we ought to keep it in mind throughout this study.

The second, and in my view, problematic conclusion Kekes’ draws from his original insights concerns the nature of *sophia* and *phronesis*. Kekes first outlines his own understanding of the distinction between these two types of wisdom:

Theoretical wisdom [or *sophia*] is an intellectual matter having primarily to do with knowledge. Practical wisdom [or *phronesis*] is mainly action-guiding, and although it too involves knowledge, it is not the same as the kind involved in theoretical wisdom. The knowledge required for theoretical wisdom is metaphysical: it is of first principles, of fundamental truths about reality. On the other hand, the knowledge involved in practical wisdom is of means to ends.<sup>45</sup>

His definitions of *sophia* and *phronesis* are fairly lucid and straightforward, and they follow the traditional Aristotelian distinction well enough. However, having offered up these conceptions of wisdom for consideration, Kekes’ next move is to reject them:

Now what I mean by wisdom is not quite Aristotle’s theoretical wisdom, nor is it exactly his practical wisdom. It is not theoretical wisdom, because I think of wisdom as action-guiding and not involving metaphysical knowledge. There are two reasons for denying that wisdom involves metaphysical knowledge. One is that such knowledge is taken to be of *a priori* truths and I do not think that there are any... The second reason for denying that wisdom involves metaphysical knowledge is that the latter, if it exists, is esoteric, ascribable only to a very few, while wisdom can be possessed by anyone willing to make the arduous effort to gain it – an effort different from the one required for becoming a philosopher.<sup>46</sup>

Kekes’ repudiation of *sophia*, as he explains it, arises first from his refusal to accept the possibility of “metaphysical knowledge,” such as Marcel’s articulation of his own experiences of being grounded in an awareness of a “universal,” or ancient accounts of experiences of goodness and order and beauty being grounded in awareness of God, or the Good Itself, or the Divine Intellect (*Nous*). In his view, human beings simply cannot and do not know of any truths that “precede” experience. Second, Kekes rejects *sophia* on the

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<sup>44</sup> Kekes, “Wisdom,” 286.

<sup>45</sup> Kekes, “Wisdom,” 281.

<sup>46</sup> Kekes, “Wisdom,” 281.

grounds that it is an elitist idea of wisdom: it is the sole pursuit of philosophers, and the possession of only a few; for wisdom to have any relevance or great consequence in the world, it must not be an “esoteric” thing, but related rather more directly to the lives of every individual in society as a possibility not beyond their own capacities as human beings of ordinary intellect. However, having rejected Aristotle’s notion of *sophia*, Kekes does not therefore embrace Aristotelian *phronesis* or “practical wisdom,” for although this sort of wisdom is, according to Kekes’ explanation, widely available as a possibility for ordinary people (and so overcomes his second objection to *sophia*), he does not see that being an effective actor and decision-maker will necessarily make one happy (the Ivan Ilyich example).

Along with Aristotle’s conceptions of *sophia* and *phronesis*, Kekes also dismisses what he calls the “Socratic wisdom” of realizing one’s own ignorance. He calls this form of wisdom “negative” for reasons that will become apparent:

There is yet another ancient conception of wisdom from which I want to dissociate my account: the Socratic. The wisdom of Socrates consisted in realizing his own ignorance. Many of the early dialogues can be read as warning of the harm involved in the failure to realize that one lacks metaphysical knowledge; Socrates, of course, did not claim to have had it. He claimed, as I understand him, that the extent to which one has it, is the extent to which he can have a good life. Socrates might have explained his intention to Aristotle as an attempt to demonstrate how far short of wisdom falls Aristotle’s yet to be identified practically wise man. The wisdom of Socrates is negative.<sup>47</sup>

Simply put, Kekes’ rejection of “Socratic wisdom” concerning one’s ignorance is premised upon the legitimacy of supposing that there are indeed such truths of which one might be ignorant. Kekes’ dismisses this claim, with the result that to believe that one is ignorant is itself ignorance of the fact that there are no “metaphysical truths” of which one might be ignorant! Kekes calls Socratic wisdom “negative” because he sees it as destroying any pretensions we might have about possessing knowledge of “metaphysical truths” while still holding us accountable to finding such will-o-the-wisps.<sup>48</sup> Kekes therefore suggests that his own understanding (a proper understanding) of wisdom must not resign itself to the

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<sup>47</sup> Kekes, “Wisdom,” 281.

<sup>48</sup> As I understand it, Kekes’ rejection of what he calls “Socratic wisdom” necessarily follows from his rejection of Aristotelian *sophia*.

negative, but must take a “positive” form. Kekes claims his own conception of wisdom is positive, but he never really explains how.

I find many areas in Kekes’ argumentation to be worthy of more serious consideration and questioning. For starters, Kekes’ rejection of *sophia* must be reviewed in terms of both of his objections. First, Kekes supposes that *sophia* cannot be entertained as a realistic articulation of wisdom due to its “metaphysical” presumptions and its grounding in a “belief” in “*a priori* truth.” Kekes’ reaction to “metaphysics” as a kind of disingenuous dogmatism is certainly understandable. However, as the philosopher Eric Voegelin explains, the language of metaphysics was not always so hypostatized; rather, it began as the expression of certain “originary experiences” that are still available to all human beings. Voegelin writes about the manner in which these “originary experiences” that compelled people to use metaphysical language in the first place was lost when metaphysics became dogmatic, and how this dogmatism, being unpersuasive through its lack of experiential basis, resulted in a mass of sceptical philosophy<sup>49</sup> – such as Kekes’ article, for example.

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<sup>49</sup> Voegelin writes: “The [metaphysical] symbols in question intend to convey a truth experienced. Regarding this intent, however, they suffer from a peculiar disability. For, in the first place, the symbols are not concepts referring to objects existing in time and space but carriers of a truth about nonexistent reality. Moreover, the mode of non-existence pertains also to the experience itself, inasmuch as it is nothing but a consciousness of participation in nonexistent reality. As Heb. 11:1 has it: ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen.’ And finally, the same mode also pertains to the meaning of the symbols, as they convey no other truth than that of the engendering consciousness. We have spoken, therefore, of a truth experienced rather than of a truth attaching to the symbols. As a consequence, when the experience engendering the symbols ceases to be a presence located in the man who has it, the reality from which the symbols derive their meaning has disappeared. The symbols in the sense of a spoken or written word, it is true, are left as traces in the world of sense perception, but their meaning can be understood only if they evoke, and through evocation reconstitute, the engendering reality in the listener or reader. The symbols exist in the world, but their truth belongs to the nonexistent experience which by their means articulates itself.

The intangibility of the experience just adumbrated exposes the symbols and their truth to strange vicissitudes of history. Because of the vanishing substratum, even the most adequate exegesis and articulation of an experience can achieve no more than symbols which remain as the exterior residue of an original full truth comprising both the experience and its articulation. As soon, however, as the symbols have separated from this fullness and acquired the status of a literary account, the intimate tension between a reality engendering and symbols engendered, holding in balance the identity and difference of the two poles, is liable to dissociate into a piece of information and its subject matter. There is no guarantee whatsoever that the reader of the account will be moved to a meditative reconstitution of the engendering reality; one may even say the chances are slim, as meditation requires more energy and discipline than most people are able to invest. The truth conveyed by the symbols, however, is the source of right order in human existence; we cannot dispense with it; and as a consequence, the pressure is great to restate the exegetic account discursively for the purpose of communication. It may be translated, for instance, into simple propositions, rendering what the translator considers its essential meaning, for use on the secondary level of instruction and initiation. If submitted to such proceedings, for quite respectable purposes, the truth of the account will assume the form of doctrine or dogma, of a truth at second remove, as for instance the propositions ‘Man is immortal’ or ‘The soul is immortal.’ Moreover, dogmatic propositions of this kind are liable to condition corresponding types of

The way out of this problem – namely, the dilemma faced by Kekes as one who would seek to be wise without seeking out *sophia* – seems to be by questioning the whole premise that the vocabulary of metaphysics refers to “concepts” and is composed of *a priori* statements – that is, statements about things we know without experience of them. What if we are willing to recognize what Marcel saw while standing amidst the ruins of Vienna? What if we, as human beings, are able to have an “originary *experience*” that renders metaphysical language about “the universal” or “God” or some such epithet conceivable and meaningful?<sup>50</sup> Moreover, if such “originary experiences” of “metaphysical” reality are available to all human beings, then Kekes’ second reason for rejecting *sophia* and philosophy (as the pursuit of *sophia*) is also overcome; the language of philosophy need not be understood as dogmatic metaphysics if it is encountered deeply and if the “originary experiences” that gave rise to it are evoked in the one attempting to philosophize; given that speech that seeks after *sophia* need not be conceived of as an elitist or specialist or “expert” vocabulary but a genuine expression of human experiences available to everyone, certainly the pursuit of *sophia* need not be considered the privilege of the few and the gifted, and strictly in the purview of “professional” philosophers. As Aristotle states at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, “By nature, all human beings seek to know”<sup>51</sup> – not just philosophers! Everyone may philosophize.<sup>52</sup>

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experience, such as fideistic acceptance or even more deficient modes of understanding. There is the seminarian, as a Catholic friend once bitterly remarked, who rather believes in Denzinger's *Enchiridion* than in God; or, to avoid any suspicion of confessional partisanship, there is the Protestant fundamentalist; or, to avoid any suspicion of professional partisanship, there is the professor of philosophy who informs you about Plato's ‘doctrine’ of the soul, or of the idea, or of truth, though to conceive of Plato as a promoter of doctrine is preposterous. Even the transformation into doctrine, however, is not the last loss that truth can suffer. When doctrinal truth becomes socially dominant, even the knowledge of the processes by which doctrine derives from the original account, and the original account from the engendering experience, may get lost. The symbols may altogether cease to be translucent for reality. They will, then, be misunderstood as propositions referring to things in the manner of propositions concerning objects of sense perception; and since the case does not fit the model, they will provoke the reaction of scepticism on the gamut from a Pyrrhonian suspense of judgment, to vulgarian agnosticism, and further on to the smart idiot questions of ‘How do you know?’ and ‘How can you prove it?’ that every college teacher knows from his classroom.” See Eric Voegelin, “Immortality: Experience and Symbol” in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 52-54.

<sup>50</sup> As far as I understand it, discussions of “recollection” or *anamnesis* in Plato's dialogues are often conducted to suggest this precise point.

<sup>51</sup> Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library 17 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), I.i.980a22.

<sup>52</sup> If my comments on Kekes' assessment of *sophia* in this section are correct, then Kekes' reasons for rejecting “Socratic wisdom” are also overcome. For it stands to reason that, if the “metaphysical” knowledge sought by Socrates is not a quest for *a priori* truth, but rather for the ground of his (and our) “originary

## 6. Charles Hartshorne and John Meacham<sup>53</sup>

Charles Hartshorne and John Meacham will be discussed together in this section inasmuch as Hartshorne's book figures as an important influence in Meacham's writings on wisdom. It is no surprise that Hartshorne's book, *Wisdom as Moderation*, conflates two virtues (*aretai*) typically distinguished from one another: namely, wisdom (*sophia*) and moderation or "sound-mindedness" (*sophrosyne*). Hartshorne attempts to establish their identity by discussing "the good" as a mean between extremes, much like Aristotle asserts that "moral" or "ethical virtue" (*ten ethiken*) is a mean, inasmuch as it is "concerned with emotions and actions, in which one can have excess or deficiency or a due mean" (*to meson*).<sup>54</sup> Besides examples of means in "the good" dealing with temperance with regard to the pleasures of eating, courage in response to fears, and liberality with respect to giving – classical moral virtues also discussed by Aristotle – Meacham applies his notion of "goodness as a mean" to "aesthetic matters":

Beauty, too, is a mean. It is not the opposite to ugliness. Ugliness is an incongruity, a disorder, a jolt; but the sheer absence of incongruity and disorder is not beauty. Rather, beauty and all aesthetic value is what, in the words of Kurt Sachs the musicologist, "lies between the fatal extremes of mechanism and chaos." By 'mechanism,' understand a too strict and unrelenting orderliness, and by 'chaos,' a sheer lack of order. In the first case there is too little surprise, sense of tension, or interest in how things may come out; in the second case there are no definite expectations to be met with pleased surprise or to awaken any desire to experience the outcome. With mechanism we are merely bored, with chaos merely confused. In neither way does the sense of beauty arise.<sup>55</sup>

While the notion of "goodness as a mean" has some sense to it, understanding all goodness as a mean – and wisdom in particular – is problematic. It certainly seems to be the case that *sophrosyne* is about finding and hitting the mark of virtue somewhere in the vicinity of the

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experiences," then there is such a thing as "Socratic ignorance" – one can genuinely not know about realities which nonetheless exist, and yet still seek to know them through recollecting one's participation in them as a lover or an erotic philosopher.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation: A Philosophy of the Middle Way* (New York: SUNY Press, 1987), and John A. Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom" in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*, 182-211.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 19, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), II.vi.10.

<sup>55</sup> Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation*, 1-2.

middle in regards to emotions, actions, and appetites.<sup>56</sup> The idea of a mean suits well any situation where there can be something negative about the extremes of deficit or surplus. Indeed, the Greek saying *pan metron ariston* advises “moderation is best in all things.” Nonetheless, while thinking about moral virtue as a mean makes sense, Aristotle never applied the notion of the mean to intellectual virtues like wisdom. It is also significant that several times in various dialogues Socrates asks his interlocutors if one ought to philosophize moderately, or if one ought rather to seek the whole of wisdom.<sup>57</sup> Does the pursuit of philosophy’s ultimate object – the Lovable Itself – require a moderate and cautious “non-lover” who is always in control of himself?<sup>58</sup> Or does wisdom’s pursuit not involve a “divine” sort of madness or *mania*?<sup>59</sup> (Hint: The immoderate lover of wisdom always wins out!)

Returning then to Hartshorne’s contentions about beauty as a mean, we can make similar criticisms. While it is quite true that beauty is a kind of mean or balance from an Apollonian perspective (i.e., concerning geometric middles and proportions), it is simply not the case that beauty is a mean when we speak about Dionysian music or erotic philosophy. There is nothing middling about either the Dionysian or the erotic, dependent for their existence as they are upon mad transport and ecstatic movement, not towards a moderated or “middled” beauty, but rather reaching out to the transcendent or sublime source of beauty: to Beauty Itself.<sup>60</sup> The danger, then, in Hartshorne’s elucidation of wisdom, is that it does not consider the sublime nature of wisdom, nor does it truly account for the erotic nature of wisdom’s pursuit.

Like Hartshorne, John Meacham asserts that wisdom is a kind of mean – in this case between knowing and doubting. Wisdom involves not necessarily knowing more than other people, but rather seeing clearly the limits of what you know. For instance:

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<sup>56</sup> I mention this subtle point because the geometric middle is not Aristotle’s intent when he speaks of hitting the mark with respect to moral virtue. For instance, courage (*andreia*) is viewed as a mean in fear (*phobos*) and confidence (*tharsos*), where he who exceeds in fear is accounted cowardly (*deilos*) and he who is excessively confident is called rash (*thrasys*). But the actual “mean” of virtue is likely closer to the rash man than to the coward, meaning that virtue will not lie in the exact middle.

<sup>57</sup> See for instance, Plato’s *Republic*, 475b.

<sup>58</sup> See the speech that ensues in Plato’s *Phaedrus* at 237a and continue until 243c, where Socrates covers his head in shame in order to praise the “non-lover” (*me eronti*).

<sup>59</sup> “The greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is set as a gift of the gods” (244a).

<sup>60</sup> See Plato’s *Symposium*, 211d.



Clearly two persons can hold the same objective amount of knowledge, yet the first might feel that he or she knows a substantial proportion of all that can be known whereas the second might feel that he or she knows relatively little... To be wise in one's actions is to avoid both of these extremes.<sup>61</sup>

Similar to Marcel in this regard at least, Meacham contends that wisdom operates as a kind of valuable brake on human pride in our own knowing. It is

an attitude taken by persons toward the beliefs, values, knowledge, information, abilities, and skills that are held, a tendency to doubt that these are necessarily true or valid and to doubt that they are an exhaustive set of those things that could be known.<sup>62</sup>

In support of his view that wisdom is a mean between knowing and doubting, Meacham says that knowing nothing at all certainly cannot be wisdom, but nor is supposing that you know everything (because you don't!); rather, wise people know what they know and what they do not know, essentially following the old adage that the more one knows, "the more one realizes the extent of what one does not know." In Meacham's estimation, "The challenge of wisdom is to avoid this easy course of merely acquiring more and more knowledge and instead to strive simultaneously to construct new uncertainties, doubts, and questions about what might be known."<sup>63</sup> This statement brings us to a surprising and provocative contention in Meacham's article; namely, that the objective of knowing seems to be to doubt what you know.

Concurrent with this contention about knowing in order to doubt is a certain view of the way that scientific inquiry ought to be conducted. Meacham points out that scientific method always ought to admit that the facts as we have gleaned them are open to falsification; indeed, openness to falsification is the only way to avoid both extremes of dogmatism and scepticism. Meacham argues "neither extreme resembles wisdom, although the middle course between the two... certainly does."<sup>64</sup> While Meacham's comments about

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<sup>61</sup> Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom," 184. Meacham's assertion that wisdom bears no relation to knowledge of the highest things, but rather is a way to describe one's own sense of what one knows is reminiscent of Trevor Curnow's discussion of the Stoics in his article, "Sophia's World: Episodes from the History of Wisdom," 1-19. In this article, Curnow voices his affection for the Stoics because of the lower aim of their wisdom. According to Curnow, the Stoic project was not that people would make themselves happy, but that they might "stop making themselves unhappy." For Curnow, "It may be that the question that should be asked is not 'Can wisdom be taught?' but rather, 'How can we stop making ourselves unwise?'" (16).

<sup>62</sup> Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom," 187.

<sup>63</sup> Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom," 183.

<sup>64</sup> Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom," 186.

scientific method and the principle of falsification are well-placed, I am still left wondering: Is the correct application of scientific method the same as pursuing wisdom? Isn't there a difference in what is sought as their respective objects? That is, it may make sense that, with respect to scientific inquiry, we seek to know in order that we may doubt what we know, inasmuch as our knowledge in any scientific discipline or study is really just a means to more knowledge and trying to gain greater understanding; because the knowledge that we seek through scientific study is never a knowing that is intrinsically valuable for its own sake, but is always a means towards some other good (ex., happiness), then certainly it stands to reason that our knowing in the realms of scientific investigation would be but a stepping stone to doubting. However, what about when the object of our knowing is ultimate, like *sophia*? What about when we seek knowledge of that which is good in and of itself and for itself, not simply as a means to other goods, but as the Ultimate Good? And inasmuch as philosophy is the pursuit of such a great good – namely, wisdom – can it truly be said that wisdom is a mean between knowing and doubting – for doubting is only of value when there is a higher good or deeper truth to unfurl, no? So is it truly appropriate to suppose that scientific method and the principle of falsification apply to philosophizing? Perhaps in order to make such a contention, Meacham must first abandon his search for wisdom, inasmuch as seeking out wisdom means seeking out and maintaining hope for a Truth that is absolute, whereas for Meacham, wisdom means that “one is able to act with knowledge while simultaneously doubting.”<sup>65</sup>

A second, but entertaining assertion that Meacham makes in this article is that we can lose wisdom<sup>66</sup> -- that wisdom does not readily increase with age, but rather decreases. This contention is highly provocative and flies in the face of the arguments made by the other researchers we have thus far investigated, as well as much “popular wisdom” about aging.<sup>67</sup> However, Meacham suggests that wisdom may be offered in popular culture as a

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<sup>65</sup> Meacham, “The Loss of Wisdom,” 186.

<sup>66</sup> The notion that wisdom can be lost has some rather illustrious precedent in the figure of King Solomon, for instance, who is said to have fallen from wisdom due to his outrageous affluence and the influence of having too many wives (see 1 Kings 11). However, the notion that wisdom, as a virtue, could be lost once it is possessed is quite perplexing.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, the Berlin Group use their wisdom paradigm to predict that the “world record” in wisdom would be held by someone in his or her sixties! Baltes and Staudinger. “Wisdom: A Metaheuristic,” 128. Similarly, Chandler and Holliday argue that our repudiation of the past along with our modern fixation of novelty and technological progress makes us less likely to recognize the value of older people, particular as models of wisdom. See Chandler and Holliday, “Wisdom in a Post-apocalyptic Age,” 128. Of course, there

consolation prize by the young to the old for the fact that they are old and life is less pleasant for them!<sup>68</sup> Meacham presents his argument bravely: “My hypothesis is that all people are wise to begin with, as children, but that as we grow older most people lose their wisdom.” In his view, wisdom is “a quality that is maintained and preserved by only a select few over the course of life.”<sup>69</sup>

How is it that youth is the time of wisdom, according to Meacham? He begins by distinguishing between “simple” and “profound” wisdom.<sup>70</sup> Contrary to developmentalists like Piaget, Meacham contends that children are already wise in a “simple” fashion, whereas with age, if such wisdom is not forgotten through a loss of awareness concerning the limits of our own knowing, wisdom may become “profound.” However, forces are at work from an early age that tempt us to lose our “simple” awareness of the limits of our own knowing. Meacham writes:

In schools a premium is placed upon absorbing as much information as possible rather than raising questions about and critically evaluating what is already known. How often does a teacher enter the classroom intending to challenge the students’ beliefs, not merely so that false information might be replaced with presumably more valid information but so that the students might leave the class feeling less confident about their knowledge (and so more wise)? Instead, the emphasis is upon knowing rather than doubting, and so the easy course of movement is away from wisdom toward the extreme of believing that one knows all, or at least enough.<sup>71</sup>

Meacham’s view suggests that, in the main, the way that we currently educate our children (and expect them to be educated) destroys any “simple” wisdom that they might have concerning the fallibility of their own knowledge; current pedagogy even renders students

are many reasons to scrutinize and to doubt that the correlation between wisdom and aging would be very strong. Christ, for instance, says “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18.2; cf. Luke 18:15-17). And Book I of Plato’s *Republic* depicts Socrates discussing with a very old man named Cephalus, who certainly is not wise, and whose passion for wisdom’s pursuit is handily outstripped by the young men in Socrates’ company.

<sup>68</sup> Meacham, “The Loss of Wisdom,” 196.

<sup>69</sup> Meacham, “The Loss of Wisdom,” 198.

<sup>70</sup> Meacham, “The Loss of Wisdom,” 201.

<sup>71</sup> Meacham, “The Loss of Wisdom.” Meacham further develops this critique of schools by suggesting that the stress on defending one’s views and always having to find the answer tends to undermine student awareness of the limitations of their own knowledge: “One’s confidence in knowing can also be increased, and wisdom lost, through immersion in an intellectual climate that forces a too early defence of one’s views, a premature foreclosure of possible conceptual positions. Rather than being permitted to playfully entertain ambiguous or contradictory positions, we are often either forced to quickly abandon tentative notions or forced into a dogmatic defence of what are likely to be still untenable positions. In the course of defending such positions, we adopt a more extreme and hardened stance, moving further from the moderation of wisdom.” (205)

hostile towards the pursuit of wisdom. However, implicit in his contention is also the suggestion that we *could* indeed teach in such a way as to promote wisdom in our classrooms.

Meacham does not appear willing to blame school practices alone for the loss of wisdom in our educational institutions. He recognizes larger social forces and expectations at work in the way we value material gain, honour, and success as adults:

Bigness and power do not guarantee goodness or wisdom, although they might provide us with a sense of importance. It is easy to mistake the accumulation of information, power, and importance for wisdom because the more power one has, the less likely are other people to challenge one's apparent wisdom. ... [O]ne of the functions of wisdom was to guard against the excessive pride that can follow from successful mastery and control. In short, one reason why wisdom decreases as one grows older is that increasing age generally brings more information, more experience, more power, greater success, and so forth, and all of these carry with them the risk of loss of wisdom through excessive confidence in knowing.<sup>72</sup>

While much of Meacham's argumentation about wisdom as a brake on human pride makes sense and coincides with what Marcel says in *The Decline of Wisdom*, I find one of his final contentions about wisdom suspicious. Namely, Meacham argues that a "wisdom atmosphere" is necessary for the cultivation of wisdom, and that, in particular, it is essential that such an atmosphere be free from tragedy.<sup>73</sup> Tragedy is thought to impede wisdom which, in his view, requires an atmosphere of safety wherein it is easy to avoid the "extremes" of too confident knowing and paralyzing doubt.

These remarks strike me as suspicious given the ancient conception of tragedy articulated by the Greeks. In Greek thought, suffering is considered essential for the development of wisdom. Eric Voegelin has written incisively about the manner in which tragedy was used as a vehicle for the cultivation of wisdom among the Greeks.<sup>74</sup> He remarks that the truth of the tragedy is action itself, that is, "the movement of the soul that culminates in the decision (*proairesis*) of a mature, responsible man." In Voegelin's view, tragedy is a form of study "of the human soul in the process of making decisions."<sup>75</sup> The decisions illustrated in Greek tragedies concern matters of justice, and Voegelin points out

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<sup>72</sup> Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom," 205.

<sup>73</sup> Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom," 206.

<sup>74</sup> He points out that, by the time of Aristotle's oft-quoted assessment of tragedy as a kind of catharsis of the emotions, tragedy had already lost its deeper spiritual function. See Eric Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*. Vol. II of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957) 246.

<sup>75</sup> Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*, 247.

that there is normally a discrepancy between what the law (*themis*) states as being just and what is ultimately just (*dike*): “Beyond the order of *themis* with its conflicts, there lies an order of *dike*, in the double sense of a higher law and of concrete decisions. The situation that is not covered by *themis* will have to be ordered by a concrete decision, a dike, of ultimate rightness.”<sup>76</sup> It is then up to the solitary individual to reach deep down into the depths of his or her soul to render a decision that establishes *dike*.

Voegelin speaks of this decision-making process as a “Dionysian descent into man, to the depth where Dike is to be found.” In his view, conduct only becomes tragic action when “man is forced into the recourse to Dike. Only in that case is he faced with the dilemma expressed by the line ‘to act or not to act’.”<sup>77</sup> Now, all this doesn’t suggest that what Meacham means by a tragedy-free “wisdom atmosphere” is the same as what the Greeks meant by tragedy. Indeed, the word “tragedy,” as we use it today, is often applied to horrible car accidents, murders, suicides, the death of a young person, or a catastrophic, unfathomable “act of God.” We use the word tragedy whenever some form of suffering offends our sense of justice in the extreme. By contrast, Voegelin would contend that, in Greek understanding, all these nasty things -- even put together -- do not constitute the meaning of tragedy. Greek tragedy certainly entails the suffering of nasty things because, as Voegelin says, man must be forced into the recourse to Dike by a dilemma. The suffering involved in the development of tragic wisdom is necessary. However, the insights of tragedy are by no means guaranteed by the occurrence of nasty events, nor simply by the need to make difficult decisions in and of themselves. Rather, tragic wisdom arises when the soul descends deep into its own depths through a Dionysiac transport to find the order of Dike or divine justice therein.

Tragic wisdom arises, according to Greek experience, from seeing and therefore knowing the ground of all order in the universe. Given the possibility for this terrible yet profound wisdom, one wonders if Meacham’s trade-off to establish a safe and tragedy-free atmosphere might be too little accommodating to genuine engagement with the depth of reality that the pursuit of wisdom demands. If one is made insulated and safe from the “extremes” of experience – and this is Meacham’s project, for he seeks “the median of

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<sup>76</sup> Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*, 249-250.

<sup>77</sup> Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*, 251.

wisdom”<sup>78</sup> – how much of the depths, let alone the heights of inquiry and pursuit after wisdom is one really offered? If the word “wisdom” itself is not simply metaphysical jargon, but rather an expression of an “originary experience” of reality, how are students served by being insulated and protected from such experiences and seeing, and prevented from following her into whatever dark place she might be hiding?

## 7. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Kevin Rathu

Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu call themselves “evolutionary hermeneuticists.”<sup>79</sup> By using this term to describe their approach to the study of wisdom, they mean that when they inspect the various meanings of the term “wisdom” throughout history, they pay particular attention to those conceptions that have had considerable longevity, and that have “served people best over the years”; the authors then aspire to track how these concepts and ideas have been adapted to present understandings. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu isolate what they refer to as the three general “dimensions” of wisdom as it has been discussed and pursued through history; namely, wisdom as a “cognitive process,” as a “virtue,” and as a “good state” or a “personal good.”

First, discussing wisdom as a cognitive process, the authors point out that the term “wisdom” has not traditionally designated knowing that concerns itself with the appearance of fleeting phenomena, but rather with enduring universal truths; wisdom in this regard is not a kind of specialized expertise but rather an attempt to apprehend how the various aspects of reality are related to each other; and contrary to what Baltes and the Berlin group contend, Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu point out that wisdom is not a “value-free” way of knowing; the term “wisdom” necessarily implies a hierarchical ordering of truths and actions directed at those truths. Nonetheless, they note that “In contemporary discussions on wisdom, as in contemporary discussions on almost any human way of knowing, one would seldom come across such integrative notions as ‘universal truth’ or ‘God’.” Moreover, as “evolutionary hermeneuticists,” the authors – unlike Gabriel Marcel – do not voice any degree of dismay at this situation, but rather agree to discard whatever modern thought has not embraced from the ancients, understanding these particular attitudes

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<sup>78</sup> Meacham, “The Loss of Wisdom,” 209.

<sup>79</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Kevin Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom: An Evolutionary Interpretation,” 25-51.

towards wisdom as aspects of the concept that have not survived: “We shall focus on the commonalities instead, in the belief that those aspects of a meme that remain the same despite great changes in the social and cultural milieu are the ones that will have the more enduring consequences for human survival.”<sup>80</sup> In order to maintain wisdom’s over-arching or hierarchical flavour and primacy over the other sciences and realms of knowing, the authors offer up a definition of wisdom as “the systematic pursuit of the connection between the branches [of knowledge] – a “science of the whole.”<sup>81</sup>

Second, and following from the idea of wisdom as a “mode of knowledge” is the contention that “wisdom becomes the best guide for what is the *summum bonum*, or ‘supreme good.’” As a kind of knowing of “the whole,” “wisdom helps the person decide what is the optimal course of action for his or her own self.”<sup>82</sup> Wisdom is therefore understood to serve the function of “the foremost public virtue” in its ability to attain the good. However, the researchers remark that “the findings of modern psychology and the social sciences in general now can be seen as casting grave doubts on this ancient belief that ‘truth shall set you free.’”<sup>83</sup> When demarcating wisdom as a virtue, the researchers make a valuable observation about some omissions from its body of meanings in modern understanding:

Here again, as in the case of searching for universal truth, it seems apparent ... that modern sensibilities have completely abandoned the hope, as well as Plato’s suggestion that a compelling ethics will follow from the contemplation of Truth.<sup>84</sup>

Among many ancient writers it was thought that knowledge of the good was enough to ensure good action and good behaviour; it was thought that nobody knowingly chooses to do anything bad; we only act to achieve bad ends out of ignorance – thinking either that what we are doing is really good when it is in fact bad, or else ranking the good that we achieve by our actions as a higher good than it is in reality. This basic view is several times discussed in Plato’s dialogues;<sup>85</sup> it is also at the heart of Hindu Samkhya philosophy in its

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<sup>80</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 30.

<sup>81</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 32.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 33.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Plato’s *Meno*, 77b-78c; also see the discussion in the *Gorgias* concerning how it is preferable to suffer injustice than to do injustice to another; similar ideas about injustice are at the heart of the discussion between Thrasymachus and Socrates in the *Republic*.

emphasis on liberating the self from suffering through insight;<sup>86</sup> and again, it is present in Nagarjuna's Madhyamika philosophy of emptiness, particularly in the conviction that, by understanding clearly the nature of the self and of the entities to which it is related, one can attain buddhahood.<sup>87</sup> Modern thinkers, however, and for reasons already discussed, have generally rejected the notion of "Truth" or the language of "God," "the universal," or "the Good Itself" which articulates "originary experience" and hence the meaning of *sophia*. And yet modern thinkers remain concerned with virtue as it relates to good action in the world. They therefore emphasize the development of a kind of practical wisdom -- for example, Baltes *et alia* in their contention that wisdom is "expert knowledge concerning the fundamental *pragmatics* of life"; this modern vision of "practical wisdom" is based on a divorce of the ethical order from the divine order.<sup>88</sup> Essentially, the role of *sophia* is minimized or even eradicated in favour of a humanistic conception of *phronesis*.<sup>89</sup>

Third, the authors isolate a sense in the term "wisdom" that indicates wisdom not only helps us make good choices (virtue) and draws us closer to the truth (cognitive

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<sup>86</sup> In his seminal work *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, Mircea Eliade writes: "The wretchedness of human life is not owing to a divine punishment or to an original sin, but to ignorance. Not any and every kind of ignorance, but only ignorance of the true nature of Spirit, the ignorance that makes us confuse Spirit with our psychomental experience, that makes us attribute 'qualities' and predicates to the eternal and autonomous principle that is Spirit -- in short, a metaphysical ignorance. ... Since suffering has its origin in ignorance of 'Spirit' -- that is, in confusing 'Spirit' with psychomental states -- emancipation can be obtained only if the confusion is abolished." Samkhya philosophy, Eliade notes, "seeks to obtain liberation solely by *gnosis*," or realization of the truth of existence. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958) 14.

<sup>87</sup> The problem from a Buddhist perspective, is that we "reify" the phenomenal world (i.e. the world of experience, including ourselves and our inner states), when, in fact, all that is phenomenal is "empty" of inherent existence. Due to our ignorance of this emptiness, we become subject to "egoism," the overvaluing of the self, our achievements, and material things. We fail to appreciate the impermanence and non-substantiality of everything around us, including ourselves. The alternative suggested in Buddhist thought is to see oneself and other entities as non-substantial, impermanent, and subject to change -- certainly not as appropriate objects of such passionate craving. Nagarjuna's emptiness philosophy works to help human beings become liberated from deluded seeing or ignorance, for it is on account of such ignorance that human beings suffer. By seeing the truth clearly, human beings might become liberated from suffering. In his commentary on Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, Jay Garfield writes: "For most of us, the best that we can do is reason our way into knowing, but not seeing, their true nature. The goal of meditation on emptiness is to bring this knowledge into perceptual experience and, hence, to see things as they are." See Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, trans. Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 208. Garfield puts the matter succinctly: "Understanding emptiness leads one to grasp less, to become more detached. Relaxing one's tendency to grasp leads to a realization of emptiness. Philosophy, meditation, and the practice of the moral virtues that issue in the relaxation of grasping are conceived from this vantage point as necessarily mutually supportive" (249).

<sup>88</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu, "The Psychology of Wisdom," 34.

<sup>89</sup> I recall this being the case in the readings for my own studies as a Master of Teaching student at the University of Calgary. There were, to my recollection, a number of readings in the course pack that discussed the significance of *phronesis*, but no mention at all of *sophia*.



process); it is also good for us in the here and now as a “personal good.” Without wisdom, none of the other goods we enjoy can be truly rewarding; wisdom is a supreme pleasure in its own right, intrinsically rewarding. Having studied what they take to be the three “general dimensions” of wisdom, Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu write of this third element: “In spite of ... overwhelming agreement of past thinkers that the pursuit of wisdom brings with it the most intense joy, this aspect of wisdom is clearly the least emphasized and least understood in modern thought.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, they diagnose the reason for this dearth of modern understanding of wisdom as a good in its own right to be the result of the rejection of *sophia* and a dismissal of the possibility of *theoria*, or contemplation:

the general devaluation of a universal realm of Truth or Being has closed the door, as it were, to the place of “perfect” joy or happiness... such experiences would be discounted today as pure fantasy, as would the metaphysical realities that supposedly sparked the experiences.<sup>91</sup>

The authors wonder about this loss, and like Marcel, they suggest that it is due to our modern fascination with technology – particularly the focus of attention it lends to the material rewards of its transformative powers, and the profits that accrue from specialization and control. They cite some contemporary research that demonstrates the “detrimental effects of so-called extrinsic rewards like money on intrinsically rewarding experience,”<sup>92</sup> and they suggest that the result of our modern technological focus on transforming the world has been that the significance of pursuing wisdom has declined in popular esteem. Philosophy, or wisdom’s pursuit, “must be intrinsically motivated, detached from politics and business”<sup>93</sup>; the authors argue that “wisdom must be pursued in order to know and not for any utilitarian end.” Wisdom, it seems, presupposes overcoming selfish ends.

## 8. Douglas Lawson

Douglas Lawson’s book, *Wisdom and Education*,<sup>94</sup> provides us with an excellent case study in the rejection of both *sophia* and its pursuit in *theoria* in favour of an

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<sup>90</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 37.

<sup>91</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 38.

<sup>92</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rathu, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 38.

<sup>93</sup> “How can he get wisdom ... whose talk is of bullocks” (Ecclesiasticus 38.24).

<sup>94</sup> Douglas E. Lawson, *Wisdom and Education* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961).

autonomous modern notion of “practical wisdom” or *phronesis*. Lawson launches his attack by stressing the importance of always looking to the social responsibility involved in education as a means towards the progress of humanity:

Unfortunately, not all of us take the long look ahead when we talk about the aims and functions of education. We have become preoccupied with our own immediate areas of special activity. We state means instead of ends. We lose sight of the meaning of life because we are too close to the problems of living. We forget to take time to see education as a process designed to help all of humanity to construct improved value concepts in each generation.<sup>95</sup>

In his view, “any objective which leaves out a part of humanity is unworthy of being called education’s ultimate objective,”<sup>96</sup> and he grounds his contentions in the works of John Dewey. Lawson points out that, for Dewey, the “moral aspect” of wisdom is paramount, and that any philosophy with a good moral conscience “must posit an aim beyond wisdom, with wisdom itself impossible except in relation to action involving evaluation of consequences which bear a societal aspect of meaning.”<sup>97</sup> Clearly, wisdom’s “value” is, for both Dewey and Lawson, “as means rather than as end.”<sup>98</sup>

Lawson’s hostility towards the ancients is apparent when he discusses traditional notions of “liberal education” (i.e., education for its own sake rather than directed toward any utilitarian end) as elitist. Lawson writes:

The ancient tradition which thus associated liberal education with elevated social status, power, and leisure has not wholly lost its place in the attitudes of men. The result may be seen in the well-worn pretence that all students who seek a liberal education do so for the sheer ecstasy of knowing.<sup>99</sup>

Again, he cites Dewey’s critique of contemplation (*theoria*) and the spiritual space necessary for its cultivation, namely leisure or *scholē*, as forces that have historically impeded the progress of education and the betterment of society at large. Lawson remarks that, in Dewey’s view, “the periods of history during which scholars looked with contempt upon the material factors of living were also the periods which contributed little to man’s

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<sup>95</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 17.

<sup>96</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 10.

<sup>98</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 48.

progress in scientific understandings.”<sup>100</sup> Following Dewey, Lawson criticizes any notion of philosophy that would create a society divided into a “working” class and a “leisure” class: “our public educational institutions belong, not merely to an intellectual elite, but to all of the people.”<sup>101</sup> The unspoken directive here, however, is that everyone must engage themselves wholly as workers rather than in *scholē*: that if not everyone is able to engage in *theoria* – if the practice of *theoria* is indeed elitist – then nobody ought to engage in such a morally reprehensible and socially irresponsible endeavour. This animosity towards *theoria* and *scholē*, in fact, seems to be a necessary outcome of the demand for a progressive and democratic educational system:

[I]t must be emphasized here that a nation which fails to provide the best and most suitable education for all of its youth cannot afford democracy; and a nation that has no fixed leisure class is one in which the vast majority of students even in the liberal-arts colleges are – and by necessity must be – concerned also with the business of making a living.<sup>102</sup>

In Lawson’s view, wisdom must be of the practical as opposed to the theoretic variety; most notably, wisdom must be activistic and transformational in an outward, socially-responsive sense: “If wisdom involves choice, it also involves the responsibility for action.”<sup>103</sup> In order to bolster his view that no pursuit or object has value in and of itself,

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<sup>100</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 53. This remark strikes me on the surface as preposterous, given the great burgeoning of science – if not the very discovery of science! – during the height of Ionian speculation, and of course, at the time of Aristotle. Throughout this time period, *scholē* or leisure was held in high esteem as the greatest good for human beings inasmuch as *scholē* was needed in order to practice *theoria* or contemplation, which they viewed as the proper and final end of all human endeavour, and as the ultimate happiness for a human being. However, perhaps Dewey and Lawson are correct about how such a valuing and cherishing of *scholē* served to stifle “progress” among the Greeks in one way. The Greeks did not, for instance, develop great surpluses of goods nor did the forces unleashed by their inquiries result in massive gains in productivity. Hannah Arendt offers a thoughtful response to this accusation, however. In her book, *The Human Condition*, she addresses “the well-known puzzle in the study of the economic history of the ancient world that industry developed up to a certain point, but stopped short of making progress which might have been expected ... [in view of the fact that] thoroughness and capacity for organization on a large scale is shown by the Romans in other departments, in the public services and the army.” Arendt writes that “it seems a prejudice due to modern conditions to expect the same capacity for organization in private as in ‘public services,’” and that the very indifference of ancient writers to economic questions is really only the result of the ancient sense that there was something slavish about enlarging one’s property instead of using it up to pursue “the political life” – or for that matter, to pursue *theoria* through the practice of *scholē*, which is in some measure the subject of Arendt’s accompanying text, *The Life of the Mind*. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). See note 69, pp. 65–66.

<sup>101</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 54–55.

<sup>102</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 50.

<sup>103</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 56.

but only in relation to its use or practicality for human purposes, Lawson again cites Dewey:

If Dewey was right in believing that our concepts of value must be associated with practical activities, then practicality, measured in the terms of accruing results of action, and value seen as entity in an absolutist sense, become mutually exclusive. One can be meaningful only in relation to human experience, the other only in relation to a transempirical reality.<sup>104</sup>

Lawson, like the other modern researchers of wisdom in our study, rejects any notion of a “transempirical” reality on the grounds that it is a metaphysical abstraction and an unwarranted *a priori* assumption.

Lawson’s exposition of the manner in which wisdom and wisdom’s pursuit are understood as being relevant (as well as irrelevant) to modern education seems to be fairly representative of the vast bulk of modern opinion. *Sophia* is generally scorned and viewed either as an elitist pursuit, or as a false notion premised upon unwarranted assumptions about the existence of a “transempirical reality” – or both. “Practical wisdom” – some modern version of *phronesis* – is therefore viewed as the only realistic and socially responsible alternative. Perhaps Lawson is correct to associate these widely-held views with Dewey. However, I am uncertain – at least at the outset -- as to how faithful Lawson’s use of Dewey is to Dewey’s own corpus of writings in this regard. For instance, Lawson’s use of Dewey seems to be premised upon his central claim that wisdom is not to be pursued for its own sake, but rather for ends external to itself: namely, the progress and betterment of society. However, in Chapter Eight of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey is quite clear that “the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education – or that the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth,” and that “[i]n our search for aims in education, *we are not concerned, therefore, with finding an end outside of the educative process to which education is subordinate.*”<sup>105</sup> This would suggest that the pursuit of wisdom -- or at least of knowledge of some kind – is, for Dewey, an activity for its own sake rather than for the sake of some extrinsic end. In fact, Dewey’s warnings against the pursuit of “growth” as though it were a “movement toward a fixed goal” rather

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<sup>104</sup> Lawson, *Wisdom and Education*, 57-58.

<sup>105</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Middlesex: The Echo Library), 78 (emphasis added). Also see chapter eight on the “Aims of Education,” where Dewey stresses that “education is literally and all the time its own reward” (84).

than regarding “growth” as an end in itself are extensive.<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, there is a good deal of truth to Lawson’s account of Dewey; for Dewey’s rejection of any idea of a final or perfect end (*telos*) aligns rather well with Lawson’s repudiation of ancient conceptions of *sophia*, *theoria*, and *scholē*.

## 9. John Dewey

John Dewey is a philosopher and thinker of great intellectual import and wide significance in the field of education. He stands without parallel among the academics and researchers that have thus far been the subject of this survey of modern thought about the nature of wisdom. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey, like Lawson and the other researchers who have only followed in his enormous footsteps, approaches the problem of modern democratic education by attacking the ancients, and Plato in particular. He writes: “Plato’s starting point is that the organization of society depends ultimately upon knowledge of the end of existence. ... But how is the knowledge of the final and permanent good to be achieved?”<sup>107</sup> Contrary, at least on the surface, to what Lawson says, Dewey here does not seem to accept any ends external to wisdom or knowledge. However, if we look closer, we see that for Dewey, education is not the same thing as seeking out wisdom or *sophia*; for such a search is premised upon the possibility of cultivating an awareness of an “originary experience” of the divine *telos*, and in his view there is no such possibility of knowing the ultimate “end of existence.” It is for this reason that he speaks about all such reaching towards a *telos* as being akin to seeking after an imposed, external end. But in his dismissal of a *telos*, Dewey necessarily dismisses *theoria*, as the pursuit of *sophia*, as well as the necessity of “leisure” or *scholē*, which makes the spiritual space for *theoria* possible.

Chapter Eight of *Democracy and Education* provides us further clues as to how Dewey understands what a properly progressive and democratic educational system ought to look like once it is purged of all externally-imposed ends or *teloi*. In his view, any “aims” sought in an educational context must be “tentative” and “flexible,” not *telos*-driven (in the Platonic sense) but subject to change depending on circumstance, findings, and interest; “aims” in education ought therefore to be contingent upon conditions.<sup>108</sup> In

<sup>106</sup> See, for instance, “Education as Growth,” chapter four of *Democracy and Education*, 42.

<sup>107</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 69.

<sup>108</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 81.

Dewey's view, "[a]ny aim is of value so far as it assists observation, choice, and planning in carrying on activity from moment to moment and hour to hour; if it gets in the way of the individual's own common sense... it does harm."<sup>109</sup> At this point, Dewey's hostility towards philosophy can be seen clearly; for philosophic inquiry often involves the philosopher in questions that run counter to "common sense." Indeed, inasmuch as philosophy's ultimate concerns are not with strictly or narrowly-understood empirical, scientific, or social reality, but rather seek out a transcendent source for our thoughts about these matters, philosophic inquiry and questions will always appear ridiculous and contrary to "common sense." Seeking out *sophia* may, in the course of things, involve departures from common sense reasoning.<sup>110</sup>

Dewey frequently speaks about "the vice of externally imposed ends" in education, and as demonstrated above, he supposes that ancient attempts to cultivate the pursuit of *sophia* through fostering a scholastic (in the sense of *schole*) spiritual environment for the purposes of sharpening our awareness of the divine *telos* in the practice of *theoria* are essentially vicious in this regard. But what if Dewey has misjudged the pursuit of such a *telos*? What if *sophia* and the love of *sophia* (literally *philia-sophia* or "philosophy") is not, classically understood, the pursuit of externally-imposed ends - of hypostatized or reified *a priori* concepts or "Ideas"? What counts as an end that is "externally imposed," after all? Need the notion of a divine *telos* be understood and dismissed as such an externally-imposed end? Or might it not be that such a divine *telos* - as was the case in the Dionysian experience of descent cultivated by Greek tragedy - is intimated internally as an "originary experience"?

Dewey's quarrel as a pragmatist against "theory" is that, unlike pragmatism -- rooted as it is in "tentative" aims and the "contingencies" of real experience -- "theory" and "the theoretical life" are accused of lacking such a root in experience, of being tied instead to arcane, obscure, or esoteric concepts and imposed ends that, unlike experience, are not available to everyone, but only to a few professional thinkers. Dewey therefore writes: "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience

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<sup>109</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 83.

<sup>110</sup> Hannah Arendt points out that thinking, by its very nature, is antagonistic to common sense inasmuch as it "subjects everything it gets hold of to doubt." See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 52.

that any theory has vital and verifiable significance.”<sup>111</sup> But this notion of “theory” as being divorced from experience and as concerned with *a priori* “metaphysical concepts” is a modern misunderstanding. At its root, the word “theory” meant *theoria*: that is, it was related to “seeing,” “beholding,” or “gazing upon.”<sup>112</sup> Certainly, then, theory is *deeply* experiential. In fact, the Greeks (and even the medieval scholastic philosophers) supposed that theory was the deepest sort of experience and the most authoritative sort of knowing; for the empirical-scientific methods of knowing lauded by Dewey rely on the senses, and sense experience attends to the phenomenal world of appearances, but the experience of phenomenal appearance is not the same as the direct, unmediated experience of beholding substance, essence, being, or reality itself. Similarly, even argumentative or analytic reasoning is of inferior quality when compared to *theoria*; certainly, reason has an advantage over sensation in that it is not beholden directly to the evidence of the senses; but it is still inferior to *theoria* inasmuch as reason is always “on the way” towards its object, and its object must be something that is subject to analytic thought, whereas *theoria* possesses (or is rather possessed by) its object.<sup>113</sup> In the act of contemplative seeing, one experiences union with what is seen. There is no deeper sort of knowing and experiencing than *theoria*. Of course, the other implication of this lost, ancient understanding of *theoria* is that it is an experience that is fundamentally human; it is not what we take today to be arcane “theoretization” or mental gymnastics with concepts and esoteric metaphysical jargon. *Theoria*, as the experience of beholding what IS, is *not* elitist as Dewey and Lawson accuse; nor is it unverifiable (for it simply IS); nor is it to be identified with the *a priori*. Rather, it is available to *everyone* who is open to “originary experiences.”

A few remarks seem to be in order concerning Dewey’s understanding of thinking and knowing as these relate to what we have said about *theoria*. In his summary to chapter twelve of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey offers his readers a clear explanation of what he considers to be the nature of thinking, and the role of thinking in education:

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<sup>111</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 110.

<sup>112</sup> The Greek verb is *theaomai*.

<sup>113</sup> In his wonderful little book, *Happiness and Contemplation*, Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper writes that “the fulfillment of existence takes place in the manner in which we become aware of reality; the whole energy of our being is ultimately directed toward attainment of insight. The perfectly happy person, the one whose thirst has been finally quenched, who has attained beatitude – this person is one who sees. The happiness, the quenching, the perfection, consists in this seeing.” See Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, St. Augustine’s Press, 1998), 58.

[T]hinking is the method of an educative experience. The essentials of method ... are first that the pupil have a genuine situation of experience ... secondly, that a genuine problem develop within this situation as a stimulus to thought; third, that he possess the information and make the observations needed to deal with it; fourth, that suggested solutions occur to him which he shall be responsible for developing in an orderly way; fifth, that he have opportunity and occasion to test his ideas by application, to make their meaning clear and to discover for himself their validity.<sup>114</sup>

Further along, in chapter seventeen concerning “Knowledge in the Course of Study,” Dewey clarifies his views concerning knowledge that is acquired through thinking. In his view, such knowledge is “an outcome of activity bringing about certain changes in the environment.”<sup>115</sup> Dewey’s exposition of thinking and knowing in these passages accords with what we have found to be the case throughout our investigations of his views concerning *theoria* and the pursuit of *sophia*; namely, thinking ought always to be problem-based and analytic, and that its nature is discursive as opposed to apprehensive or “beholding.”<sup>116</sup>

Having read Dewey, I am left wondering whether it would be at all accurate or fruitful to say, according to ancient Greek philosophic terminology, that his emphasis in thinking is dianoetic rather than noetic, or in medieval Latin philosophic parlance, that his concerns are with *ratio* rather than the *intellectus*. These ancient terms are not jargon, but rather indications of how careful Greek and Latin authors were in their attempts to differentiate thinking -- to distinguish different sorts of experiences of thinking from one another according to their objects.<sup>117</sup> *Dianoia* might roughly be translated as “thought,” whereas *noesis* is most often translated as “intellection.” *Dianoia* includes geometric and deductive thinking; it involves the discovery and use of axioms and hypotheses without

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<sup>114</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 124.

<sup>115</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 164.

<sup>116</sup> George Santayana suggests something like this insight when he comments that Dewey, while affirming that human beings have experiences, nonetheless, refuses to entertain the possibility that those things that we experience actually and substantially exist – that there is anything essential of which we become aware or that we might *behold*. He writes that “this admitted objectivity of real things remains internal to the immediate sphere: they [the things we experience] must never be supposed to possess an alleged substantial existence beyond experience” (683). From Dewey’s perspective, it is “the most terrible illusion” to suppose that “the essences given in the immediate exist, generate their own presence, and may persist and rearrange themselves and so generate the future.” For Dewey, “[t]he immediate ... is always specious; it is peopled by spectres,” and thus “immediate experience of things, far from being fundamental in nature, is only the dream which accompanies our action” (684). See George Santayana, “Dewey’s Naturalistic Metaphysics” *The Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 25 (Dec 3, 1925): 673-688.

<sup>117</sup> Notice how undifferentiated our own language is with regard to thinking when compared with the Greeks.



testing them, or “taking them up” (*anairesis*) towards their ultimate measure. *Noesis*, by contrast, involves the dialectical investigation of axioms and hypotheses. It is through *noesis* that we aspire to know the highest things, and it is this form of thinking that orders the *psyche*. The Latin counterparts to these Greek terms are *ratio* and *intellectus*. “*Ratio*” designates the experience of the activity of reasoning, of analysing, synthesizing, and manipulating ideas in order to make sense of them. *Ratio* is the rough equivalent, as far as I can determine, of *dianoia*, whereas *intellectus* is roughly akin to *noesis*.<sup>118</sup> Looking back on Dewey’s exposition of the nature of thinking, it seems that his prime concern is with the dianoetic manipulations of *ratio*; however, inasmuch as he would certainly encourage students to question and to test hypotheses (quite possibly what Dewey means by “tentative” aims), it seems reasonable to suppose that Dewey’s educational objectives also share richly in the noetic dimensions of the *intellectus*. Also, Dewey’s emphasis that thinking always be grounded in experience is laudatory, for both *dianoia* and *noesis* are experiences of thought. Nonetheless, his emphasis on knowledge as “an outcome of activity bringing about certain changes in the environment” suggests a limitation upon his willingness to engage in the full amplitude of noetic activity; for *theoria*, as the culmination of *noesis* wherein all the principles (*archai*)<sup>119</sup> of science and the arts are taken up

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<sup>118</sup> Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper offers an excellent explanation of the Latin terms that can lend clarity to our investigation of wisdom and its pursuit: “Contemplation is a form of knowing arrived at not by thinking but by seeing, intuition. It is not co-ordinate with the *ratio*, with the power of discursive thinking, but with the *intellectus*, with the capacity for ‘simple intuition.’ Intuition is without doubt the perfect form of knowing. For intuition is knowledge of what is actually present; the parallel to seeing with the sense is exact. Thinking, on the other hand, is knowledge of what is absent, or may be merely the effort to achieve such knowledge; the subject matter of thinking is investigated by way of something else which is directly present to the mind, but the subject matter is not seen as it is in itself. The validity of thinking, Thomas says, rests upon what we perceive by direct intuition; but the necessity for thinking is due to a failure of intuition. Reason is an imperfect form of *intellectus*. Contemplation, then, is intuition; that is to say, it is a type of knowing which does not merely move toward its object, but already rests in it.” See Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation* 74; cf. Josef Pieper, “Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labour,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Waskom (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 14-15.

<sup>119</sup> Book VI of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* begins with an investigation of the relationship between “first philosophy” or metaphysics and the specific or disciplinary sciences of physics and mathematics. Aristotle re-iterates his view that the specific sciences deal with specific things or classes of things, not with being as being: “It is the principles and causes of the *things which are* that we are seeking; and clearly of the things which are *qua* being. There is a cause of health and physical fitness; and mathematics has principles and elements and causes; and in general every intellectual science [*episteme dianoetike*] or science which involves intellect [*dianoias*] deals with causes and principles, more or less exactly or simply considered. But all these sciences single out some existent thing or class, and concern themselves with that; not with Being [*ontos*] unqualified, nor *qua* Being, nor do they give any account of the essence [*tou ti estin*]; but starting from it, some making it clear to perception, and others assuming it as a hypothesis [*hypothesein*], they demonstrate [*apodeiknuousin*], more or less cogently, the essential attributes of the class with which they are dealing. Hence obviously there

dialectically to their highest principle in the one divine beginning or *arche*, does not involve “bringing about changes in the environment”; whereas reasoning or discursive thought necessarily involves change and fluctuation, analysis and synthesis, *theoria* involves not the manipulation of manyness, but rather the experience of unity or oneness with its object; in fact, categories of subject and object disappear where knowing becomes not a matter of manipulating an object to affect an “environmental” change in it, but rather participation in the other through union with it.

At this juncture, I would like to investigate what Dewey says directly about contemplation (*theoria*) and its relation to leisure (*scholē*) as the essential environmental basis for the pursuit of wisdom or *sophia*. In chapter fifteen, entitled “Play and Work in the Curriculum,” Dewey considers what role – if any – leisure ought to play in education. In his view, the only sort of leisure that is admissible is “recreative.” In his words,

Recreation, as the word indicates, is recuperation of energy. No demand of human nature is more urgent or less to be escaped ... Education has no more serious responsibility than making adequate provision for enjoyment of recreative leisure; not only for the sake of immediate health, but still more if possible for the sake of its lasting effect upon habits of mind.<sup>120</sup>

It is important to point out here that what Dewey means by “recreative leisure” is not what the ancients meant by *scholē*. Rather, recreative leisure is wholly focused on the world of work; its intent is always action-oriented; it is directed towards more knowledge in the Deweyan sense of “an outcome of activity bringing about certain changes in the environment.” Recreational activity is like “recharging your batteries” on the weekend. It is respite from labour, but it is granted as a means to store up energy for more labour and more effort.<sup>121</sup> In this regard, it is antithetical to the classical notion of *scholē*, according to

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is no demonstration of substance [*ousias*] or essence [*tou ti estin*] from this method of approach, but some other means of exhibiting it.” (1025b1-17)

In this passage, Aristotle states that each of the sciences starts out with being or essence either as the ground or basis for its perceptions, observations (and I suppose also its conclusions), or as a hypothesis or assumption upon which to proceed and to build deductively or demonstratively upon. Dewey’s manner of educational inquiry is akin to movement within these disciplines, and in search of their respective *archai*.

<sup>120</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 155.

<sup>121</sup> In his own extensive writings of contemplation, wisdom, and leisure, Pieper has several times linked this rejection of the *vita contemplativa* and the demand for a world of “total work” in which leisure is replaced with “recreation” to totalitarianism. See, for instance, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 79; also see Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (Scarborough: Pantheon Books, 1952), and Pieper, *For the Love of Wisdom*. I reproduce here one particularly powerful insight offered by Pieper about the implications of demolishing the opportunity for *scholē*: “[P]ractice [that is, the work-a-day “active life”]

which leisure was not thought of as a means to more effective or productive work; rather, work was seen as a necessary evil in order to provide opportunity for leisure. This reversal made eminent sense to the ancients because it is from within the spiritual atmosphere of *scholē* that one might engage in *theoria*, and thereby pursue *sophia*.

In chapter nineteen, Dewey writes about the quarrel between labour and leisure and the need, as he sees it, to reconcile the two. Once again, he turns to the ancients as the source for what he considers to be an unwarranted elitism and privileging of leisure over labour:

The educational formulations of the social situation made over two thousand years ago have been so influential and give such a clear and logical recognition of the implications of the division into labouring and leisure classes, that they deserve especial note. According to them, man occupies the highest place in the scheme of animate existence. In part, he shares the constitution and functions of plants and animals – nutritive, reproductive, motor or practical. The distinctively human function is reason existing for the sake of beholding the spectacle of the universe. Hence the truly human end is the fullest possible of this distinctive human prerogative. The life of observation, meditation, cogitation, and speculation pursued as an end in itself is the proper life of man. From reason moreover proceeds the proper control of the lower elements of human nature – the appetites and the active, motor, impulses. In themselves greedy, insubordinate, lovers of excess, aiming only at their own satiety, they observe moderation – the law of the mean – and serve desirable ends as they are subjected to the rule of reason.<sup>122</sup>

Even assuming that theoretic or contemplative “beholding” of “the spectacle of the universe” is possible, Dewey remains critical of the view that this possibility would be widely available, since most people are not interested in or capable of a leisured life of the mind or the rigours and self-discipline it entails. Dewey remarks: “Only in a comparatively small number is the function of reason capable of operating as a law of life. In the mass of people, vegetative and animal functions dominate.”<sup>123</sup> Hence, in his view, privileging

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does become meaningless the moment it sees itself as an end in itself. For this means converting what is by nature a servant into a master – with the inevitable result that it no longer serves any useful purpose. ... The truth is that as soon as we are no longer obliged to earn our living, we no longer know what to do with our life and recklessly squander it.” Perhaps as in the examples of Faust and Ivan Denisovich already discussed above, such a life devoid of contemplation and its possibility in the spiritual space provided by leisure, life becomes, as Pieper says, filled with “deadly emptiness” and “endless ennui.” In Pieper’s view, “[t]his is the desert which results from destruction of the *vita contemplativa*.” *Happiness and Contemplation*, 95. Pieper’s comments make me wonder about how our school system, devoid as it is of leisure for both students and teachers, affects our capacity for happiness and our ability to pursue *sophia*.

<sup>122</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 187.

<sup>123</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 187.

leisure over labour cannot result in anything other than unwarranted and undemocratic elitism. Dewey therefore not only attacks classical sentiment concerning the preciousness of *scholē*; he also demands that we free ourselves from its remaining vestiges in current society in order to actualize a truly democratic education:

We are in a position honestly to criticize the division of life into separate functions and of society into separate classes only so far as we are free from responsibility for perpetuating the educational practices which train the many for pursuits involving mere skill in production, and the few for a knowledge that is an ornament and a cultural embellishment.<sup>124</sup>

Indeed, Dewey takes the eradication of *scholē* – which again, is the necessary spiritual atmosphere for the practice of *theoria* and the search for *sophia* – as perhaps the most significant component of his project to establish an educational system for a truly democratic society. Dewey makes precisely this point when he writes:

the problem of educating in a democratic society is to do away with [this] dualism and to construct a course of studies which makes thought a guide of free practice for all and which makes leisure a reward of accepting responsibility for service, rather than a state of exemption from it.<sup>125</sup>

Dewey has made his quarrel with the ancients and medievals concerning the value and legitimacy of *scholē* – and correspondingly, the pursuit of *sophia* through *theoria* – plain for all to see. In chapter twenty, he re-iterates how he understands the very search for *sophia* itself to be a violation of the true manner in which knowledge is derived, and as an impediment to the progress of society:

To know reality [according to the medievals] meant to be in relation to the supreme reality, or God, and to enjoy the eternal bliss of that relation. Contemplation of supreme reality was the ultimate end of man to which action is subordinate. Experience had to do with mundane, profane, and secular affairs, practically necessary indeed, but of little import in comparison with supernatural objects of knowledge.<sup>126</sup>

## 10. Glen Gray

Glen Gray's position on wisdom is interesting in its nuances, for it shares certain understandings with Dewey about wisdom while at the same time fundamentally waging war against him. Gray begins his book, *The Promise of Wisdom*, by affirming the

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<sup>124</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 190.

<sup>125</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 193.

<sup>126</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 196.

importance of *theoria*, saying that nobody can truly be accounted educated unless they have a “vision” (*theoria*) of what they are trying to do.<sup>127</sup> In this regard, he is critical of American society – and perhaps implicitly of American philosophers of education like Dewey! – for always being “primarily intent on doing rather than ‘seeing’.”<sup>128</sup> Gray’s assessment of American society is not dissimilar to Marcel’s as he stood in the wreckage of Vienna pondering the remarks of the American soldier who could not understand why the destruction of ancient, revered buildings posed a significant existential difficulty for him.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, Gray is under no illusions that the ills of American society could be solved by a knowing that, like Dewey’s knowing, is simply “an outcome of activity bringing about certain changes in the environment.” Indeed, part of the difficulty that Gray wrestles with (that doesn’t seem to be much of a problem for Dewey) is with the pace of the “progress” of knowledge on the one hand, and yet the concomitant failure of that knowledge to bring us any greater happiness. Much like Kekes, Chandler, and Holliday in their use of Ivan Ilyich, Gray offers up the example of Faust as a man of great learning, yet miserable to the core – certainly in Gray’s view not a laudatory example either of the truly educated man or someone who is wise.<sup>130</sup> To accentuate further his lamentation about the futility of more knowledge without the acquisition of wisdom, Gray quotes the opening stanza of T.S. Eliot’s *The Rock*: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? / Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”<sup>131</sup> Unlike Dewey, Gray’s entire quandary in

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<sup>127</sup> Glen Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom: a Philosophical Theory of Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 4. Clearly, Gray departs here from Dewey inasmuch as he does not say that “an ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory.”

<sup>128</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 4.

<sup>129</sup> Perhaps Gray’s own experiences as a soldier in the Second World War gave him some insights into the significance of the loss of reverence and the attenuation of awareness of “the universal” that were not as readily available to Dewey the academic.

<sup>130</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 15-16.

<sup>131</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 16. The full stanza runs as follows:

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,  
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.  
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,  
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,  
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying  
The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,

this philosophical investigation of education is to find a way back to wisdom or *sophia*, classically understood.

Gray begins his inquiry by delineating the two traditional senses of wisdom as being “practical” on the one hand and “theoretical” on the other. Practical wisdom, he points out, enables a person to apply his or her learning and knowledge to the enrichment of daily activities; through the exercise of practical wisdom an individual might exhibit excellence or virtue in the conduct of life; moreover, Gray points out that among the Greeks, the wise man was held necessarily also to be an effective citizen, one in control of his appetites, and able to live a life guided by reason.<sup>132</sup>

Theoretical wisdom, by contrast, involved the search for truth about the world and our place in it. According to Gray, such wisdom is embodied in

the vision of the pure scientist or researcher, the philosopher and the man of great intellectual power, who are concerned with knowing things for their own sake. This sort of wisdom comes from study and reflection and is the product of leisure and freedom from the daily life of vocation and association with others of quite different concerns. Such theoretical wisdom involves long-continued intellectual discipline, inherited ability, and a passion for truth however unpleasant or impractical.<sup>133</sup>

Citing the Greeks further, Gray points out that “This wisdom does not ... ‘teach a man how to find his way home.’ It does not make him practically effective as a family man, citizen, or community leader.” However, “Aristotle at least felt that it did make a man supremely self-sufficient and even god-like, for it enabled him to retrace the thoughts of God after Him.”<sup>134</sup>

At this point it is important to address a difficulty with Gray’s account that plagues the way that he seeks out a solution to the existential anxiety he feels. Gray has equated *sophia*, or “theoretical wisdom,” with pure science, pure research, or knowledge “for its own sake.” This confusion arises for Gray on two counts. First is the notion of a kind of knowledge that is its own justification. In ancient thought, knowledge of the Good Itself or

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But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
Bring us farther from GOD and nearer to the Dust.

<sup>132</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 22-23.

<sup>133</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 24.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

of God was the only knowledge that was truly good “for its own sake”; all other knowledge of knowable things was only a shadow or an incomplete image of this true good, and it was for the sake of knowing this final good that all things ultimately were known.<sup>135</sup> Hence, Gray’s suppositions (which we now take for granted as the truth) about “pure research” or “pure science” as the height of “knowing for its own sake” -- that is, science or research not harnessed in the service of some other prescribed finite end or worldly ambition – are not, strictly speaking, correct. For although “pure science” or “pure research” is not conducted with an extrinsic worldly purpose in mind, it nonetheless is distinct from *sophia* in its objects which are of a finitely good rather than an infinitely good nature.

The second difficulty that Gray stumbles over in his definition of theoretical wisdom as “pure science” is the equivocation of the various senses of the words “science” and “knowledge.”<sup>136</sup> Briefly, the word “science,” which connotes a particular study or method of inquiry into a specific field of knowledge, can also be used to connote our aspirations for knowledge (*scientia*) about the highest things. However, the fields of study associated with the various sciences, even in their “pure” – that is to say, unharnessed to any extrinsic goal – form, are not the same as that science which seeks to know the highest things. On these two counts, Gray finds himself confused, for when *sophia* is simply treated as a science like any other science (i.e., through equivocated meanings) that seeks out knowledge “for its own sake” (i.e., without distinguishing the nature of its objects), he is led to the strange conclusion that *sophia*, left to its own devices, can wreak enormous havoc and destruction in the world through its disinterested inventiveness, such as the horrible weapons of the Second World War with which Gray was all too familiar as a soldier.

Gray finds himself in a terrible bind because of this confusion about *sophia*. Unlike Dewey, he refuses to reject either *theoria* or the possibility of *sophia*; he recognizes that without the possibility of *theoria* – of “beholding” that which is – there is no real and true

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<sup>135</sup> The idea here is that the good that you come to know in anything is only a good by participation in the Good Itself as its source.

<sup>136</sup> These difficulties with equivocation do not simply exist in English and Greek, but are very likely endemic to all languages. Moses Maimonides speaks of equivocation in the use of the Hebrew word for wisdom (*hokmah*) in the final book of his *Guide for the Perplexed*, counting at least four separate meanings to the term (chapter LIV). Thomas Aquinas also points out that the word for wisdom in Latin, *sapientia*, has at least two different meanings (i.e., that one is “wise” in a particular study or art, or that one is wise because one knows God, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.45). Or again, Nagarjuna notes the same equivocation in Buddhist thought with regard to the truth, and hence feels the need to speak of a “doctrine of two truths” – one “conventional” and the other “ultimate.”

“seeing”; there can be no true community (or communion) with that which is; in effect, without the ability – one that is not an elite attribute, but available to *every* human being -- to “gaze upon,” we’re all left in an unhappy state like Faust, even with all the learning in the world. In Gray’s view, “to renew the struggle to achieve involvement and intimacy with this larger natural and human environment is surely the fuller meaning of the educational adventure.”<sup>137</sup> Put somewhat differently, Gray suggests that education requires *theoria*, since *theoria* is the manner of unmediated involvement and intimacy with the *cosmos* of what is. And Gray notes that *theoria* need not be understood as something elitist or so sublime that it is only available to a few of us. Rather, everyone is capable of “gazing upon” the *cosmos* of being to various degrees.<sup>138</sup> However, the bind arises for Gray when he supposes alongside this ancient understanding of *theoria* and *sophia* that *any* “knowledge for its own sake” – whether that be pure science, or pure research, or pure enjoyment of love for another – is the same thing as *sophia* and that it attains to the same object. For then *sophia* is indeed a kind of knowledge incapable of guiding itself – “of finding its way home,” as Gray says – and it therefore stands in need of “practical wisdom” or *phronesis* to guide it.

The impotence of *sophia* – necessitated by modern assumptions about its nature -- in this regard pushes Gray into other confusions and causes him difficulties that force him to retrace some of his steps, causing him to fall into contradictions about *sophia*. First, due to *sophia*’s inability to guide itself home, Gray admits that both prudence and *sophia* are needed:

The danger in such a separation is patent in our times, since so much of the theoretical at present lies in the natural sciences. Our creative scientists are discovering, often with agonized consciences, that their most pure and apparently

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<sup>137</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 35-36.

<sup>138</sup> Gray offers many examples of how the call to *theoria* is most certainly not an elitist activity: “Such a search for relationships with the fuller aspects of the self and world is pursued in many ways, within and outside the schools. Understanding is the one way to which the schools, at their best, are devoted. Understanding is furthered through knowing in the manner of the sciences, through aesthetic enjoyment and communion, through participation in the progress of inquiry, through reflection on these things, and doubtless in other ways. Falling in love, in the many senses of that ambiguous word, is another way of reconciliation. It furthers our education in ways that nothing else can, provided that it does not become fixed and exclusive in regard to the objects and persons involved. Gaining perspective is still another; for, though a seeming paradox, it is nevertheless true that we can be really close to someone or something only when we learn to see it or him at one remove, critically and objectively. We learn to care for the world in which we are totally involved, not when we are unthinkingly at one with it in the fashion of animals, but after we have become reconciled to it as individuals capable of standing apart from it.” Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 36.



remote theories are capable of practical and destructive application by technology. Unless they assume some responsibility for the application of theory, the theoretical life may become its own destroyer.<sup>139</sup>

*Sophia* needs prudence to avoid her misuse; prudence needs *sophia* in order to establish community and connection with the *cosmos* of being. In Gray's words, "though we cannot unite the two kinds of wisdom, they must learn to support and to supplement each other."<sup>140</sup> But then one is led to wonder: why would someone who had *sophia*, or knowledge of the highest order, not also *necessarily* be in possession of prudence? How could someone having knowledge of the highest and greatest good not also thereby know how to act and how to live? Gray's exposition of *sophia* leads us into this perplexity. Second, if theoretical wisdom or *sophia* is, in fact, "pure science" or "pure research" in the sense of a specialized pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in a particular discipline or area of investigation, then clearly not everyone is possessed of the ability to theoretize; wisdom and theory are quickly "professionalized" by such assumptions. As a result, Gray must both say and not say that *theoria* is a common human capacity; he must both say and not say that *theoria* is an elitist activity, and like both Dewey and Lawson, that the pursuit of *sophia* is an undemocratic pastime available only to the few, whereas practical wisdom or *phronesis* is a democratic virtue available to the many.

As an educational philosopher rather than as a soldier, Gray finds himself witness to a war of the spirit between those who, like Dewey, would purge *sophia* from the schools on the one side, and those like the "pure scientists" on the other, "who want the accent in schooling to be on straining the minds of students early and late in the pursuit of learning the materials of our heritage in order to make them searchers and researchers for truth in whatever realm."<sup>141</sup> Gray comments that "[t]his distinction between practical and theoretical wisdom goes to the heart, I believe, of many conflicting theories of education and competing schools of educational philosophy."<sup>142</sup>

One final comment is in order concerning Gray's elucidation of "the promise of wisdom." This concerns his already discussed penchant for depth of understanding, for "seeing" or "gazing upon," and his view of education as establishing a "community" of

<sup>139</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 28.

<sup>140</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 29.

<sup>141</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 24.

<sup>142</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 25.

being. Unlike Meacham, Gray would reject any calls for a sterilized, safe, or “tragedy-free” environment as though these were the proper conditions for the creation of a “wisdom atmosphere.” Rather, Gray argues forcefully for the need to immerse students in unshielded experience of reality in order that they might gain insight, self-knowledge, or truly engage in the activity of “gazing” – for how could one “gaze upon” reality if one’s eyes were being shielded from it? Gray comments:

the knowledge that moral skill demands is direct and first hand. Our schools most necessarily deal in vicarious experience, and our homes, eager to shield children from unpleasant mistakes, tend to keep life at one remove as long as possible. Our mass media make us observers of others’ behaviour, actual and make-believe, and foster the illusion that we know when we do not know.<sup>143</sup>

Perhaps it is due to Gray’s own experiences of the tragic and the terrible effects of war as a soldier that he is able to see how the spectacle of immense human suffering is an important gateway into *theoria* and towards wisdom. Like Marcel, the experience of war’s devastation affects him tremendously (in the ancient sense of the *tremendum*, or that which inspires reverence and awe), and perhaps these powerful, personal “originary experiences” are what lend a qualitatively different flavour to their writings when compared with Dewey’s more pedantic style. Gray’s openness to the experience of *theoria* allows him to make statements not only as to the value of *theoria* and philosophizing, but also as to its incalculable importance to everyday life, full as it is of dangers and adversities ripe for “gazing”:

The plain fact is that no one can know himself and his world without a generous amount of exposure to the hazards of uncontrolled experience. This includes experience of the extremes of human conduct, for few of us can know in advance how we will react to the crises of violence, falling in love, unemployment, the death of a close friend, loneliness, mob behaviour, or any of the other boundary situations that confront our career in time. Inwardly we stand amazed at our own actions in such encounters and discover dimensions of the self we never suspected.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 105. Here, Gray aligns his call for education to be more experientially-based with Dewey. He sees in Dewey, and rightly so, a scholar who was concerned with the depth of learning. He points out that for Dewey, real, genuine learning was “a process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men.” In Gray’s estimation, as in Dewey’s, our educational efforts are failures when they do not touch these dispositions at the heart of human character. “Until and unless the process of education reaches this level of the human being, it has little real chance of affecting fundamentally the way he conducts his life. ... How little of what we experience in school and out really changes our lives, either in the inner or outer sense!” (30).

<sup>144</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 105.

## II. Ancient Writers on the Subject of Wisdom<sup>145</sup>

For the purposes of offering a survey of what some ancient and medieval writers have said about the significance of *sophia* and the implications their understanding might have in the field of education, I have narrowed my investigations down to four philosophers: one Greek (Aristotle), one Roman (Boethius), one Jew (Maimonides), and one Christian (Thomas Aquinas). I have not spread the net of my research further to include eastern conceptions of wisdom (*prajna*) even though this would be a very fruitful activity as well.

### 1. Aristotle

#### (i) Distinguishing *Sophia* and *Phronesis*

Aristotle begins his discussion of wisdom or *sophia* in the *Nichomachean Ethics* by distinguishing between what he sees as the two basic ways in which this word is used. On the one hand, the term *sophia* is employed to denote “those men who are the most perfect masters of their art,” such as master craftsmen;<sup>146</sup> today, we would refer to such people as “experts” in their respective fields. On the other hand, Aristotle points out that we also think of some people as “wise in general” (*sophous holos*), and not in any one department of knowledge. Such people, we say, must be possessed of “the most perfect sort of knowledge” (*he akribestate ton epistemon*). The wise man (*sophos*) therefore must have knowledge not only of the conclusions that follow from “first principles” (*tas archas*); he must also know “the truth” (*aletheuein*) about these *archai* themselves. Hence, wisdom is not simply what we might call scientific knowledge of the principles that form the basis for activities and inquiry in the various studies and arts in which human beings might engage. It is not good enough simply to have a knowledge of these *archai* and how to apply them; to be wise, one must know what relation these *archai* bear to “the truth” (*aletheia*); that is, one must know how the various *archai* are themselves related to the one divine beginning or *arche*, here referred to by Aristotle as Mind, Intellect, or *nous*. This is why he calls

<sup>145</sup> In this section, I am reluctant to treat Plato under any of these categories since his dialogues, when read carefully, necessarily escape systematization or expression of a doctrine in terms of “what Plato said.” Plato will, however, figure most prominently in the organization of my entire dissertation as an organizing and directive force and adviser – particularly his dialogic investigations of the *metaxy* or the “in-between” as this image arises in such dialogues as *The Symposium*, *The Republic*, and *The Lysis*.

<sup>146</sup> Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.vii.1.

*sophia* a combination of *nous* and “knowledge of the most exalted objects” (*episteme ton timiotaton*):<sup>147</sup> inasmuch as one “takes up” (*anairesis*) the most exalted objects of knowing towards their truly first principle in the divine, one shares, to the extent possible for a mortal being, in the immortal *nous* through one’s own noetic activity,<sup>148</sup> for the human *nous* – our share in what is immortal -- is only a reflection of the divine *nous*.

Having offered an over-arching explanation of the nature of *sophia*, Aristotle next designs to distinguish it from “practical wisdom,” “prudence,” or *phronesis* – a quality here also identified with “political science” or *ten politiken*.<sup>149</sup> Unlike *sophia*, *phronesis* does not concern the “most serious thing” (*spoudaiotaten*), since human affairs are certainly not the highest thing in the *cosmos*. In fact, Aristotle points out that *phronesis* need not even be construed as a distinctly human excellence or virtue (*arete*); rather, it is a kind of knowing of what is good that human beings share with all complex sentient beings; just as a prudent human being knows and is able to act in a good way, so too do animals share in *phronesis* inasmuch as they display a capacity for “forethought” (*pronoetiken*) as regards their own lives.<sup>150</sup> In this respect, *phronesis* is depicted as quite a low and common thing, and very different from *sophia*.

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<sup>147</sup> Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.vii.3.

<sup>148</sup> As explained in the review of modern literature on the study of wisdom and its significance to education, *noesis* and “noetic” activity can be distinguished from *dianoia* inasmuch as *dianoia* (or “thinking”), if the word is considered from a technical perspective, is a form of thinking that, being given the *archai* of the particular sciences and arts, applies these *archai* downward deductively; whereas noetic thought, *noesis* (or “intellection”) is different because it “takes up” (*anairein*) all such *archai* dialectically towards their true *arche*. I also made mention that *ratio* and *intellectus* are, as far as I can tell, the rough equivalents of *dianoia* and *noesis*.

<sup>149</sup> Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.vii.3-4.

<sup>150</sup> Werner Jaeger confirms this observation in *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, trans. Richard Robinson, second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 83.

## (ii) On Accusations against *Sophia*

After distinguishing the exalted nature of *sophia* from the lowliness of prudence, Aristotle next turns to deal with a common criticism directed at *sophia* and those who pursue it to the furthest extent: namely, philosophers. Because *sophia* is cultivated when those seeking it “take up” (*anairesis*) each thing towards its beginning, which is beyond the multitude of things as well as the *archai* of the arts and sciences of these things, those seeking out wisdom necessarily engage in a practice that “disengages” them from, or rather, causes them to look “disinterestedly” past or through the many and finite things and affairs of the world, and instead to cast their gaze towards the source of these things and pursuits.<sup>151</sup> Philosophers, or anyone who seeks after wisdom, therefore look as though they are oblivious to the world around them.<sup>152</sup> The ridiculous *appearance* of philosophers is often the butt of jokes and lodged as a criticism against them: Thales falling into a well because he was too engrossed in contemplating the heavens, or the philosopher being lampooned as a “stargazer” on a ship of fools in Plato’s *Republic*<sup>153</sup> are only two noteworthy examples. Because philosophers -- due to the strength of the spiritedness (*thymos*) with which they pursue wisdom -- show such disinterest in the worldly things of practical men, Aristotle remarks that they are accounted “wise but not prudent,” and that this is why they are accused of “ignorance” (*agnoia*) concerning their own “private” (*idiotes*) affairs. Moreover, this perceived ignorance of worldly affairs affects the way that

<sup>151</sup> Pieper remarks about this theoretic activity that it is only in one respect “disinterested” seeing: “*Theoria* has to do with the purely receptive approach to reality, one altogether independent of all practical aims in active life. We may call this approach ‘disinterested,’ in that it is altogether divorced from utilitarian ends. In all other respects, however, *theoria* emphatically involves interest, participation, attention, purposiveness. *Theoria* and *contemplatio* devote their full energy to revealing, clarifying, and making manifest the reality which has been sighted; they aim at truth and nothing else.” Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 73.

<sup>152</sup> Hannah Arendt makes this claim not only about philosophers, but *anyone* engaged in the life of the mind. For all who think must necessarily appear “absent-minded” to an observer, and the “loss of common sense ... happens to everybody who ever reflects on something” (53). Indeed, in Arendt’s view, thinking implies “withdrawal from the world of appearances” as “the only essential precondition.” Thinking always implies remembrance, since in Arendt’s view, “every thought is strictly speaking an after-thought.” In alignment with Aristotle’s observation about the ridicule directed towards philosophers or anyone who engages in thinking, Arendt writes: “These remarks may indicate why thinking, the quest for meaning – as opposed to the thirst for knowledge, even for knowledge for its own sake – has so often been felt to be unnatural, as though men, whenever they reflect without purpose, going beyond the natural curiosity awakened by the manifold wonders of the world’s sheer thereness and their own existence, engaged in an activity *contrary to the human condition*. Thinking as such, not only the raising of the unanswerable ‘ultimate questions,’ but every reflection that does not serve knowledge and is not guided by practical needs and aims, is, as Heidegger once observed, ‘*out of order*’. It interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a *stop-and-think*.” See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 78.

<sup>153</sup> See Book VI of *The Republic*, 488a.

even their knowledge of the highest things is understood by those who are strictly concerned with practical life and worldly matters; for “while admitting them to possess a knowledge that is rare [*peritta*], marvellous [*thaumasta*], difficult [*chalepa*], and daimonic [in the sense of superhuman or divine, *daimonia*], they yet declare this knowledge to be useless [*achresta*], because these men [namely, philosophers] do not seek out [*zetousin*] the good things of human existence [*ta anthropina agatha*].” In this regard, not only is *sophia* accused of being “ignorance” about human affairs; it is also dismissed as “useless” knowledge about nothing in particular – certainly not of the divine *arche*. Perhaps the most famous (and most amusing) image of this accusation against philosophy and *sophia* is the depiction of the students of philosophy at Socrates’ “thinkery” in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* with their *false third eye* or “asshole” [*ho proktos*, line 193] pointed towards the heavens while stooped over topsy-turvy “gazing upon” the anus of a gnat simply to engage in a useless kind of knowing that is “for its own sake.” This depiction of philosophers as “assholes” is well known to Aristotle; he feels the need in his *Nicomachean Ethics* to explain its nature and point to its errors -- in his own dry and methodical manner, of course!

At this point,<sup>154</sup> Aristotle pauses to deal with the confusion about *sophia* as an inferior knowledge, and how this difficulty arises from the way in which it is, as a kind of knowledge (*episteme*), conflated with specialized knowing in the fields of the arts and sciences, or with a general knowledge of the world of facts, and how these lesser sorts of knowledge themselves differ from the specifically human form of *phronesis*. Prudence, Aristotle contends, is distinguished from *sophia* in that it is concerned with “human things” (*ta anthropina*), and with things that can be the object of “deliberation” (*bouleusasthai*). Given its object in the Divine Mind (*nous*), *sophia* is not associated with deliberation, since we only deliberate about things that vary -- that might or might not be -- and that are means to an end attainable by action (*praxis*). The “good deliberator” (*ho euboulos*) is therefore described by Aristotle without reference to *sophia* in this passage, as one who can attain to the best actions for a man by means of calculation (*kata ton logismon*).

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<sup>154</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.vii.6ff.

### (iii) *Phronesis* as the “Mastercraft”

However, just as *sophia* and *phronesis* differ as regards their object, Aristotle is also careful to point out that *phronesis*, like *sophia* (in the sense of “divine science”), is not the same thing as specialized or even general knowledge of worldly things. Prudence is not merely knowledge of “universals” (*katholou*); it must also take into account particular facts, since it is concerned with action (*praxis*), and action always deals with particular things. Here Aristotle calls to mind the popular notion of the “theorist,” or one who has a general knowledge of the way things are, but is unable to act well in the world because he is unfamiliar with, and unable to deliberate effectively about, the particulars of the situation in which he finds himself. As we have already seen, this “theorist” is not the same man as the one who pursues *sophia*; for the object of knowing differs significantly in each case; whereas the “theorist” that is criticized in this passage has a generalized knowledge of the things of this world (including the various *archai* that underlie the arts and sciences, for instance), the true “theorist” is one who, knowing these *archai*, “takes them up” towards their divine source noetically. It is the “theorist” whose knowledge of the world of things is general and lacks attention to specifics who is, in this passage, found to exhibit less prudence or ability to act than “men of experience” (*hoi empeiroi*) who may not know about such universals, but are nonetheless aware of specifics.

It is an unwarranted presumption to suppose that Aristotle’s observation here also extends to the true theorist (i.e., the one who truly seeks to “see” or “behold” the Divine Mind), or the philosopher. He merely makes the observation that the prudent man must exhibit not only knowledge of particular facts, but also a knowledge of universals. However, Aristotle then goes on to say that even both of these put together are not equivalent to the specifically human sort of prudence; for *phronesis*, Aristotle asserts, also requires some “supreme directing faculty” or “ruling art” (*architektonike*). It is at this point that the flavour of Aristotle’s discussion of prudence as a rather low thing moves towards something that is quite exalted.<sup>155</sup> Prudence now begins to look like some sort of effect of

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<sup>155</sup> Werner Jaeger sees Aristotle’s characterization of *phronesis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in much more stark terms than I can manage. He writes that in Aristotle’s early work (particularly the *Protrepticus*), *phronesis* was understood as the “science of being,” and as a knowledge of “the Anaxagorean *Nous*.” However, by the time of the writings that posthumously were compiled into his *Metaphysics*, this conception of *phronesis* “had disappeared.” In Jaeger’s view, “the *Nicomachean Ethics* also presents a wholly different picture,” and “in this work the *phronesis* of the *Protrepticus* is definitely rejected.” Rather, “Aristotle reduces

the presence of *sophia* in the realm of practical affairs. Here, Aristotle seems to encourage us to ask the question, “Can one indeed be prudent as a human being without also seeking out wisdom, or knowledge of the ‘highest good’?”

What is this “supreme directing faculty,” this “ruling” or “master art” that is more than a combined knowledge of universals and particulars, and that directs human action (*praxis*) towards its highest end? At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle famously queries:

If therefore among the ends at which our actions aim there be one which we wish for its own sake, while we wish the others only for the sake of this, and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else ... it is clear that this one ultimate End must be the Good, and indeed the Supreme Good [*to ariston*]. Will not then a knowledge [*gnosis*] of this Supreme Good be also of great practical importance for the conduct of life? Will it not better enable us to attain what is fitting, like archers having a target to aim at? If this be so, we ought to make an attempt to determine at all events in outline what exactly this Supreme Good is, and of which of the theoretical or practical sciences it is the object.<sup>156</sup>

Here, Aristotle clearly does not dismiss knowledge of the *Ariston* (a knowledge previously referred to as *sophia*) as useless for human action and worldly affairs. Rather, such knowledge is accounted of “great practical importance for the conduct of life.” Thus the portrayal of the lover of wisdom (*philosophos*) as the useless and ignorant man that we discussed above can handily be dismissed as a popular, cheap caricaturization and a misunderstanding of *sophia* itself. Nonetheless, we must explore the difficult problem of why prudence or *phronesis* is the term that Aristotle uses for wisdom in the realm of practical human affairs rather than *sophia* -- if indeed, *sophia* has such “great practical importance.” Understanding Aristotle’s challenging manner of distinguishing *sophia* from *phronesis* involves looking more carefully at what he says about the need for the “mastercraft,” or the *architektonike*.

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the word to its meaning in ordinary usage ... He deprives it of all theoretical significance, and sharply distinguishes its sphere from that of *sophia* and *Nous*.” According to Jaeger, at this later stage in his writing, Aristotle “insists that it [*phronesis*] is not speculation but deliberation, that it is concerned not with the universal but with fleeting details of life, and that it therefore does not have the highest and most valuable things in the universe for object, and in fact is not a science at all.” See Jaeger, *Aristotle*, 82-83. For all my own deliberating about this, I cannot see that Aristotle’s “shift” or development in thinking regarding prudence is so clear as Jaeger suggests. It seems to me that prudence is a much more complicated, messy concept in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: at once afforded to animals, yet also a kind of knowing that is necessary for human beings to attain the Highest Good.

<sup>156</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.ii.1-3.



The need for an *architektonike* arises out of the awareness that none of the arts (*technai*) involved with making or the disciplinary sciences (*epistemai*) involved with specialized knowing are sufficient as bases for action (*praxis*) that attains to the “highest good.” In Aristotle’s view, one cannot speak intelligently about action or the ends of action without the implication of there being a highest end or good. Simply put, all actions have ends (i.e., we act *for* something), and these ends may be subservient to higher ends; in order to avoid an infinite regress of such ends, a “highest good” (*tagathon kai to ariston*) must be assumed. According to Aristotle, the “science which explores the highest good and which is concerned with human action under the aspect of attaining the highest good is a ‘mastercraft’; and this mastercraft is the science of politics.”<sup>157</sup> This *architektonike* is the “master craft” or “ruling art” whereby human nature as a *politikon zoon*<sup>158</sup> finds its fulfillment.

“Political science” (*he politike*)<sup>159</sup> is not, like all the other *technai*, an art of making;<sup>160</sup> nor is it, like the multitude of *epistemai*, concerned simply with “expert” knowledge in specialized fields of study. Rather, political science, as “the mastercraft” -- the embodiment of *phronesis* in its human form -- is the art of action (*praxis*),<sup>161</sup> and it is by means of this *architektonike* that all the various ends of the arts and sciences might find their orchestration and be harnessed for *praxis*. The suggestion here is that not everything that we commonly speak about as “action” is really *praxis*; for instance, we seek to know; we make and we do; but our knowing and making and doing often do not attain to the good as we suppose they might;<sup>162</sup> in a higher sense, the only time we really “act” is when what we do or make is truly directed towards this Highest Good. Action or *praxis*, in this regard, is a distinctly human capacity, and prudence or *phronesis* is distinguished as human excellence in the achievement of this highest good through action. On the one hand, the individual who privately acts effectively for his highest good is prudent; Aristotle notes

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<sup>157</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, vol. 3 of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 294.

<sup>158</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1253a4.

<sup>159</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.i.6.

<sup>160</sup> Hannah Arendt levels this criticism against both Plato and Aristotle; she argues that both of them understand politics not truly as action, but rather think “of acting in terms of making, and of its result, the relationship between men, in terms of an accomplished ‘work’.” See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 196.

<sup>161</sup> “The end of this science is not knowledge but action” (*to telos estin ou gnosis alla praxis*, I.iii.6-7).

<sup>162</sup> “The best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men, / Gang aft agley, / An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain, / For promis’d joy!” See Robert Burns, *To A Mouse*.

that, among the specifically human forms of *phronesis*, this is one sense of the term: it is “that kind of wisdom which is concerned with oneself, the individual.”<sup>163</sup> However, on the other hand, he also writes that this sense of *phronesis* as the ability of an individual to attain the good through action is incomplete inasmuch as human beings are political animals; the highest good they seek through action is therefore not any private good, but rather one that is common (*to koinon*). This explains why Aristotle says that “prudence [*phronesis*] is indeed the same quality of mind [*hexis*] as Political Science [*he politike*], though their essence [*to einai*] is different.”<sup>164</sup> Prudence in its truest form as “the political art” of action aims at the highest good that is also “the common” (*to koinon*) good of all human beings; in comparison to prudence as a private capacity to attain the highest good for oneself in one’s actions, securing the highest good for a body politic (*politeia*) according to our nature as political animals is a thing “more divine” (*theioteron*).<sup>165</sup> Indeed, the conception that a human being could be prudent in private life (*idiotes*) without regard for the fact that the highest good is necessarily a common good that requires us to engage our political natures is rendered highly problematic, according to Aristotle: “Probably as a matter of fact a man cannot pursue his welfare without... politics. Moreover, even the proper conduct of one’s own affairs is a difficult problem, and requires consideration.”<sup>166</sup> Whether it be in the private life of maintaining one’s household (*oikonomos*), or in the political life of action, prudence is in either case the manner in which human endeavours are related to the *Ariston* or the Supreme Good. Hence, even the life of action (*praxis*) has a component somehow rooted in a knowledge of divine things. However, this insight returns us to our former question about the nature of wisdom and its significance in all areas of life: “Mustn’t there also be wisdom or *sophia* even at the root of the active life?”

#### (iv) The Divine and Political Ends of *Sophia* and *Phronesis*

Aristotle offers us more assistance as we attempt to understand prudence in its human form as a quality distinct from *sophia*.<sup>167</sup> As we have seen, on the one hand, *phronesis*, as the capacity for effective use of “forethought,” is an attribute shared by both humans and

<sup>163</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.viii.3.

<sup>164</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.viii.1-2.

<sup>165</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.ii.8.

<sup>166</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.viii.4.

<sup>167</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.viii.1ff.

the other animals. Certainly, at this level, and to this extent, *phronesis* could be cultivated in schools. On the other hand, *phronesis* can also connote the “good habit of mind” (*hexis*) that is the same as “political science” (*he politike*). In this second sense, *phronesis* is the knowledge and ability to achieve our highest end as human beings engaged in human affairs together, seeking out that modicum of happiness (*eudaimonia*) that is afforded to us. As we shall see, it is this sense of *phronesis* that Aristotle suggests is problematic with regard to youthful instruction. However, further difficulties in understanding Aristotle’s sense of the distinction between *sophia* and *phronesis* now begin to emerge from the fact that “the supreme good” (*to ariston*) is the ultimate object of both *sophia* and *phronesis*; for *sophia* is the quality of knowing the *Ariston*, and yet it is also clear to Aristotle that the human being is a “political animal” (*politikon zoon*)<sup>168</sup> whose ultimate happiness (*eudaimonia*) is to be achieved through “political science,” or a knowing of political things. How can both of these things be simultaneously? The answer is best articulated by Eric Voegelin in *Order and History*. The confusion that is possible here arises from the claim that human beings have a share in both the mortal and the immortal – their mortal share of happiness being attained through *phronesis*, or political science in the practical life, and their immortal share of happiness through *scholē* and the cultivation of *sophia* in the contemplative life. Of the contemplative life, Voegelin writes that

it transcends the merely human level. Man can lead it only in so far as he is more than man, only in so far as something divine is really present in him. Since this divine part in the composite nature of man is *nous*, the life of the intellect is divine as compared with life on the merely human level of the practical excellences. Hence we must not follow the advice of those who would enjoin us to think only of human things because we are men, and only of mortal things because we are mortals [Here, recall our discussion of modern thought that dismisses concern for *sophia* in education]. It is our duty to make ourselves immortal, as far as that is possible in life, by cultivating the activity of the best part in us which may be called our better or true self. The *nous* is the orienting or ruling part in our soul (*to kyrion*), and it would be strange indeed if man should choose not to live the life of his own self but of that of something else. And, finally, Aristotle lets his train of argument debouch, beyond anthropology, into the problem of ontology. The most suitable realization of each thing is the realization of that which is best in its nature (*physis*); the life according to *nous* is the best and pleasantest for man because *nous* more than anything else is the very nature of man. “The life of *nous* is therefore the happiest [*eudaimonestatos*]” (1177b27-1178a8).<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1253a4.

<sup>169</sup> Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 306.

In short, whereas the end of action or *praxis* is to attain the highest end for human beings as both mortal and human, the end of *theoria*, or the kind of “seeing” that is cultivated through leisure (*scholē*) is *sophia*; and this end is not specific to human beings insofar as they are merely mortal (*thanatos*), but rather to the extent that they participate in what is immortal (*athanatos*) and divine.

#### (v) Warnings Against Instructing Youth in the Pursuit of *Phronesis*

At this point in our study concerning the importance of cultivating *sophia* in the modern context of education, Aristotle’s warnings about such instructions bear careful note to which we must return later. Having discussed the various senses implied by *phronesis*, the term for “practical wisdom,” including its ultimate manifestation as the “mastercraft,” Aristotle emphatically states that “the young are not fit to be students of Political Science” (*διο τες πολιτικες ουκ εστιν οικειος ακροατες ho neos*, I.iii.5). His reasoning is that “each man judges correctly those matters with which he is acquainted,” and that youth are acquainted with very little due to lack of experience in living.<sup>170</sup> “To criticize a particular subject, a man must have been trained in that subject,” but youth have not yet received sufficient training or developed such competencies. “To be a good critic, he must have had an all-round education,” but youths are not yet so educated. Hence, lacking sufficient experience of things “that supply the premises and subject matter” of political science, young people are incapable of its study. Moreover, Aristotle notes – and perhaps he has seen my classroom! – that the youth are led by their “feelings” (*tois pathesin*) so that they will study political science to no purpose or advantage. And these cautions against attempting to instruct young people in “practical wisdom” are not simply “ageist”; Aristotle remarks that “the defect is not a question of time” – that one can be young or old in years, but still “immature in character” (*to ethos nearos*); inasmuch as the lives and the various aims of youth “are guided by feeling,” knowledge of political science “is of no use, any more than it is to persons of defective self-restraint.” However, “moral science” (literally, “reasoning about the appetites or desires,” *tois de kata logon tas orexeis*) may be of great value to those who guide their desires and actions by principle.”<sup>171</sup>

<sup>170</sup> He stresses the inaccessibility of *phronesis* for the young again at VI.viii.5-6.

<sup>171</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.iii.5-7.

Aristotle's warning about teaching young people and keeping in mind the extent of their training and experiences is of great relevance for our own study concerning the role of wisdom in education. As we have seen, most of the modern authors in our survey reject any role for *sophia* in education; however, all of them are in agreement that *phronesis* is of vital importance, and although they disagree on the extent to which it can be taught, they nonetheless all agree that wisdom's pursuit ought to be encouraged in schools. And yet, Aristotle is emphatic that "practical wisdom," or *phronesis*, is *not* amenable to the life experiences and character of youth. Young people, in Aristotle's view, are unsuited to studies in the formation and cultivation of prudent action without first attending to the cultivation of "ethical" or "moral" virtues that regulate their appetites; for this reason, Aristotle recommends instruction in "moral science" as a precursor to the study of Political Science.

#### **(vi) Warnings against Instructions Leading Youth in the Pursuit of *Sophia***

At this point, one might wonder, against modern pretensions and perhaps in lieu of Aristotle's observations, if there is not something more amenable to youthful interest and experience in the spirit of wisdom's pursuit as *sophia* than as *phronesis*; for the cultivation of *sophia* is a kind of leisured activity; it is not directed at the world of action or of work; as a form of education (*paideia*), it is rather more like what children (*paides*) do when they engage in play (*paidia*): it is an activity (*energia*) that is pursued "for its own sake," unlike either action (*praxis*) or work (*ponos*). And in principle at least, it ought to be what we do with children when they are in "school" and engaged in "scholastics"; after all, these words are not, at their root, amenable to the notion of education as work, but rather as *schole*, or leisured activity in the cultivation and pursuit of *sophia*. Moreover, one pursues *sophia* as one pursues trying to recollect and articulate a reasoned account of "originary experience" – in particular, the experience of "wonder" (*thauma*).<sup>172</sup> As is well known, children -- and especially very young ones -- are naturally full of wonder about the world.<sup>173</sup> Indeed, these observations about the amenability of children to philosophy in principle seem to illuminate why the majority of Socrates' philosophic discussions are *not* with the very old, or the

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<sup>172</sup> Plato, *Theatetus*, 155d.

<sup>173</sup> See Tobin Hart's book *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* for his extensive discussions of wonder and children -- particularly chapters two and four.

middle-aged, or even with mature men, but with the *neanioi*: the “young men” who were of the age to have just begun to grow facial hair. In fact, some of the dialogues, such as the *Lysis*, are conducted with *paides*, or children not yet having reached puberty.

And yet, here too, Aristotle voices reservations about any education of the youth aimed at *sophia*. He writes:

One might indeed further enquire why it is that, though a boy [*pais*] may be a mathematician [*mathematikos*], he cannot be wise [*sophos*] or a physician [that is, have a knowledge of being as it is derived from *theoria* related to the examination of nature, or *physis*]. Perhaps the answer is that mathematics deals with abstractions [*ta men di'aphaireseos estin*], whereas first principles [*hai archai*] are derived from experience [*ex empeirias*]: the young can only repeat them without trusting [*pisteuousin*] in their truth, whereas the formal concepts of mathematics are easily understood.<sup>174</sup>

Although reservations concerning instruction in philosophy are strongly voiced in Plato's dialogues as well, Aristotle's remarks about the inaccessibility of philosophy for children and young people are of a significantly different character here. Whereas in the dialogues it is assumed that all humans – young or old – have “originary experiences” and are able to recollect such experiences of the “beginning things” (*hai archai*), Aristotle contends that such anamnestic experiences are beyond the reach of youth – and therefore that Socrates' dialogues with the young are somehow misplaced or directed at an audience by its own nature incapacitated for such pursuits and inquiries. Indeed, this assessment of the young being unable to grasp “first principles” or “originary things” by means of recollection (*anamnesis*) may go some distance to explaining Aristotle's implicit criticisms of *anamnesis* in the Platonic dialogues.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.viii.6-7.

<sup>175</sup> Jaeger points to what he sees as a contrast in Aristotle's early and later work in this regard. He writes that Aristotle's *Eudemus* “develops Plato's theory of Recollection, and the belief in personal immortality as we find it there and even in the dialogue *On Philosophy* ... are incompatible with the psycho-physics of the work *On the Soul* as it has come down to us.” Jaeger, *Aristotle*, 333. As I read *On the Soul*, Aristotle is rather critical of the specifically “Pythagorean” myths of reincarnation and transmigration, calling these “absurd views” (*On The Soul* I.iii.22). However, Aristotle's understanding of myths, and their relation to recollecting “originary experiences” of the *archai* remains ambiguous. On the one hand, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he dismisses the ability of young people to engage in such experiences; yet on the other hand, he recognizes in his *Metaphysics* a fundamental philosophic similarity between the “lover of myth” [*philomythos*] and the “lover of wisdom” [*philosophos*]; for both are alike in their propensity to wonder, to feel perplexed, and to recognize their own ignorance (*ho d'aporon kai thaumazon oietai agnoein*, *Metaphysics*, I.ii.10; 982b18). And children of all ages – but particularly the youngest in my experience – are indeed “lovers of myth” or *philomythoi*.

**(vii) *Aporia* concerning *Phronesis* and *Sophia* and their Value in Education**

One of the most challenging elements of Aristotle's elucidation of the significance of *sophia* and *phronesis* is that, just when we think we know and can distinguish each from the other, and that we understand why both are of great concern to human beings, Aristotle's account of them throws us into confusion:

The further question may be raised, "What is the use of these intellectual virtues [namely, *phronesis* and *sophia*]?" *Sophia* does not see [*theorei*] the means to human happiness at all, for it does not ask how anything comes into existence [*geneseos*]. *Phronesis*, it must be granted, does do this; but what do we need it for, seeing that it studies that which is just and noble and good for man, but these are the things that a good man does by nature. Knowing about them does not make us any more capable of doing them ... If on the other hand we are to say that Prudence is useful not in helping us to act virtuously but in helping us to become virtuous, then it is of no use to those who are virtuous already. Nor is it of any use either to those who are not, since we may just as well take the advice of others who possess Prudence as possess Prudence ourselves.<sup>176</sup>

In short, we are left with the problem that *sophia* once again appears quite useless because it is not concerned with human affairs or worldly things. *Phronesis*, by contrast, is indeed concerned with such matters, but its pursuit too is rendered problematic; for one who is already prudent will have no need of its study or pursuit since such a human being will already be able to attain the goods it provides; and one not in possession of *phronesis* is not made any more prudent by knowing of *phronesis*, any more than we are rendered "more capable of healthy and vigorous action by knowing the science of medicine or of physical training."<sup>177</sup> Indeed, Aristotle asks the question that all students ask in school, "Why bother with any of this junk? Isn't it just a waste of time?" And yet Aristotle is not content with exposing his account of practical and theoretical wisdom even to this level of perplexity. He deepens our awareness of these difficulties further by inquiring as to the ranking of *sophia* over *phronesis*, writing "it would seem strange if *phronesis* which is inferior to *sophia*, is nevertheless to have greater authority than *sophia*: yet the faculty that creates a thing governs and gives order to it."<sup>178</sup>

In response to the student's perplexity concerning why anyone would even desire either form of wisdom in the first place, Aristotle first asserts that *sophia* and *phronesis* are

<sup>176</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xii.1-2.

<sup>177</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xii.2.

<sup>178</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xii.3.

the virtues (*aretai*) of the two parts of the intellect respectively -- *sophia* of the speculative intellect, and *phronesis* of the practical intellect -- and are therefore necessarily desirable in themselves, even apart from any effect they might engender.<sup>179</sup> Second, Aristotle states that they are desirable not only for themselves, but for their effects. On the one hand, *sophia* produces happiness (*eudaimonia*), “not in the sense in which medicine produces health, but in the sense in which healthiness is the cause of health.” In other words, wisdom is the cause of being wise, and in being wise a human being attains to the happiness that is the true fulfillment of his or her immortal nature as a rational being who “seeks to know.”<sup>180</sup> On the other hand, prudence too produces desirable effects with respect to action: “prudence (*phronesin*) as well as moral virtue (*ten ethiken areten*) determines the complete performance of man’s proper function.” Whereas moral virtue “ensures the rightness of the end we aim at,” prudence “ensures the rightness of the means we adopt to gain that end.”<sup>181</sup>

However, this line of defence of *phronesis* seems only to multiply the questions that we might ask about wisdom and its significance to education rather than settle our minds about its nature. Aristotle’s remarks about the relationship between *sophia*, *phronesis*, and *he ethike arete* are particularly puzzling because they seem, once again, to render *sophia* useless and irrelevant. That is: if the ethical or moral virtues give us the “right ends” to aim towards, and prudence gives us the “right means” towards those ends, then of what value at all is *sophia*? Moreover, Aristotle’s statements here about prudence determining “means” and moral virtues determining “ends” would invite us to wonder if prudence is dependent upon the moral virtues as something that arises from them -- for how could a “good means” be found without first having determined the appropriate end? Or is it the other way around: do the moral virtues only arise once prudence exists in the soul -- for how could a moral virtue ever be an excellence unless it provided the soul a means to hit its target? Responding to these perplexities would seem crucial to our own study concerning the relevance of wisdom in education: Does the pursuit of wisdom require a prior development of moral virtue? Or does moral virtue require a modicum of wisdom in order to exist in the first place?

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<sup>179</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xii.4.

<sup>180</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a22.

<sup>181</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xii.6.



### (viii) The Relationship between the Moral Virtues and *Phronesis* as it Relates to Education

Aristotle attempts an explanation of the relation between the moral virtues and practical wisdom or *phronesis* by first restating the problem. He defines virtue as what secures the rightness in our choice of an end (*ten men oun proairesin orthen poiei he arete*). But “to do the actions that must in the nature of things be done in order to attain the end we have chosen is not a matter for virtue, but for a different faculty [*dynameos*].”<sup>182</sup> So what is the precise relation between moral virtue (*he ethike arete*) and *phronesis*? By his earlier assessment that young people are unfit for the pursuit of prudence as Political Science (*he politike*), Aristotle perhaps suggests that the establishment of moral virtue must precede prudence, and therefore that prudence depends upon moral virtue. Indeed, Aristotle says as much when he writes that the “eye of the soul cannot acquire the quality of Prudence without possessing Virtue.” Moral virtue, or the right ordering of the lower soul’s appetites according to good ends, is presumed by the existence of *phronesis* which, without awareness of such ends, would not know of the means whereby to achieve them. In support of this contention, he writes that the Supreme Good (*to Ariston*) “only appears good to the good man: depravity [*mochtheria*] perverts the soul and causes it to hold false views about the first principles of conduct. Hence it is clear that we cannot be prudent [*phronimon*] without being good [*agathon*].”<sup>183</sup>

However, Aristotle seems unhappy with the view that the other moral virtues could exist without *phronesis* to help them achieve the ends they espy. *Phronesis*, or practical wisdom, is unique in being both a moral virtue that provides effective means for the appetitive elements of the soul to achieve their good ends, as well being as an intellectual virtue; for it is the excellence of the practical intellect. In his view, then, it is not proper to say that “all virtues are forms of *phronesis*,” for only prudence occupies this position as a virtue of both the intellect and the appetitive soul; but it *is* correct to say that the moral virtues “cannot exist without *phronesis*.”<sup>184</sup> Aristotle attempts to explain how it can both *be* and *not be* the case that the presence of the other moral virtues is necessary for prudence to exist on the one hand and that prudence is necessary for the other moral virtues to exist on

<sup>182</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xii.8.

<sup>183</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xii.10.

<sup>184</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.viii.3-4.

the other. He does so by distinguishing between what he calls “natural virtue” (*physike arete*) and “authoritative” virtue (*ten kyrian*).<sup>185</sup> “Natural virtues” exist in the souls even of wild animals (*theriois*) and children (*paisi*) as “natural dispositions” (*hai physikai*), much as Aristotle earlier conceded that *phronesis* of a kind exists anywhere the capacity for “forethought” is displayed as regards one’s own life; however, “without intelligence” (*aneu nou*) these natural capacities or abilities to attain desired ends may be manifestly harmful. So whereas the “natural virtue” or capacity to attain desired ends may be present without *phronesis*, true or “authoritative” virtue that involves choosing (*proairesis*) rightly (*orthon*) in order to attain a good end cannot exist without *phronesis*. In this way, Aristotle contends that “it is not possible to be good in the true sense without *phronesis*, nor to be prudent without moral virtue [*tes ethikes aretes*].”<sup>186</sup> Aristotle uses his distinction between “natural virtue” and “authoritative” or “true” virtue also to explain a peculiar difficulty in deciding whether the virtues can exist in isolation from each other, or whether or not if anyone has a single one he possesses all the others necessarily as well. Aristotle writes that in regard to the “natural virtues,” it is possible to have one without possessing the others, just as someone might have a natural capacity for one thing but not for another; “but it is not possible in regard to those virtues which entitle a man to be called good without qualification.” For “if a man have the one virtue of *phronesis* he will also have all the moral virtues together with it.”<sup>187</sup>

Given Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* as, effectively, the possession of all the other moral virtues in their “authoritative” (*kyrian*) as opposed to merely “natural” (*physike*) form, one is left still with Aristotle’s second perplexity; namely: of what use is *sophia* given the scope of *phronesis* in ordering the lives of human beings? And how could it possibly be that *phronesis* is inferior in rank to *sophia*? Aristotle ends Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning the nature of wisdom simply by saying, “it is not really the case that *phronesis* is in authority over *sophia*, or over the higher part [*beltionos moriou*] of the intellect, any more than medical science is in authority over health.”<sup>188</sup> In his view, to

<sup>185</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xiii.1.

<sup>186</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xiii.6. Again, because on the one hand, true or “authoritative” virtue involves choice (*proairesis*) of the good for its own sake (and consequently *phronesis* must be present); on the other, if one is prudent, then one is also necessarily full of the other moral virtues.

<sup>187</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xiii.6.

<sup>188</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xiii.8.

suppose that *phronesis* is superior to *sophia* would be akin to saying that Political Science (or *phronesis* at its height as the manner of establishing the common good through effective action not simply for a private citizen but for an entire polity) governs the gods as well as men.

### (ix) Pleasure in Relation to *Theoria* and Wisdom's Pursuit

In our reflections on Aristotle's remarks concerning wisdom in its theoretic and practical forms as *sophia* and *phronesis*, and in our investigations concerning their relevance to the subject of education, it is important to examine what Aristotle says about the pursuit of each kind of wisdom. In our review of modern writers on the subject of wisdom, consideration of a "wisdom atmosphere" arose.<sup>189</sup> Is there a similar concern for atmosphere or environment in Aristotle's writings on the pursuit of *sophia*? To what extent would securing such an atmosphere be essential for the cultivation of wisdom in a modern school context, if indeed such an ambition is even realistic or appropriate? In order to respond to these questions, we must examine what Aristotle refers to as the "two lives" in which the great goods of wisdom are pursued and, to the extent possible for a human being, embodied. These manners of living are referred to by Aristotle as the "active" and "contemplative" lives.

Aristotle begins Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a discussion of the significance of pleasure (*hedone*) in human life, and in particular, with the role that pleasure plays in education:

Pleasure is thought to be especially congenial to the human race (*to genei hemon*); and this is why pleasure and pain are employed in the education (*paideuosi*) of the young (*tous neous*), as means whereby to steer their course. Moreover, to like (*to chairein*) and to dislike (*to misein*) the right things is thought to be a most important element in the development of moral virtue (*ten tou ethous areten*).<sup>190</sup>

The problem, of course, is that many like or "rejoice in" (*to chairein*) the wrong things and "hate" (*to misein*) things that ought not to be hated. Pleasure, or *hedone*, ought not to be understood as the Good (*Agathon*), and not every pleasure is desirable (*hairetai*); however, it is also true that "there are certain pleasures, superior in respect of their specific quality or

<sup>189</sup> See, for instance, Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom"; also Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*.

<sup>190</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.1.

their source, that are desirable in themselves.”<sup>191</sup> Aristotle next turns to an examination of the nature of these pleasures that are desirable in themselves.

First, he begins by noting an important association between pleasure and “seeing” (*he horasis*). The act of seeing appears to be “perfect” (*teleia*) at any moment of its duration: “It does not require anything to supervene late in order to perfect its specific quality.”<sup>192</sup> In other words, sight attains directly and completely to what is seen for as long as it sees; it requires no mediating faculty or power, but is a kind of direct apprehension or knowing wherein the seer and the seen are melded together in the most perfect knowing. Aristotle remarks that “pleasure also appears to be a thing of this nature”; inasmuch as it is akin to seeing, it attains to its object in a unity, as the pleased is to the pleasuring, without mediation, and for as long as the union remains in duration.

Second, Aristotle considers pleasure using the metaphors of movement and rest. He decides that pleasure is most akin to a form of rest rather than movement, since “every motion (*kinesis*) involves duration, and is a means to an end,”<sup>193</sup> whereas the pleasure that Aristotle seeks out in this portion of his inquiry is a pleasure that is desirable for itself.<sup>194</sup> As a means to an end, motion is not perfect because it is not satiated in attaining its desired end; moreover, “motion is not perfect at every moment,” and “the many movements which make up the whole are imperfect.” However, “the specific quality [*to eidos*] of pleasure on the contrary is perfect at any moment,” inasmuch as it is a perfect having of the desired.

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<sup>191</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.iii.13.

<sup>192</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.iv.1.

<sup>193</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.iv.2.

<sup>194</sup> There is a wonderful debate between Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas on this precise point about pleasure. Namely, Thomas understands human perfection in terms of the intellect’s beholding (*theoria*) of God, whereas Duns Scotus sees the movement of the will (that is, love) as holding the primary place in attaining to the divine. This debate could be rephrased in terms of our current inquiry concerning whether that pleasure that is desirable for itself (the *visio beatifica*) is best understood metaphorically as movement or rest. Josef Pieper’s commentary on Thomas offers a useful response; he affirms Thomas’ position – that while not dismissing the insights of Duns Scotus in this regard. That is, he affirms that Duns Scotus is correct about the pleasure of movement – as the love of God – being the most meaningful thing “for man here on earth”: “the persistent striving for ‘the whole good.’” However, as a Thomist himself, he ultimately agrees with Aquinas that the highest and perfect pleasure for human beings is *theoria*. Indeed, the pleasure that human beings derive from the movements of loving and seeking out the good only exist “because it may be possible for us to desire God with our whole beings, but not (yet!) to possess Him wholly. Nevertheless, desiring aims at possession. And possession is had in contemplation.” See Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 98. For a more involved analysis of the debate between Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus on this problem, see Hannah Arendt’s chapter in section II of *The Life of the Mind* entitled, “Duns Scotus and the Primacy of the Will.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 125-146.

Consequently, “it is clear that pleasure is not the same as motion, and that it is a whole and something perfect.”<sup>195</sup>

Next, Aristotle develops his analysis of the metaphor of the senses and seeing directed at what is desired and the knowledge achieved through seeing in terms of its relation to the intellect’s beholding (*theoria*) of the best of its objects. He writes:

Inasmuch as each of the senses acts in relation to its object, and acts perfectly when it is in good condition [*tes eu diakeimenes*] and directed to the finest [*kalliston*] of the objects that belong to it ... it follows that the activity [*energia*] of any of the senses is at its best [*beltiste*] condition when the sense-organ being in the best condition is directed to the best of its objects; and this activity will be the most perfect and the pleasantest. For each sense has a corresponding pleasure, as also have thought [*dianoian*] and speculation [*theorian*], and its activity is pleasantest when it is most perfect [*teleiotate*], and most perfect when the organ is in good condition [*he tou eu exontos*] and when it is directed to the most excellent [in the sense of “most serious” or “most worthy of attention,” *to spoudaiotaton*] of its objects; and the pleasure perfects the activity.<sup>196</sup>

If we follow Aristotle’s rich use of the sensory metaphor carefully, we can see its relevance and applications in the field of education. “Seeing,” “beholding,” or *theoria* may indeed have its ultimate object or perfection in the *visio beatifica*; but Aristotle certainly does not limit its relevance to the soul that is perfect in its attainment of the divine vision. *Theoria* is not, as modern authors – and even a great many ancient critics -- have claimed it to be: it is not an elitist affair for only the most spiritually-refined and capable adepts. Rather, *theoria* is a quality of existence enjoyed and enjoyable by all human beings even at the level of sensory perception. And certainly it is a mode of existence and a kind of pleasure that is open to and inviting for students of all ages.

#### (x) The Accessibility of *Theoria* in Education

Josef Pieper, a Thomistic philosopher well versed in Aristotelian thought, reflects in his writings on the sublime, yet eminently accessible nature of *theoria* for all people. Pieper writes much in agreement with Aristotle in this regard when he asks, “Who can deny that there are other possible origins and inspirations for contemplation?”:

It is this, I think, that is specially noteworthy in the classical doctrine of contemplation: that the transfiguring experience of divine satiation can come to one

<sup>195</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.iv.3-4.

<sup>196</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.iv.5.

in a host of ways. The most trivial of stimuli can bring one to this peak. And this being so, we are brought sharply to the arresting and indeed astounding realization – so opposed is it to everything we are in the habit of thinking about contemporary man – that contemplation is far more widespread among us today than appearances would indicate.<sup>197</sup>

Pieper identifies ordinary and therefore in some ways “obscurer varieties of contemplation,” emphasizing that the practice and the experience of *theoria* need not be restricted to its “specifically religious form.” Rather, “the high appreciation accorded for so long to contemplation has every right to be accorded to a good many experiences which come our way in the course of everyday life.”<sup>198</sup> Somewhat like Glen Gray in his willingness to affirm the “theoretic significance” of seeing in everyday experience, Pieper points out that there is a “contemplative way of seeing the things of creation.” In the most mundane of experiences – for instance, in the pleasure afforded by slaking one’s thirst with a drink of cool water – Pieper sees ample opportunity for *theoria*:

A man drinks at last after being extremely thirsty, and, feeling refreshment permeating his body, thinks and says: What a glorious thing is fresh water! Such a man, whether he knows it or not, has already taken a step toward that “seeing of the beloved object” which is contemplation. How splendid is water, a rose, a tree, an apple, a human face – such exclamations can scarcely be spoken without also giving tongue to an assent and affirmation which extends beyond the object praised and touches upon the origin of the universe. Who among us has not suddenly looked into his child’s face, in the midst of the toils and troubles of everyday life, and at that moment “seen” that everything which is good, is loved and lovable, loved by God! ... Such non-rational, intuitive certainties of the divine base of all that is can be vouchsafed to our gaze even when it is turned toward the most insignificant-looking things, if only it is a gaze inspired by love. That, in the precise sense, is contemplation.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 83.

<sup>198</sup> Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 83. I detect a tension in Aristotle in this regard. On the one hand, it seems quite clear that Aristotle sees how *theoria* plays an integral role even in the life of the senses and is therefore accessible to all human beings. On the other hand, as we have already seen, Aristotle also views the pursuit of *sophia* and the life of *theoria* as a rather exclusive affair not available or appropriate to young people inasmuch as they, in his view, lack experience of the *archai*, or the “originary experiences” upon which such “seeing” is itself predicated. I suspect that Pieper’s insights in this regard are rather more Thomist than Aristotelian: that Thomas himself chooses to pick up the ecumenic element of Aristotelian philosophy as amenable to a larger Christian message, and that he sloughs off its exclusionary elements.

<sup>199</sup> Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 84-85. Pieper also detects contemplative elements in “true art” and poetry in its concern for “passionate precision of sensual description,” which itself is “a demonstration of the intensity with which the gaze of earthly contemplation respects the visible aspects of objects in his world, and tries to preserve them.” Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 87.

Indeed, following Aristotle's sensory metaphor for *theoria* carefully, "precise attention" to things in the world as we experience them is itself a form of contemplative "beholding"; in this way, *theoria* need not be understood as by-passing or blurring the reality of the visible world as mere "symbolization"; rather, as Pieper points out in his Aristotelian manner, "contemplation directs its gaze straight at the heart of objects. In so doing, it perceives in the depths a hitherto hidden non-finite relationship. And in that perception lies the peculiar essence of contemplation."<sup>200</sup> Essentially, contemplation or *theoria* is a possibility for all human beings who "gaze" with depth into the world of finite good things around and within themselves to intimate in some fashion that which is infinitely good. Ancient sentiment seems to regard all true education as a means of cultivating not merely a middled and moderate range in our awareness of reality,<sup>201</sup> but also these heights as well as these depths of our nature as human beings.

#### **(xi) The Connection between Wisdom and Happiness**

All the authors in our study, be they ancients or moderns, agree that if education is of any value to a human life, it must in some sense contribute to our happiness. In light of his discussion of pleasure, Aristotle investigates its relationship to happiness in the lives of human beings. Life (*zoe*), states Aristotle, is an activity (*energia*) that each of us exercises upon those objects and with those faculties that we most enjoy.<sup>202</sup> The pleasure we derive from such activities perfects (*teleioi*) them, and therefore perfects life, which is what all human beings seek. This is why, even though Aristotle has said that pleasure is not akin to motion, "there is no pleasure without activity, and also no perfect activity without its pleasure."<sup>203</sup>

Of course, as any schoolteacher knows, people take pleasure in and pursue all sorts of things, many of which are not good, or are less good than they suppose. However, Aristotle points out that "in all such cases the thing really is what it appears to be to the

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<sup>200</sup> Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 86-87.

<sup>201</sup> Note the contrast we developed earlier with our modern authors: Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation*; and Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom."

<sup>202</sup> Aristotle provides the example of the musician exercising his sense of hearing upon musical tunes, and the lover of learning (*philomathes*) exerting his thinking (*dianoia*) upon theoretical matters (*ta theoremata*). Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.iv.10.

<sup>203</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.iv.11. The discrepancy between these two statements about pleasure can be understood by saying that pleasure, inasmuch as it is had for its own sake, is a state of rest, or a state of having; whereas human life, in pursuit of pleasure, is a kind of movement towards satiation in the pleasurable.

*spoudaios*<sup>204</sup> – a Greek word that is very difficult to translate, but variously rendered as “the good or excellent man,” “the mature man,” or the “serious man” – one at any rate who knows and is properly serious about serious things, but also unserious about unserious things. The *spoudaios*, unlike the rest of us, always takes appropriate pleasure in the right sorts of things, and no pleasure in inappropriate things. Unfortunately, the *spoudaios* is a rather rare individual. So the question becomes: “How do we, as teachers and students, come into the knowledge that the *spoudaios* has of the right relation of pleasure to its true objects? How are the pleasures which serve as the prime motivating factor behind all the ambitions and activities in which students demonstrate eagerness to be related to their overall happiness?” Certainly if wisdom or *sophia* is to have any relevance to our lives or to education, it must have some bearing upon our ability to live happily. Aristotle ends his *Nicomachean Ethics* with precisely this question.

### **(xii) Aristotle’s Rejection of Play (*Paidia*) as the Pursuit of Wisdom**

In Aristotle's view, “happiness [*eudaimonia*] is not a certain disposition of character [*hexis*],” since if it were, someone who remained asleep for his or her entire life could be happy, as could one who was plunged into the greatest misfortune. Happiness must rather be some form of activity (*energia*); in particular, it must be an activity that is not a means to some other end, but one that is an end in itself, for “happiness lacks nothing, and is self-sufficient [*autarkes*].”<sup>205</sup> As we mentioned earlier, play (*paidia*) is one such activity desirable for its own sake; and yet Aristotle is emphatically unwilling to say that play is the same as happiness. Rather, in his view, *paidia* is very much the same as a trifling “past-time” (*diagoge*) – it is a pretence to leisure (*scholē*) that is cultivated by those who would squander their health and their estates; it is a prerogative of tyrants (*tyrannoi*) and their sycophants.<sup>206</sup> In this passage, play is criticized as an affectation of those who are either insufficiently serious about worldly affairs, or else they take pleasure in depraved things that are not really pleasant but rather “disgraceful” (*aischros*).<sup>207</sup> Here, the playful, immature man is counterposed directly with the serious and mature man – the *spoudaios*.

<sup>204</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.v.10.

<sup>205</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.vi.2.

<sup>206</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.vi.3.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.v.11.



Indeed, at least on the surface the word “play,” as Johan Huizinga remarks in his book, *Homo Ludens*, “is the direct opposite of seriousness.”<sup>208</sup>

Perhaps part of Aristotle’s distaste for *paidia* as *diagoge* is that it is “time-centred”; that is, the man engaged in *diagoge* seems to be oblivious to what is *not* centred in time; the “past time” is both a squandering of life’s resources as well as of the time given to all us that we might use in the cultivation of higher activities of the mind; one who simply “passes the time” has little or no regard for such “timeless” concerns. Indeed, Aristotle has earlier related *theoria* and the pursuit of *sophia* to the cultivation of a pleasure that is for its own sake, and that does not have its grounding *in* time, but rather outside of time.<sup>209</sup> *Theoria* and its pleasures are therefore quite different than “time-wasting” or “killing time” with idle pursuits, in Aristotle’s view.

These criticisms of *diagoge* are certainly well-placed by Aristotle when directed at such men, but they do not deal exhaustively with the full range of activities that are encompassed by the word “play.” Most notably, it seems peculiar that Aristotle’s remarks in this passage about what he sees as a false relation between *paidia* and happiness make no mention of play in its specifically child-centred purview at all.<sup>210</sup> Perhaps this is because the *spoudaios* whom Aristotle seeks is a “mature man,” whereas a child is necessarily

<sup>208</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 5.

<sup>209</sup> I refer here to Aristotle’s discussion of pleasure not as movement towards a good, but rather as rest in union with that good. He writes that “a movement necessarily occupies a space of time (*chronos*), whereas a feeling of pleasure does not, for every moment of pleasurable consciousness is a perfect whole.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.iv.4. This passage is particularly valuable when we examine the timeless quality of the enjoyment of *theoria*. However, it also serves as useful criticism of *diagoge*, where one engages oneself in activity not to rest in union with a good, but rather to be rid of time in which one might experience such pleasurable consciousness in the first place. Time-wasting or passing time can be seen as antithetical to thinking in this regard. Hannah Arendt describes the experience of thinking as this “timeless” quality of the “now” or the *nunc stans* in her *Life of the Mind*: “In this gap between past and future, we find our place in time when we think, that is, when we are sufficiently removed from past and future to be relied on to find out their meaning, to assume the position of ‘umpire,’ of arbiter and judge over the manifold, never-ending affairs of human existence in the world, never arriving at a final solution to their riddles but ready with ever-new answers to the question of what it may be all about” (209-210). Pieper also offers us a useful contrast of time-wasting and leisure in relation to Aristotle’s question concerning human happiness: “One who is happy steps away from the parcelling up of time and into a reposeful Now, a *nunc stans* in which everything is simultaneous. But this very quality once again links the happy man with the contemplative man. It is not only that the simple insightful gaze of the *intellectus* is related to the ‘discursive’ movements of the *ratio* as the eternal to the temporal. Rather, in contemplation man is capable of remaining longer without fatigue or distraction than in any other activity; time flies by. In happiness as in contemplation, man takes a step out of time.” Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 101.

<sup>210</sup> Children are, in fact, mentioned in Book X.vi.4. They are compared to grown-ups in an analogous ratio as follows: children (*paisi*) are to grown men (*andrasin*) as the worthless (*phaulois*) are to the virtuous (*epieikesin*).

“immature”? Nonetheless, children certainly do not play to “kill time” in the manner of the fool’s *diagoge*; their play is not foolish at all in this way. Indeed, Huizinga remarks that play “lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly.”<sup>211</sup> That is, children’s play cannot be condemned as folly, nor can it be held to account for not embodying *sophia*. In fact, inasmuch as children play, they do so free from all such dualisms; their play is free from all moral, rational, and practical constraints. As Huizinga puts it: “Play lies outside the antithesis of wisdom of folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil. ... The valuations of vice and virtue do not apply here.”<sup>212</sup> In this regard, children’s play is not at all dissimilar to philosophy, which in its most sublime form seeks beyond all dualisms, beyond both good and evil, beyond the purview of discursive thought and reasoning, for a true ground in the One (*to hen*).<sup>213</sup>

Children’s *paidia* cannot be rightly criticized using Aristotle’s conception of play as *diagoge* simply by the fact that it is truly a “voluntary activity.”<sup>214</sup> Unlike *diagoge*, which arises from the experience of time as a constraint and from the desire to be rid of the liberty one has in which one might enjoy *scholē*, the child’s *paidia* is inherently free: “Child and animal play because they enjoy playing, and therein precisely lies their freedom.”<sup>215</sup> In this regard, even the play of animals transcends the “past times” of the foolish men Aristotle criticizes; for both the play of children and of animals originates from a place of freedom rather than from the desire to shirk one’s freedom – in the case of the foolish men, the desire to be rid of the opportunity to cultivate their highest freedom in *scholē*.<sup>216</sup>

Child’s play is further distinguished from *diagoge* by “disinterest” in ordinary life. Where the man engaged in *diagoge* attempts to rise above normal, ordinary affairs through

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<sup>211</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 6.

<sup>212</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 7.

<sup>213</sup> See, for instance, Nietzsche’s conception of philosophy as being “beyond good and evil.” Consider the erotic madness of the winged soul that aspires above all duality and multiplicity towards that realm outside of the cosmos itself in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, or the discussion of “the Good Beyond Being” in Plato’s *Republic* at 509b. Also see Nagarjuna’s Madhyamika philosophic dialectics, which are designed to break down all discursive reasoning and destroy our attachments to all dualities in order to cultivate an understanding beyond all words. Or consider the manner of Hindu Vedanta wherein all multiplicity and all dualities are ultimately reconciled in the One as Brahma.

<sup>214</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 7.

<sup>215</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 8.

<sup>216</sup> “Animals play, so they must be more than merely mechanical things. We play and know that we play, so we must be more than merely rational beings, for play is irrational.” Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 4. My point here is that animals and children exhibit freedom in their play: certainly positive attributes. However, the man engaged in *diagoge* “kills time” rather than cultivating *scholē* in order to realize that higher freedom that is his potential as a human being.

“killing time,” he nonetheless does so only because he is still thinking of those affairs, sometimes seeking notoriety in the eyes of others for his stature as tyrant, or perhaps for his abilities as the tyrant’s favourite and sycophant; at other times the fool engages in *diagoge* as a means to escape the gruelling nature of his work rather than participating in a form of play that is good in its own right (for instance, as *schole*). Child’s play, however, is quite different from this spiritual weakness or infirmity: “Not being ‘ordinary’ life it stands outside the immediate satisfaction of wants and appetites, indeed it interrupts the appetitive process.”<sup>217</sup> Given its “disinterest” in worldly affairs, if play may be adequately defined as “an action accomplishing itself outside and above the necessities and seriousness of everyday life,”<sup>218</sup> then how is child’s play much different from what the lover of wisdom does in pursuit of *sophia*? The child, like the one pursuing wisdom, engages freely in an activity for its own sake, that is pleasurable as its own end, and that transcends all worldly affairs in its focus. Children’s *paidia*, like philosophy, “thus has its place in a sphere superior to the strictly biological processes of nutrition, reproduction and self-preservation.”<sup>219</sup>

All of these observations about children’s *paidia* are made in contradistinction to Aristotle’s assessment of play. It is true that Aristotle is silent in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* about children in relation to *theoria* and happiness. However, some inferences about the matter seem fair. As we have seen, not only does Aristotle voice a certain disdain for children elsewhere, enumerating them alongside “wild animals”<sup>220</sup> in their capacity for mindless yet “natural virtue” (*physike arete*); he also denies the possibility of guiding them in the pursuit of *sophia* inasmuch as they are said to lack any consciousness of the “originary experiences” or “beginning things” (*hai archai*) that are foundational to such a pursuit. To the extent that Aristotle denies that children have the ability to engage in such anamnestic experiences, we must consider whether he truly recognizes the spiritual height and depth of a child’s consciousness. Huizinga, for instance, remarks that when a child plays he “is quite literally ‘beside himself’ with delight, transported beyond himself to such an extent that he almost believes he actually is such and

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<sup>217</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.

<sup>218</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 26.

<sup>219</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.

<sup>220</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xiii.1.

such a thing, without, however, wholly losing consciousness of ‘ordinary reality’.”<sup>221</sup> Given that children, in their rich imaginative lives, are capable of such spiritual transports, one might wonder why they would be incapacitated for the recollection of *hai archai*. Indeed, what are we to make of Socrates dialoguing not only with *neanioi* but even with *paides*, interrupting them in the Lyceum, in their place of school, while they are playing at wrestling and knucklebones?<sup>222</sup> How is it that philosophy is not, in Plato’s dialogues at least, an elite pursuit, but rather something to be undertaken alongside children’s games and contests (*agon*)? Huizinga remarks, “It would seem that we are accustomed to think of play and seriousness as an absolute antithesis. It would seem, however, that this does not go to the heart of the matter.”<sup>223</sup> In his seventh letter, Plato tells us that every “serious” or “mature man” – i.e., every *spoudaios* – avoids writing about “serious things” (*ton spoudaion*);<sup>224</sup> and so it might not be much of a stretch here to suppose that philosophy, at least as Plato has written about it, is not a serious, but rather a *playful* thing. Indeed, in his *Laws*, Plato describes human beings as divine playthings.<sup>225</sup> Our lot in life is to play in a manner that is pleasing to the god, following the tugs that we feel upon our strings as divine puppets. Inasmuch as we are willing to play this sacred game, we are animated and divine ourselves; but to the extent that we refuse to play or to respond to the god’s tugs, we are merely bags of meat hanging on a string. Huizinga too makes this observation when he links play to our connection with sacred things: “In play we may move below the level of the serious, as the child does; but we can also move above it – in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred.”<sup>226</sup>

### **(xiii) The Contemplative Life and the Pursuit of Wisdom as True Happiness in Education?**

Returning then to Aristotle’s elucidation concerning the relevance of pursuing wisdom for happiness: he delineates happiness as activity in accordance with “the highest

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<sup>221</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 14.

<sup>222</sup> See Plato’s *Lysis*.

<sup>223</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 18.

<sup>224</sup> Plato’s *Epistle VII*, trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 344cd.

<sup>225</sup> See Plato, *Laws*, 644d.

<sup>226</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 19.

virtue” (*ten kratisten*) in the best part of us.<sup>227</sup> Aristotle esteems the intellect or *nous* as this “best part,” and although he is unsure of whether it is actually divine (*theion*), or simply the “most divine” (*to theiotaton*) part of us, he nonetheless says that it is that portion of our being that is empowered to know what is noble and divine; it is the activity (*energia*) of the *nous* in accordance with the virtue proper to it that will constitute perfect happiness (*he teleia eudaimonia*) for human beings. This activity, Aristotle reiterates, is contemplation (*theoretike*).

Contemplation, or *theoria*, says Aristotle, is the highest form of activity, since the *nous* “is the highest thing in us, and the objects with which the *nous* deals are the highest things that can be known.” *Theoria* is also said to be superior to all other forms of *energia* because “it is the most continuous”; that is, we can engage in it longer than we can carry on any other form of action. Moreover, *theoria* is thought to be the most pleasurable form of activity, since it alone is in accordance with *sophia*, which is itself the highest virtue. It is for this reason that Aristotle claims that the life lived in pursuit of wisdom is the most pleasurable of lives.

Aristotle’s remarks here about the contemplative life bear some careful consideration in terms of their application in the modern classroom. At the outset, it seems ridiculous to suggest that the noetic exercises of which Aristotle speaks here could be at all relevant to learning in a crowded, busy, noisy, distracted place like the modern-day school. Doesn’t participation in the contemplative life presuppose previous initiation, long practice, development of self-control, and higher noetic powers than are typically available in the classroom? In fact, as teachers it seems that one of our prime concerns is always to keep our students busy and active rather than contemplative; they cannot be given any time in which they have nothing to do, because they will not know what to do with it; they “won’t be learning”; they will “waste time,” or most annoyingly, they will become disruptive. As a panacea for these difficulties, we fill the curriculum with more and more for them to learn – so many hurdles and tasks, in fact, that it is common for teachers to bemoan ever having time during the year to get through it all. And we use ever-more diverse technologies to ensure that even those who struggle with assimilating the “more and more” can do so more easily and with greater speed and efficiency. We train our students now to move along

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<sup>227</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.vii.1.

speedily through their days; and we are told from our first moment as teachers *never* to only have the children at one activity; after all, children “cannot focus for long”; their attention spans are “minute”; therefore, we must “mix it up”; class periods at the high school level (forty minutes when I was a boy, up until recently in Alberta sixty minutes, and now in my current school eighty minutes!) must be chopped up into smaller bits. Students must experience variety and be kept moving at all costs. All of these practices seem antithetical to what one does when one contemplates.

These problems of the modern classroom – and their dissonance with Aristotle’s discussions of *theoria*, *scholē*, and *sophia* – are not merely a problem for student learning. Indeed, one of the greatest frustrations that I have as a teacher is that I too am treated this way by administrators and by foundational school structures. Many teachers that I have met feel the same way about the endless “busy work,” the useless meetings, and the tunnel vision focus on assessment of student performance in the mastery of their school “work”: all of these things prevent us from exercising our leisure, or even realizing what leisure really means. However, given that a good many teachers feel this way -- that the system is a paternalistic insult to our intelligence, that it is an accusation against our professionalism, that it is an indication of distrust on the part of our administrative and provincial superiors - - ought not we as well reconsider how we view our student’s leisure? If we feel that we ought to be allowed to learn the meaning of *scholē* through encounter with it, and thereby learn through familiarity with the experience how to enjoy our *scholē* as true scholastics, then ought not it be *our* prime concern to turn our own students into effective *scholars* as well? Rather than stifling the possibility for developing a “wisdom atmosphere” of leisure and thereby discouraging the cultivation of *theoria*, ought we not, as teachers, take it as our mission to help our students learn how to enjoy their leisure rather than grow up to become the foolish men of whom Aristotle speaks who simply “kill time” until they die? For as we earlier remarked about child’s play, children may be more naturally disposed to leisure than we suppose; certainly adults have been known to “kill time” at work because work can indeed be drudgery; work can be “busy work,” devoid of meaning and joy. We can, and very often do, experience work not as a source of pleasure, but as a means of social control: as a means to keep us “in order,” and to prevent us from exercising the freedom that we might enjoy by coming into an awareness of the meaning of *scholē* and the opportunity it

affords for wisdom's pursuit. Indeed, it seems reasonable to suppose that the busyness that we impose on teachers and students is itself the cause of much "killing time"; for what else is there to do when school is not *schole* but school-work? Could it be that always keeping students and teachers busy is *not* the solution to the problem of idleness, but rather that it exacerbates the problem by not providing us the opportunity in which to learn how to be scholastic, philosophic, or contemplative? In this paper, I wish to propose, in the Platonic sense, that we ought to "turn around" (*periagoge*) our souls from our present course; in some small way, we ought to pursue the wisdom that the ancients intuited and felt as the pleasure of "gazing upon" the highest (but also the deepest) things. If we could simply structure our days in school so that they fostered a "wisdom environment" that lends itself at least occasionally to *schole* and the practice of *theoria*, our students – and we too as teachers – would be happier, as Aristotle suggests; for happiness is an activity in accordance with the highest virtue in the best part of us. This part of us ought to be cultivated – not simply in its dianoetic powers of critical analysis as we do now – but also in recognition of the higher capacities and functioning of *noesis*.<sup>228</sup>

#### (xiv) Theoretic Education as Immortalization (*to athanatizein*)

Aristotle distinguishes the "active life" and its "practical pursuits" from the "contemplative life" and its concern with "seeing" or *theoria*, calling the former un leisured (*ascholia*) and "directed to some further ends, not chosen for their own sake," whereas the latter embodies the meaning of true *scholia*. The theoretic activity of the intellect (*he tou nou energieia*) excels its practical activities in "seriousness" (*spoude*); it is this activity of the *nous* that constitutes "complete human happiness."<sup>229</sup> However, Aristotle writes that the aspect of our lives that participates in *schole*, in which we are able to cultivate or practice "gazing upon" the highest (and also the deepest) things is higher than the human level, "for not in virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine."<sup>230</sup> In this regard, Aristotle bids all human beings – not simply grown men or so-called philosophers, but *all* of us – to "immortalize" or *athanatizein*:

<sup>228</sup> See the portion of my thesis dealing with Dewey for clarification of these terms *dianoia* and *noesis*.

<sup>229</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.vii.7.

<sup>230</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.vii.8.

If then the intellect [*nous*] is something divine [*theion*] in comparison with the human [*ton anthropon*], so is the life [*bios*] of the intellect divine in comparison with human life. Nor ought we to obey those who enjoin that a human being should have human thoughts [*anthropina phronein*] and a mortal the thoughts of mortality [*ton thneton*], but we ought so far as possible to immortalize [*athanatizein*], and do all that human beings may to live in accordance with the highest thing [*to kratiston*] in ourselves; for though this be small in bulk, in power [*dynamei*] and honour [*timiotati*] it far surpasses all the rest.<sup>231</sup>

Certainly Aristotle voices his doubts about the abilities of a variety of sorts of people – youth and children included – to pursue *sophia*. But here he is quite clear that *sophia* is indeed the greatest good, and that *scholē* and *theoria* are essential for all human beings who wish truly to receive any sort of “immortalizing” education. Aristotle therefore serves as an excellent example in our study of the extent to which our educational focus upon the middle, upon the strictly human and mortal, and assessment of the critical-analytic elements of education, is *not* an education aimed at the pursuit of wisdom, and therefore *not* an education aimed at directing us towards happiness. Indeed, modern-day education, in its emphasis on efficiency in work does not even rise to the level of children’s games or play, inasmuch as the concerns of our middled educational strategies do not rise above “the strictly biological processes of nutrition, reproduction and self-preservation”<sup>232</sup> to which they are ultimately harnessed. The full amplitude of our human being is not explored by such an education. Students are not challenged to investigate the depths or the heights of things; they are not even given the opportunity to be made aware of these extremes without the proper “wisdom atmosphere” – without a recognition of the value of *scholē*; rather, our current atmosphere serves, if anything, to stifle and to discourage any such awareness of the need to *athanatizein*.

## 2. Boethius

### (i) Introduction: Philosophy's Relevance in the Lives of Students?

One of the most enjoyable aspects of being an English teacher is having the good fortune to read Shakespeare over and over again with my students. In Alberta, students are, *en masse*, first introduced to Shakespeare in grade nine when they read *Romeo and Juliet*.

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<sup>231</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.vii.8.

<sup>232</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.



This beautiful play is full of insight and challenges both for students and teachers, and it is well suited to the age of the students in grade nine, for like them, Juliet "hath not seen the change of fourteen years"<sup>233</sup>; Romeo is only slightly older. The accuracy of the play in depicting a deep love of which all people – and these two young people, in particular – are capable and which all human beings seek out and can appreciate hits me very deeply no matter how many times I read it. And Shakespeare is wonderfully insightful in contrasting the depth of feeling between the lovers (Romeo and Juliet) and friends (Romeo and Mercutio) on the one hand with the claims of their educators (Juliet's father and Friar Lawrence) on the other hand to instruct the young couple about what is expected of them, and what is worthy of their attention as an object of love.

Having only just met his beloved Juliet -- each having pledged undying love to the other in their upcoming marriage -- Romeo must say good night to Juliet on pain of death as he leaves her father's orchard. To Romeo's "thriving" soul, Juliet says, "A thousand times good night!" Romeo's response is particularly relevant to our current study when he says: "A thousand times the worse, to want thy light! / Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books; / But love from love, toward school with heavy looks."<sup>234</sup> Here, Romeo speaks the truth that all schoolteachers must face in dealing with their young students: namely, that books and learning and school are ordinarily experienced by young souls not as a source of love, but rather as a movement away from the lovable. As a schoolteacher, how could one possibly persuade the youths in one's care to show concern for studies designed to point them at the truth? How can the schoolteacher convince them that what they learn through study might lead them towards an understanding of higher meanings? How can anyone seeking to educate youth hope to do so – even when we model our teaching upon the pursuit of wisdom -- when love and friendship are experienced as the only real venue for meaningfulness in the young person's life?<sup>235</sup> What consolation can there be in philosophy for the young heart and mind?

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<sup>233</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (New York: Signet Classic, 1964), I.ii.9.

<sup>234</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.ii.155-157.

<sup>235</sup> Poet and musician Bruce Springsteen makes a similar observation from his own experiences of learning in high school in "No Surrender":

We busted out of class had to get away from those fools  
We learned more from a three minute record than we ever learned in school  
Tonight I hear the neighbourhood drummer sound

The ridiculous nature of philosophy in the experience of the young person full of passion and love and despair is nowhere more evident in literature (at least to my knowledge) than in the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. In Act Three, Romeo's best friend Mercutio has just been slain; out of grief at his friend's death, and as a response to his own feelings of guilt in the death, Romeo slays the perpetrator, Tybalt, and is in turn banished from "fair Verona" for "civil brawling" in the streets contrary to Prince Escalus' edict. Romeo is absolutely distraught at his sentence, and he sees his impending exile as an equivalent to death. In Romeo's experience, love is the fountainhead of all that is good and meaningful in the world; hence, permanent exile from what one loves, although it does not entail a bodily death, is more fearsome because it involves a spiritual death inasmuch as the soul of the lover is forever denied its beloved. Upon receipt of the news of his exile, Romeo says:

There is no world without Verona walls,  
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.  
Hence-banished is banish'd from the world,  
And world's exile is death: then banished,  
Is death mis-term'd: calling death banishment,  
Thou cutt'st my head off with a golden axe,  
And smilest upon the stroke that murders me.<sup>236</sup>

Romeo loves a real, beautiful, young girl, made of real flesh and real blood. In her and through her, he experiences all beauty; he knows the things of love deeply and intimately through her intercession. In his love for Juliet, Romeo experiences "heaven"; being able to love one's beloved, and through loving to establish a deep union with the beloved as the source of one's loving is, in Romeo's experience, the most divine thing for a human being; without the opportunity for a union of lover and beloved, Romeo does not feel that life is worth living. When Friar Lawrence attempts to calm Romeo's fervour for love by

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I can feel my heart begin to pound  
You say you're tired and you just want to close your eyes and follow your dreams down.  
Springsteen is correct when he sings, "we learned more from a three-minute record than we ever learned in school." Most keen, thymotic youth understand the truth of Springsteen's lyrics, and this is the reason why they "bust out of class" to get away from those "fools" -- the teachers. School does not, in their view, attend to the pounding of their hearts -- that "neighbourhood drummer sound" -- nor does school align with their dreams. The poetic genius of Springsteen in this song should not be under-estimated: the Dionysiac element of music that we discussed earlier in relation to *sophia* and Greek tragedy is apparent not only in the descent within the heart, at the centre of the human being, but also in the descent into one's dreams during sleep -- a state that challenges the everyday order of fools and borderlines on death, or dreamless sleep.

<sup>236</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.iii.17-22.

distinguishing between the alternatives of bodily death and bodily estrangement from the one he loves, Romeo speaks the truth of the youthful soul's sense of immediacy in love:

'Tis torture, and not mercy: heaven is here,  
 Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog  
 And little mouse, every unworthy thing,  
 Live here in heaven and may look on her;  
 But Romeo may not: more validity,  
 More honourable state, more courtship lives  
 In carrion-flies than Romeo: they may seize  
 On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand  
 And steal immortal blessing from her lips,  
 Who even in pure and vestal modesty,  
 Still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin;  
 But Romeo may not; he is banished:  
 Flies may do this, but I from this must fly:  
 They are free men, but I am banished.  
 And say'st thou yet that exile is not death?  
 Hadst thou no poison mix'd, no sharp-ground knife,  
 No sudden mean of death, though ne'er so mean,  
 But 'banished' to kill me?--'banished'?  
 O friar, the damned use that word in hell;  
 Howlings attend it: how hast thou the heart,  
 Being a divine, a ghostly confessor,  
 A sin-absolver, and my friend profess'd,  
 To mangle me with that word 'banished'?<sup>237</sup>

As any schoolteacher knows, the high school abounds with love and friendship and dramas of all sorts. The immediacy of youth is everywhere around us when we teach. But classroom teaching, thinking, and learning, all in some way demand a suspension of these loves and friendships in their immediacy. We have earlier pointed out that all thinking is in some deep way "out of order"; for this reason, Hannah Arendt writes that thinking "interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a *stop-and-think*."<sup>238</sup> So how then can the cultivation of cognition offer any great enticement to a student if thinking necessarily involves exile from the immediacy of one's feelings, from one's loves, and one's friendships? Indeed, how can the

<sup>237</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.iii.29-51.

<sup>238</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 78. What Arendt says here in agreement with the Heidegger quote about thinking as being "out of order" is true; but it seems to me that thinking need not be understood as a removal or divorce from the experience of the lovable, nor need it be a denial of union with the beloved; rather, thinking is a loving activity that seeks the highest form of unity, and perhaps the only true union possible, wherein thought is united with its object in oneness. We shall develop this insight further in our examination of Boethius' philosophy.

schoolteacher counsel the student to abandon his beloved and to accept his banishment from the lovable things that he knows for the supposed greater good of what is more lovable in thinking, yet less obvious in the experience of youth?

Shakespeare vividly dramatizes this precise quandary in his play. Friar Lawrence asks Romeo, a "fond mad man," to hear him speak. He offers to console Romeo about the loss of his beloved by entreating him to pursue wisdom: "I'll give thee armour to keep off that word [banishment]; / Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy, / To comfort thee, though thou art banished."<sup>239</sup> Romeo responds immediately and with passionate disgust:

Yet 'banished'? Hang up philosophy!  
 Unless philosophy can make a Juliet,  
 Displant a town, reverse a prince's doom,  
 It helps not, it prevails not: talk no more.<sup>240</sup>

Romeo knows only the immediacy of loving a real human being, and he craves after union with his real flesh and blood beloved; any alternative to the object of his real and visceral love is an abstraction that has no bearing upon what he knows of love from his own experiences of love. Indeed, as readers, we suspect that Romeo's love is more real than the replacement offered by the friar, who is old and chaste, and lacks any experience of youthful passions or romantic love.<sup>241</sup>

Perhaps the "consolation" offered by the friar is a mere abstraction?<sup>242</sup> Readers ought to ask the questions, "Is the friar's exhortation to philosophy truly philosophic? Is the friar's advice to Romeo truly wise? Can it be said that the friar truly pursues wisdom given the outcome of his plans and his actions?" For instance, the estrangement and death of both Romeo and Juliet could have been entirely avoided if only the friar had held the truth up

<sup>239</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.iii.54-56.

<sup>240</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.iii.57-60.

<sup>241</sup> Romeo makes this point convincingly when he says:

Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel:  
 Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,  
 An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,  
 Doting like me and like me banished,  
 Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear thy hair,  
 And fall upon the ground, as I do now,  
 Taking the measure of an unmade grave. (III.iii.64-70)

<sup>242</sup> The most telling of all the friar's speeches that betrays the deficiency of his "philosophy" as true consolation occurs when he speaks to Juliet's family soon after they discover her "dead" in her bedchamber. The friar does not deal at all with the experience of the young girl's death as a great loss for the family, but rather tells them to rejoice in her premature death -- that death is a great blessing, and that to die young is the greatest of all blessings. See Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, IV.v.65-83.

more highly than his own private interests in avoiding public controversy; simply telling the parents the truth and revealing the couple's elopement would have pressed the families of the lovers to make peace, and would have turned their "households' rancour to pure love."<sup>243</sup> However, the friar avoids potential personal embarrassment and culpability for arranging their secret marriage by concocting a deceitful plan to conceal his deed from the eyes of both families; moreover, on discovering that his ill-fated plan has ended with the death of Romeo, the friar does not stay with young Juliet in the tomb to console her and to bear his part in the death of her husband as a matter of justice; rather, out of cowardice he chooses to run from her and from his own responsibilities; he leaves her all alone among dead men's bones to despair at the loss of her own beloved, "environed with all these hideous fears."<sup>244</sup> Every year I teach the play, my students are shocked and disgusted by the cowardice and irresponsibility of the friar in this regard. The friar's actions in the play are certainly not the deeds of a wise man, but rather of one lacking in all prudence (*phronesis*) and in whom any sense of the universal good (*sophia*) has taken flight. Indeed, how could one who truly seeks wisdom, and who exhorts others to do the same, be so full of vice and cowardice as Friar Lawrence?

Ostensibly, the friar offers philosophy to young Romeo; but can the offer of philosophy be made by one lacking both in courage and in the philosophic spirit that seeks after the truth even at the expense of his own reputation? Can philosophy be offered to students by teachers who are themselves not motivated to pursue wisdom, but simply "schooled" in philosophic books, teacher-training manuals, and "methods" of philosophic discourse? Romeo recognizes the emptiness of such an enterprise; such a "philosophy" ought to go "hang" itself, for it is already spiritually dead to the real quest after wisdom that is the heart of philosophy. Words from such "wise men" (*sophoi*) are no consolation. "Philosophy" of this sort is but impotent chatter in the absence of and in exile from the Lovable, and for this reason Romeo demands that the friar "talk no more."

The "philosophic" chatter of men schooled in books and studies claiming to be "adversity's sweet milk" is empty inasmuch as it cannot deliver unto Romeo his beloved. The "philosophy" of Friar Lawrence is a study predicated on the experience of exile as a

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<sup>243</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.iv.92.

<sup>244</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, IV.iv.50.

fundamental and inescapable existential state. Such a "philosophy," Romeo accurately remarks, cannot "make a Juliet, / Displant a town, [or] reverse a prince's doom." It is a philosophy that leads nowhere but to despair, and his response to the friar's invitation to philosophize is not only clear, but entirely justified. The pursuit of such "wisdom" is no acceptable alternative to real love for a real human being. Unlike the consummation of love between two real human beings, the friar's "philosophy" cannot offer any real union with the beloved. To engage in such "philosophic activity" is to accept one's internment, one's imprisonment, and one's banishment from the true object of love and the source of all that is beautiful. If philosophy is as Friar Lawrence would have us believe, then how could we as educators ever make it palatable to our young students to philosophize? Indeed, how could anyone ever wish to live in such a state of exile from the Lovable with "philosophy" as consolation for one's unending pain?

## **(ii) To See or Not to See? That is the Question**

In his rejection of the friar's "philosophy," Romeo remarks that although philosophers "hear" words for which "madmen" lovers such as Romeo have no ears, nonetheless, such "wise men have no eyes"<sup>245</sup> and are worthy of scorn for their blindness. The words (*logoi*) of philosophers, and their concern with speeches (*logoi*) in the life of reason (*logos*) are denuded of their final object in the beloved. Philosophic discussion, reasoning, and dialectic strike Romeo as empty words; he therefore enjoins the friar, his "friend profess'd," to "talk no more"; the words of the friar's "philosophy" involve a speaking and a listening that is without loving and seeing. Moreover, lovers are "mad," but *sophoi* such as the friar are not. Certainly, the friar means to suggest that young "mad men" are full of a diseased sort of love that is over-hasty and lusty by nature; but the friar neglects to admit that although lovers may be full of such "human madness," they may also be possessed by a "divine madness" through which all great and beautiful things come to fruition in the soul.<sup>246</sup> The friar's portrayal of the philosopher as the completely sane and "wise" man lacks either of these attributes, according to Romeo. His "consolation" is rather to be as a stone moved by neither form of madness. The erotic madness (*mania*) of which

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<sup>245</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.iii.61-62.

<sup>246</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a.

Socrates speaks in Plato's *Phaedrus* and through which the soul of the lover sprouts wings and is enabled to take flight and to participate in its beloved through seeing (*theoria*) is not part of the friar's "philosophy." Indeed, the friar once counsels Romeo against any such mad flights of the spirit, and to be moderate in his love, saying:

These violent delights have violent ends  
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,  
Which as they kiss consume: the sweetest honey  
Is loathsome in its own deliciousness  
And in the taste confounds the appetite:  
Therefore love moderately; long love doth so;  
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.<sup>247</sup>

However, true philosophy, as the love of wisdom, is akin to the true "lover of beauty" (*philokalos*) who seeks after his beloved in all things and to the furthest extent;<sup>248</sup> it is not moderate in its passion for its beloved; rather true philosophy is the *immoderate* love of wisdom; it is the erotic desire for the whole of wisdom, not for some little part of it, or as though a moderate amount would simply "suffice."<sup>249</sup> Philosophy is maddened to the full end of itself. Friar Lawrence's advice to "love moderately" falls -- and will *always* fall -- on deaf ears of all lovers, including Romeo and those true seekers after *Sophia*. The lover does indeed "see" -- or rather seeks to see -- what the moderate "hearer" of consoling words has considered impossible to see. In consoling words, "wise men" remain exiles; they give up on ever uniting with their beloved, settling instead for *logoi* as surrogates. By contrast, in seeking out a loving union with their beloved through sight, lovers remain faithful to their beloveds and ever strive towards them with the greatest immoderation. Romeo's love for Juliet is, in this regard, a more accurate depiction of true philosophy than all the friar's scholasticism and "philosophic" teachings. For true philosophy has *Sophia* as its true end; the words, speech, and reasoning (*logoi*) of true philosophy are not denuded of their beloved, but rather reach out towards wisdom through *noetic* activity and in the cultivation of contemplative seeing (*theoria*) afforded in the "wisdom atmosphere" of *scholē*.

<sup>247</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.vi.9-15.

<sup>248</sup> In Plato's *Phaedrus*, the *philosophos* and the *philokalos* are reckoned as equals alongside "one of a musical or loving nature." See *Phaedrus* 248d.

<sup>249</sup> A similar point is made in the discussions between Socrates and Glaukon in Book V of Plato's *Republic*, where Socrates asks Plato's brother: "Won't we also then assert that the philosopher is a desirer of wisdom, not of one part and not another, but of all of it?" See *Republic* 475b.

### (iii) Boethius and True Philosophy

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius provides a wonderful alternative to the empty consolations and exile "philosophy" of the friar in *Romeo and Juliet*. Boethius was born about 480 C.E. in Rome. His father was an ex-consul, and he himself was consul under Theodoric the Ostrogoth in 510. Boethius' political career was full of bravery and concern for the common good. On his own account, he engaged in politics not for its honours or glories, or for the monetary rewards that it might bring; rather he took up politics "in accordance with that teaching" of Plato that "those states would be happy where philosophers were kings or their governors were philosophers." Boethius felt it to be his civil duty to engage in political affairs "lest the rule of nations be left to the base and wicked, bringing ruin and destruction on the good."<sup>250</sup>

Entering politics, Boethius was led into considerable conflict with unscrupulous men; he provides us with a long list of his courageous stands against political injustice, such as frustrating corrupt politicians like Conigastus from robbing men weaker than himself, preventing Trigguilla from various injustices, and protecting poor men from the "unchecked avarice of barbarians."<sup>251</sup> At the time of writing his famous *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius had been thrown into prison in distant Pavia on the accusation that he had wanted to preserve the Senate.<sup>252</sup> There amidst the gloom of the prison, bereft of all human companionship and his great library, Boethius awaited his violent execution without redress to any political justice. Boethius truly was an exile in his own land.<sup>253</sup> However, perhaps the most remarkable thing about Boethius for the purposes of our own study is that, during his imprisonment and while awaiting his certain and violent end,<sup>254</sup> he did not seek

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<sup>250</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 74 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), I.i.18-25.

<sup>251</sup> Boethius' list of his valorous deeds in politics is extensive. See *Consolation of Philosophy*, I.i.34-75.

<sup>252</sup> Boethius writes: "I am charged with preventing those accusers from bringing forward proofs whereby the Senate might have been convicted of treason." Against this charge, Boethius finds no reasonable mode of redress. He cannot deny the charge, since he admits that "I did want the Senate to be preserved, nor shall I ever cease to want it so." Nor is he given opportunity "to use the confessions of my accusers themselves" so that the falsity of the forgeries attributed to him "would have been evident for all to see." Boethius is essentially thrown into prison, tortured, and executed for a crime that is not a crime, and on a charge that he is not at liberty to dispute. See Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, I.i.76-94.

<sup>253</sup> "Now I am condemned to death, my goods confiscate, for too zealously supporting the Senate, although I am nearly five hundred miles away and unable to speak in my own defence." Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, I.i.130-134.

<sup>254</sup> Boethius was killed either in 524 or 525 in Pavia, either by the sword, the axe, or by being clubbed to death.



out solace and comfort in his Christian religious faith, but rather turned to philosophy to console him. Nowhere in the *Consolation of Philosophy* is Christ mentioned; rather, it is Lady Philosophy who comes to visit him and to comfort him in his time of troubles. Like Romeo, Boethius has been banished – Romeo to Mantua, and Boethius to Pavia; like Romeo, Boethius too is a lover of beauty and a seeker of sights<sup>255</sup> rather than simply a hearer of words. When Lady Philosophy appears to Boethius, certainly she speaks to him; but gathering "her dress into a fold," she first wipes clear his eyes of the tears and sorrow that have overtaken him in order that he might *see* her more clearly.<sup>256</sup> In replacement of that despair of night that "comes flooding down upon the world" when one cannot see, the vision of Lady Philosophy comes to sweep "away night and lets the daylight out / So that the sparkling sunlight / Suddenly flashes on our wondering eyes."<sup>257</sup> Unlike the friar's "philosophy" of exile and words forever *in absentia* from the beloved, Boethius' philosophizing is able to achieve union with its most beloved object in contemplative seeing or *theoria*. This is an important observation about true philosophy, for it has hopefulness about it, and it therefore need not go "hang" itself. True philosophy as practiced by Boethius is able to attain to its beloved; it hears, but it also *sees*, and thereby achieves union of seer with what is seen in a way that the friar's philosophy of exile cannot.<sup>258</sup> If the possibility of such a philosophy were revealed to modern-day students – if they were given a reason to accept that their thinking and the cognitive exercises of school

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<sup>255</sup> Indeed, philosophers have since before the time of Solon been called seekers after sights and sight-seers. See, for instance, Book One of Herodotus' *Histories* where Solon is said to have left Athens for ten years after setting down her laws on the grounds of "sight-seeing" (*kata theorias*). Herodotus, *The Histories, books I-II*, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 117 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), I.29. The word "philosophy" was itself coined by Pythagoras long before Solon. He likened the "philosopher" to a spectator in a vast theatre of action; the philosopher was the sort of individual who did not participate directly in the action itself, but beheld it and enjoyed himself while doing so all in one look.

<sup>256</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, I.ii.16-18.

<sup>257</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, I.iii.8-10.

<sup>258</sup> In an essay entitled "On the Theory of Consciousness," Eric Voegelin discusses the different qualities of consciousness cultivated by hearing as compared to seeing. Hearing captures best "the phenomenon of flow" or "the gliding and sliding away" of things and the "'fleetingness' of sensuous awareness." But, conversely, Voegelin remarks that "the selection of this class of experience seems to reveal that one must rely on the sphere of the senses in order to make us conscious of the 'fleetingness' of consciousness, in which, by the way, not everything is fleeting." The phenomenon of "flow" experienced in sensations like hearing is but a "limit experience"; it does not rise to the same height of consciousness as the seeing of Romeo, the mad man, the *philosophos*, or the *philokalos*. In Voegelin's view, the "phenomenon of 'flow' is eminently important but not as a key to the understanding of time-consciousness, rather it is important as an experience in which the bottleneck of the body can be felt as something through which the world is forced as it enters the order of consciousness." See Eric Voegelin, "On the Theory of Consciousness," chapter two in *Anamnesis*, trans. Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 15-17.

are not a kind of imposed exile from love and friendship, but rather a means towards the highest attainment of the Lovable in a true vision or seeing (*theoria*) of wisdom, then how much less would their days be filled with inertia, sloth, or carelessness (*akedia*) – the manner in which leisure is so often seen in our culture of “total work”; and how much more would they come into an awareness of the meaning and preciousness of leisure or *scholē* as they see it little by little! How much more would they enjoy and treasure their days in school!

#### **(iv) Philosophizing and a "Wisdom Atmosphere"?**

In our study of modern views concerning the nature of wisdom and its pursuit, we discussed what Meacham calls the need for a "wisdom atmosphere,"<sup>259</sup> or that sort of environment in which wisdom might be most readily cultivated and pursued in schools. Indeed, this subject is of central importance in our own thesis and investigations. Meacham argues that in order to foster wisdom in schools it is necessary to nurture among students a sense of security and freedom from "tragedy." He justifies his claims about the need for safety and freedom from tragedy on the grounds that wisdom is a "mean," and therefore that it can only be found through avoiding the “extremes” of too confident knowing on the one hand and paralyzing doubt on the other. Lack of safety and exposure to tragic experience would, in his view, lead students away from the middle towards the latter "extreme" pole of experience. However, as Romeo's insight into love suggests, a "true philosophy" would be most extreme and maddening and immoderate; like his own love for his beloved Juliet, it would certainly not be "safe" or likened to a "mean" in its essence. In our earlier discussions of such a "wisdom atmosphere," we sided against Meacham and affirmed Gray's contention concerning the importance of exposure to rather than shelter from reality in order to foster wisdom; fundamentally, for Gray education cannot occur without deep, tragic experience.<sup>260</sup> Alongside of Gray's argument to this effect, we also drew upon Voegelin's insights about the meaning of Greek tragedy to suggest that the safe, secure, and "tragedy-free" environment lauded by Meacham may, in fact, be a detriment to the development of deep understanding.

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<sup>259</sup> Meacham, "The Loss of Wisdom," 206.

<sup>260</sup> Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom*, 105.

Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* throws further suspicion on Meacham's claim about the proper environment for philosophizing. Boethius is by no means driven to philosophize in a "tragedy-free" environment; nor is he "safe" or "secure" while awaiting his violent execution. Rather, Boethius' philosophizing arises very much in the same way as wisdom erupts from the depths of Greek tragedy. As we have seen, Voegelin writes that the truth of tragedy is action itself, that is, "the movement of the soul that culminates in the decision (*proairesis*) of a mature, responsible man." Certainly, education -- if it is anything at all -- involves the training of young souls towards maturity, and towards acting for justice (*dike*). However, acting for justice is neither an easy nor a safe matter in Greek tragedy. Society's laws may dictate to its citizens what justice is, but these laws also fall short of what justice truly is, and the soul involved in tragic action must reach down into its depths to discover the true standard by which all justice might be rendered.<sup>261</sup> Voegelin makes this point when he writes: "Beyond the order of *themis* [that is, laws, customs, or societal norms for conduct] with its conflicts, there lies an order of *dike*, in the double sense of a higher law and of concrete decisions. The situation that is not covered by *themis* will have to be ordered by a concrete decision, a *dike*, of ultimate rightness."<sup>262</sup> Voegelin's remarks here certainly help us to understand Boethius' philosophizing as well; just as in Greek tragedy, the laws of Boethius' day clearly did not establish justice, but rather condemned an innocent man to death. In order to find justice and consolation in his circumstance, it was necessary for Boethius as a solitary individual to reach deep down into the depths of his soul for a decision that established *dike*. Thus, Boethius engages in philosophizing, such that philosophy is not only a dialectical ascent (*anairesis*) towards a seeing (*theoria*) of Wisdom herself; it is simultaneously a descent (*katabasis*) into the depths of the soul.<sup>263</sup> Philosophy is in this way associated with the broadest psychic journeying of the soul to the highest heights and the deepest depths. Philosophy, as both

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<sup>261</sup> This point about laws and societal norms or "values" as not being the ultimate source for our "evaluative" cognitions is discussed at greater length later in my thesis in the section on Thomas Aquinas and the superiority of his own contemplative taxonomy over Benjamin Bloom's modern-day conception of mental activities in the cognitive domain.

<sup>262</sup> Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*, 249-250.

<sup>263</sup> For a useful discussion of this simultaneous ascent-descent in philosophy as it is depicted dramatically and dialectically in Plato's *Symposium*, see Sean Steel, "Katabasis in Plato's *Symposium*." *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 31, no. 1 (2004): 59-83.

tragic and sublime in its extremities, is the means whereby human beings might cultivate the greatest psychological amplitude of experience and understanding.

Boethius' *Consolation* raises an important question for us as modern educators concerned with the cultivation of wisdom, both in terms of our own quest, as well as in consideration of how we might enculture such questing for wisdom among our students. If the pursuit of *sophia* demands a certain kind of "wisdom atmosphere," then what would such an environment look like? How ought we to organize our own schools so that this culture of *scholē* -- so integral to the pursuit of wisdom, at least according to all ancient authorities -- might be encouraged with the ultimate end of wisdom always in mind? If Meacham is incorrect in his own recommendations about what such an environment must look like -- i.e., if "safety" and "freedom from tragedy" are not clearly related to fostering *scholē* -- then what is the correct understanding of such an atmosphere? Perhaps the ancient consensus concerning the value of "tragedy" for the purpose of cultivating wisdom might be stated best by quoting Samuel Johnson's modern insight that "nothing focuses the mind like a hanging."<sup>264</sup> Suffering and loss tend to drive the human mind towards deep and fundamental questions about the meaning and value of the things in our lives. During his own encounter with Lady Philosophy, Boethius hears the words of another, less lady-like goddess, Fortuna:

"Why, man, do you daily complain against me," she says, "what hurt have I done you? What goods of yours have I taken from you? Contest with me the possession of wealth and office before any judge, and if you can show that any such thing is the property of any mortal, I shall immediately and perfectly readily grant that those things you want back were indeed yours. When nature brought you out of your mother's womb, I accepted you, naked and poor in all respects; I supported you, and, ready to be kind to you, even pampered you with my wealth, and over-indulgently spoiled you -- which is precisely why you are now so angry with me. I surrounded you with every kind of affluence and splendour within my power. Now I am pleased to draw back my hand. You should thank me, as having enjoyed the use of what was not yours, not complain as if you had lost something of your own."<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> I have often wondered why, at least in terms of my own limited experience to the world of literature, it seems that so much of the world's most thoughtful and best writing emerges among authors exposed to horrible circumstances and totalitarian regimes, and why by contrast literature produced in peaceful and comfortable societies not shaken to their core by grief and trauma seems so much less thought-provoking and rich.

<sup>265</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, II.ii.3-16.

The matter of justice arises for Boethius when his own execution is imminent: when "bad things happen to good people." Arguably, such a difficult question could only be genuinely explored by an inquirer with a vested and experiential interest in suffering and loss. Such is the case for Boethius; such is also the case for both teachers and students. Hence, wherever the questions of philosophy are pursued, some element of tragedy must be part of the atmosphere of all such inquiry. In experiencing first-hand and immediately the deep difficulty of finding the ground of true justice through his own loss and sufferings, Boethius is led by Lady Philosophy to consider a "wonderful" (*mirum*) truth that is "difficult to put into words." Namely, that

ill fortune is better for men than good. Fortune always cheats when she seems to smile, with the appearance of happiness, but is always truthful when she shows herself to be inconstant by changing. The first kind of fortune deceives, the second instructs; the one binds the minds of those who enjoy goods that cheatingly only seem to be good, the other frees them with the knowledge of the fragility of mortal happiness.<sup>266</sup>

In his *Consolation*, Boethius writes that the experience of bad fortune is held up by Lady Philosophy in a manner contrary to "common sense"<sup>267</sup> as being more instructive, and of more assistance in the pursuit of wisdom than good fortune.

And yet, the tragic element stressed in all ancient understandings of wisdom need not be espoused as the only factor in the creation of a "wisdom atmosphere" for the purposes of cultivating *scholē* among students and teachers. One of the greatest "wonders" of which Boethius becomes aware through his sufferings at the hands of Fortuna is that "this rough and unpleasant fortune has discovered those friends [*amicitiae*] who are truly loyal to [him], and has divided the honest from the dishonest among [his] companions." Through the losses brought about by Fortuna, Boethius becomes aware of "the most precious of all kinds of riches – true friends."<sup>268</sup> Put another way, if "seeing" clearly what *is* (*theoria*) or "focusing the mind" can be understood as the greatest benefit of tragedy, and if this is the reason why tragedy promotes rather than impedes the creation of a "wisdom atmosphere," then surely a true and genuine "seeing" of one's friends and of the good as it

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<sup>266</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, II.viii.7-13.

<sup>267</sup> Recalling our earlier discussions of modern views on wisdom, notice here how the argumentation of Lady Philosophy would be rejected by Dewey as being hostile to "common sense." See Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 83.

<sup>268</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, II.viii.18-26.

manifests in our friendships is also part of *scholē*. Indeed, Boethius writes that "the most sacred kind of good is that of friendship [*amicorum*], a good reckoned not a matter of fortune but of virtue [*virtute*]." <sup>269</sup> In the entire *Consolation*, friendship is the only earthly good that Boethius mentions with this degree of praise.

Clearly, not all friendships are "friendships of virtue." Indeed, such friendships are the rarest and most precious of all human relations. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes at great length and with considerable incisiveness about the variety of friendships experienced in a human life. I think, in conjunction with these philosophic observations, that one of the primary attractions of becoming a teacher – at least in my own experience and anecdotally in the accounts of other teachers as well – is that young people live and breathe friendship in a way that most older people do not. And it is perhaps the teacher's desire to live vicariously among others who are still able to engage in friendship that is one of the greatest attractions of teaching. Nonetheless, it is from within this atmosphere of friendship – and certainly friendships of all sorts abound in our schools – that the deepest learning occurs. It is from within these experiences of friendship that our students – and we too as teachers – come to *see* what is essential about one another, and in *seeing* (*theoria*) to know in a deep contemplative fashion that unifies knower with what is known. This is the sweetness of friendship; this is what our students love and cherish above all things, and this is what drives many of us into teaching and keeps us from quitting the "profession" despite all of its frustrations. For this reason, friendship must be part of any "wisdom atmosphere." Indeed, Boethius' lonely prison cell – which I occasionally liken to my own four classroom walls on bad days! -- was itself a place of friendship, inasmuch as his philosophizing and fraternizing with Lady Philosophy is the deepest and most extreme friendship (*philia*) with wisdom (*sophia*).

#### **(v) The Consolation of Philosophy in a Small Saskatchewan Prairie Town?**

Boethius' *Consolation* can help us further isolate what a "wisdom atmosphere" might look like in a modern-day setting, as well as what it most certainly would *not* look like. It is well worth imagining what it must have been like for Boethius to be isolated in his cell, bereft of human companionship, without his books, and without anything to

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<sup>269</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, III.ii.34-35.

distract him from the fact of his unjust imprisonment, exile, and impending execution. Indeed, the “atmosphere” in which Boethius exercised his *scholē* in pursuit of *sophia* was one of undisturbed attention – certainly nothing like the modern-day classroom. In the modern day “twenty-first century” school of the modern-day “twenty-first century” learner, teachers are told repeatedly on their PD days that students today learn differently than ever before in human history. Students today think more quickly than students of yesteryear; they move more quickly through more sorts of information, and they require constant movement and stimulation to suit these new realities. To require students to sit peacefully is, it seems, contrary to the demands of “kinaesthetic learners.” Moreover, student attention spans are shorter now than ever before because of the new way in which students interact with the world through rapid-fire media and technology; their sense of immediacy in everything is heightened by the movement in technological innovations towards making everything that occurs in reality also available technologically in “real time.” Experience of the world seems to require technological mediation in this regard. Students do not feel “connected” with their world or part of a unified or communal whole without constant and streaming access to their cell phones, iPods, and internet browsers. Attention spans shorten as demands for immediate gratification increase and as the promises of technology to provide instant gratification become seemingly more realizable. Patience and endurance in thinking wanes as attention spans falter; but rather than teach in a way that would counteract this trend, we are told that we must pander to this new learning modality by providing our students with not less, but ever more access to technological distractions. Rather than seeking to lengthen our student’s attention spans, we are instructed to be realistic and innovative; we are told to teach to the nature of the “twenty-first century” students in front of us by breaking our pedagogy into smaller, more digestible chunks. Teachers are encouraged (if not shamed and forced) to make liberal use of all technologies available in order to enliven and enrich their pedagogy with ever more diverse modalities of stimulation to account for the various “learning styles” of their students. The busy, active, and hard-wired classroom is the healthy and happy classroom, so the modern teaching orthodoxy goes.

However, such a modern-day classroom is quite hostile to the pursuit of wisdom and the cultivation of *scholē*. Perhaps the best example I can offer my reader in this regard

is drawn from a book that I love to read and discuss with my grade nine students. I first read W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen The Wind* when I myself was in grade nine, and the book has always stuck with me because of the author's wonderful ability to articulate so clearly, so beautifully, and so realistically the inward spiritual events, questions, and wonderings of its main character, Brian O'Connell, who we first meet at the age of four, and who we watch grow up into his early teenage years. The setting for the book is small town rural Saskatchewan during the Great Depression. As you can imagine even if you have not read the book, there is not a great deal of action! This is a very contemplative novel. There are no car chases; there are no gun fights, or wizards, or aliens, or singing swords to titillate and stimulate and occupy young readers. For this reason, the book at first strikes many of my students as incredibly, if not stultifyingly, boring. "Nothing *ever* happens in this book, Mr. Steel!" is what I frequently hear in protest from the students every year. However, as we stick with the book, as I read it to them aloud in class, and as we explore the questions and recollections of childhood that the book presents to us, student excitement invariably builds around the book's questions and the almost-lost spiritual intimations that the book reminds us about and would have us consider.

The novel is, in many respects, a chronicle of Brian's maturation; central to this chronicle are his experiences of wonder and spiritual expectancy referred to repeatedly as "the feeling." Mitchell articulates a wonderful example of "the feeling" Brian experiences as a small boy in his first year of grade school. The "wisdom atmosphere" in which Brian's "feeling" arises is one of peaceful and deep quietness; it occurs early on a Sunday morning before anyone else is awake, and while young Brian is busy at his chore of shining the family's shoes for church.<sup>270</sup> I reproduce the passage in full below:

Sunday was different, he decided. It gave one a strange feeling of set-apartness. Until *they* came down he would be all alone with the cuckoo clock ticking loud in the living-room beyond the hall, ticking loud like an old man limping along. He'd better put the shoe polish in its drawer before it got tipped over on the floor. That had happened once.

Past the gleam of polished table tops in the living-room he went to the window in his father's den. He looked out to the empty porch, its trellis thick with Virginia creeper. He stood there a moment then turned away with a sudden feeling of restlessness, a hungering dissatisfaction that descended upon him without warning.

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<sup>270</sup> Our modern hostility to environments in which "the feeling" might be cultivated is apparent in the move to start the school day later and later on the grounds that a significant body of research indicates that our students are not able to learn effectively or efficiently in the early morning hours.



The front door swooshed behind him as he went out to the Sunday morning serenely still.

As he sat on the porch steps with his chin in his hands, the slow, tonguing sound of the Catholic church bell drifted to him from the other side of the town. Like on a lawn, he thought with the inarticulate yearning in him deepening, a kid turning slow somersaults over a lawn – looking up with his head, then ducking it to take another slow turn completely over on the lawn. When it had stopped, the morning stillness seemed to have a quality of numbness. Sunday was different. Sunday was very Sabbath.

A twinkling of light caught his eye, and he turned his head to see that the new flake leaves of the spirea were starred in the sunshine; on every leaf were drops that had gathered during the night. He got up. They lay limpid, cradled in the curve of the leaves, each with a dark lip of shadow under its curving side and a star's cold light in its pure heart. As he bent more closely over one, he saw the veins of the leaf blown up under the drop's perfect crystal curve. The barest breath of a wind stirred at his face, and its caress was part of the strange enchantment too. Within him something was opening, releasing shyly as the petals of a flower open, with such gradualness that he was hardly aware of it. But it was happening, an alchemy imperceptible as the morning wind, a growing elation of such fleeting delicacy and poignancy that he dared not turn his mind to it for fear that he might spoil it, that it might be carried away as lightly as one strand of spider web on a sigh of a wind. He was filled with breathlessness and expectancy, as though he was going to be given something, as though he was about to find something.

“Breakfast, Spalpeen.”

The feeling broke; it broke as a bubble breaks. Once it had been there, and then, with a blink, it broke.<sup>271</sup>

Brian's “feeling” is the precise illumination of the mind and spirit that spawns philosophic activity. It visits him only under the peculiar circumstances of inner quietness and attention and openness. Brian's “feeling” arises for him as a deep awareness and as a “seeing” that is “alchemical” or transformative in quality; it is experienced as a yearning expectancy that looks beyond all the ordinary ways of seeing things to intimate that “set-apartness” that underlies things. It is not a seeing of what is simply temporal and passing, but rather a gleaning glimpse of what might be seen through these things of the eternal. This “feeling” is the precise foundational anamnestic, “originary experience” and activity of *scholē*, or leisure in the ancient sense of that word. *Who Has Seen the Wind* demonstrates clearly that *scholē* is not the sole prerogative of mendicants, monks, and gray-haired old men, nor is it an intellectually elitist activity not widely available to all human beings; rather, Mitchell makes it obvious to all his readers that *scholē* is available in everyday and ordinary small

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<sup>271</sup> W. O. Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1947), 117-118.

town life in Saskatchewan – that *scholē* is a real possibility even (and perhaps *especially*!) for a little boy. And the magic of Mitchell’s book is that he shows his readers that we too have very likely had such experiences, perhaps even many times, although we may have forgotten about them. *Who Has Seen the Wind* is a call to modern-day readers to philosophize: that is, to remember, to recollect, and to awaken our own “inner Brians.” Mitchell invites us once again to become deeply aware of our world, to seek out its ground, and to wonder at it. As teachers, if we are to pursue wisdom in the modern-day classroom, it must look something like what Mitchell presents to us in beautiful literary fashion.

Plato writes in his *Meno* that all learning is a form of recollection or *anamnesis*. As Brian grows towards his teenage years, he finds that his “feeling” fades. He ceases to have it at all after his father dies, when he must “grow up” to become like the man of the house with new responsibilities:

He seldom thought of the yearning that had harried him as long as he could remember. Fragments of sense perception would return to him from the past; the dimly recollected pictures of a dead pigeon, a tailless gopher lying on the prairie, something about a drop. Once he had recalled the two-headed calf to Fat and Ike; they remembered it, but that was all.<sup>272</sup>

Indeed, as we grow older, our memories of such “originary experiences” fade, and our innate tendency is to harden to the philosophic spirit. As Meacham pointed out in our review of modern views on the nature and pursuit of wisdom, we most often become more certain of what we know as we grow older, and the world looks more ordinary and predictable to us. We become more calculative and adept at achieving the goals we choose for ourselves and at acquiring the things we have decided for ourselves are desirable and good. In the process, however, we lose something dear to us of which we were once so intimately aware before we “grew up” and matured.

Plato recognized this tendency and wrote about it in his old age; perhaps it is for this reason that the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* speaks of the need for drinking parties (*symposia*) among the members of the oldest and third of the choruses (*chorai*) into which a society might be divided. The Stranger likens the souls of those in the eldest, Dionysian

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<sup>272</sup> Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, 268. Many of these enumerated experiences of Brian’s “feeling” also serve to dispute Meacham’s claim that a “wisdom environment” must be “safe” and “tragedy-free,” for Brian experiences depth of questioning and wonder most often in unpleasant and “tragic” or traumatic circumstances.

chorus to iron, since with age, human beings become hardened: that is, they become more moderate and full of shame.<sup>273</sup> Consequently, they are less willing to sing as the young things sing in the chorus of the Muses, or even as the young adults sing in the Apollonian chorus. Wine is needed to encourage the older men to sing.<sup>274</sup> The Athenian describes wine as "a drug [*pharmakon*] that heals the austerity of old age."<sup>275</sup> It softens their hard disposition "so that it becomes more malleable, like iron when it is plunged into fire."<sup>276</sup> In this way, the souls of the drinkers become youthful and fiery and soft.<sup>277</sup> The rule of calculative reasoning (*logismos*) in them drops away in relaxation, and they become like children again, ready to be led by a wise helper who has the ability and knowledge to educate and mould souls.<sup>278</sup>

If learning is indeed anamnetic as Plato says, and if maturation involves a kind of hardening or forgetting of what we knew by participatory experience when we were young through "the feeling" or what Voegelin has called "originary experiences," then true education as the pursuit of wisdom (*philosophia*) would involve recapturing that originary, anamnetic awareness of what has been forgotten. In this regard, true education is not simply Musical or Apollonian in nature: neither can it simply be training for the body and harmonization of the appetites, nor can it be solely the cultivation and mastery of forms in the soul and dexterity with calculative reasoning. Rather, true education must also be Dionysian in its bent: that is, it must melt or enflame the soul so that it might be made malleable and released from the stringency of forms, just as the old men's souls must through intoxication become youthful and fiery and soft.

Near the end of Mitchell's novel, this Platonic insight is rendered wonderfully in the tannery of Milt Palmer, the town shoemaker.<sup>279</sup> Brian wanders into the shoemaker's shop to have his skates sharpened, and he overhears the town's two philosophers, Digby and Palmer, conversing about "Barkly's" idealism.<sup>280</sup> Hearing the two men discuss how it could possibly be that each man might be "inside" the other, how all of the world might be contained within each man, and that all of what *is* may in fact exist only inasmuch as

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<sup>273</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 665e.

<sup>274</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 666a.

<sup>275</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 666b.

<sup>276</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 666c.

<sup>277</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 671b.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> It is perhaps not at all coincidental that Milt Palmer is a "shoemaker," given the number of times that shoemakers are brought up in the philosophic discussions of Socrates in Plato's various dialogues.

<sup>280</sup> That is, George Berkeley.

everything is in the mind of God, Brian stares “fascinated” at the shoemaker. The philosophic discussion between the two men reminds Brian of “the feeling” that he had almost completely forgotten since childhood. He asks Palmer:

“You got a feeling?”

“Huh!”

“You – do you get a funny feeling – like – well – you wanted to know something, only you don’t know what you – have you got a feeling?”

Mr. Palmer looked down at the skate he held in his hand; he pursed his lips, then bent down. He came up with a jug. The sound of the cork drawn was reluctant on the silence; the jug gurgled. Milt Palmer wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“It’s like you are going to spill over,” said Brian, “and you’re all –”

“No,” said Mr. Palmer, “can’t say I got that in there, Kid. I got a hell of a lot, but – I guess that ain’t there no – more.” He said it, thought Brian, sadly.<sup>281</sup>

Brian finds himself able to recollect something of his childhood “feeling” through the briefest exposure to philosophic wondering and dialectic. Milt Palmer tries through philosophizing and drink to soften his hard and leathery soul unsuccessfully throughout the story; but Brian finds a better interlocutor in Digby, the town’s upper school teacher and principal. When Brian asks Digby to help him understand his earlier conversation with Palmer, Digby replies doubtfully, saying “I don’t think you’re old enough.” Nevertheless, Digby engages young Brian in philosophic discussion. When Brian submits too easily to Berkeley’s idealistic position, Digby remarks, “I was afraid so ... Don’t let it bother you.” Digby supposes at this point that Brian is too young and incapable of embarking in the struggle that is part and parcel of the philosophic enterprise and the pursuit of wisdom. But Brian recognizes that he has been engaged in something like philosophy ever since he can remember, and he responds with a burst of intense, heart-felt passion and honesty:

“But it does!” Brian looked up to the Principal’s face. “I’ve been trying to – to figure out for a long time and it won’t! Everything has to figure out, doesn’t it?”

“No – not everything.”

“But – if it doesn’t figure out –”

“Just some things.”

“I never told anybody – if I have to know about sense – sense –”

“You just keep on trying,” Digby said.

“I’ll know some day?”

Digby looked down at him without saying anything.

“I get the closest – I use to – when there’s a feeling. Is there a feeling?”

“Yes.”

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<sup>281</sup> Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, 310-311.

“Then I’m on the right track?”

“I think you are.”

“A person can do it by feeling.”

“That’s the way,” said Digby.

“Then, I’m on the right track.” Brian said it with conviction.<sup>282</sup>

Turning then to our question concerning the manner in which the modern classroom might be best modelled to encourage our “inner Brians,” it seems that we must find a way as educators to slow down the maturation process of our charges. When Brian approaches Digby in the final chapter of the novel after the death of his grandmother lamenting, “I don’t get the feeling any more. I – don’t think I will – get it any more,” Digby responds, “Perhaps ... you’ve grown up.”<sup>283</sup> If maturation involves the hardening of the soul so that it becomes inattentive to “originary experiences” or incapable of “the feeling” that Brian pursues throughout his childhood, then we must find a way to counteract the forgetting that is necessitated by current educational practice and learning environments. Like Plato’s Athenian Stranger, we must look for a suitable drug (*pharmakon*) to apply to the souls of our students – as well as to ourselves! – that will call to mind such recollections and that might console us as opposed to forever burying our awareness of the anamnetic.

Young Brian provides us two useful hints about what we must do in this regard. First, after his experience with the dewdrop on the leaf, Brian accompanies his family to church, hoping that in the solemnity and prayerful atmosphere of the church, such a feeling might arise once more: “Perhaps the feeling would come to him again in church. He would make it come, thought Brian as the family walked through the vestibule and into the main body of the church. Surely it would come, he told himself.”<sup>284</sup> However, much to his chagrin, the feeling does not come, and it cannot be forced to come. Many times I have heard it said by various teachers that students today are less reflective and less able to engage in deep experiences than in the past because they are no longer used to sitting still and listening attentively in places like churches, synagogues, and temples. It is their opinion that this lack of familiarity with silence spills over with negative effects into the classroom. This may be true. However, clearly by Brian’s example, although a church-like atmosphere lends itself to certain insightful observations, the peacefulness and

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<sup>282</sup> Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, 312-313.

<sup>283</sup> Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, 316.

<sup>284</sup> Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, 121.

prayerfulness of such an environment alone is not enough to bring about a recollection of the “originary experience” or “feeling.” Indeed, the church that Brian attends is filled with hateful, closed-minded, and bigoted people. We cannot suppose that a “wisdom environment” is necessarily a place of great depth of “feeling,” although certainly such “feelings” might arise more readily within such an atmosphere.

Brian makes a second observation about the arid periods of waiting for “the feeling.” His grandmother, sensing his restlessness and probably aware of his fidgeting (as children are apt to do in church) tries to set him still by offering him a peppermint candy:

He felt a nudge and turned to take the peppermint his grandmother held out to him. Then his mind was on the sweetness of the candy cooling under his tongue. You couldn’t get a feeling with a peppermint in your mouth, he thought.<sup>285</sup>

This is perhaps one of the most insightful comments in Mitchell’s book for the purpose of our study and its search to find a means to encourage the pursuit of wisdom in a modern school setting. Brian most happily takes the candy from his grandmother; modern-day students most happily take the “candy” offered to them as well. But rather than candy, Brian’s deepest heart seeks out “the feeling”; students too might also seek out such a feeling, or at least consolation for the loss of their “feeling” through its recapitulation in philosophy -- the pursuit of wisdom. Like Brian when he hears Palmer and Digby conversing, modern-day students too might indeed seek to rekindle a lost remembrance of such “feelings” through philosophy. And perhaps school itself might even be carefully organized to promote such a “wisdom atmosphere”; perhaps school might actually be designed to provide *schole* in which students and teachers could be free to seek out such happiness; schools might, if conscientiously organized, themselves be arranged to model the conditions necessary for *schole* to arise; under such conditions, schools – as true places of *schole* -- might become avenues for the cultivation and exploration of such philosophic “feelings.” However, any classroom in which students are constantly stimulated by the proverbial “peppermint stick” will *always* thwart and derail any hopes for philosophic investigation and the cultivation of *schole*.

The “peppermint stick” of the modern classroom can be comforting technological stimulation that diverts the mind from resting or prevents the development of deep, inward

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<sup>285</sup> Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, 123-124.

attention; or the peppermint stick might in fact be the promise that “feelings” of inter-connectedness with others and the world can only be experienced and cultivated technologically when the individual is plugged into the mainframe -- that human beings alone on a prairie without a cell phone or a computer cannot, on their own, and according to their own nature, achieve any real “feeling” for the world and one another.<sup>286</sup> Or again, the peppermint stick might be found in other non-technological practices that distract students from cultivating a genuine focus on questions and wondering for its own sake; these difficulties certainly arise whenever teachers are witness to students beginning to resist thinking about or seriously considering anything that “is not for marks.” Indeed, the hypertrophied social and political demand for “accountability” in education serves in this way to stultify and to thwart the development of a “wisdom atmosphere” by constantly diverting student attention away from “the feeling” of learning towards the reward (or punishment) of grades. Such is the demand that everything be assessed, that all student responses be graded and ranked and measured, that everything learned be taught according to a well-known and universally-accepted standard that is beyond dispute, that the classroom be a busy place of school-*work* and achievement rather than a place where human beings might learn how to enjoy their leisure, and that both students and teachers be held always to the highest degree of public “accountability.” Only by escaping from all of these “peppermint stick” diversions can philosophic attention be cultivated, can wisdom be sought, and can the consolation of philosophy as a means to recover the loss of their childhood “feeling” be provided to students.

#### **(vi) Boethius and “The Feeling” of Intelligence**

In his lonely prison cell, Boethius the philosopher (*philosophos*) *sees* his beloved, Lady Philosophy, and is consoled by the vision. As an exiled lover of beauty (*philokalos*),

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<sup>286</sup> Many of my students were transfixed by the recent science fiction film *Avatar* for these very reasons. In *Avatar*, technology is presented both as a destructive and a salvific force. It is depicted as a bane inasmuch as technology can be used to destroy the world when it is harnessed for the purpose of greed, lust, and domination. However, it is viewed as the only true mode of spiritual awareness, and the only real means for human beings towards a mystical union of the spirit. The race of Na’vi model this technological pretence to spiritual union by plugging themselves into nature through their own built-in organic patch cords. As part of our own classroom experiments, I have frequently asked students to try “making do” for a month (or even a week) without a cell phone or the internet. Students who embark in this bold experiment normally report that the experience was almost unbearable for them – that they felt terribly alone and alienated, and incapable of community or “feeling” without constant access to their cell phones and communication technologies.

Romeo seeks a vision of his own true love, Juliet. And as a young boy, Brian O'Connell *sees* many things in the depth of quietness on the Canadian prairies which brings with it a "feeling" that he is "going to be given something." In all three philosophically-rich narratives, the metaphor of sight plays an important and central role, for it is a kind of seeing that unites each of the characters with his beloved. I wish to close my discussion of Boethius' writings with a brief exposition of his enucleation of the various modes of cognition that are given articulation using the metaphor of "seeing." The discussion of these matters will be carried further when we explore Thomas Aquinas' writings on the taxonomic spectrum of cognition. Indeed, Thomas draws part of his own understanding of cognition from Boethius' philosophic writings in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, as we shall see.

In *The Consolation*, Lady Philosophy distinguishes four different ways in which people might "gaze" or "look upon" (*contuetur*) things. In order from least to greatest, these are sense (*sensus*), imagination (*imaginatio*), reason (*ratio*), and intelligence (*intellegentia*). Sense is distinguished from the other three modes of "looking" as examining a shape set in underlying matter, whereas imagination can "see" the shape alone without the matter; reason surpasses both sense and imagination by examining the specific form in question according to a universal. However, the eye (*oculus*) of intelligence is set higher still, "for passing beyond the process of going round the one whole, it looks with pure sight of the mind at the simple Form itself."<sup>287</sup> Boethius next points out that the higher power of comprehension embraces the lower, while the lower in no way rises to the higher, for "neither can sense attain to anything outside matter, nor does imagination look at universal specific forms, nor reason grasp the simple Form."<sup>288</sup> Intelligence alone distinguishes all things subject to that Form by "looking down from above"; only intelligence has the power to know reason's universal, imagination's shape, and what is materially sensible -- and it does so without using reason, imagination, or the senses to do so, but only "by the one stroke of the mind" (*illo uno ictu mentis*).<sup>289</sup>

Boethius next points out how "seeing" and therefore direct knowing extends beyond the human being to play a role in the lives of all lower organisms, as well as among

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<sup>287</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, V.iv.82-91.

<sup>288</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, V.iv.92-94.

<sup>289</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, V.iv.103.



divinities.<sup>290</sup> Whereas sense alone without any other kind of knowledge belongs to living things that do not move, imagination belongs to beasts that move, which seem already to have in them some disposition to flee or to seek out things. Reason, however, is a mode of seeing peculiar to human beings alone; unlike lower beings, we are thought by Boethius to be able to judge of particular forms according to a universal, but unlike divinities that surpass the strictly mortal nature of human existence, we only acquire intelligible truth from the variety of composite things, and because of our mortal nature, we must come into understanding of truth discursively. Our knowing as reasoning, discursive beings involves struggle and work; it is not all in one look and immediate. Divinities, by contrast, are not beholden to knowing what *is* through coming to see it in composite things; divine knowing does not proceed discursively through a process of coming into knowledge; rather, divine knowing is immediate and intuitive; it is a direct union of knower with what is known. Boethius writes: “Reason belongs only to human kind, as intelligence only to the divine.”<sup>291</sup> Inasmuch as human beings know in the fashion of intelligence, they transcend their own mortal nature and participate in the happiness of the gods.

This direct knowledge is the sort of knowing that engages Boethius in his prison cell when he sees Lady Philosophy. It is the sort of knowing that Romeo desires when he yearns for union with his Juliet; and it is also this direct, non-discursive knowing that Brian experiences in his “feeling.” Elsewhere in *The Consolation*, Boethius offers his readers a proportional statement in which he says that “reasoning is to understanding, as that which becomes is to that which is, as time is to eternity.”<sup>292</sup> Whereas reasoning (*ratio*) concerns the diverse, the mutable, and that which could be otherwise, understanding (*intellectus*) concerns what always *is*, what is not diverse, what is immutable, and what is beyond the power of discursive thought, only being graspable by that part of a human being that is not strictly mortal but participates in divinity. The exercise of *intellectus* is the highest modality of philosophy; it is, as Aristotle, says, “immortalizing” (*to athanatizein*). And yet *intellectus* is certainly not an elite activity, nor is the exercise of the intellect the sole

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<sup>290</sup> Here, Boethius appears to be following Aristotle’s divisions of soul into nutritive, appetitive, and rational components as discussed in *De Anima* II.ii-iii. See Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

<sup>291</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, V.v.17-18.

<sup>292</sup> “*Igitur uti est ad intellectum ratiocination, ad id quod est id quod gignitur, ad aeternitatem tempus.*” Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, IV.v.78-80.

prerogative of philosophers. Plato remarks in his *Phaedrus* that “lovers of beauty” (*philokalos*) also relish it, as do “musical souls” (*mousikou tinos*), or for that matter, souls of a “loving” (*erotikou*) or erotic nature.<sup>293</sup> How is it, then, that the exercise of the *intellectus* is so ubiquitous, and yet so little attended to and largely dismissed in modern education? How is it that our attention in schools has almost completely shifted to the cultivation of rationality and the development of the *ratio*? Why is it that our schools indulge in the discursive work and toil of reason without inviting students to enjoy the leisure of intellection? Ought not all human beings be taught and encouraged to “immortalize,” as Aristotle says? Need it be the case that school be forever as Romeo has it? Namely, that “Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books; / But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.” We will continue to explore these questions in light of what the remainder of the ancient and medieval writers in this section of our study have to say.

### 3. Moses Maimonides

#### (i) Maimonides on Why Mass Education of the Youth Should NOT Include Philosophy

The twelfth century Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides brings forth a very difficult challenge for my thesis, in which I attempt to argue that the pursuit of wisdom is not only appropriate in the modern public school, but of central importance, and that an atmosphere in which such a pursuit might be promoted ought to be of the greatest concern both to educators and policy makers. In Chapter XXXIII of his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides states:

You must know that it is very injurious to begin with this branch of philosophy, viz., Metaphysics; or to explain [at first] the sense of the similes occurring in prophecies, and interpret the metaphors which are employed in historical accounts and which abound in the writings of the Prophets. On the contrary, it is necessary to initiate the young and to instruct the less intelligent according to their comprehension; those who appear to be talented and to have capacity for the higher method of study, i.e., that based on proof and on true logical argument, should be gradually advanced towards perfection, either by tuition or by self-instruction. He, however, who begins with Metaphysics, will not only become confused in matters of religion, but will fall into complete infidelity. I compare such a person to an infant fed with wheaten bread,

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<sup>293</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 248d.

meat and wine; it will undoubtedly die, not because such food is naturally unfit for the human body, but because of the weakness of the child, who is unable to digest the food, and cannot derive benefit from it. The same is the case with the true principles of science. They were presented in enigmas, clad in riddles, and taught by all wise men in the most mysterious way that could be devised, not because they contain some secret evil, or are contrary to the fundamental principles of the Law (as fools think who are only philosophers in their own eyes), but because of the incapacity of man to comprehend them at the beginning of his studies: only slight allusions have been made to them to serve for the guidance of those who are capable of understanding them. These sciences were, therefore, called Mysteries (*sodoth*), and Secrets of the Law (*sitre torah*).<sup>294</sup>

In this passage, Maimonides contends first that young people are not only unfit for philosophy, but that philosophy is unfit for young people. Children lack the ability to digest the unadorned truth that philosophy seeks; in order to make truth palatable to them – that they might be able to receive it and grow from its influence – it must be told to them by means of story, enigma, and riddle. In Maimonides' view, young people require myth rather than philosophy; they ought to receive schooling in the stories, prophecies, orthodoxy, and traditions of their surrounding society so that the order that is prescribed in such stories might inform and order their own inner lives and actions, which in turn might later serve as the basis for more perfect philosophic studies where aptitude and interest is shown. A solid foundation in cultural myth and religious tradition is the necessary groundwork for philosophy; to try philosophizing before mythologizing is to put the proverbial cart before the horse, in Maimonides' view.

A second contention suggested by this passage is that youth who are too early exposed to the truth that such tales are metaphors, or that orthodox teachings may themselves be made subject to argumentation and dialectical scrutiny become confused and full of infidelity. Premature exposure to dialectic and argumentation breeds in young people a kind of scepticism and contempt for all tradition. Nothing spoken to such youths as true is accepted as true. Truth itself becomes subject to doubt, since every truth purported by their elders appears to fall victim to criticism and argumentation. Where the processes of "metaphysical" inquiry are engaged in too early by a student, the end result is that no teaching has time to abide or to mould the inner life of such a student; indeed, such a

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<sup>294</sup> See Chapter 33 of Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 43-44.

student lacks any ability whatsoever to be taught inasmuch as he is bereft of docility (*docilitas*). On “docility,” James Schall writes:

It means the virtue of being able to be taught. The very name of this striking virtue implies that we must at some point choose to be taught. Only the proud cannot and will not be taught. Pride means, quite literally, that we are closed to everything but ourselves. If we are proud we allow ourselves to learn nothing because we think we already know everything, or perhaps that only what we know is worth knowing. This is the worst of human conditions. If sloth is the cardinal sin that refuses to examine our purpose in this world, pride is that cardinal sin at the heart of all other sin and disorder of the soul. It wants not to discover what is worth knowing, but positively to decide whether anything is worth knowing at all.<sup>295</sup>

Maimonides does not simply warn against introducing the young prematurely to metaphysics; he also writes that “we should not instruct the multitude in pure metaphysics, or begin with describing to them the true essence of things, or with showing them that a thing must be as it is, and cannot be otherwise.”<sup>296</sup> Neither children nor the multitude of individuals – i.e., those who receive schooling in our public school system – ought to be exposed to philosophy!

Maimonides gives five reasons for not encouraging the broadest base of people to philosophize. First, he writes that “the subject itself is difficult, subtle and profound,” such that only the few could ever hope to understand any of it. Second, he remarks that “the intelligence of man is at first insufficient; for he is not endowed with perfection at the beginning, but at first possesses perfection only *in potentia*, not in fact.” In other words, just because all human beings have “potential” does not mean that their potential will be realized.<sup>297</sup> “There are many things that obstruct the path to perfection,” writes Maimonides, and sadly very few people have either sufficient preparation or leisure to learn all that is necessary in order to develop that perfection which they have *in potentia*. Third, preparatory studies for “metaphysics” are of long duration. “Man, in his natural desire to reach the goal, finds them frequently too wearisome, and does not wish to be troubled by them.” Simply put, the majority of people do not have the wherewithal to philosophize, or to seek out wisdom to its full extent. Fourth, Maimonides cites the “physical constitution of man” as an impediment to philosophizing. He points out that “it has been proven that moral

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<sup>295</sup> James Schall, *The Life of the Mind: On the Joys and Travails of Thinking* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 117.

<sup>296</sup> See Chapter 33 of Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* Chapter, 44.

<sup>297</sup> Indeed, the truth of such a statement is immediately obvious to any schoolteacher.

conduct is a preparation for intellectual progress, and that only a man whose character is pure, calm and steadfast, can attain to intellectual perfection.” However, “many men are so constituted that all perfection is impossible”; some are too passionate and full of a wantonness that is simply a part of their make-up; others are either too spirited, or else too little spirited, while yet others are too full of levity or else too quick to anger and rashness. Fifth, Maimonides writes that it is in the nature of human existence to need to toil and struggle and work: “Man is disturbed in his intellectual occupation by the necessity of looking at the material wants of the body, especially if the necessity of providing for wife and children is superadded,” and “much more so if he seeks superfluities in addition to his ordinary wants.”<sup>298</sup> With all of these factors in mind, Maimonides advises against introducing philosophy to the multitude as though it would serve them beneficially in any way.

If Maimonides’ insightful warnings were not enough to stymie my thesis altogether, then we must also admit that he is in the very best of company in his cautions against “premature” philosophizing. As with the other ancient authors in our study, Maimonides too makes the strongest warnings about “teaching philosophy” to children, about instructing the young in metaphysics, and encouraging them to pursue wisdom. As we have seen, Aristotle thinks children deficient not only in life experiences, but also unable to grasp the first things (*archai*) that are needed to proceed in philosophic discussions.<sup>299</sup> Also like Maimonides, in Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates asks whether or not one ought to take great precaution “not to let them [young people] taste of arguments while they are young?” Socrates says to Glaukon:

I suppose you aren’t unaware that when lads get their first taste of them, they misuse them as though it were play, always using them to contradict; and imitating those men by whom they are refuted, they themselves refute others, like puppies enjoying pulling and tearing with argument at those who happen to be near.<sup>300</sup>

Socrates here points out that the “techniques” of philosophic discourse such as dialectical inquiry, forensic rhetoric and elenchus might themselves be used un-philosophically and, in

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<sup>298</sup> See Chapter 34 of Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 44-49.

<sup>299</sup> We dealt with and responded to this accusation effectively in our earlier discussion of Aristotle, however.

<sup>300</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 539b.

fact, eristically as a tool of sophists.<sup>301</sup> In his own day, young people who saw Socrates dialoguing with well-respected “pillars” of the community, with their fathers, and with politicians took a certain delight in watching those men claiming to know what they did not know exposed in their ignorance. Socrates’ reasoning for doing so was not eristical but rather sprang from his own genuine desire to know the truth. However, the power of the “techniques” of speech to undermine and to destroy propositions certainly held a great deal of potential for enjoyment and abuse in the hands of youth who did not properly understand the higher purpose of such investigations. Perhaps it is for this reason that Plato depicts education in philosophy as not even set to begin until the age of fifty.<sup>302</sup>

James Schall echoes these precautions against premature philosophizing in his own writings, citing not only Plato’s authority, but also the philosopher Leo Strauss’ observation that “the greatest minds contradict one another regarding the most important matters.”<sup>303</sup> In Schall’s view, such philosophical disputes can and do lead to scepticism,<sup>304</sup> for if the “greatest minds” cannot agree on what is true, then maybe seeking after the truth is pointless? Maybe there is no truth? Eric Voegelin too appears to have serious doubts about the wisdom of encouraging young students to philosophize as part of a “liberal education.” First, it is by no means obvious that liberal education – and therefore philosophy as the most liberal of all the sciences -- should be extended to everybody, for not everybody wants such an education or is able to digest it. This observation seems to be supported by Socrates’ comment in the *Republic* that “no forced study abides in a soul.”<sup>305</sup> In some of his unpublished notes, Voegelin remarks that “[t]he various character types of men predispose some to receive a liberal education, and others, probably the vast majority, not to receive it. From the mere fact that liberal education is something desirable, does not follow that every human being appreciates it.” Second, in Voegelin’s view, it is a misconception that liberal education can be extended to everybody. He rightly observes that “[l]iberal education has to be dispensed by a teaching staff,” and that “here again we are faced by the problem that a

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<sup>301</sup> Eristic is that form of verbal quarrel that seeks to destroy and to undermine whatever is said regardless of its truth-content. Eristic has its root meaning in *eris*, the Greek word for strife, quarrel, debate, contention, or even battle. Eris, or Strife, was also considered to be a goddess in the pre-Olympian Greek pantheon.

<sup>302</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 540a.

<sup>303</sup> See Leo Strauss, “‘What is Liberal Education?’ An Address Delivered at the Tenth Annual Graduation Exercises of the Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults. June 6, 1959,” in *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1968) <http://www.ditext.com/strauss/liberal.html> (accessed June 10, 2011).

<sup>304</sup> See Schall, *The Life of the Mind*, 164.

<sup>305</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 536e.

first-rate teaching staff is not available in any numbers that we should like to have.”<sup>306</sup> So from Voegelin’s remarks, we acknowledge the problems that not everybody is interested in philosophizing, and that few teachers are “qualified” to lead their students in philosophic investigations.

## (ii) A Defence of Philosophizing with Young People

Despite these considerable and reasonable warnings by men of far greater wisdom, I wish still to argue that a broader enticement to philosophize in our public schools would be beneficial, and that the development of a “wisdom atmosphere” wherein both students and teachers might begin to explore and to investigate the world and themselves philosophically could only be an improvement upon current educational practices. Rather than contending, as Maimonides seems to suggest, that premature exposure to philosophy destroys the “docility” of students, I would argue from my own classroom experiences that philosophizing with students can actually have the opposite effect, rendering them more docile. Most school teachers will assent to the truth of the observation that teenage high school students by and large already think they know everything;<sup>307</sup> many of them enter our classes supremely unwilling to listen and closed to learning. Such young students already lack *docilitas*; they are already full of the pride that Schall warns against; but they certainly *have not* been brought to this state by exposure to philosophy. However, philosophy can be a way out of such a state. Philosophy can be enjoyable for students; it can break through the monotony of the school day in which everything is predictable and conventional and “known” – even the sorts of answers demanded by teachers and in their tests are “canned” or pre-determined, and have pre-set answers that students simply need to discover in order to be assessed favourably; philosophic questioning, however, strikes students as something wholly different and of a different order of interest; students can be led by philosophic questioning to consider their own convictions and opinions; occasionally they find themselves realizing that they did not know what they thought they knew. Philosophy can be the royal road to self-knowledge in this regard. The power of philosophizing with young people is that it may serve as a counterweight to human pride rather than as an

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<sup>306</sup> Eric Voegelin, “The Fate of Liberal Education,” Hoover Institution Archives, Box 47, Folder ID: 5.

<sup>307</sup> A similar adage has been reproduced on many signs in many homes of many parents ever since I was a boy: “Teenagers: Leave home now while you still know everything!”

augmentation of it. In this regard, philosophy serves as a force for good counsel in the lives of young people and as a check on youthful *hybris*, much as Gabriel Marcel depicted wisdom to be in our review of modern views about wisdom and wisdom's pursuit. At least in my experience as a high school teacher, I have *never* seen philosophy become a corrupting force in the lives of my students. Rather, it has always struck me that our conversations in class have been enriched and enlivened, and that learning becomes more enjoyable when the spirit of philosophy overtakes us.

It is certainly the case that Socrates appears to warn against introducing young people too early to philosophy in Plato's *Republic*, and I have reproduced above some of the most suggestive passages to that effect. However, as anyone who loves Plato knows, the dialogues are notoriously difficult to interpret. And the discussion of education and the place of philosophy in education as it is discussed in the *Republic* takes place in a much larger and complex set of hypothetical circumstances in a "city in speech," all the factors of which may not be fully grasped in the stark assumption that Plato says it is simply wrong to philosophize with youth. Indeed, as we remarked in our earlier commentary on Aristotle, if either Plato or Socrates truly supposed that it was wrong to philosophize with youth, then why would Socrates spend so much time philosophizing throughout the Platonic dialogues *not* with the very old, or the middle-aged, or even with mature men, but with the *neanioi*: the "young men" who were of the age to have just begun to grow facial hair? In fact, some of the dialogues, such as the *Lysis*, are conducted with *paides*, or children not yet having reached puberty. Moreover, if philosophizing with the youth was such a forbidden and ill-advised activity, then it seems downright bizarre that Socrates would have continued in the activity of speaking with young people after his manner even to the point of being put to death as "a corrupter of the youth."<sup>308</sup> It is in light of my own experiences as a teacher of young people, as well as in consideration of Socrates' own love for young people that this thesis advises against the cautions of Maimonides and so many other wise men. I persist in my contention that philosophizing has an important role in a modern educational setting, and that we must seriously consider what atmospheric factors must be in place in order to nurture its potential through the cultivation of *scholē*. Indeed, Socrates himself claims in his own defence speech against the charge of "corrupting the youth" that he has never been

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<sup>308</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 24b.



anyone's teacher.<sup>309</sup> Certainly in a school setting, teachers teach. But when the spirit of philosophy takes over, we speak not as teachers, but as fellow learners and inquirers – as friends in pursuit of wisdom.

### (iii) Maimonides on Wisdom

In the final chapter of his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides discusses the meaning of the term wisdom (*hokmah*). He remarks that the Hebrew word is used of four different things. First, “it denotes the knowledge of those truths which lead to the knowledge of God”; this is the sort of wisdom that we have thus far been exploring as the whole of wisdom, and as the true object of all philosophic inquiry. Second, “the expression *hokmah* denotes knowledge of any workmanship.” As we have already seen, Aristotle discussed this sort of wisdom as a masterful knowledge in a particular discipline, trade, or study. Third, *hokmah* “is also used of the acquisition of moral principles.” Such virtuous individuals can be said to be “wise” despite being “unschooled” in argument or unable to render an account of what they know as good and righteous. And finally, *hokmah* implies “the notion of cunning and subtlety.”<sup>310</sup> Here, the term is used pejoratively of one who is sly and able to manipulate others successfully to acquire the objects of desire.

Maimonides returns in this final chapter to a discussion we have reported above concerning the importance of myth and tradition in relation to wisdom and wisdom's pursuit. As we have already seen, he holds that knowledge and familiarity with one's own mythical, religious, and cultural traditions must precede any forays into philosophic exegesis.<sup>311</sup> Speaking of his own cultural and religious traditions in the torah, Maimonides remarks that “a person that has a true knowledge of the whole Law is called wise in a double sense.” On the one hand, he is wise because “the Law instructs him in the highest truths.” On the other hand, he is considered wise because it “teaches him good morals.” But as the truths contained in the Law are taught by way of tradition, not by a philosophical

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<sup>309</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 33a.

<sup>310</sup> See Chapter 54 of Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 393.

<sup>311</sup> Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper makes a similar claim about the importance of “revelation” as a foundation for philosophizing. He writes that “all philosophizing rests in an interpretation of the world that has been passed down to it as something ‘always already’ communicated in advance and that this tradition ignites philosophizing.” In his view, “[w]ithout the pre-existing counterpoint of a somehow illuminative divine wisdom that offers itself to man as a gift prior to any intellectual effort on his part ... philosophy ... is not conceivable at all.” See Pieper, “What Does it Mean to Philosophize?” in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 69-70.

method, Maimonides writes that “the knowledge of the Law, and the acquisition of ‘true wisdom,’ are treated in the books of the Prophets and in the words of our Sages as two different things”:

[R]eal wisdom demonstrates by proof those truths which Scripture teaches us by way of tradition. It is to this kind of wisdom, which proves the truth of the Law, that Scripture refers when it extols wisdom, and speaks of the high value of this perfection, and of the consequent paucity of men capable of acquiring it.<sup>312</sup>

In this regard, there is a kind of wisdom that all who become schooled in their own cultural traditions embody when they live in those traditions and when their actions are informed by a correct understanding of those traditions. However, there is also a higher sort of wisdom than this whereby one is able to render an account of what one knows from tradition. The former sort of wisdom must precede the latter chronologically. But only this latter, higher sort of wisdom, wherein the one who is wise can give an account and render “true metaphysical opinions as regards God,” constitutes the highest perfection of the human being, according to Maimonides.<sup>313</sup>

Maimonides’ writings are relevant to our current study concerning the nature of wisdom and its pursuit in modern-day public schools because he would have us wonder about the relevance of our own traditions. Many teachers and parents suppose that education must always be up-to-date and modern – that there is no real or legitimate place for old, let alone ancient or (gasp!) religious texts in public school curricula. Maimonides’ observations would have us challenge these suppositions. As an English teacher, I have frequently found it frustrating and disappointing that fewer and fewer students are familiar with basic stories that are foundational to “Western civilization.” So many literary allusions and metaphors lose their power to provoke thought where students have remained uneducated about even the most basic Bible stories, for instance. Certainly, wisdom is not the same thing as having a grab-bag of literary and Biblical quotes at one’s disposal; but it seems reasonable to question whether or not – if we are indeed serious about fostering

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<sup>312</sup> See Chapter 54 of Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 394.

<sup>313</sup> There are, says Maimonides, four kinds of perfection. The first kind, the lowest, is perfection in regards to property. The second kind includes “the perfection of the shape, constitution, and form of man’s body, the utmost evenness of temperaments, and the proper order and strength of his limbs.” The third kind involves “moral perfection, the highest degree of excellence in man’s character.” This moral excellence is ranked only second best because it is necessary and useful only “when man comes in contact with others.” The fourth kind, being the highest, is “the true perfection of man.” See Chapter 54 of Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* Chapter, 394-395.

wisdom in our schools and creating a “wisdom atmosphere” that might encourage philosophic thinking – part of allowing for the possibility of the “higher wisdom” of which Maimonides speaks is not laying the basic foundational structure in which its lower form (that is, the knowledge of one’s own cultural traditions) might thrive.

#### **4. Thomas Aquinas**

In our discussions concerning the nature of wisdom and its pursuit in the context of education, the writings of Thomas Aquinas are valuable not only as an extension of Aristotle’s thoughts, but also as a departure from them. On the one hand, Aristotle is praised most highly by Thomas as “*the Philosopher*”; on the other hand, Thomas nonetheless struggles against Aristotle in order to subsume his Greek philosophic enterprise of pursuing wisdom into a Christian theological understanding. Most significantly, in order that Christian faith might be deemed necessary and that Greek philosophy should be seen as deficient, Thomas’ Christian philosophizing requires him to demote the Greek sense of *sophia* from its place of esteem as the highest of all virtues; he does so by re-articulating Aristotle’s discussion of wisdom (*sapientia*), subdividing *sapientia*, on the one hand, into a non-Christian and strictly human knowledge of divine things according to the natural intellectual powers given to human beings to pursue such things; and on the other hand, *sapientia*-proper becomes a gift (*donum*) arising from the presence of the three theological virtues of faith (*fides*), hope (*spes*), and love or charity (*caritas*). Both the moral and the intellectual virtues – along with their respective yet lower forms of wisdom, *prudentia* and *sapientia* -- are made subordinate to the new “cap-stone” virtues which bring with them a form of wisdom unavailable outside of the Christian faith.

##### **(i) Happiness as the Ultimate End for Human Beings**

In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas asks whether or not human life has an ultimate goal (*ultimus finis*). On the one hand, Thomas offers several reasons to deny such an ultimate end. These arguments are similar in tone to those of John Dewey, already studied in a previous chapter of this thesis. Generally, Thomas provides arguments that aims stretch out indefinitely, that all of our aims may in fact simply be provisional rather than final, and that there can be a series of aims without limit. However, Thomas replies to these

contentions that “to maintain an indefinite is to deny it the nature of good which means being an end. The prospect of going on indefinitely is tantamount to this. Hence the need of positing an ultimate end.” In other words, whenever there is intention, it is the prospect of the goal in mind that originally moves desire; take this away, and desire would be moved by nothing. Were there no ultimate end, nothing would be desired, no activity would be finished, no desire would come to rest: “Were there no first step to the end, no one would start doing anything or make up his mind, but instead would deliberate interminably.”<sup>314</sup>

Another question important for our study is asked by Thomas: “Is there one ultimate end for all human beings?” This question is a particularly difficult one to answer honestly and reasonably in today’s school setting, where a positive response would likely smack of intolerance, undemocratic sentiment, and be condemned as contrary to the principles of a modern pluralistic society. Besides, there are good reasons, says Thomas, to suppose that there is not one ultimate end for all human beings. For instance, Thomas notes that, were the end the same for all, “men would not choose diverse walks of life, whereas in point of fact they do.” Empirical observation of human behaviour in the real world lends itself to dismissing the strange notion that there is one final end that all human beings share in common. The actions of human beings are individual affairs. Moreover, “though men agree in their common specific nature, they are quite diverse in their personal proclivities. Consequently their chief aims are not identical.” In other words, although we are all human, this does not mean that we all share the same goals or interests in our actions. However, Thomas overcomes these objections simply by stating “all agree in desiring that ultimate which is happiness (*beatitudo*).”<sup>315</sup> Indeed, elsewhere in the *Summa*, Thomas is emphatic that it is beyond the capacity of human beings to will *not* to be happy.<sup>316</sup> Thomas explains

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<sup>314</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 16 entitled *Purpose and Happiness* (Cambridge, England : Blackfriars, 1964), 1a2ae.1,4.

<sup>315</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.1,7.

<sup>316</sup> Thomas writes that happiness can be considered in two ways. First, he considers the general notion of happiness, in which case every human being desires happiness. The idea here is that happiness consists in “the perfect good,” and since good is the object of the will, the perfect good of human beings is that which entirely satisfies our will. Consequently to desire happiness is nothing else than to desire that one’s will be satisfied, and this everyone desires. Second, happiness may be discussed according to the multifarious specific notions that people have of it, and in the multitude of ways in which people seek it out. It is in this second way that all human beings do not know of happiness; they neither know what it is nor where it is found. Consequently, in this respect, not all desire it. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.5.8. Also see *Summa Theologica* 1ae2ae.13,6, where Thomas discusses choice, stating that “of necessity a man wants to be happy and cannot

that there are two ways we can speak of the *ultimus finis*: namely, according to its meaning, and according to its mode of realization. As for the first, all human beings, says Thomas, are in agreement, “because all desire their complete fulfillment, which ... is what the final end means.” As for the second, however, not all of us are in agreement; “for some want riches, others a life of pleasure, others something else.”<sup>317</sup> Part of the project of the educator, it would seem, is to direct human beings towards a better understanding of what precisely is their *ultimus finis*; as we have seen from Aristotle – and as we shall see also in Thomas’ writings – this knowledge of the ultimate end is wisdom, or *sapientia*.

## (ii) Gradations of Happiness?

Following Aristotle, Thomas discusses happiness (*felicitas*) as “an activity in accordance with consummate virtue.” Happiness involves the perfection, the realization, or “full expansion” of our being: “Each thing is perfect inasmuch as it is actual, for what is potential is still imperfect. Happiness, therefore, must go with man’s culminating actuality,” and this means his being active.<sup>318</sup> As far as I can tell, the two Latin words for happiness, *felicitas* and *beatitudo*, are used interchangeably by Thomas. However, the word *beatitudo*<sup>319</sup> has a very specific and higher meaning also employed by Thomas, for it denotes “the ultimate perfection of human nature.” According to Thomas, there is a twofold ultimate perfection of our rational nature: “The first is one which it can procure of its own natural power; and this is in a measure called beatitude or happiness.” Following this first sense of the term, inasmuch as we exercise, realize, or actualize our potential as rational beings, we are enabled to enjoy a modicum of *felicitas*. Interestingly, Thomas equates this first sense of happiness with Aristotle’s notions of both *sophia* and *theoria*. As we have seen, rightly understood, the Greek philosophic understanding does in fact attain to *beatitudo*; indeed, Thomas certainly admits this when he writes that it is “hence that Aristotle says that man’s ultimate happiness consists in his most perfect contemplation, whereby in this life he can behold the best intelligible object; and that is God.” However, even though Thomas recognizes that Aristotle knew and could render an account of

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will not to be happy or to be unhappy.” In his view, “choice is of the means, not the end; it is about particular good, not the perfect good, which is happiness.”

<sup>317</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.1,7.

<sup>318</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.3,2.

<sup>319</sup> According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary, the word *beatitudo* was first coined by Cicero.

*beatitudo* and its pursuit in *theoria*, there is nonetheless a tension in his writings that would render the Greek experience of happiness (*eudaimonia*) secondary or subordinate to a higher, Christian possibility. Eager to differentiate this higher possibility, Thomas writes “above this happiness [i.e., the happiness of contemplating God, or *theoria*] there is still another, which we look forward to in the future, whereby ‘we shall see God as He is.’ This is beyond the nature of every created intellect.”<sup>320</sup> Here, Thomas appears to speak of the hope (*spes*) that Christians, unlike the Greek philosophers, cultivate for complete enjoyment of God in a Hereafter;<sup>321</sup> and yet, as Blackfriar Brian Davies remarks, there is also an implied denial in Thomas’ writings that Aristotelian *theoria*, in its pursuit of wisdom, truly achieves its mark of attaining to the *Ariston*:

For Aquinas, then, human happiness, properly speaking, is the vision of God. It is the cleaving to God as the mind’s all-fulfilling object. This, of course, means that his view of moral action is hardly a secular one. His interpreters have sometimes suggested otherwise on the ground that what he says on this topic is an endorsement of Aristotle, and the suggestion is not entirely silly. His views on moral action are, in general, similar to those of Aristotle, who also speaks of a goal of human action which is perfective and fulfilling. He calls it *eudaimonia* ... Yet, while Aristotle concentrates on *eudaimonia* as the ultimate goal for people, Aquinas thinks in terms of *beatitudo*, for which there is no strict equivalent in Aristotle. Aristotle’s teaching on human action makes no mention of God (as Aquinas understands the word ‘God’), while *beatitudo* involves knowing and enjoying (loving) God. ‘Complete happiness (*beatitudo*),’ Aquinas writes, ‘requires the mind to come through to the essence itself of the first cause. And so it will have its fulfilment by union with God as its object.’<sup>322</sup>

For Thomas, then, the Greek manner of pursuing *sapientia* is deemed insufficient, since the most it can do is perfect the intellectual nature of human beings (hence, wisdom or *sapientia* as an intellectual virtue), but it does not (and cannot) rise or aspire to the highest wisdom in God Himself.

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<sup>320</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a.62.1.

<sup>321</sup> This formulation is not, strictly speaking, correct; for “hope” in having the future Supreme Good in God, or *spes*, is not as “perfect” as actually having or being possessed by that Good. This is, in fact, why Thomas locates the supreme happiness for human beings in the intellect whose function it is “to behold” rather than in the will whose function it is “to desire”; for desire implies a not-yet-possessing, whereas “beholding,” *theoria*, or *contemplatio*, suggests a union of what is seen with what sees. But then, this difficulty also renders what Thomas says about the “second,” more perfect form of happiness problematic; for isn’t the first form, *contemplatio* (as the possession of what one sees) more perfect than the hoping for such possession implied by the second? Perhaps the only way to reconcile this difficulty is to say that, for Thomas, the truest beatitude only comes after death, when *contemplatio* is not intermittent and imperfect as it is in this life, but rather sustained and eternal, being in everlasting union with God’s divine substance.

<sup>322</sup> Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 230.

### (iii) The Moral Virtues

In order to grasp Thomas' understanding of what is *sapientia* it is important to situate his writing about wisdom within the larger theological psychology of human nature that he articulates in the *Summa Theologica*. In his view, *sapientia* is a virtue (*virtus*). According to Thomas, all virtue is a kind of good habit (*habitus*)<sup>323</sup> – a *habitus* being “that by virtue of which we hold ourselves well or ill in regard to passions or actions.”<sup>324</sup> Thomas defines virtue as “a good quality of mind by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us.”<sup>325</sup> Next, following Aristotle, Thomas subdivides the virtues into moral and intellectual categories. Thomas makes this division on the grounds that, in human beings there are two principles of human actions: the intellect and the appetites. Therefore, every human virtue must be a perfection of one of these two principles; intellectual virtue perfects either the speculative or the practical intellect, whereas moral virtue perfects the appetitive part of the human being.<sup>326</sup>

As these divisions suggest, moral virtues are excellences in the lower, appetitive aspects of the soul; they involve hitting a kind of “mean” between excess and deficiency with regard to the appetites and emotions,<sup>327</sup> whereas intellectual virtues are not concerned with hitting such a mean, but rather with developing excellences in the intellect. Among the moral virtues are numbered prudence (*prudentia*), justice (*iustitia*), fortitude or bravery (*fortitudo*), and temperance (*temperantia*). These four are named the “cardinal” or “principle” virtues inasmuch as they are “concerned with rectitude of appetite.”<sup>328</sup> The cardinal virtues are themselves ranked according to the “nobility” of their object. Practical wisdom, or *prudentia*, for instance, is regarded most highly among the moral virtues; it is apportioned a special status among them inasmuch as it is also an intellectual virtue, perfective of the practical intellect. Thomas maintains that it shares this dual status since the moral virtues are said to set the good ends for our activities (based on their foundation

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<sup>323</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.55.1. Here, Thomas appears to be following Cicero in calling virtue “a habit like a second nature in accord with reason.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.47.7. Note b.

<sup>324</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a.83.2.

<sup>325</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.55.4.

<sup>326</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.58.3.

<sup>327</sup> Thomas speaks of moral virtue as “keeping to a mean decided by reason in the way that a wise man would so decide it.” See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.47.7.

<sup>328</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.61.1.

in *synderesis*<sup>329</sup>), but *prudentia* is necessary in order for any of these ends to be attained since it is concerned with finding the appropriate means of their achievement. It is for this reason that prudence is said to be the necessary condition for all the moral virtues, just as the moral virtues are necessary for prudence to arise. Because of the co-dependent nature of prudence and the moral virtues, of means in relation to their ends, Thomas also states that anyone who has one of the moral virtues necessarily has all the others as well.<sup>330</sup>

Among the cardinal excellences, practical wisdom, or *prudentia*, surpasses the other moral virtues by the nobility of its object in perfecting the practical reasoning as opposed to perfecting merely the appetitive power. So too does justice (*iustitia*) surpass the other moral virtues by reason of its object, which concerns the will<sup>331</sup> and the ordering of the rational appetite, whereas all the other moral virtues concern the ordering of the passions, or lower appetites.<sup>332</sup> Among the remaining cardinal virtues, courage or *fortitudo* ranks next, centred as it is in the irascible part of the passionate or appetitive soul; it is this virtue that subjects the “appetitive movement” to reason in matters of life and death, and it is for this reason that courage holds “first place” among those moral virtues that are about the passions, “but is subordinate to justice.” Finally, temperance or *temperantia*, being in the concupiscible

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<sup>329</sup> *Synderesis* is a term peculiar to scholastic philosophy. It signifies a kind of “moral sense,” or an instinctive understanding of the first principles of practice; it is not a special moral faculty, but a *habitus* of the practical reason. Put another way, it is a kind of naturally-present reason that determines beforehand the ends of moral virtue. That is, without *synderesis*, moral virtue would not “know” the good ends that are naturally its object. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.47.6. *Synderesis* seems to be akin on the practical plane to the way that we know axioms or first principles of thought in the theoretical plane, which are just given to everyone; elsewhere, Thomas describes *synderesis* like our instinctual grasp of right and wrong and what we ought to do. *Synderesis* is what always directs us towards the good. For this reason, Thomas doesn’t suppose *synderesis* to be a “power” (*potentia*), since powers can be used for good or ill; hence *synderesis* must be a *habitus*. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a.79.12. Thomas notes that *synderesis* is closely associated with conscience (*conscientia*), except that he speaks about *synderesis* as a *habitus*, whereas conscience he calls an “act” (*actus*). See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a.79.13.

<sup>330</sup> Thomas clarifies this point by speaking about moral virtue in two senses: “Imperfect moral virtue, temperance for instance, or fortitude, is nothing but an inclination in us to do some kind of good deed,” and if we take moral virtues in this way, they are not connected, since one person may be brave but not liberal, or liberal but not chaste. However, “the perfect moral virtue is a habit that inclines us to do a good deed well; and if we take moral virtues in this way, we must say that they are connected.” A virtue cannot be perfect as a virtue if isolated from the others. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.65.1.

<sup>331</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.66.1.

<sup>332</sup> “Justice is the most excellent of all the moral virtues, as being most akin to reason. This is made evident by considering its subject and its object: its subject, because this is the will, and the will is the rational appetite ... its object or matter, because it is about operations, whereby man is set in order not only in himself, but also in regard to another.” See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.66.4.



part of the passionate or appetitive soul, ranks last among the principle virtues, concerned as it is with lower matters of food and sex.<sup>333</sup>

#### (iv) The Intellectual Virtues and their Relation to the Moral Virtues

Having delineated Thomas' understanding of the ordering of the moral virtues, we can now more clearly see what relation these lower virtues bear to the intellectual virtues, and to both *sapientia* and *prudentia* in particular. The intellectual virtues are themselves subdivided into practical and theoretical categories; among the practical intellectual virtues are included practical wisdom or *prudentia*, and art (*ars*). Among the theoretical virtues of the intellect are numbered theoretical wisdom or *sapientia*, understanding (*intellectus*), and science (*scientia*).<sup>334</sup> As we have seen, practical wisdom or *prudentia* is shown to be essentially an intellectual virtue, but it has something in common with the moral virtues because it is right reasoning about the means to achieve the ends dictated by them with regard to their objects in the passionate or appetitive part of the soul. Thomas also stresses that, just as *prudentia* cannot be without the moral virtues, neither can the moral virtues be without the intellectual virtues of prudence and understanding. However, Thomas also states that the moral virtues do not require the theoretical virtues of *sapientia* or *scientia*, nor do they require the practical intellectual virtue of *ars*.<sup>335</sup> The idea that *sapientia*, *scientia*, and *ars* are unnecessary for the existence of moral virtue has a ring of truth to it

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<sup>333</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.66.4.

<sup>334</sup> I have found these categories difficult oftentimes because of their parallel meanings. For instance, art is here a virtue, and yet art is also a term we use generally for making. Science is here called a virtue, but elsewhere science is a discipline of the mind or a kind of specialized study that certainly need not result in any sort of virtue (the atomic bomb, for instance, is the product of scientific study). And *intellectus*, as we have already seen, is a word used to denote a particular form of non-discursive or intuitive thinking (much like the height of *noesis* for the Greeks), but it seems more like a power of the soul than a virtue *per se*. I am not entirely certain about how these ambiguities affect Thomas' overall understanding of the intellectual virtues, but it seems that by rendering them equivocally, the pagan "virtues" may be had, but possessed in the wrong way, and therefore are in need of the truly "Christian" or theological virtues for direction. But this re-organization of the intellectual virtues throws me into further perplexity, because if the intellectual virtues are truly virtues, then how could they be had "in the wrong way"? I am not sure if this difficulty is due to my own misunderstanding of Thomas, or if it is simply the result of a confusion or ambiguity that is necessarily a part of Thomas' theological anthropology and psychological understanding.

<sup>335</sup> Thomas' rationale here is that moral virtues, as the basis for making good choices, require not only that the good end of action be found, but also a good means towards that end (hence, the need for *prudentia*). In addition to *prudentia*, understanding (*intellectus*) is also required for good choices, since *intellectus* enables us to intuit the self-evident principles both in speculative and practical matters. Here, it seems that *intellectus* has its double in *synderesis*, which was earlier designated as fulfilling the function of giving us understanding of the basic principles of morality.

inasmuch as it stands to reason that good, moral people exist who nonetheless are not deeply wise, or well-versed in science, or adept in art.<sup>336</sup> However, coordinate with these assertions about the necessary relationship between *prudentia*, *intellectus*, and the moral virtues is the claim that the other intellectual virtues may exist without the moral virtues – that wisdom, science, and art can exist without moral virtue.<sup>337</sup>

This claim that, as virtues, *sapientia*, *scientia*, and *ars* can exist independently from the moral virtues poses certain difficulties.<sup>338</sup> How could one be wise without also being moral or “hitting the mean” with respect to one’s appetites, for instance? Here, *sapientia* is understood as a *habitus* of the intellect that enables it to operate effectively according to its natural propensities in exploration of the highest things; *scientia* too is called a virtue or *habitus* with regard to knowing and deducing; as is *ars* localized as excellence with regard to making in the practical realm. But in all three cases, there is an ambiguity about the intellectual virtues as *virtues* aiming at and achieving the good. On the one hand, *sapientia* as an intellectual virtue aims at and achieves knowledge of the highest things inasmuch as that is possible using the natural rational capacities of the created intellect; *scientia* as an intellectual virtue aims at and achieves knowledge in the various areas of inquiry and disciplines; and *ars* as an intellectual virtue aims at and achieves effective productions and makings. On the other hand, it seems to be the case that each of wisdom, science, and art, understood in this way, could certainly aim at the achievement of goods that themselves fall short of (and may even be contrary to) the true or highest good. It is as though wisdom, science, and art are simply excellences of the mind or intellect in the performance of skills and logical or rational machinations. One wonders if, for Thomas, the “wise man” in this regard could be pedantic in his knowledge of the highest things without actually embodying

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<sup>336</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.58.4.

<sup>337</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.58.5.

<sup>338</sup> Thomas discusses the independence of the intellectual virtues from the moral virtues at some length in his examination of the contemplative life (*Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.2). He notes that Aristotle's *Ethics* states that “moral virtue belongs to active but not contemplative happiness.” So moral virtue is, in this regard, not essential to contemplation. But nonetheless, Thomas admits that moral virtues are important as a groundwork of dispositions that make contemplation possible. He writes: “the moral virtues do have their place in the contemplative life as dispositions. The act of contemplation, in which the contemplative life consists essentially, is impeded by the vehemence of the passions, which turn the soul's desire from things of mind to things of sense, and by external disturbances. Now the moral virtues restrain the vehemence of the passions and quell disturbance from external distractions. Therefore the moral virtues are part of the contemplative life dispositively.” This same logic can be used to suggest that, although intellectual virtues may exist without moral virtues, in practice such a feat would be impossible without the moral dispositions laid beneath intellectual excellences as their groundwork.

virtue or living virtuously, for instance. Here, we also see the beginnings of Glen Gray's concerns about the "wisdom" pursued by scientists who, living the "theoretical life," nonetheless build atomic bombs and hence make wisdom look like a very strange and hypocritical characteristic.

#### (v) Wisdom and Its Relation to the Other Intellectual Virtues

Unlike the virtues of the practical intellect (*prudentia* and *ars*) which concern human action and human goods, the virtues of the speculative intellect (*sapientia*, *intellectus*, and *scientia*) pertain to the study of either nature or God. Put another way, the "good work" that is the focus of the speculative intellect, and which the three speculative virtues perfect, is the consideration of truth. Among these three virtues, understanding or *intellectus* is the habit of directly knowing the principles of things; *intellectus* allows us to know things at once or intuitively. It is termed a "direct" form of knowing by Thomas.<sup>339</sup> By contrast, "indirect" knowing or consideration of the truth takes one of two forms. It

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<sup>339</sup> *Intellectus* at first seems like a fairly straightforward concept to describe the way that we know what we know. On the one hand, it appears to denote our basic ability to see what is obvious or given in the first principles and axioms of science, like a basic understanding of the principle of non-contradiction, for instance: everyone knows this principle; it requires no proof; it simply *is* the case. However, on the other hand, *intellectus*, as direct knowing, intuitive knowing, or non-discursive knowing of its object seems to resemble *theoria* or *contemplatio* in some basic way as well. And yet contemplative gazing seems to be a different sort of thing than just knowing what is axiomatic. In Greek thought, this difficulty was dealt with by saying that *dianoia* (thought) is the manner of reasoning *downward* from the axiomatic; put another way, *dianoia* is involved in the application of those basic principles as they pertain to the various sciences (*epistemai*) and arts (*technai*), whereas *noesis* (intellection) is the manner of "taking up" (*anairesis*) these principles or axioms themselves towards their one true beginning dialectically. This, of course, suggests that *noesis* has both a discursive, dialectical component (as in Thomas' *ratio*) as well as a non-discursive, contemplative component that strives after and directly grasps its object (as in Thomas' *intellectus*). It seems probable that Thomas' desire to distinguish two forms of *sapientia* in his own theological anthropology arises from his dissatisfaction with the dual nature of *noesis* in Greek thought. Thomas too wants to account for the dual functions of *noesis*, but in so doing his articulation of the role of *intellectus* (as the Latin counterpart to *noesis*) remains equally ambiguous, dealing as it does with the same real experiences of thinking and transcendence.

I find much of Thomas' nomenclature in the *Summa* difficult and confusing, since the same word often seems to denote multiple experiences. For instance, *intellectus* not only suggests the simple or immediate knowing of axioms, and "direct" knowing (as opposed to the indirect knowing of *ratio*); it simultaneously denotes an intellectual virtue pertaining to excellence in non-discursive thinking. *Intellectus* is a form of thinking that is contrasted with *ratio*, and yet it isn't simply thinking or a power of the intellect to grasp directly its object, but an excellence in that power inasmuch as it is a virtue. And then this difficulty seems to be further complicated by the fact that *intellectus* is a manner of direct knowing, just as *theoria* is a direct knowing or "beholding" of what is known by the knower (or perhaps, again, the beholder is himself held by what is beholder). So is *intellectus* really a variant of *theoria*? Perhaps *theoria* or *contemplatio* reaches more commonly into the daily life of human beings in their ordinary operations as knowers than is suggested by the lofty sense so often implied by contemplation and "the contemplative life"? What exactly is the relationship between understanding, contemplation, and wisdom?

either involves knowing “the highest causes” and “the ultimate term of all human knowledge” as *sapientia*;<sup>340</sup> or it involves knowing what is “last in some particular genus of things,” as is the case with science. As consideration of the highest causes, *sapientia* is said by Thomas rightly to judge all things and set them in order. *Scientia*, by contrast, connotes knowledge of “that which is last in a genus of knowable matter”; in this regard, *scientia* perfects the intellect with regard to its knowing concerning that specific area of investigation. Thomas writes that whereas there are many *scientiae*, there is only one *sapientia*.

Thomas’ remarks about the relations between the various theoretical or speculative virtues go some distance to addressing the concerns that I have voiced in the previous section as well as the problem that worries Gray concerning “theoretical wisdom” and its relation to science: namely, that scientific knowledge and the powers of art to make can be abused when these arts and sciences are not informed or held to account by the virtue of wisdom. To this effect, Thomas establishes a ranking among the intellectual virtues themselves, wherein *scientia* is said to depend upon understanding “as on a virtue of higher degree: and both of these depend on wisdom, as obtaining the highest place, and containing beneath itself both understanding and science, by judging both of the conclusions of science, and of the principles on which they are based.”<sup>341</sup> In this regard, *scientia* cannot be truly *scientia*, nor can understanding be true understanding if *sapientia* is not first presupposed. *Sapientia* is deemed to be the greatest of the intellectual virtues because its object is the supreme cause, or God. As the greatest of the intellectual virtues, it is said to exercise judgment over all the other intellectual virtues.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.57.2. This claim that *sapientia* is an indirect form of knowing strikes me as difficult to understand given the relationship that Aristotle has articulated between *theoria*, or direct “beholding” of the Good and wisdom or *sophia*. Again, Thomas’ reluctance in his discussion of *sapientia* as an intellectual virtue to discuss wisdom as a direct “beholding” may be part of his larger attempt to distinguish a human or natural form of wisdom from a higher, divinely-apportioned wisdom that is only available through the theological virtues.

<sup>341</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.57.2. Elsewhere, Thomas writes: “Wisdom makes use of indemonstrable principles which are the object of understanding, not only by drawing conclusions from them, as other sciences do, but also by passing its judgment on them ... Hence it follows that wisdom is a greater virtue than understanding.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.66.5.

<sup>342</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.66.5.

**(vi) *Sapientia* as Intellectual Virtue (*Virtus Intellectualis*) vs. *Sapientia* as Infused Gift (*Donum*)**

Thomas, like the philosophers preceding him in our study, is aware of the various ways in which the word *sapientia* may be meant. On the one hand, he recognizes that the term can be used to designate great or masterful knowledge concerning a particular genus of things; one might be wise in the ways of physics, mathematics, medicine, carpentry, or bookkeeping, for example. On the other hand, there is a higher meaning that Thomas recognizes and wishes to illuminate and further subdivide into two new categories. This is the meaning of *sapientia* as the knowledge of God. On the one hand, as we have already seen, there is in Thomas' view an intellectual virtue (*virtus intellectualis*) afforded the name of *sapientia*; as a speculative virtue *sapientia* is the perfection of that element of the human intellect that seeks out knowledge of the highest things and the ultimate cause of all things according to its own natural capacities. However, Thomas contends that there is also a higher form of *sapientia* than mere intellectual prowess; it is a superior knowledge of God that is not derived from the workings of reason, study, or human effort, but is only attained through the Holy Ghost as a divine gift (*donum*).

Here we have an important observation on Thomas' part that, unlike *prudentia*, *ars*, *scientia* -- and also *sapientia* when discussed as an intellectual virtue -- this highest sort of wisdom is not teachable.<sup>343</sup> The distinction Thomas makes between these two higher gradations of wisdom is rendered best as follows:

The wisdom which is called a gift of the Holy Ghost, differs from that which is an acquired intellectual virtue, for the latter is attained by human effort, whereas the former is 'descending from above'. On like manner it differs from faith, since faith assents to the divine truth itself, whereas it belongs to the gift of wisdom to judge according to the divine truth. Hence, the gift of wisdom presupposes faith, because "a man judges well what he knows."<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> That science and art are teachable is uncontroversial. Elsewhere, Thomas states that *prudentia* is an intellectual virtue produced by teaching and experience. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.47.15. Thomas deals with the "teachability" of *prudentia* at length at 2a2ae.49.3. I have left "understanding" (*intellectus*) out of this list because I cannot find a claim about its "teachableness" made by Thomas. It seems reasonable, however, that *intellectus* is not teachable, since it is a direct apprehension of the truth, much like the manner in which axioms are grasped or the Good is "gazed upon" in *theoria*, rather than arrived at through a train of reasoning. While not teachable, however, it certainly might be cultivated or encouraged.

<sup>344</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.45.1. Elsewhere, Thomas writes that "the gift of wisdom is more excellent than the wisdom which is an intellectual virtue." *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.45.3 (objection 1).

In Thomas' view, it seems that Aristotle's enucleation of *sophia* and the possibility that the *nous* might pursue wisdom through *theoria* or "gazing upon" the *Ariston* in a union of knower and known is not admissible outside of the Christian faith, since faith is presupposed in any case where the gift of wisdom is bestowed.<sup>345</sup> Interestingly, by differentiating wisdom in this way, *sapientia* undergoes a simultaneous demotion and promotion. On the one hand, pagan philosophic articulations of wisdom and its pursuit are rendered impotent in the attainment of their ultimate object; at most, such philosophic endeavours can cultivate the "intellectual virtue" of wisdom. On the other hand, *sapientia* as a divine gift supplants even faith (*fides*) in its gloriousness, inasmuch as *fides* only "assents to the divine truth," whereas *sapientia* is able to judge by it. In this regard, the majesty of *sapientia* as divine gift and a consequence of charity or love (*caritas*) even overtakes *prudentia* in the realm of practical affairs where judgement is the mainstay of action.<sup>346</sup>

That *sapientia* is superior to *prudentia* even in the realm of action is made clear by Thomas, whose vision of the gift of wisdom very closely resembles Aristotle's discussion of *sophia* and the union in *theoria* of seer with what is seen during its pursuit. Thomas writes:

The higher a virtue is, the greater the number of things to which it extends. Wherefore from the very fact that wisdom as a gift is more excellent than wisdom as an intellectual virtue, since it attains to God more intimately by a kind of union of the soul with Him, it is able to direct us not only in contemplation but also in action.<sup>347</sup>

Thomas' defence of *sapientia* against the charge of being useless with regard to action here is quite similar to Aristotle's in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>348</sup> In response to the question of

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<sup>345</sup> It is very difficult from what Thomas has written to tell for certain if this "gradation" of wisdom serves to deny pagan philosophers access to divine wisdom, or if Thomas would simply admit that it is possible for non-Christians also to receive such wisdom as a gift.

<sup>346</sup> The effectiveness of judgements derived from *sapientia* as a divine gift is discussed by Thomas as the result not merely of perfected reasoning (as would be the case with *sapientia* as a speculative virtue), but also on the grounds of "connaturality" with the Eternal: "Wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgement according to the Eternal Law. Now rectitude of judgement is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge." Thomas contrasts the ability of the two sorts of wisdom to make judgements as follows: "It belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgment about Divine things after reason has made its inquiry, but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Ghost to judge aright about them on account of connaturality with them." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.45.2.

<sup>347</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.45.3.

<sup>348</sup> See especially *Nicomachean Ethics* I.ii.1-3 where Aristotle writes that knowledge (*gnosis*) of the Supreme Good will make us better archers with respect to hitting the target of the good in all our actions.

“whether *sapientia* is merely speculative or practical also,” Thomas responds: “To wisdom belongs first of all contemplation which is the vision of the beginning, and afterwards the direction of human acts according to the divine rules.”<sup>349</sup> Thomas’ systematic response to this question makes his answer even more emphatic than Aristotle’s concerning the utility of *sapientia* in the realm of practical (and therefore prudential) affairs.

It is worth emphasizing Thomas’ reasons for distinguishing *sapientia* as *donum* from its lesser status as a *virtus intellectualis*; it is precisely the notion of wisdom as *donum* that is most thoroughly rejected in modern thought; and because it is also this form of wisdom that cannot be taught, one therefore is led to wonder what place its discussion has in an investigation of the role of wisdom in education. Let us therefore deal with (a) the nature of *sapientia* as *donum*; and (b) the question of whether or not this highest notion of *sapientia* has any relevance in discussions related to public education.

### **(a) *Sapientia* as *Donum*: The Larger Context**

The rationale for speaking of such wisdom as above the natural capacities of human beings is provided by Thomas in his discussion of “How God is known by us”:

To know self-subsistent being is natural to the divine intellect alone; and this is beyond the natural power of any created intellect; for no creature is its own existence, forasmuch as its existence is participated. Therefore the created intellect cannot see the essence of God, unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it.<sup>350</sup>

Simply put, God, or the supreme cause of all things is beyond all the things that can be thought or intellected; anything that we can think of is not God. Thought can only aspire to grasp intelligible things, but God is beyond all that is finitely intelligible or comprehensible. Strictly speaking, it is beyond the nature of the human intellect and its manner of apperceiving the truth through reason to be able to attain to a truth that is not subject to duality, multiplicity, or analysis. When the human intellect therefore finds itself in the act of “gazing upon” this highest reality or the ground of all that is real, it can only do so by transcending its own nature:

Everything which is raised up to what exceeds its nature must be prepared by some disposition above its nature... But when any created intellect sees the essence of God,

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<sup>349</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.45.3.

<sup>350</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a.12.4.

the essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the intellect. Hence it is necessary that some supernatural disposition should be added to the intellect in order that it may be raised up to such a great and sublime height... this increase of the intellectual powers is called the illumination of the intellect.<sup>351</sup>

The illumination of the intellect which enables the intellect to engage in direct knowing of the divine through contemplation, in Thomas' theological anthropology, arises as a result of divine grace, love, or charity (*caritas*). The *donum* of *sapientia* is a kind of "sympathy or connaturality for divine things"<sup>352</sup> that results from the influence of charity, the highest among the theological virtues. Further, Thomas states that while faith and hope – the other two theological virtues – may exist imperfectly without charity,<sup>353</sup> it is impossible for charity to exist without the other two.<sup>354</sup> Consequently, it seems that human beings cannot properly be said to exhibit *caritas*, or the love of God, unless their love is informed by both faith and hope. Thomas' sense of *sapientia* as the highest gift of love, in this way, seems to be the sole preserve of those who abide in Christian teachings.

At this point in our study, the question therefore arises about what role philosophy has in relation to the *donum* of wisdom, and if philosophy is even capable of pursuing its object to the fullest extent. Is philosophy in some sense impotent as compared with theology, for instance? That is, if we are serious about pursuing wisdom, must we all be theologians of a particular creed with a particular faith and particular hopes? Is philosophy forever exiled from its highest desire? Thomistic scholar Josef Pieper has written about Thomas' understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology; he points out that Thomas distinguished the two "in order to join, not to part." In his view, by their nature philosophy and theology belong together in a unity in form. According to Pieper's analysis, any treatment of philosophy as "the handmaiden of theology" is problematic, and he states that such a view is not rightly attributed to Thomas;<sup>355</sup> Pieper points out that for Thomas, "philosophy does not 'serve' for anything, because it is concerned with wisdom. This is just what distinguishes philosophy from the separate sciences. It is not 'subordinate' to any

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<sup>351</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a.12.5.

<sup>352</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.45.2.

<sup>353</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.65.4.

<sup>354</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae.65.5.

<sup>355</sup> Pieper pinpoints the origin of this subordination of philosophy to theology in the writings of Philo of Alexandria; subsequently, it becomes a view commonly shared by a number of the early Church Fathers.



adventitious purpose."<sup>356</sup> However, having denied any subordinate role for philosophy in pursuit of the *donum* of wisdom, Pieper nonetheless affirms Thomas' stance that theology "achieves" the goals of philosophy on a "higher plane." Concerning the relationship between philosophy and theology in Thomas' thought, Pieper writes:

I would answer this tricky question as follows: Theology's way of "enlisting the services" of philosophy is something quite different. In its very essence, this process is different from and not to be compared with the way practicality draws upon the services of the sciences. Philosophizing aims at wisdom, we have said, and moreover, at wisdom for its own sake. But theology, which comes forward with claims to "dominance," is a higher form of wisdom itself! To enlist philosophy in the services of theology, then, does not mean to subordinate it to any alien, adventitious end. Rather, the end inherent in the act of philosophizing itself – namely, wisdom itself, "knowledge of the highest causes" – is the very same goal that is attainable and achievable in religion and in theology on a higher plane than in philosophy.<sup>357</sup>

Genuine philosophizing – inasmuch as Wisdom is, properly speaking, an attribute only of the Divine -- implies the presence of all three theological virtues. Love of God, as the love of the Good, must be present in the one who loves wisdom, for Wisdom is indeed the Greatest Good. But Thomas insists that *caritas* is only possible in the presence of both *fides* and *spes* – faith being "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,"<sup>358</sup> and hope the recognition that "anything is made possible to us by means of the divine assistance."<sup>359</sup>

Thomas' articulation of *sapientia* as a *donum* resulting from *caritas*, which itself arises only in the presence of Christian *spes* and *fides* – collectively the three theological virtues – leads us in our inquiry into legitimate questions about the nature of the *donum* – i.e. whether such a *donum* is therefore not available outside of Christian faith – as well as concerning the problematic nature of the relationship between the "theological virtues" and the rest of virtue. Simply put, if Thomas' understanding is correct, then it appears possible to have virtues, but to have them in the wrong way – that is, without the three theological virtues. But how can this be? For example, a pagan philosopher who aims at and yearns for the ultimate good may very well lack Christian faith in Christ as the god-man, for instance;

<sup>356</sup> Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Octagon Books, 1982), 154.

<sup>357</sup> Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, 154-55.

<sup>358</sup> *Hebrews* 11.1.

<sup>359</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.17.1.

or he may not share the hopes that are particular to the Christian creed concerning the apocalyptic fulfillment of human nature, the resurrection of the dead, and the transfiguration of the universe through which all wrongs are made right, the guilty suffer their deserved punishment, the meek inherit the earth, and so forth. In loving the Greatest Good, or the *Ariston*, in the absence of this *fides* and this *spes*, would the philosopher then have such love, but nonetheless have it in the wrong way? If virtue is excellence in aiming at and attaining to the good, then it makes little sense to say that one can possess virtue, but possess it improperly, misdirected and unaware of its target: one either has virtue or one does not; one either hits the mark of virtue or one does not. If a virtue were possessed in the wrong way – say, by not being accompanied by *fides*, *spes*, and *caritas* – then it would simply not be an excellence; indeed, the ability to achieve goods in the wrong way is tantamount to vice. Put another way, inasmuch as we "miss the mark" (*hamartanein*) of the Good, is this not the meaning of "sin" (*hamartia*)? By seeking greater differentiation with regard to the nature of wisdom than is offered in Aristotelian and Platonic accounts, Thomas has stumbled upon the difficult problem of how, as a Christian theologian, to privilege Christian theology and a faith-based understanding of wisdom over a Greek philosophic understanding.<sup>360</sup> I am unable to see any convincing resolution to this problem, and it extends beyond the boundaries of the present study.

Of course, the notion of wisdom as *donum* need not be articulated exclusively in Christian theological terms. Much of what Thomas has to say about *sapientia* as *donum* has its origin in Aristotle's writings. Although we did not discuss it in our section on Aristotle, it is the case that Aristotle was well-aware that the human intellect is not the self-sufficient source for all knowledge. The conception not just of wisdom, but of all virtue and all knowledge as a *donum* is in some sense implicit in Greek thought inasmuch as we rely on what is beyond ourselves as the impetus for our seeking (*zetesis*); essentially, "all human

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<sup>360</sup> This problem seems quite common in Christian literature. On the one hand, Christ is thought to be "the one true way"; all other mediators (*daimones*) between God and human beings become "demonic"; on the other hand, there have been many good and wise people who preceded Christ historically within the Christian tradition (Christian theologians recognize the patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible, for instance), as well as philosophers such as Plato and Socrates who are external to that tradition. For this reason, in his *Inferno*, Dante supposed that many ancient pagan writers and philosophers ought to be depicted as dwelling in the "first circle" of Hell -- a rather pleasant and wonderful place of conversation and companionship; such sagely men were not Christian and so could not be said rightly to possess the true virtues of faith, hope, and love; but nonetheless they had some sort of virtue that was easily recognized and affirmed.

beings by nature desire to know" (*pantes anthropoi tou eidenai oregontai physei*)<sup>361</sup> because they are pulled along by the source, without which there would be no knowledge, no virtue, and certainly no wisdom. Aristotle writes about this originating impetus to movement – the ultimate object of desire (*to orekton*) and of thought (*to noeton*) -- as the "Unmoved Mover" (*ti ho ou kinoumenon kinei*)<sup>362</sup> and the "final cause" (*to hou heneka*) of all things. It is that which "causes motion as being an object of love (*eromenon*), whereas all other things cause motion because they are themselves in motion."<sup>363</sup> This "something" (*ti*) which moves "while being itself unmoved, exists actually, and cannot be otherwise in any respect." Without this unconditioned "something," Aristotle explicitly states that no "excellence" (*to eu*) is possible<sup>364</sup> -- i.e. no goodness, no virtues, and no wisdom.

Aristotle's discussion of the Unmoved Mover and the idea that all virtue is somehow a gift of grace or love (*caritas*) that is made possible by the unconditioned reality of the Lovable affords us a means of understanding Thomas' insights into *sapientia* as a *donum* in non-dogmatic terms.<sup>365</sup> Aristotle writes about intellection or *noesis* as the highest mode of our participation (*metalepsis*) in the ultimate object of thought:

Now thinking or intellection (*noesis*) in itself is concerned with that which is in itself best (*aristou*), and thinking in the highest sense with that which is in the highest sense best. And mind or intellect (*nous*) thinks (*noei*) itself through participation (*metalepsin*) in the object of thought (*tou noetou*); for it becomes an object of thought by the act of taking hold (*thiggonon*) and thinking (*noon*), so that mind (*nous*) and the object of thought (*noeton*) are the same, because that which is receptive of the object of thought (*tou noetou*) and being or essence (*tes ousias*) is mind (*nous*). And it [mind or *nous*] is actualized (*energei*) by possessing this object.<sup>366</sup> Hence it is actuality rather than potentiality that is held to be the divine possession of mind (*ho nous theion echein*), and its contemplation (*theoria*) is that which is most pleasant and best.<sup>367</sup>

Put simply, in Aristotle's view, the mind engaged in intellection or *noesis* is itself imbued with the gift of participating in the divine nature to the extent that, at its culmination in *theoria*, it may be fully actualized as knower (*nous*) unified to what is known (*Nous*).

<sup>361</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 980a22.

<sup>362</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072a25.

<sup>363</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b2-5.

<sup>364</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b6-15.

<sup>365</sup> Here, we wish to dismiss the question of whether the Christian theological virtues are necessary to pursue the *donum*, and instead focus upon Aristotle's Greek philosophic approach to this same element of reality.

<sup>366</sup> That is, intellect or mind (*nous*) and thinking are "actualized" when the subject and the object of thought are identical.

<sup>367</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b18-25.

*Noesis*, having its height in *theoria*, is receptive of the gift of unification with the Lovable. The Thomistic notion of *sapientia* as *donum* is therefore understandable in non-dogmatic Greek philosophic terms as well.

Plato's Socrates makes similar observations about virtue (*arete*) as a gift. It is often taken as the most basic assumption about Socrates' "teachings" and Plato's writings that "virtue can be taught."<sup>368</sup> However, in both the *Meno* and the *Protagoras*, for example, an affirmation of this basic assumption about virtue is less than certain. For starters, both dialogues are admittedly "aporetic"; that is, neither one resolves into a "teaching" or a dialectically-established, positively-asserted bit of knowledge about the nature of virtue; rather, both dialogues end with Socrates and his interlocutors in a state of perplexity (*aporia*) concerning the nature of virtue. Further, it would be surprising indeed if Socrates were to agree that virtue were a teachable subject, particularly since the most prominent supporters in ancient Athens of the view that virtue was teachable were those in direct opposition to Socrates and philosophy, and so often mistaken for philosophers themselves – namely, the wandering (mostly foreign) teachers known as sophists (*sophoi*). Indeed, it was on the basis of their claim to be able to teach virtue that sophists (literally, "wise guys") charged a generous fee for their services from parents who wished their sons to be successful in political affairs. Protagoras of Abdera, the namesake for Plato's dialogue *The Protagoras*, is said to have been the first of these men to have charged a fee of a hundred minae for a course of study.<sup>369</sup> Over against this claim stands the older, aristocratic view that virtue is not teachable, but rather a matter of bloodline and inheritance.<sup>370</sup> Plato's *Protagoras* depicts Socrates in discussion with Protagoras concerning the precise question of whether or not virtue in the form of "political science" (*ten politiken techne*) can be

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<sup>368</sup> See, for instance, Werner Jaeger's three volume masterpiece on Greek education, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939). Basic to Jaeger's analysis seems to be the assumption that Socrates affirms the premise that virtue is a kind of knowledge, and that it must be a form of knowledge if it is to be teachable. See particularly Jaeger, *Paideia. Volume Two: In Search of the Divine Centre* (91). He states as "Socrates' creed" that "virtue goes back to the knowledge of true values," and that this is "the foundation-stone of all education" (122). For a compilation of articles from a variety of perspectives (not all concerned with Socrates and Plato) on the question of the "teachability" of virtue, see Barbara Darling-Smith, *Can Virtue Be Taught?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

<sup>369</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925). See chapter eight on Protagoras IX.52.

<sup>370</sup> See particularly Jaeger's discussion of Pindar and the Greek aristocracy in Book One of *Paideia*, Volume I.

taught. Socrates voices his doubts about the possibility of teaching such practical wisdom or prudence, saying “I didn’t suppose that this could be taught” on the grounds that nobody excellent in political affairs seems able to pass on their knowledge or to teach others how to be similarly excellent.<sup>371</sup> In the *Meno*, Socrates again enters into a discussion of what is virtue, and whether or not virtue can be taught. At the end of this dialogue, Socrates and his interlocutors remain perplexed, but nonetheless wary of both the sophistic and the aristocratic claims about virtue. Socrates says, “if this whole account of ours has been correctly examined and stated, virtue is neither present by nature (*physei*) [the aristocratic claim] nor taught (*didakton*) [the sophistic claim]: it comes to be present in those to whom it comes, by divine apportionment (*theia moira*), without intelligence (*aneu nou*).”<sup>372</sup> In other words, all virtue (*arete*) – and not only *sapientia* – is in some way a *donum* according to Socrates.

#### **(b) The Relevance of *Sapientia* as *Donum* in Public Education**

Given that Thomas speaks of the highest form of *sapientia* as a *donum*, and both Aristotle and Plato speak of not only *sophia*, but all of virtue (*arete*) and excellence (*to eu*) as a divinely-apportioned gift, one wonders what relevance any discussion of wisdom and virtue might have in the field of public education. First, why attempt to teach what is fundamentally *not* teachable? Why concern oneself with wisdom or the rest of virtue at all? Second, if public education prohibits the free investigation of the “religious” aspects of reality, and yet the genuine pursuit of the highest (or the deepest) truth and wisdom ineluctably points us in these directions, then how is philosophy, as the pursuit of Wisdom - where not only wisdom but *all* of virtue is somehow a divine gift -- even admissible in a school setting? This challenge seems particularly acute in Alberta with its Bill 44 legislation wherein a waiver and disclaimer is the legal obligation of every teacher inquiring with his or her students into the truth: when legal prescriptions are placed upon

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<sup>371</sup> See Plato’s *Protagoras* 319a-320b.

<sup>372</sup> Plato’s *Meno* 99e-100a. Socrates repeats this statement at 100b: “Then from this it appears, Meno, that virtue comes to be present by divine apportionment in those to whom it comes.” Yet even in this statement he says that they cannot know “clearly” or “certainly” without further inquiry into what virtue itself is.

classroom inquiry with every mention of such elements of reality,<sup>373</sup> how can one philosophize or seek to cultivate virtue or character excellence in an educational setting?

The answer to these questions about the legitimacy of pursuing wisdom in a public educational institution lies in the fact that *all* virtue is never for its own sake. The Roman Seneca teaches that “Virtue is its own reward,” and that “the having done it is the recompense for what is done rightly.” The Stoic idea here is that virtue is self-sufficient: that it doesn’t rely on any source or purpose beyond itself – that it is *not*, in some fashion, a gift dependent upon what is beyond us. But Thomas, Plato, and Aristotle tell us that “man cannot live by such happiness. The deepest thirst cannot be allayed in this way; the true expectation of the human heart will not accept such a substitute.” Pieper observes that “wherever such an attitude has been attempted or asserted, it has been artificial and imposed – because it has been something against nature.”<sup>374</sup> In other words, an education that would content itself with what is dependent solely upon what is taught or teachable is not an education at all. Rather, all education of any sort, inasmuch as it has happiness as its aim, depends upon developing wisdom, or consciousness of and attention to this final end and this Unmoved Mover. Whether the impetus or universal desire to know this final cause is named as such, it is nonetheless rooted in the experience of the attractive force of ultimate reality. It is for this reason that education and human life as a rational enterprise cannot help but be in some fundamental way theological and philosophical. Of course, the

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<sup>373</sup> I have reproduced and boldfaced here the pertinent challenges to philosophic inquiry and the pursuit of wisdom that are presented by the recent changes to our provincial laws pose in the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act* (2009). The following is added after section 11:

Notice to parent or guardian

11.1(1) A board as defined in the *School Act* shall provide **notice to a parent or guardian of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, prescribed under that Act include subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation.**

(2) **Where a teacher** or other person providing instruction, teaching a course of study or educational program or using the instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) **receives a written request signed by a parent or guardian of a student that the student be excluded from the instruction,** course of study, educational program or use of instructional materials, **the teacher** or other person **shall** in accordance with the request of the parent or guardian and without academic penalty **permit the student**

(a) **to leave the classroom** or place where the instruction, course of study or educational program is taking place or the instructional materials are being used for the duration of the part of the instruction, course of study or educational program, or the use of the instructional materials, that includes the subject-matter referred to in subsection (1), **or**

(b) **to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction,** course of study or educational

program or using the instructional materials.

<sup>374</sup> Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 34.

suggestion here is that true education involves recognition that all excellence and all knowing is in some sense a *donum*, that philosophy approaches wisdom as such a *donum*, and that the recognition of the *donum* that permeates all things requires the cultivation of attention, appreciation, and the sense of one's own finitude and limitation in relation to the Unlimited (*Apeiron*) source of that *donum*.

**(vii) Attention to the Nature of Wisdom as *Donum* being Integral to True Education**

Thomas' insight concerning the *donum* of wisdom is relevant for our larger discussion of education due to the emphasis it brings to bear on the cultivation of attention. Being attentive or cultivating attention involves recognizing the manner in which, when we engage in "seeking to know" (*zetesis*), we are necessarily engaged in developing an awareness of the fact that our knowledge and our knowing are themselves dependent upon the object that we seek to know; by attending carefully to the impetus for *zetesis* we become aware of the fact that we are being pulled towards what we desire to know; we experience the *donum* in this pull as the originary stimulus without which no inquiry would at all be possible.<sup>375</sup>

In a manner that accords with Aquinas' account of the *donum*, the significance of cultivating the capacity for attention to this *donum* in an educational setting is well-developed and well-explained by the Christian mystic Simone Weil. Weil writes that the key to a proper conception of studies "is the realization that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God." She observes that "the highest part of the attention only makes contact with God, when prayer is intense and pure enough for such a contact to be established; but the whole attention is turned toward God." From her Christian perspective, cultivation of attention in school studies is essential spiritual training for prayer, and ultimately for contemplation of the divine. Weil remarks that "school exercises only develop a lower kind of attention. Nevertheless, they are extremely effective in increasing the power of attention that will be available at the time of prayer, on condition that they are carried out with a view to this purpose and this purpose alone." In Weil's estimation, "the development of the faculty of

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<sup>375</sup> Awareness of this originary stimulus is not dissimilar to the Platonic notion of *anamnesis* or Voegelin's remarks about "originary experiences" previously discussed in our analysis of Aristotle's thoughts on *sophia*.

attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies." In her view, most school tasks have a certain intrinsic interest as well; indeed, Dewey and others in our study emphasize the importance of cultivating "interest" as the primary motivation behind all student learning.<sup>376</sup> However, according to Weil, such interest is secondary. "All tasks that really call upon the power of attention are interesting for the same reason and to an almost equal degree." The purpose of learning in all subjects is not to master that subject, but rather to develop our faculty for attention which, "directed toward God, is the very substance of prayer."<sup>377</sup>

Weil's comments about education in the disciplines and subjects as a means to train the faculty of attention in preparation for its higher contemplative or "theoretic" purpose shed a remarkable light even on the notion of measuring "student achievement." Our current manner of testing for student achievement deals exclusively with how well a student performs his or her assigned tasks; essentially, we are commanded by our curriculum guides to measure only the level of mastery of subject materials. However, Weil is relatively uninterested in this mode of assessment. Whether or not we excel in a given subject is, for her, not the key issue: "If we have no aptitude or natural taste for geometry, this does not mean that our faculty for attention will not be developed by wrestling with a problem or studying a theorem. On the contrary, it is almost an advantage."<sup>378</sup> In effect, a student could be failing by all outwardly quantifiable measures and standardized tests, and yet also be deeply engaged in the cultivation of his or her highest faculties, as preparation for his or her highest happiness in *theoria* or *contemplatio*. If we seriously consider the words of Weil, Thomas, Aristotle, and the other ancient and medieval writers in this study as they pertain to the pursuit of wisdom through attention to the *donum*, then the entire edifice of modern-day education around which circulates our most dogmatically-held views about student achievement must be reconsidered and perhaps rejected in some fundamental way:

Students must therefore work without any wish to gain good marks, to pass examinations, to win school successes [sic]; without any reference to their natural abilities and tastes; applying themselves equally to all their tasks, with the idea that

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<sup>376</sup> See particularly chapter ten of Dewey, *Democracy and Education*.

<sup>377</sup> See Simone Weil, "Reflection on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God" in *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (Toronto: Perennial Library, 1951), 105-106.

<sup>378</sup> Weil, "Reflection on the Right Use of School Studies," 106.



each one will help to form in them the habit of that attention which is the substance of prayer [or in non-Christian terms, *theoria* or *contemplatio*]. When we set out to do a piece of work, it is necessary to wish to do it correctly, because such a wish is indispensable in any true effort. Underlying this immediate objective, however, our deep purpose should aim solely at increasing the power of attention ... as, when we write, we draw the shape of the letter on paper, not with a view to the shape, but with a view to the idea we want to express. To make this the sole and exclusive purpose of our studies is the first condition to be observed if we are to put them to the right use.<sup>379</sup>

In Weil's estimation, education is, in its final end, wholly theoretic or contemplative; true schooling is not a matter of rigorous application of the intellect to one's "school-work"; nor is true education about finding ways to improve student test scores; rather, it concerns the cultivation of *schöle*; that is, it requires that we as teachers and as students learn how to engage in "leisure" -- in the capacity to attend to the source of that pull and that universal "desire to know" that underlies all of our studies. Indeed, the emphasis on school as "school-work," and as a "curriculum" (literally a horse race that all of our students are under threat of the goad to run) requiring the demonstration of "will power" in our work is, according to Weil, wholly off the mark:

Will power, the kind that, if need be, makes us set our teeth and endure suffering, is the principal weapon of the apprentice engaged in manual work. But, contrary to the usual belief, it has practically no place in study. The intelligence can only be led by desire. For there to be desire, there must be pleasure and joy in the work. The intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy. The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running. Where it is lacking there are no real students, but only poor caricatures of apprentices who, at the end of their apprenticeship, will not even have a trade.<sup>380</sup>

"School," in the truest sense of that word, cannot be work. Rather, it must be deeply and fundamentally directed at the cultivation of a dispensation in students towards the ultimate object of *schöle* through the habit and practice of attention. Weil explains what she means by "attention" in the following passage:

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts, as a man on a mountain who, as he

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<sup>379</sup> Weil, "Reflection on the Right Use of School Studies," 108.

<sup>380</sup> Weil, "Reflection on the Right Use of School Studies," 110.

looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.<sup>381</sup>

It is with this emphasis on the importance of cultivating attention as the primary purpose of education that we now turn to Thomas' discussion of teaching and the contemplative life.

### **(viii) Pursuing Wisdom: a Medieval Taxonomy of the Contemplative Life**

It is important to stress that, for all the ancient and medieval authors in this study, it is certainly *not* the case that there is only one sort of life – the contemplative life; nor do any of them argue that it ought to be the project of an educational system to make or to transform society into some strange order of monks or contemplative mystics. My own study similarly does not argue for any such transformation. Rather, each of the authors in this survey of ancient philosophy simply points to the importance of recognizing that *theoria* or *contemplatio* is a fundamental component in the pursuit of wisdom, that this activity is made possible in the enjoyment of *scholē*, and that both *scholē* and *theoria* or *contemplatio* are indispensable elements of education and of human life; contemplation and the environment proper for its cultivation (*scholē*) are necessary for the development of elements of human nature that cannot rightly be neglected, discouraged, or in the worst case scenario, denied legitimacy.

As with Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Thomas too distinguishes the "active life" (*vita activa*) from the "contemplative life" (*vita contemplativa*). Thomas explains this division as befitting the rational nature of human beings; that is, inasmuch as human beings are "living things which move or operate from within themselves" in accord with reason, human life involves both the intellectual pursuit of knowledge and rational action in the world. In Thomas' view, the distinction between the two lives is largely one of emphasis – that is, some human beings are simply predisposed to one activity over the other: "since some men especially dedicate themselves to the contemplation of truth while others are primarily occupied with external activities, it follows that human living is correctly divided into the active and the contemplative."<sup>382</sup> The division into these two lives is by no means absolute: each human being engages in both action and contemplation to various degrees

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<sup>381</sup> Weil, "Reflection on the Right Use of School Studies," 112.

<sup>382</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.179.1.

and at various times with the result that the two lives are ineluctably combined in the individual lives that people lead. Nonetheless, there is a ranking of the two lives: following Aristotle, Thomas asserts that the active life is subordinate to the contemplative life inasmuch as the contemplative life aims at the pursuit of our highest end in Divine Wisdom, whereas the active life has as its aim goods achievable through virtuous and prudent action in human affairs.<sup>383</sup>

That the *vita contemplativa* is not an arcane or intellectually elite concept but rather a term to describe an essential element of any fully human life is clear from Thomas' discussion of the variety of contemplative activities. Etymologically, "contemplation" derives from *templum*, which long ago referred to the space marked out by the seer with his divining rod as a location for his observations. From this root, the word came to signify the actual observation made by the seer.<sup>384</sup> Contemplation, as related to "seeing," is pervasive in some sense, just as anyone who knows does so by "seeing." All of our knowing is, in this very general way, tied to our ability to see what we come to know. Of course, some things are seen more deeply and more clearly than other things, and the purpose of cultivating the *vita contemplativa* in each individual life is to deepen and to clarify our seeing and our knowing.

Thomas follows Richard of St. Victor in distinguishing various intellectual activities as part of the *vita contemplativa*, these being contemplation (*contemplatio*), meditation (*meditatio*), and cogitation (*cogitatio*). *Cogitatio* is the activity of considering the many things from which one intends to gather a simple truth. It can "include sense perceptions for the knowledge of certain effects, also acts of the imagination, and the discursus of reasoning as well concerning various signs or whatever will lead to a knowledge of the truth which is sought." Indeed, any actual operation of the intellect can be called "cogitation." Thomas also remarks that *cogitatio* is the concentration of a mind that is prone to wander. Cogitation, as an element of the *vita contemplativa*, is widely present any

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<sup>383</sup> Essentially, the distinction previously discusses between *sophia* and *phronesis* (or *sapientia* and *prudentia*), applies in the same relation between the contemplative and active lives. Unlike *sophia* and its pursuit in the contemplative life, *phronesis* in the active life does not concern the "most serious thing" (*spoudaiotaten*), since the development of excellence in human affairs is certainly not the highest thing in the *cosmos*.

<sup>384</sup> These remarks are derived from Varro's *De Lingua Latina*, lib. 6. For details, see Appendix 3 to the Blackfriars' edition of Volume 46 of Thomas' *Summa Theologica*, trans. Jordan Aumann (London: Blackfriars, 1966), 103.

time human beings engage in reasoning, imaginative activity, the consideration of sense data, or whenever they apply their minds with some degree of focus or attention to discursive thought.

*Meditatio*, says Thomas, refers to “the process of reasoning from certain principles which arrive at the contemplation of some truth.” It is the investigation of a mind occupied in the search for truth (*veritas*). Thomas remarks that consideration (*consideratio*) means the same thing as *meditatio*, and that every operation of the intellect can in some way be called “consideration.” In this respect, there are no clear lines between *meditatio* and *cogitatio*; perhaps the best way to distinguish between the two would be to say that *cogitatio* is a linear or discursive process – that the term describes the movement of reason from one thing to the next in a rational manner, whereas *meditatio* is a term that describes thought that aims more precisely and with pointed focus at some final end; *meditatio* appears to describe our awareness not so much of being in the stream of reasoning as much as of the fact that our reasoning has some truth as its endpoint or destination place. According to this loose definition, any time human beings focus their reasoning, directing it towards some particular object of thought and the illumination of that object in the light of truth, they are engaged in some form of meditation.

Finally, “*contemplatio* refers to a simple gaze upon a truth” (*contemplatio pertinent ad ipsum simplicem intuitum veritatis*). It is the soul’s “penetrating and easy gaze on things perceived.”<sup>385</sup> It is worth noting here that, in Thomas’ own words, *contemplatio* can be quite a low, common thing as well as a sublime and perfect thing: it need not be construed as *the* simple gaze upon *the* truth: any penetrating gaze upon anything perceived will do. Contemplation, like *cogitatio* and *meditatio*, is part of ordinary experience and learning, and it is implied as part of any knowing; it need not be understood in the loftiest terms as the height and perfection of knowing, although at its pinnacle the term certainly connotes this perfection as well. Indeed, in the notes to the Blackfriars’ edition of the *Summa*, the editors suggest that, properly understood, the term *contemplatio* can *only* refer to this perfection of knowing. They remark that, as an activity of the speculative intellect, contemplation should be referred to one of three operations: simple apprehension,

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<sup>385</sup> “*Contemplatio est perspicax et liber contuitus animi in res perspicendas.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.3.

immediate judgment, or discursive reasoning. They write that it cannot be “simple apprehension because that is not the way in which man perceives truth, except imperfectly, and contemplation, as a perfect act of the speculative intellect, seeks truth.” In this regard, the Blackfriars seem less willing than Thomas is in this passage of the *Summa* to admit that there is an affinity between, say, basic understanding (*intellectus*) or intuitive grasping of the axiomatic, and *contemplatio*.<sup>386</sup> Neither is contemplation reducible to “discursive reasoning,” according to the Blackfriars, for it is rather “the intuitive gaze upon truth.” Therefore, “contemplation is to be resolved into an immediate, non-discursive judgment wherein the human mind perceives truth, and the speculative intellect functions precisely as a power of understanding and not as a power of reasoning.”<sup>387</sup>

Thomas addresses the problems noted by the Blackfriars concerning the meaning of the term *contemplatio* by remarking that, while there are indeed various activities (*diversi actus*) in the contemplative life, these diverse activities are but a kind of practice, preparation, or steps along the way to that one activity in the contemplation of truth. He writes:

An angel perceives truth by simple apprehension, but a man comes finally to gaze upon simple truth only by progressive steps. Consequently, the contemplative life has only one activity in which it finally terminates and from which it derives its unity, namely the contemplation of truth, but it has several activities by which it arrives at this final activity. Some of these have to do with the understanding of principles from which one proceeds to contemplation of truth; others with the deduction from those principles to the truth one seeks to know. The final activity, however, which completes the process is simply the contemplation of that truth.<sup>388</sup>

Put another way, Thomas points out that something can belong to the contemplative life in two ways: “primarily” and “secondarily” or “dispositively.” In the first sense, “the contemplation of divine truth belongs to the contemplative life primarily because this contemplation is the goal of the whole human life.” This “primary” sense of contemplation accords with what we have previously seen in Aristotle’s writings, wherein our ultimate

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<sup>386</sup> This distinction between simple understanding and theoretical or contemplative gazing arises because human knowing is held to progress discursively through a line of reasoning (*ratio*), on the one hand, and “intuitively” in the understanding (*intellectus*) on the other. Although there is a simple and intuitive intellection of the axiomatic that is an ordinary part of everyday life, the Blackfriars’ note distinguishes between this simple intuitive grasping and contemplation, which rather transcends simple understanding (*intellectus*) by moving upward from the intuited first principles towards the ground of all these principles in the Truth Itself.

<sup>387</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 46. Note b, p. 23.

<sup>388</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.3.

happiness is found in contemplation of the most lofty object of intelligence. However, in a secondary sense, “because we can arrive at the contemplation of God through divine effects ... so the contemplation of them also pertains to the contemplative life, because through them man is led to a knowledge of God.”<sup>389</sup> Hence, other activities through which we seek to know – inasmuch as we relate our desire to know to a higher desire to know the source of all that can be known<sup>390</sup> – belong “secondarily” or “dispositively” to the *vita contemplativa*. It is in this secondary sense that the breadth of contemplation -- i.e., as pertaining to a panoply of activities and manners of knowing and seeking after truth -- is recognized. Thomas therefore accounts not only “contemplation of the divine truth” in the “primary sense,” as part of the contemplative life; he also affirms the life of moral virtue, certain acts other than contemplation, and contemplation of the divine effects as components of the *vita contemplativa* in this “dispositive” or “secondary” sense.

Thomas furthers our understanding of the breadth and scope of contemplation in the *Summa* by pointing out that, although the contemplative life has gazing upon the Divine and pursuit of Divine Wisdom as its final and highest goal, there are nonetheless a variety of types (*species*) of contemplation. Following Richard of St. Victor, Thomas enumerates six:

The first is in the imagination alone, as when we consider corporeal things; the second is in the imagination assisted by the intellect, as when we consider the order and disposition of sensible things; the third is in the intellect assisted by the intellect, as when we are raised to invisible things through the consideration of visible things; the fourth is in the intellect as intellect, as when the mind considers invisible things which the imagination cannot perceive; the fifth is above the intellect, as when through divine revelation we know things which the human mind cannot comprehend; the sixth is above the intellect and contrary to it, as when through divine

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<sup>389</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.4.

<sup>390</sup> The idea that our “seeking to know” (*zetesis*) ought always to be focused on coming to know the source of all that is knowable is related to the activity of *meditatio* as discussed above; *meditatio* focuses the mind’s powers upon reaching out towards that ultimate object of knowing. This attitude of attentive focus distinguishes *meditatio* and contemplative activity in general from mere curiosity. Thomas distinguishes curiosity from *zetesis* that is dispositively part of the contemplative life by quoting Augustine: “In the consideration of created things we should not exercise a vain and futile curiosity, but they should serve as stepping-stones to immortal and everlasting things.” In this way, all scientific inquiry and investigation ought to be encouraged, not as knowledge for its own sake (Gray’s previously discussed concerns about the foibles of “theoretical science” and the atomic bomb are relevant here), but rather as a form of meditation that reaches out for the ground of all knowledge. Citing David’s words in *Psalms* 142, Thomas writes: “I meditated on all thy works; I meditated upon the works of thy hands. I stretched forth my hands to thee.” Scientific investigation, in this regard, is but a means or “stepping-stone” for meditation on the ground or source of all scientific knowledge, according to Thomas. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.4.

illumination we know those things that seem contrary to human reason, such as the teaching on the mystery of the Trinity. Only the last seems to attach to divine truth.<sup>391</sup>

Contemplative life spans a broad spectrum of activities; at the first and most basic level, whenever we consider the things of sense, we are engaged in contemplative activity. Second, when we transition from sensible to intelligible things; third, when we think about the things of sense critically or analytically according to those of the mind; fourth, we are engaged in a form of higher contemplative activity when we consider in their own right those intelligible things that have been reached through the sensible (say, for instance, our ideas and concepts about the world of things); at the fifth level, Thomas points to the consideration of intelligible realities that cannot be reached through the things of sense but can be understood by reason (*rationem*); such are the things we know through “revelation” – perhaps as when we consider myths, stories, inspired poetry and music, and the truths that may be unfolded therein through conscientious literary studies. Finally, Thomas speaks of “the consideration of intelligible things which the intellect can neither discover nor exhaust; this is the sublime contemplation of divine truth wherein contemplation is finally perfected.”<sup>392</sup>

Certainly both teachers and students, as human beings, move through all of these various *species* of contemplation to varying degrees. The larger question concerning the diversity of contemplative activities, however, is the extent to which what we do in schools recognizes and cultivates learning in the full richness of this spectrum. Given that contemplation is related to our highest happiness as human beings, and that education should be about making human beings aware of and independently able to pursue their highest happiness as rational beings, to what extent do the contemplative exercises administered in our schools truly lead our students into such an awareness of the full amplitude of our human nature? And to what extent are teachers given any opportunity to pursue the richness and full panoply of contemplative activities?

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<sup>391</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.4.

<sup>392</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.4.

### (viii) Contemplation and Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

The most popularized and standard model for considering the manner in which thinking forms a hierarchy in current educational practice is detailed in Benjamin Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.<sup>393</sup> All new teachers are taught that they must ensure that student learning incorporate thought processes at each of the levels identified by Bloom and following his ordering; moreover, as teachers, we are all instructed that our modes of classroom assessment must measure learning across these "educational objectives." Bloom lists six such "objectives" in the "cognitive domain" from lowest to highest rank as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.<sup>394</sup> In the second portion of his taxonomy, which deals with the "affective domain," he lists five strata from least to greatest: receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and "characterization by a value or a value complex."<sup>395</sup> It is significant for

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<sup>393</sup> Benjamin Bloom. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* (Ann Arbor: David McKay Co., 1956).

<sup>394</sup> Bloom provides a valuable Appendix to his *magnum opus* in which he neatly summarizes these various categories of educational objectives as follows: "Knowledge," the lowest level of learning in the taxonomy, includes knowledge of specifics (terminology, facts); knowledge of ways and means of dealing with specifics (methods of inquiry, standards of judgment, knowledge of conventions, knowledge of trends and sequences, classifications and categories, and criteria); knowledge of universals and "abstractions" in a field (theories, principles, generalizations, and structures). Above this first and lowest taxonomic level, Bloom next ranks "intellectual abilities and skills," under which the other five levels of learning are subsumed. The second level, "Comprehension," represents the lowest level of understanding. It includes translation, interpretation, and extrapolation. At the third level, "Application," Bloom includes the use of "abstractions," technical principles, ideas, and theories. At the fourth level Bloom places "Analysis," wherein "communication" may be broken down into its constituent elements or parts "such that the relative hierarchy of ideas is made clear and the relations between the ideas expressed are made explicit." At this level, Bloom includes the analysis of elements, relationships, and organizational principles. At the fifth level, referred to by Bloom as "Synthesis," the constituents of analysis are fitted back together and the parts are understood so as to form a whole. Synthesis involves seeing patterns in wholes not previously recognized, and it includes the production of individual or "unique" communications (such as writing a story, an essay, or giving an oral account of a personal experience), the production of a plan or a proposed set of operations, and the derivation of a set of abstract relations (as in the ability to form and reform hypotheses, to make mathematical discoveries, and to generalize). The sixth and highest level of Bloom's taxonomy, "Evaluation," involves making judgements about the value of material and methods for given purposes. It includes judgements in terms of "internal evidence" (such as the logical consistency of statements) as well as according to "external criteria" (as, for instance, using theories, generalizations, and judgments according to the highest available standards in cultural understandings or in fields of study). See Bloom, *Taxonomy*, 201-207.

<sup>395</sup> At the lowest level in his five-part affective taxonomy, Bloom places willingness to receive or attend to the existence of phenomena and stimuli. He subdivides this lowest form of affective receptivity into "awareness" (in the form of consciousness of a thing), "willingness to receive" (i.e. suspension of judgment about an object of perception, willingness to tolerate it rather than to avoid it), and "controlled or selected attention" (the ability to differentiate between various stimuli, as for example, discrimination with regard to music, and alertness toward "values judgements" as these appear in literature). At the second level, Bloom places responding to phenomena in terms of the interest that it evokes; he includes at this level "acquiescence in responding" (in the form of "obedience" or "compliance" to classroom demands), as well as "willingness to



our current study that Thomas' medieval taxonomy depicts a broader amplitude in terms of both cognition (thinking) and affectation (willing). For instance, Bloom's cognitive taxonomy reaches its apex in the "evaluation" of propositions according to their logical consistency, their avoidance of fallacious reasoning, and by how well they measure up to accepted cultural and disciplinary standards. However, from what we have thus far seen in our own study of thinking and the contemplative life in relation to wisdom, this supposed apex of cognition is quite a low summit that does not recognize the full amplitude of our cognitive abilities and cognizable reality.

For starters, Bloom's taxonomy does not carefully distinguish between the mind's powers of *ratio* and *intellectus*. Rather, his discussion of cognition emphasizes *ratio* at the expense of *intellectus*, which, if it shows up anywhere, is accorded some degree of recognition at the lowest level of cognition identified by Bloom – perhaps as basic "knowledge" or simple grasping of the axiomatic. However, among the ancients and medievals, *intellectus* was always ranked more highly than *ratio* as a superior form of knowing because it grasps its object directly. *Intellectus*, as we have already discussed it, is a power of the mind (*mens*) whereby the knower grasps what is known without resort to discursive reasoning. Bloom's simple "knowing" of facts and dates, of axioms and

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respond" (as in the capacity for voluntary activity) and "satisfaction in response" (wherein the subject experiences joy in voluntary activity). At the third level, Bloom places "valuing," or the recognition that "a thing, phenomenon, or behaviour has worth." According to Bloom, "behaviour categorized at this level is sufficiently consistent and stable to have taken on the characteristics of a belief or an attitude." Here, Bloom seems to be emphasizing consistency in behaviour as indicative of growth and development in alignment with a particular value or value system. At this third level, Bloom includes "acceptance of a value" (as in a "belief" or the "emotional acceptance of a proposition or doctrine upon what one implicitly considers adequate ground"), "preference for a value" (that is, not just acceptance of a "value," but a willingness to be identified with it), and finally "commitment" to a value. Here, Bloom stresses the idea that "certainty" or "conviction" is important in the development of proficiency in the affective domain. At the fourth level, Bloom places "Organization," meaning that the "learner successfully internalizes values" into a coherent "system." At this level, Bloom includes "the conceptualization of a value" (the ability to "abstract" a value and to see how it relates to "those that he already holds or to new ones that he is coming to hold") and the "organization of a value system" (wherein a learner brings together "a complex of values, possibly disparate values ... into an ordered relationship with one another," preferably one that is "harmonious and internally consistent." At the highest affective level, Bloom places "Characterization by a Value or Value Complex." At this level, "the values already have a place in the individual's value hierarchy, are organized into some kind of internally consistent system, have controlled the behaviour of the individual for a sufficient time that he has adapted to behaving this way." The indicator that this stage has been attained is that "the individual acts consistently in accordance with the values he has internalized." At this level, the affective domain is further subdivided into a awareness of a "generalized set" or an orientation that gives rise to consistent behaviour on the one hand, and "characterization," which Bloom calls "the peak of the internalization process." Here, Bloom locates the articulation of "one's view of the universe, one's philosophy of life, one's *Weltanschauung* – a value system having as its object the whole of what is known or knowable." See Part Two of Bloom's *Taxonomy*, 176-185.

principles, is in some way related to *intellectus* as a basic form of immediate grasping of what is given; and yet Bloom's sense of "knowing" at this very basic and lowest level is also distinct from *intellectus*; for Bloom correctly sees that one can "know" facts yet not *understand* them in their greater significance; one can "know" (by rote memorization, for instance) a range of data that one has been taught without ever having questioned its truth or significance or established its meaningfulness dialectically. *Intellectus*, on the other hand, is most often translated as "understanding," and it is precisely this sense of *intellectus* that is clearly not intended by Bloom at such a low level of learning. His taxonomy deigns to offer us a coherent and comprehensive elucidation of the full amplitude of cognition in its correct order; but in reality, he accounts for only *ratio* as a power of *mens*, leaving *intellectus* out of his cognitive taxonomy entirely.

Even dismissing his silence concerning *intellectus*, Bloom's elucidation of *ratio* is itself problematic. At the highest, "evaluative" level of cognition, our rational powers are described by Bloom as judging by pre-established "cultural" and "disciplinary" criteria. On the one hand, "evaluation," according to Bloom's taxonomy, proceeds by inspection of things thought according to "internal evidence" – that is, by examining how systematically-coherent and logically consistent are the objects of thinking. On the other hand, in addition to the criterion of internal consistency (one might include here logic and deductive reasoning), "evaluative" thinking also considers whether or not the objects of thought accord with the "external criteria" of cultural understandings, societal norms and values, and the highest available standards in any given field of study. For Bloom, it does not seem to be the case that "evaluation" may proceed without recourse to basic acceptance of some pre-existent set of acknowledged principles, axioms, cultural beliefs or values. Indeed, judgment according to these beliefs or values appears to be the basis for all "evaluative" thinking in Bloom's taxonomy.

Using the terminology we have thus far found illuminating from ancient philosophy, we may say that Bloom's elucidation of "evaluative" cognition is restricted to dianoetic operations; it does not rise to the level of noetic activity. To recapitulate: *dianoia* (thought) is that form of cognitive activity that reasons downward from the axioms (*axiomata*) or principles (*archai*) of any given discipline or field of study; *dianoia* takes these *axiomata* and *archai* and applies them in the operations of the various arts and

sciences. Dianoetic thought in any science or art might also recognize when a given idea or application conflicts with the principles fundamental to its particular branch of study;<sup>396</sup> this dianoetic mode of evaluating data according to the established first principles of the various disciplines accords well with the “evaluative” level of learning depicted in Bloom’s taxonomy.

However, Bloom’s taxonomic explanation of our evaluative capacities does not reveal any clear evidence of awareness of the element of *noesis* (intellection) in cognition. *Noesis*, unlike *dianoia*, does not apply reasoning downward from the various *archai*, but rather takes these *archai* themselves upward (*anairesis*); the various axioms and principles of the disciplines and fields of knowledge are themselves tested, questioned, and taken up dialectically towards their true beginning and source in the Divine *Arche*. Philosophic inquiry, or the pursuit of wisdom – and again, this is the focus of our present study – takes *noesis* as its primary mode of cognition; unlike Bloom’s “evaluative” thinking, the noetic operations of philosophy transcend the *archai* as they are given both in cultural beliefs (as for example, those we find in mythological accounts of “first things”) and in the “highest available standards” of the various arts and scientific disciplines (i.e., the axioms and principles) and the “theories” that are built from them; whenever the cognitive activity of *noesis* is engaged – that is, whenever the mind reaches out for the ground of all its knowing and the source of all that is knowable -- the axiomatic is itself judged dialectically according to its relation to the first beginning or *Arche*, which itself is grasped at the apex of noetic activity in the contemplative gaze (*theoria*). In this regard, Bloom’s taxonomy is vastly deficient as a complete depiction of the full amplitude of the cognitive domain: it is wholly concerned with the *ratio* at the expense of any awareness of the *intellectus*; while accounting for the dianoetic elements of cognition, it lacks any concern with or recognition of the important role of *noesis* – the primary mode of pursuing wisdom.

Apart from its deficient amplitude, Bloom’s cognitive taxonomy (literally, his “customary ordering”) also appears to be disordered, if not in some respects inverted hierarchically. The problems with Bloom’s ordering of the “educational objectives” are evident if we carefully consider it in light of the ancient and medieval taxonomies in this

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<sup>396</sup> For instance, applying the principles or recognizing the axiomatic in a mathematical problem allows one to evaluate whether a particular solution to that problem is correct or erroneous.

study. The most obvious difficulty is, of course, that Bloom's "lowest" taxonomic level is called "knowledge." According to ancient thought, human beings exist in an "in-between" (*metaxy*). That is, human beings are neither in a state of complete ignorance (*agnoia*) nor knowledge (*episteme*), but rather inhabit a realm between these two poles known as opinion (*doxa*). Human *doxai*, being somewhere in this middle ground, must be tested dialectically for their truth content; the cognitive movement that constitutes education within the *metaxy* always intends towards knowing and away from ignorance; falsehood must be unearthed and rejected while truth, inasmuch as it is present in an opinion, must be identified and "taken up" (*anairesis*) so that the one "seeking to know" or engaged in *zetesis* might aspire towards knowledge. According to this ancient taxonomy, "knowledge" is not properly what one starts with, but rather what one aims at in one's desire to know. Hence, Bloom's taxonomy seems to be inverted hierarchically with regard to "knowledge."

Some further clarification of the proper position of "knowledge" in any true taxonomy of cognition is needed at this point. Is knowledge to be found at the beginning and lowest level taxonomically? Or is it found only at the highest summit? As is pointed out in Plato's *Meno*,<sup>397</sup> just as one could never seek out what is wholly unknown to oneself without in some sense knowing of it beforehand, so too would no one ever desire to know anything if one already knew what one sought to know. The very fact of our "seeking to know", or *zetesis*, implies both knowledge and ignorance. In ancient thought, then, no one who seeks to know is truly ignorant; inasmuch as we seek to know, we know at least that we do not know. And more than this: by following Plato's discussion of recollection (*anamnesis*) in the *Meno*, there is also the notion that what we come to know we have always in some sense known through participation (*metalepsis*) in what we have earlier in this study termed "originary experiences"; essentially, our coming to know is best characterized as a kind of recollection of what we have always known to be the case simply by our participation in the order of being. Our anamnetic knowing, following Plato's account, is simply the development of our consciousness of the fact and reality of this *metalepsis*. In short, although it is certainly the case that our desire to know presupposes

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<sup>397</sup> Plato, *Meno* 80d-81e. The problem posed by Meno in this passage is that, on the one hand, we would never seek to know what we already knew; yet on the other hand, unless we somehow know of a thing, how could we ever seek to know about it? Socrates addresses this difficulty in his discussion of *anamnesis*, an idea that we have already discussed at some length elsewhere in this study.

knowledge even at the lowest level, it is equally true that knowledge is not to be found at the beginning but rather as the end-point of our inquiries. In this regard, Bloom's taxonomy of cognition strikes us as founded upon a perplexing inversion and denigration of the term "knowledge."<sup>398</sup>

If the term "knowledge" seems not to be the appropriate name for what is lowest but rather highest in a properly-ordered cognitive taxonomy, so too does it seem to be the case that Bloom's affective taxonomy suffers an inversion of order with regard to his judgements concerning the significance of "attention" on the one hand and "value consistency" on the other. To begin with the former, at the lowest level in the "affective domain" Bloom places willingness to receive or attend to the existence of phenomena and stimuli. He subdivides this lowest form of affective receptivity into "awareness," "willingness to receive," and "controlled or selected attention." Here, Bloom identifies consciousness of a thing's existence, willingness to tolerate a thing's existence, and the ability to differentiate or distinguish between various stimuli. Now certainly it is the case that consciousness or awareness is a basic attribute of all sentient life, and so can be reasonably classified as a low capability. However, as we have seen throughout our investigation of wisdom's pursuit, there is a higher sense to attentive awareness that must be acknowledged. The ancients and medievals refer to this attentive gaze, this receptive awareness, as *theoria* or *contemplatio*. As the manner in which the highest object of knowing is ultimately grasped, it is this sort of attention or awareness that is the mainstay of philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom. As we have seen, Weil contends that all education worthy of the name is concerned with cultivating precisely this sort of attention. In this regard, attention is not rightly conceived as the lowest form of affectation as Bloom contends, but rather its most sublime element. In short, by inspecting ancient and medieval taxonomies, we become cognizant of those elements of cognition and affection that transcend Bloom's taxonomy, and we find reasons

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<sup>398</sup> Michael J. Booker makes a similar criticism of Bloom's classification of "knowledge" as the lowest level of the taxonomy; in Booker's view, Bloom disparages "factual knowledge" as something "beneath our concern" (347). He accuses Bloom of "denigrating 'mere knowledge'" as a low and insignificant thing (353), and he sees this denigration as having long-term negative educational consequences. See Booker, "A Roof without Walls: Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy and the Misdirection of American Education" *Acad. Quest.* (2007): 347-355. For another good critique of Bloom's Taxonomy as it contributes to the primacy of "high stakes testing," see Herbert Kohl, "A Love Supreme – Riffing on the Standards: Placing Ideas at the Center of High Stakes Schooling" *Multicultural Education* (Winter 2006): 4-9.

for asserting that Bloom's taxonomy is itself an inversion of the true order of the soul and its "affective domain."<sup>399</sup>

A second inversion of order can be espied if we examine Bloom's ranking of "value consistency" as highest among the objectives of the "affective domain." In order to understand what Bloom means by this phrase, it is necessary to retrace his steps backward through the lower strata of his taxonomy of the affective domain towards the higher. After attention or "awareness" and "obedience" (the first and second tiers of the taxonomy), Bloom places "valuing," or the recognition that a thing, phenomenon, or behaviour has worth. The indicator for Bloom that this affective objective has been reached is that our actions follow consistently from our "acceptance of a value" or belief, in which we have developed a degree of certainty or conviction. At the fourth level, Bloom places the "organization" of these "values" into a coherent and internally consistent "system." The fifth and highest affective objective, according to Bloom, is that our actions and behaviours are in harmony with this system -- that "the individual acts consistently in accordance with the values he has internalized." The peak of affective achievement, for Bloom, is the coherent development of one's own "world view," or *Weltanschauung*.

Bloom's taxonomy of the affective domain is problematic on many levels if we compare it to the ancient and medieval models discussed in this study. To begin with, awareness of reality at the primary level need not be understood at a higher level to give rise to "convictions" and "certainty" which then must cement into "values," let alone "systems" of values. Rather, from the philosophic vantage point wherein wisdom is pursued, wherein all *doxai* are exposed to dialectical investigation, and wherein all *archai* are themselves "taken up" noetically towards their source in the Divine *Arche*, it is precisely our originary awareness of the anamnestic that inspires us to seek after what we do

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<sup>399</sup> Even apart from this inversion, another equally troublesome problem arises. For how is it that awareness and attention are not part of the cognitive taxonomy? If, according to ancient and medieval understanding, the *vita contemplativa* culminates in the act of *theoria*, and *theoria* is really a sublime form of attention, then how is attention not a cognitive attribute? Thomas recognizes that the "affective domain" certainly has its role in the contemplative life, but fundamentally, *theoria*, or "gazing" is an act of the intellect (*intellectus*) rather than the will (*affectus*). He writes that "intention is an act of the will (*voluntas*) ... because it has to do with the end, which is the object of the will. Hence, as regards the very essence of its activity, the contemplative life belongs to the intellect; but as regards that which moves one to the exercise of that activity, it belongs to the will, which moves all the other faculties (*potentias*), and even the intellect, to their acts." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.1. In this regard, Bloom is correct to distinguish thinking from willing; but his classification of attention and awareness in the "affective domain" of the will rather than in the "cognitive domain" of the intellect is misleading.

not know, and to question what we supposed we knew when in fact we did not. Philosophic movement up the hierarchy in the "affective domain" does not properly resolve itself in the solidification of "values" or in the creation of a "system" of values, but is rather the manner whereby all values are themselves brought into question. In this regard, the pursuit of wisdom as it relates to activities spawned from the will in the affective domain does not necessarily resolve itself into actions "consistent" and in accordance with such values; rather, wisdom's pursuit most often will, as we have seen in our review of modern literature on wisdom, serve as a brake against all such actions proceeding from systematization or the application of "convictions" arising from a "world view." Essentially, the highest level of Bloom's affective taxonomy is a complete inversion of the proper ordering of the soul from an ancient and medieval perspective. Such convictions and actions according to a coherent *Weltanschauung* might actually serve to undermine, deny, or subvert our awareness of reality at the primary level, when the "value" of our convictions is taken as what is real, and when the real that one knows through attentive awareness is forsaken in favour of the system's internal consistency.

Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives drives the way that we teach and that we understand learning in today's classroom. As we have seen, this taxonomy has serious deficiencies. We can see even more clearly some of its deficiencies if we look specifically at Thomas' six-part cognitive or contemplative taxonomy already discussed.<sup>400</sup> Bloom's taxonomy certainly recognizes the consideration of corporeal things in the imagination at the first level in Thomas' ordering. Similarly, the second and third levels of cognition are acknowledged by Bloom, wherein the order and disposition of sensible things is considered, and invisible things are considered by means of their image in visible things. Bloom too is able to account in his taxonomy for the fourth level in the medieval taxonomy, at which intelligible things reached by the senses are considered in their own right. At the fifth level, Bloom's ordering also seems able to consider intelligible things that cannot be reached through the things of sense but only understood by reason. The dianoetic thinking (or *ratio*) that is stressed by Bloom can certainly extend into this territory of cognition. But at the sixth level in which intelligible things are considered that the intellect can neither discover nor exhaust – "the sublime contemplation of truth wherein

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<sup>400</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.4.

contemplation is finally perfected"<sup>401</sup> – Bloom stops short. Such intellection requires recognition of the *donum* discussed previously; that is, in order for this sort of cognition to arise, one must be willing to recognize that one's knowing is itself the result of an awareness of a good that transcends all the goods that can be thought about discursively. At this sixth and highest level, the noetic rather than the dianoetic power -- the *intellectus* rather than the *ratio* -- has sovereign resonance. At this level, *theoria* or *contemplatio* is the mode of grasping what is the true source for knowing and understanding. Bloom's taxonomy simply does not admit this sort of cognitive activity which transcends all systematizations of thought, as well as all critical, analytic, synthetic, and evaluative thinking.

Apart from cutting off the sixth level of contemplation, Bloom's own dianoetic constraints hobble thinking at each of the lower levels, since noetic activity and *intellectus* move throughout this hierarchy as well, and not solely at its highest end. For instance, even at the first level in the medieval taxonomy, wherein the things of sense are considered by the mind, wisdom may be pursued noetically; *noesis* may, even at this lowest level, take the things of sense up towards their true beginning in the Divine *Arche*; and the intellect may certainly gaze upon being at any of these levels in the contemplative taxonomy; critical-analytic, synthetic, or evaluative thought need not be the only way in which the mind deals with its thought objects, contrary to what Bloom's taxonomy suggests.

Yet another way to evaluate Bloom's taxonomy in light of the ancient and medieval taxonomies that incorporate the pursuit of wisdom is to inspect his ordering according to the three movements of the soul discussed by Thomas and originating in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>402</sup> In *The Divine Names*, Dionysius speaks of both "divine intelligences"<sup>403</sup> and souls as having three sorts of movements: circular (movement around

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<sup>401</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.4.

<sup>402</sup> See particularly Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, in *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 704d-705b. Thomas' treatment of these three contemplative "exercises" is found at *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.6.

<sup>403</sup> Thomas and Dionysius distinguish between the cognitive powers of angelic intelligences and the human soul with regard to the "uniformity" of their respective knowledge. The angelic intellect is said to possess uniform knowledge that is not given to the human soul inasmuch as such beings do not "acquire intelligible truth from a variety of composite things," and secondly because they do not "understand intelligible truth discursively but by a simple intuition." The human intellect, by contrast, "draws intelligible truth from the objects of sense and understands that truth by means of a certain discursus of the intellect." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.6.



a stationary point), straight (movement proceeding from one point to another), and spiral (being the combination of the other two). Speaking particularly of the souls of human beings, Dionysius writes:

First it [the soul] moves in a circle, that is, it turns within itself and away from what is outside and there is an inner concentration of its intellectual powers. A sort of fixed revolution causes it to return from the multiplicity of externals, to gather in upon itself and then, in this undispersed condition, to join those who are themselves in a powerful union. From there the revolution brings the soul to the Beautiful and the Good, which is beyond all things, is one and the same, and has neither beginning nor end. But whenever the soul receives, in accordance with its capacities, the enlightenment of divine knowledge and does so not by way of the mind nor in some mode arising out of its identity, but rather through discursive reasoning, in mixed and changeable activities, then it moves in a spiral fashion. And its movement is in a straight line when, instead of circling in upon its own intelligent unity (for this is the circular), it proceeds to the things around it, and is uplifted from external things, as from certain variegated and pluralized symbols, to the simple and united contemplations.<sup>404</sup>

Thomas clarifies these three movements as they apply to human beings. Each of the three movements is broken down by Thomas into its respective components. Of particular interest in our study is what Thomas has to say about the circular movement. He writes that this circular movement of the soul consist of several things, “of which the first is the withdrawal of the soul into itself from external things.” The second is “a certain concentration of its powers, whereby the soul is freed from error and outward occupation.” And the third is “union with those things that are above the soul.” This uniform circular movement is not readily available to human beings without the correction of a “twofold dissimilarity.” The first is that which “arises from the diversity of external things, and this requires that the soul withdraw from external things.” Second, the human soul, unlike the angelic intelligence, operates using the discursus of reasoning. In order for the uniform, circular movement to be achieved, all operations of the soul must be directed “to the simple contemplation of intelligible truth.” Once reasoning ceases, “the soul’s gaze may be fixed on the contemplation of one simple truth.” This sort of cognitive activity puts “everything else aside” and involves the dedication of oneself solely to the contemplation of God and the pursuit of Wisdom. Thomas remarks, moreover, that in this circular motion of the soul,

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<sup>404</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 705a-705b.

“there is no error,” just as there is no error in the knowledge of first principles which we know by simple intuition (*simplici intuiti*).<sup>405</sup>

Studying Thomas’ articulation of the soul’s circular movement, we can see how foreign it is to the taxonomy of educational objectives that drives instruction in our classrooms. Whereas Bloom’s ordering stresses the cultivation of discursive, analytic, synthetic, and evaluative capacities, the circular movement calms these learning priorities, seeking their effective cessation. Whereas reasoning and classroom thinking – and for teachers, the evaluation of student achievement -- involves the measurement and “progression” of rational capacities according to certain skill sets in thinking and cognitive development, the circular movement of the soul cannot be so evaluated, since by its nature it is separate from all discursus, and it is “free of error.” The circular movement has no measure other than the Measure in which it participates by pursuing Wisdom in contemplative gazing. Bloom’s taxonomy is unable to account for this psychic movement, and not surprisingly, our own educational biases, modelled as they are on “accountability” in learning, measurements, standardized testing, and “assessment for learning,” do not recognize let alone cultivate such cognitive activities, even though such activities constitute the “highest happiness” for human beings according to all the ancient and medieval taxonomies discussed in our own study.

Next, after having parsed the circular movement into its components, Thomas indicates that the straight movement in the soul is not one thing but twofold: first, during such a movement “the soul goes out to those things that are around it.” Second, “it is raised from external things to simple contemplation.” Put another way, the straight movement in the soul “proceeds from external objects of sense to the knowledge of intelligible realities.” The straight motion of the soul, in this way, moves from externals of sense towards intelligible realities discursively, and through discursus, it reaches towards the non-discursive reality apprehended through contemplation in the circular motion. Similarly, Thomas speaks of the spiral movement of the soul as arising from “the fact that the soul is enlightened in divine truths in a manner proper to reason and about many things.” The spiral movement is said to exist in the soul inasmuch as “it uses divine revelation in

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<sup>405</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.6. It is worth noting here that our word “intuition” is derived from the Latin *tueor*, “to look,” and so has a certain resonance with the beholding function of *theoria* or contemplation.

reasoning.” Put another way, when the soul reasons (for reasoning is linear, moving from point to point) using the insights of *theoria* concerning primary or non-discursive reality, it moves in a spiral fashion. All such spiral and straight movements are “based on the differences of above or below, to the right or the left, forward or backward, and varying circles.” All refer to the discursus of reason:

For if it is a movement from one opposite to another, it will be a movement to the right or the left. If it is a movement from causes to effects, it will be a forward and backward movement. If it concerns a thing’s surroundings, whether immediate or remote, it will be a circle. When the discursus of reason proceeds from things of sense to the intelligible within the order of natural reason (*naturalis rationis*), it enters into straight movement; when it is according to divine revelation (*illuminationes divinas*), into the spiral movement ... Only the immobility he [Dionysius] mentions belongs to the circular movement.<sup>406</sup>

Interestingly, whereas before it appeared that only the circular movement of the soul would be denied by strict adherence to Bloom’s taxonomy, we can now clearly see that all three movements are jeopardized, inasmuch as each is either the embodiment of the circular (as *contemplatio* or *theoria*), or is directed towards the circular (as in the straight), or makes use of insights gleaned from the circular motions of the soul (as in the form of the spiral). In this way, by denying credence to one motion of the soul, all the other motions that Bloom argues must be fostered and recognized in a fully educational program of teaching and learning are thrown into doubt.

The contemplative pursuit of wisdom through the fostering of *theoria* in the “wisdom atmosphere” of *scholae* has now been shown to be an essential component of any legitimate taxonomy of educational objectives. Bloom’s taxonomy -- the taxonomy held as orthodoxy among most modern educators and promulgated to all teachers and pushed in all classrooms and evaluative systems -- has been shown definitively to be fraught with difficulties. Through our dialectical investigation of its character, we have shown that it is not a tenable ordering and incorrectly judges the psychic amplitude of the cognitive and affective domains in regards to education.

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<sup>406</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.6.

### (ix) Pursuing Wisdom: The Need for *Schole* and the Dangers of *Akedia*

Our study thus far indicates quite emphatically that leisure or *schole* is necessary to all true education. *Schole* is the “atmosphere” in which the full amplitude of cognitive and affective educational objectives might be explored; throughout this thesis, we have asserted that *schole* is the proper climate for the pursuit of wisdom, and that it is the environment in which contemplation or *theoria* might be practiced or cultivated. Without the opportunity for *theoria* that is afforded through the availability of *schole*, none of the three movements of the soul can be properly encouraged (for the circular is *theoria*, and both the straight and the spiral either point to or make use of the circular, as we have seen). However, we have not dealt at great length with what *schole* might look like in a school system or an educational facility. In our earlier discussions, we addressed Aristotle's particular concern that play (*paidia*) does not properly approach the true meaning of *schole*, and therefore that it does not provide an appropriate model for a wisdom environment; rather, Aristotle dismisses play as a pretence to *schole*; he calls *paidia* a kind of *diagoge*: he sees it as “killing time”; and Aristotle is correct that *schole*, as the means of cultivating *theoria*, is not concerned with “killing time,” but rather with the search (*zetesis*) for the timeless. Hence, in Aristotle's view, *paidia* – an activity similar to *schole* inasmuch as both *schole* and *paidia* engage the soul in activities that are “ends in themselves,” much as happiness is its own end – is not a true image of *schole*. In his judgment, the pursuit of *sophia* is quite unlike play; *philosophia*, or philosophy is the serious affair of the “serious man” or *spoudaios* – certainly *not* the prerogative of the child who plays or lacks such seriousness and maturity.

However, we disagreed with Aristotle's assessment of *paidia* on the grounds that child's play is not the same as “killing time”; it is therefore not to be judged like the activities of the foolish man who wastes his time in vain recreational pursuits. Rather, during our discussion of Aristotle we argued extensively concerning the similarities between *paidia* and *schole*. We argued, following Huizinga, that *paidia* is not unlike philosophy, and that “in play we may move below the level of the serious, as the child does; but we can also move above it – in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred.”<sup>407</sup> All of our previous discussion of *paidia* as it relates to *schole* must now be related to our

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<sup>407</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 19.

discussion of Thomas' writing concerning the contemplative life and the cognitive taxonomy in which wisdom is pursued through the practice of *scholē*. Like Aristotle, Thomas too distinguishes between killing time and leisure. The former arises from the desire to be freed from the experience of lacking occupation, or having nothing to do with one's own time; one's time is experienced as a burden from which one must seek relief because one has never learned how to cultivate the latter aptitude, namely, leisure, or attentive awareness of the timeless. Indeed, the inability to enjoy one's *scholē* among youths, having taken the form of idleness, is rightly blamed as the cause for much delinquency, crime, and social dysfunction.

These contrasting attitudes towards the experience of one's own freedom during time that is not filled up with labours, past-times, and work have been the topic of much discussion among ancient and medieval writers. In distinction from our modern understanding wherein recreation is always juxtaposed to work and labour, the antipode to leisure (*scholē*) has always been understood classically as inertia, sloth, or carelessness (*akedia*). Indeed, Aristotle's remarks of criticism concerning the wasting of time in recreation by tyrants, sycophants, and immature, playful men might shed some light on our own modern pretences against and distrust of "leisure" as the wasting of time, in a world where time is money, and where all publicly-affirmed goods revolve around productivity, worldly success, and the world of work. Thomistic scholar Josef Pieper connects our modern distrust and equivocation of *scholē* with *akedia* as a totalitarian impulse:

To the devotees of a total work culture such a statement [Aristotle's or Thomas' affirmation of *scholē*] must appear to be nothing short of immoral and a repudiation of the meaning and order of human society. From such a standpoint, leisure is either to be understood as a temporary break from work – in which case one writes it off as a necessary evil – or else leisure becomes another word for inertia and idleness. According to the teachings on life of the High Middle Ages, just the opposite, however, is true: it is leisurelessness that is related to inertia, and it is precisely from inertia that the restlessness associated with work for work's sake springs. Genuine leisure is not compatible with this kind of inertia, for leisure presupposes that man assents to his own nature. The ancient concept of inertia, or *akedia*, which is a metaphysical one, suggests a man at variance with himself. And for this reason *akedia* is regarded as *vitium capitale*, which should be translated as "root" rather than "cardinal" sin. Inertia gives rise above all – this is the medieval doctrine – to despair and the *evagatio mentis*, that rambling uneasiness of the spirit which manifests itself

in the insatiability of curiosity, in inconstancy of residences and decision, and, more generally, in inner restlessness and leisurelessness.<sup>408</sup>

The modern classroom is a breeding ground for such inner restlessness. "Work for work's sake" certainly names appropriately much of what we do in schools, whether as students in the process of being assessed, or as teachers forced into endless meetings and tasks of questionable value. It is an oxymoronic place of "schoolwork" in which *scholē* is carefully guarded against; children are impressed upon to "finish their *work* in class" or else they will have "homework"; indeed, much of the modern scholarship against issuing homework perhaps arises from some sort of recognition that school has become fundamentally "un-scholastic," and rather more of a crushing burden.<sup>409</sup> All of our teaching is focused on the central concept that we are preparing our students for the future work of university or college, or else for the world of work and labour that, unlike school, is not given the false pretence of being named after *scholē*. Not being offered any opportunity to learn how to cultivate *scholē*, students never learn how to enjoy their *scholē*; generally the propensity for wonder that is the hallmark of little children wanes; older students become impatient with *noetic* inquiry that "makes problems where there are none," or that raises problems that cannot be solved deductively through the application of principles provided by teachers; and certainly *theoria*, or the loving gaze that appreciates and grasps primary reality, becomes less and less relevant the further they advance through the educational system, and the more that they are told that what really matters isn't the questions that you have and the problems that you see, nor is it significant to your academic transcript that you wonder or that you hunger for meaningful experience that might render unto you a deep appreciation of the world and a sense of thankfulness; rather, what matters is your answers to the sorts of questions that teachers ask and that the Alberta government demands be asked.

But can one circumvent the problem of *akedia* by *forcing* students to "philosophize"? Can philosophy, as the pursuit of wisdom and the cultivation of *theoria* in the atmosphere of *scholē*, be taught and assessed like other subjects? Is the solution to our problem simply to incorporate philosophy as yet one more task among all the other tasks

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<sup>408</sup> Pieper, "Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labour," 21; also on *akedia*, see Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 38-40.

<sup>409</sup> See, for instance, Professor Alfie Kohn's website dedicated to the contentions that grading and homework impede learning: <http://www.alfiekohn.org/index.php>.

that students must perform, and in which they must produce measurable results? Perhaps big philosophic questions are like other types of questions asked in mathematics, science, English, or social studies curricula? Perhaps such questions fade in the consciousness of students unless continually prompted as a function of school work and demanded according to the modes of assessment that we administer; but under these circumstances, can such questions truly be pursued in the genuine spirit of philosophy? As we have seen in our study of Thomas' writings, the circular movement of contemplation that is central to the pursuit of wisdom is "free of error"; it is therefore not susceptible to assessment, for assessment only makes sense where error exists. But what cannot be assessed is quickly pushed out of the way in the busyness of the classroom. Hence, when all motivation for learning is enforced extrinsically by grades, when the only legitimate judgements to be made about an educational system are held to be performance on standardized tests or student's measurable abilities in dianoetic applications of the *ratio*, when teachers are taught always to keep their students moving and occupied and stimulated with a variety of tasks and technologies as though this were the way in which "the twenty-first century learner"<sup>410</sup> best learns, when the attentive gaze of the *intellectus* is forsaken for isolated concern with the *ratio* (or worse, when deep thinking is neglected in favour of the gloss needed for scoring well on tests), when teachers themselves are made slaves to the "horse race" of curriculum documents and denied leisure during their preparatory periods and on their "professional development" days, it is no surprise that both teachers and students become filled with *akedia*. Teachers are denied a space to learn and to cultivate their *scholē*; they themselves have been taught to treat leisure as the enemy of classroom productivity – essentially, they are trained to believe the claim that leisure is akin to idleness, and without proper teaching and practice, this claim becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Pieper's comments concerning *akedia* have much relevance to our educational system: the modern classroom has become largely a place of totalitarian leisurelessness and total work; it is a microcosmic model of our larger society's self-(mis)understanding.

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<sup>410</sup> See, for instance, my own school division's working document, Rocky View School Division, "'Engaging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners' 2008-2011 Three Year Plan" [http://www.rockyview.ab.ca/publications/assets\\_publications/threeyearplans/threeyearplan20082011.pdf](http://www.rockyview.ab.ca/publications/assets_publications/threeyearplans/threeyearplan20082011.pdf) (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

## (x) Teaching and the Contemplative Life

Thomas asks the question “whether teaching (*docere*) is an activity of the active or contemplative life.”<sup>411</sup> He finds that the act of teaching has a "twofold object" that gives it both active and contemplative components:

It is a function of the active life to ponder a truth interiorly so that we may be guided by it in external action; it is a function of the contemplative life to ponder an intelligible truth interiorly and take delight in the consideration and love of it.

Inasmuch as the object of teaching concerns the "audible expression" of the word, and leading others in the consideration of the truth for their benefit, teaching is service to the neighbour; it arises out of friendly concern for others, and it takes its place in the active life. However, inasmuch as teaching has as its object "the sweetness of truth" itself, and the soul of the teacher is enflamed with friendship for truth, to this extent teaching "has its place in the contemplative life."

If we are to re-invigorate *scholē* and to promote *theoria* in the modern classroom, where ought our reforms to start? The root passionate experience of philosophy, as the pursuit of wisdom, is *philia*, or friendship. The centrality of friendship to the rest of the virtues, to the pursuit of happiness, and to seeking wisdom as our highest end is not lost on Aristotle, who makes *philia* the subject of a good part of his own *Nicomachean Ethics*. And according to Thomas, friendship is a necessary component to all teaching, whether in its active aspect as service to the neighbour (i.e. one's students), or in its contemplative aspect as friendship with the truth itself.<sup>412</sup> Certainly any teacher could confirm Thomas'

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<sup>411</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.3.

<sup>412</sup> Margret Buchmann argues for the great importance of friendship in education in her own discussion of this passage from Thomas' *Summa*, and in conjunction with Aristotle's views on *philia*. She writes: "The subject matter of teaching, or its *first* object, is ... the consideration and love of truth in all its forms, with the teacher taking delight in that consideration and love. Compared to external acts of teaching, even practical arguments, this object and associated activities have logical, though not necessarily temporal, priority. In teaching, the contemplative precedes the active life because of its nature, and the nature of teaching. ... Still teaching aims at those others and is conveyed through external acts, for instance, speech; and those to whom contemplated truth is communicated are therefore its *second* object." That teaching is not simply friendship towards the truth, but also involves friendship towards one's students is argued forcefully by Buchmann: "That one's attention is urged on, towards the second object of teaching, also follows from the relation that there is, in human life, between what one most delights in and the wish to be sharing it with other people, particularly one's friends." Here, Buchmann follows Aristotle in the contention that "whatever existence means for each class of men, whatever it is for whose sake they value life, in that they wish to occupy themselves with their friends." To the extent, then, that teaching belongs to the active life, it requires exertions in the spirit of fellowship and kindness. See Margret Buchmann, "Argument and Contemplation in Teaching" *Oxford Review of Education* 14, no.2 (1988), 204.



statements about the power of friendship in teaching by looking to its power in our schools: students bind heart and soul with nothing in school more powerfully than their own friendships.

The potency of *philia* in fostering the *scholē* proper to the perfection of teaching in both its aspects, as well as in student learning, is only matched by the power of *paidia*. Indeed, the close bond between *philia* and *paidia* may be that *paidia* is the form through which true friendship expresses itself. So whether, as teachers, we are a friend to wisdom (the contemplative aspect of teaching, according to Thomas), or friendly towards our students by encouraging them to pursue wisdom (the active aspect), our friendliness towards the truth and our neighbour (i.e., the student) will always in some measure take the form of *paidia*. As we have seen in our earlier defence of *paidia* against Aristotle's accusations, play relates us to our highest nature. We discussed Plato's depiction of human beings as divine play-things; if we are not to be simply dead sacks of meat hanging from a cord, we must respond to the playful tugs of the god upon our strings; we must dance divinely for the pleasure of the god. Through this image, Plato teaches us that *paidia* is, in some sense, the manner of our highest fulfillment as human beings in relation to the immortal source of all the good things in which we might rejoice;<sup>413</sup> moreover, in conjunction with Plato's philosophic image, we have discussed Huizinga's defence of play as a form of activity that, in principle, is not dissimilar to philosophy. The rejoicing that is proper to our experience of freedom from work in leisure (*scholē*) as opposed to the despair of *akedia* might be verified by any teacher who sees the degree to which the students in his school adore one another as friends and rejoice in one another through play, and that this sort of play is what they all truly seem to desire above all else as the source of their genuine happiness. If we therefore take Thomas' comments about friendship and unite them (as we are wont to do, given experiences readily available to any school teacher) with Huizinga's insights concerning play, we begin to see the sort of atmosphere that might cultivate and

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<sup>413</sup> In Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger distinguishes human things as "unserious" and only divine things as worthy of "seriousness," with the concomitant suggestion that human life at its height is, when properly understood, a form of play: "I assert that what is serious should be treated seriously, and what is not serious should not, and that by nature god is worthy of a complete, blessed seriousness, but that what is human, as we said earlier, has been devised as a certain plaything of god, and that this is really the best thing about it. Every man and woman should spend life in this way, playing the noblest (*kallistas*) possible games, and thinking about them in a way that is the opposite of the way they're now though about" (803c). See Plato, *The Laws*, trans. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

foster *scholē* among both our students and our teachers. Such an atmosphere would be one of friendship (*philia*) and play (*paidia*). Such a school would be truly "scholastic": it would provide both students and teachers with a venue for practicing their *scholē* and for diminishing their *akedia*. Moreover, it would aptly bring teaching to its perfection as both an active and a contemplative activity; on the one hand, through familiarity with such an atmosphere, teachers would not be kept interminably busy for the sake of busyness and out of distrust of them as professionals by their administrative and governmental superiors; in *scholē*, they would be given opportunity to cultivate a friendship for the truth for its own sake, and thereby begin to pursue Wisdom. On the other hand, teachers could encourage *scholē* by their own example among their students, and particularly by fostering the element of play in their pedagogy; for *paidia*, as Huizinga notes, moves not only "below the level of the serious," but also above it – "in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred."

In the parts of this thesis following our elucidation of ancient views of wisdom and wisdom's pursuit as components of education, we will investigate and assess various ways that this atmosphere of *scholē* has been introduced into modern-day teaching, curricula, and educational programs. To what extent have these innovations provided a space for *scholē* in our schools? To what extent is the full amplitude of the *metaxy* recognized in these various alternatives? How deep and how high does education according to these alternatives push *zetesis*? To what extent has the pursuit of wisdom, as the most true and excellent form of education, been taken up in our modern-day understanding of teaching and learning?

### CHAPTER THREE: PROSPECTS FOR THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM IN CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

In our survey of ancient and modern views concerning wisdom, we have shown that, although the modern writers in our study cannot agree on what is the precise nature of wisdom, there is nonetheless a broad consensus among all of them that wisdom is an important element of a proper education. More heartening than this, our investigation of ancient writers has provided us with some much needed clarity about the nature of wisdom, and it gives us much reason to be hopeful that wisdom's pursuit remains a possibility in the current day; each of the ancient writers in our study demonstrates how the pursuit of wisdom is, in fact, integral to our happiness as human beings; their insights suggest that philosophy and its associated contemplative practices in an atmosphere of *scholē* might lend us the opportunity to cultivate elements of our nature that are left mainly undeveloped, undiscovered, and neglected – if not purposefully thwarted -- in our modern school system with its emphasis on accountability, on the assurance of pre-determined outcomes, on global competitiveness, and on the acquisition of skills and competencies.

Our present study of wisdom makes quite clear how neglected and undervalued wisdom has been, and remains, in our modern educational institutions – even those like Alberta's which are lauded as being among “the best in the world.”<sup>414</sup> Indeed, our modern concerns in education – and those most keenly valued by our governments -- are with practical matters and utility; that is, education is viewed as the primary mode of developing the power to acquire and maintain worldly goods; education is viewed as the most powerful mode to achieve our desires, whatever those desires may be; education is valued as a means to ensure the affluence and success that all parents wish for their children. These are the goals towards which all of our current educational efforts are directed; and we laud these goals *en masse* as being tied most closely to our hopes and dreams for our children and our future. However, as the ancient writers – and many of the modern writers as well -- in our study have pointed out very clearly, these goals, even if they are achieved, do not contribute at all to the cultivation of wisdom. For instance, as we have seen in Chandler and Holliday's study of the character of Ivan Ilyich, one might gain all worldly goods yet still

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<sup>414</sup> “Clever rednecks: It's not just the economy that is booming; schools are too” *The Economist* (Sept 21, 2006) <http://www.economist.com/node/7945805> (accessed Feb 28, 2011).

remain interminably unhappy. Sternberg, another researcher in our study, has remarked that our modern concern ever to hone and to develop our critical-analytic problem-solving faculties (what the ancients referred to as the *ratio*) has successfully augmented our “intelligence quotient”; but this same “human intelligence has, to some extent, brought the world to the brink.” The consensus among the thinkers included in our study is that there has been no complementary development of wisdom alongside of our powers of calculative reasoning. Without this development, no amount of schooling, education, and training can bring us any closer to the happiness that the ancients have all said is our true end.

As educators, we need not continue along this path of hypertrophied fixation with the development of the *ratio*; as educators, we hold tremendous power both to help ourselves as well as the children that we teach to turn towards the pursuit of wisdom. Of course, many of the ancient writers in our study voice serious doubts about the extent to which such aspirations towards wisdom might feasibly be promoted *en masse*, and particularly among the young. These doubts are worthy of consideration and must be taken seriously; however, our study of these same ancient writers on the pursuit of wisdom also makes it clear that the hope that wisdom’s pursuit offers us *always* remains a possibility for human beings who are willing to turn away from the allure of acquisition, from the gratification of desires, and from the vanity of success in order to seek that true happiness that is the end of not just a *select few* people, but rather is the proper and highest end for *all* human beings. It is for this reason that our present study of the pursuit of wisdom in education is an exciting and hopeful inquiry that has the potential – at least on a small scale beginning with those few teachers and students for whom such a pursuit catches fire, and then perhaps for others by their example – truly to “transform” education. In this study, light is shed upon the hope and the possibility that the integration of such philosophic, contemplative, or noetic studies into the school curricula might awaken our awareness of the *intellectus* rather than simply stiffen our resolve to ratchet up the level of our technical mastery and successes associated with the *ratio*; this study voices the hope that our human capacity (as mortal beings who might “immortalize”) for *theoria* might inform – and perhaps relax, or at the very least moderate in a cautionary fashion -- the current feverish and intensive (if not to say, *exclusive*) concerns with competitiveness and success that drive all of our educational goals and efforts at reform.

## I. Reflections on Albertan Initiatives in Education and the Pursuit of Wisdom

### 1. The 2010 “Inspiring Education” Report

The aforementioned states of hopefulness and excitement brought about by our investigation of the importance of wisdom and the possibility of its pursuit in education easily give way to discouragement and despair when we read The 2010 Steering Committee Report to the Minister of Education entitled, “Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans.”<sup>415</sup> This document clearly illustrates not only the Government’s but also the general public’s lack of interest in – if not hostility to -- pursuing wisdom; instead, it focuses even more stringently upon bolstering student achievements that correspond roughly to Bloom’s taxonomic objectives as discussed earlier in our thesis.<sup>416</sup> Rather than encouraging students and teachers to open themselves to the possibility of theoretic gazing upon the world as “being” (*to on*) – and as we have seen, Aristotle says that philosophy is precisely that “science which studies being as being”<sup>417</sup> -- this document is prefaced with a strange prophecy in which the real world – a world whose being is always available to us as human beings for contemplation -- is to be presented to students rather as though it were a computer, or like a surface upon which computers might project information about the world.<sup>418</sup> Rapt attention to the world as it is given (*theoria*) – that is: direct, unmediated communion with a world that we have not created but into which we are born -- as *being* is thereby deflected in favour of immersion in the transitory, fabricated stimuli and flickering images that are made available to us through technological innovations on the surface of things.

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<sup>415</sup> Government of Alberta, “Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans” The Steering Committee Report to the Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister of Education. Government of Alberta (April 2010) <http://www.inspiringeducation.alberta.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=wqYRVMaWPH8%3D&tabid=75> (Accessed Feb. 28 2011).

<sup>416</sup> See the section of my thesis on St. Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>417</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.i.1; 1003a.20-21.

<sup>418</sup> The Steering Committee Report begins as follows:  
“What is ahead for tomorrow’s learner?

Currently in development, a device called the “Sixth Sense” gives users information about any object in their immediate surroundings. It projects out information normally found on a computer, **in effect making the world a computer.**

The Sixth Sense device is a wearable pendant that combines a mirror, a pocket projector, and a camera. Both the projector and the camera are connected to a cell phone in the user’s pocket. **The device projects visual information on surfaces, walls and physical objects so that they become interfaces.** ...  
Imagine the possibilities for learners!” See “Inspiring Education,” 3 (boldface added).

In a subsequent reference to this brave, new world of learning in the 2030 classroom, the Report tells the story of a young girl named Chipo who has recently immigrated from Africa; she is depicted teaching her Albertan peers about her homeland solely with the aid of technological interfaces, and “a computer design program” with a “massive database.” One of the most curious things about the Committee’s “vision” of the 2030 classroom is that the teacher is never mentioned in this vignette.<sup>419</sup> Indeed, heavy stress is placed upon the idea that the teacher must no longer be seen as an expert or “authority” in his or her field of study who shares his or her knowledge of this field with students; rather, the teacher must become “an architect of learning.” In this regard, even the most basic meaning of the term “wisdom” (carefully identified by many of the thinkers in our study) as a kind of expert knowledge within a particular discipline is held in disrepute by the Committee Report.

The Report’s stance on precisely what a teacher ought to know – that is, his or her modicum of “wisdom” or expertise in a given field of study -- is ambiguous at best. On the one hand, it seems that educators must be deeply knowledgeable since “teachers must achieve excellence”;<sup>420</sup> additionally, public comments indicate a hope “that our educators

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<sup>419</sup> The prophecy runs as follows:

“A new girl has joined the class. She comes from the African nation Zimbabwe, and her name is Chipo. While one-half of the children were born in other countries, no one comes from Zimbabwe.

The children have many questions. What is the town like that Chipo comes from? What sports do they play? What languages do they speak? Chipo has a question too: How will I fit in?

By tapping her bracelet, Chipo connects to a digital network and shows the class the life she knows. She projects an image of the village centre onto the wall of the classroom. With a flick of her finger, she reaches her friend Gamba who, in real time, takes the class on a tour of Chipo’s former neighbourhood. Now the projection shows brick houses with metal roofs and children playing soccer. Chipo explains that many of the homes are owned in partnership with relatives.

Chipo’s classmates come upon a gathering of local musicians. The music is compelling – the extra pulse the children hear makes some of them dance around the classroom. But what interests them the most are the instruments, particularly one that is a rectangular block with metal prongs. Chipo says that the instrument is a mbira, but some call it a thumb piano.

The mbira player performs a couple of simple tunes that the children record so they can learn to reproduce them on the keyboards within their notebooks. In the classroom, using a computer design program, a group of children start to build their own mbira. The program refines their rough sketches, making suggestions for improvement. Connecting with the program’s massive database, they experiment with different sounds, and create a digital 3-D model for their version of the traditional mbira. This one is more compact and higher in tone.

The mbira player, excited to have an opportunity to practise English and learn about Canada, agrees with Gamba and Chipo to check back with the class the next week to see how they are doing with their new mbira. The class goes on to work with the mbira player to create a performance piece that they share with other classes at the next school assembly.” See “Inspiring Education,” 9.

<sup>420</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 7.

are equipped with a knowledge that is as deep as it is broad.”<sup>421</sup> On the other hand, the claim seems to be that due to the pace of change and the sheer volume of things to know, teachers are not capable of being wise experts or “authorities” in their fields of study anymore. “Today’s pace of change is greater than at any other time in history,”<sup>422</sup> and in the future “the pace of change will be relentless and greater than we have ever experienced.”<sup>423</sup> Whereas a “single flow of information through an instructor” was “successful in educating past generations,” the Committee asks, “Will it be enough in a knowledge-based society?”<sup>424</sup>

Indeed, the authors of the Report seem to render the most basic sense of “wisdom” as expertise superfluous in the twenty-first century classroom where technology may be introduced as a surrogate for the real, living knower – namely, the teacher -- who might be an authority and competent guide in a given discipline or field of inquiry. The entire notion of wisdom as “expert knowledge” in a particular discipline or field of study seems to have become outmoded in the “knowledge-based society” in which, ironically, it is not important to know anything in particular; a real “knowledge-based” education is not about actually knowing anything specific, but rather knowing how to access information about the thing that you seek to know: “As we focus more on competencies, there will be less emphasis on knowing something, and more emphasis on knowing how to access information about it.”<sup>425</sup> From the perspective of the Committee, then, wisdom at the most basic level of

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<sup>421</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 21. As a side note, I have for a long time found it frustrating and disheartening as a teacher that my efforts at genuine “professional development” – that is to say, inquiry into my own areas of academic interest and specialty – have consistently been thwarted, discouraged, and frequently punished by administrators who do not wish teachers to pursue their own education, but instead use PD days as a means of social control, enforcing “accountability,” and certainly *not* in ways that contribute in any way to the “broadening” or “deepening” of teacher knowledge and understanding.

<sup>422</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 13.

<sup>423</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 4. In these extracts, the Committee seems to suggest that *all* knowledge is of transitory things – that teachers *do not* instruct their pupils about anything that lasts. One wonders about what their stance might be on basic knowledge of mathematical principles, scientific method, or, in the study of literature, the reflective capacities of human beings engaged in thinking about their own nature -- human nature itself being something that is unchanging by definition. Is not the Committee’s alarm about the “pace of change” rather one-sided in this regard? Perhaps the Committee’s alarm is itself an indication that it, as well as the majority of Albertans who participated in the “dialogue,” has lost sight of *being* – of what might be lasting or eternal beneath all of the fleeting change and turmoil of technological society. Certainly teachers at any point in history can, and ought to, have a grasp on the principles of their own disciplines in order to teach them. Indeed, as we have seen earlier, dianoetic reasoning in the various arts and sciences presupposes this basic apprehension or *seeing* of the principles (*archai*) at the foundation of each of the disciplines.

<sup>424</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 11.

<sup>425</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 25.

competencies and skills in particular fields of study may be reducible to adept use of information technologies; the promotion of such *ersatz* wisdom consists in making access to those technologies as widespread as possible.

The entire notion of a “wise” teacher-expert is presented in the Report as outmoded due to what is seen as the increasingly rapid pace of change. The Committee remarks that a forward-thinking educational system must be responsive to this new reality: “In a system that is more learner-centred and competency-based, Albertans see the role of the teacher changing from that of a knowledge authority to an architect of learning.”<sup>426</sup> The place of “wisdom” in any given field of study is, in this way, supplanted by technologies that provide all information about any given subject instantaneously or in “real time” – much as the example of Chipso cited above suggests. The teacher then seems to be relegated to the position of chaperone or facilitator for the transpiration of this technological process.

At this point, we ought to question the appropriateness of the dismissal of the paradigmatic teacher as “wise” expert or authority. Indeed, it is a foundational principle of Western civilization that knowledge is something that is taught by one who knows to one who does not know – that one must, at a bare minimum, at least know something in order to be able to teach it to another.<sup>427</sup> Professor James Schall has written poignantly about the importance of knowledgeable teachers for student learning, and the joy that teachers take in passing on knowledge to their students. In his view, the good teacher is irreplaceable and cannot simply be an “architect of learning,” or one who sets students up for inquiry without having expertise in the area of inquiry under study; the teacher *must* be an authority; he or she *must* embody a degree of wisdom in regard to the discipline being taught.

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<sup>426</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 7; cf. 23. Although the teacher is no longer to be viewed as an authority in his or her subject area, the document strangely states that teachers may nonetheless “invite an expert in from the community to teach a class” (23). Very little faith, indeed, seems to be placed in the knowledge base of teachers in Alberta. Perhaps that is why, when the Committee Report lists the participants in their “dialogue with Albertans,” explicit mention is made of “parents and legal guardians,” “community and not-for-profit/volunteer organizations,” “educational stakeholders, including trustees” (are these teachers?), “educational organizations, including Aboriginal and Francophone,” “students and youth,” “post-secondary institutions,” “business and industry,” and even “the public at large,” *no explicit mention of teachers as “teachers” is made anywhere*. See “Inspiring Education,” 15.

<sup>427</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas’ remark that “the teacher, who explicitly has the whole knowledge of a thing, can more expeditiously lead someone to this knowledge than can someone who learns it inducing it from himself. The teacher can do this from the fact that he knows the principles of knowledge in a certain community of knowledge.” *De Veritate*, II, 2, ad 4.



Contrary to the suppositions of the Committee, the problems facing learners in today's fast-paced, "knowledge-based" society cannot be solved through greater integration of technology into the classroom by a teacher-architect as opposed to a "wise" or expert teacher with some authoritative knowledge in his or her discipline -- even if this technology is "less" to "support teaching" and "more" to "support the creation and sharing of knowledge."<sup>428</sup> Citing Thomas Aquinas as his main source for his own educational insights, Schall identifies three reasons why students often find it difficult to learn, even when they want to, and even with access to all the latest technological devices and tools. The first is that there are so many disparate things to know and that there seems to be no order to hold them all together. "Seeing no order of learning, the beginner becomes confused and discouraged." The second reason is that learners in any given field of study very often are unable to see the internal order of that specific discipline. "In this case, one might understand the book or conversation but not how it relates to anything else." Thomas refers to this key notion as *ordo disciplinae*, or the fact that "there is an order of subject and its parts, and of subjects themselves to one another." The third problem Schall notes that is encountered by the student wishing to learn is that being unable to see the *ordo disciplinae* generates what Aquinas calls *fastidium et confusionem*: that is, "loathing and confusion." Schall remarks that "much of our difficulty in provoking students to learn ... arises precisely from the sense of loathing and confusion that naturally arises when they are confronted, as they usually are, with a mass of unrelated material."<sup>429</sup>

What greater "mass of unrelated material" is there than the World Wide Web? Thomas' one thousand year-old remarks are particularly prescient of the difficulties facing students today who find themselves immersed in the modern technological classroom where, as the Report says, the pace of change is ostensibly "greater than at any other time in history," and where careful attention to one book with a knowledgeable teacher has been supplanted by instantaneous internet access to a multitude of disparate sources unfamiliar either to students or teachers. In such an environment of information overload, certainly not only students, but also the teacher who is *not* an authority in his or her respective field, would succumb to both *fastidium* and *confusionem*. As protection against this impediment

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<sup>428</sup> "Inspiring Education," 22.

<sup>429</sup> James V. Schall, "On Teaching and Being Eminently Teachable" in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs* (Worthington: ISI Books, 2001) 23.

to learning, the teacher must, therefore, be “wise” in the basic sense of knowing his or her discipline well. Schall writes:

the teacher, the one who has learned himself, who knows his “science” or discipline explicitly, can by this very means better lead the student to knowledge than the student could lead himself. And Aquinas held that it is better to be able to teach or pass on things that we have contemplated, that we have delighted in knowing, than simply to know them by ourselves.<sup>430</sup>

In his emphasis on the teacher’s knowledge of his or her subject, Schall points to an important element of teaching that is sidelined by the Report in its belief that a teacher’s shortcomings in “wisdom,” expertise, or authoritative knowledge can be overcome through technological innovations; namely, there is a spiritual component to teaching that marks it off especially as both an active and a contemplative enterprise.<sup>431</sup> The spiritual basis for teaching is first *having seen the truth*! In this way, teaching at its root is necessarily a contemplative activity; neither student nor teacher can circumvent the need to contemplate or “to gaze upon” (*theorein*) what *is (to on)* by delivery through a technological apparatus. Technology does not “theorize”; unlike a teacher, it does not *see*, and it does not love the truth, take joy in the truth, or share the truth. On the day that governments hand over teaching to machines as a cost-cutting efficiency, teaching will no longer be teaching; for teaching is, and must remain, a spiritual activity.

Part of the reason why teachers teach is because they delight in *seeing* the truth, much as the act of contemplation is said by all the ancient writers in our study to be the most delightful of activities. If a teaching could be delivered without such a *seeing* on the part of the teacher, there would be no joy in it. And without the joy of *seeing* (*theoria*, the contemplative aspect of teaching), there would be no impetus for sharing the love *of* and the joy *in* the truth with one’s neighbour – in this case, the student (the active aspect of teaching). Both elements of teaching must exist for learning to transpire in a genuine teacher-student relationship; no amount of technological innovation can alter this basic fact of existence.

Both Schall and Thomas help us see that there is a necessary spiritual structure to teaching and learning. This means that education, contrary to what the Report says, cannot

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<sup>430</sup> Schall, “On Teaching and Being Eminently Teachable,” 24.

<sup>431</sup> See our earlier discussion of this distinction in the tenth section of this thesis devoted to Thomas Aquinas.

properly be “student-,” “child-,” or “learner-centred”;<sup>432</sup> it must be *truth*-centred. Consequently, its centre must lie somewhere *between* the teacher and the learner. Without the teacher’s learning, or without the teacher’s *having seen* – if education could truly be “student-centred” as the Report suggests -- there could not possibly be any teaching to pass on to the learner. There can be no genuine dialogue between teacher and student where the centre is not somewhere *between* the discussants -- if *truth* rather than either of the participants is not the central concern of both parties. Just as the contemplative element of *seeing* – that immediate apprehension of the truth by the *intellectus* -- in the “expert learning” or “wisdom” of the teacher *must* be present for the joyfulness of teaching to exist in the first place, so too would teaching cease properly to exist without its active component wherein this truth is passed joyfully from teacher to student.<sup>433</sup>

The stress throughout the “Inspiring Education” document, however, is not on the joy of teaching and learning that accompanies the act of *seeing (theoria)*, helping, or being helped to *see*, but rather on the alarm that Albertans (and Canadians by extension) ought to feel about the pace of change in a globalized world economy, the intensity of international competition for jobs and success, and worries about losing all that we have thus far acquired as Albertans, which is, in the Report, referred to as our “birthright”<sup>434</sup>:

Will the child born this year have the skills necessary to both continue Alberta’s legacy and strengthen it? Will this child be able to keep up with the pace of change? The answer, according to Albertans who contributed to the Inspiring Education dialogue is “probably not.” Very few Albertans believe today’s children are learning in a manner that responds to current or emerging realities.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> “To achieve their full potential as expressed in the vision children must be the centre of *all* decisions.” See “Inspiring Education,” 6; cf. 7, 22.

<sup>433</sup> Aligned with Thomas’ discussion of teaching, Schall remarks that “the nobility of teaching” is *contemplata tradere*, that is, “to pass on to others the things we have first contemplated in our own souls.” This contemplation, writes Schall, “is the one thing that we owe to ourselves and our students. The truth we know, moreover, is not exclusively ‘ours.’ When students learn the same truth we have taken so long to learn, we are not less, though they are more.” In order for the student (the potential philosopher!) to be provoked to learn, not only must he or she be eminently teachable; “the teacher must himself know, must know the order of the discipline and its relation to other disciplines.” Schall points out that, “many confusing and irrelevant things must be sifted through [think here of the world wide web!], lest the task be loathsome and confusing.” In the end, says Schall, both teacher and student “must be about the truth, about *that which is*, about what neither made but what both must discover in a community of learning.” See Schall, “On Teaching and Being Eminently Teachable,” 26-27.

<sup>434</sup> See, for instance, “Inspiring Education,” 4.

<sup>435</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 13.

As “the amount of available information continues to grow” in the new and global “knowledge-based economy,” the Committee contends that

Albertans will need to access, select and use information competently to make informed decisions. They will be increasingly challenged to determine the accuracy of the information at their fingertips. The creativity and innovation of its citizens will become Alberta’s ultimate renewable resource.<sup>436</sup>

Throughout the Report, special emphasis is placed upon efficient and competent use of information; that is, students must finish school being able to access information, sift through vast and ever-increasing volumes of information, make sense of this information, and judge information both for its credibility and its utility. Here, we see the Committee’s concern with building “competencies” that correspond roughly to the “cognitive objectives” of Bloom’s taxonomy as discussed earlier in this thesis.<sup>437</sup> Using the philosophic language we have thus far developed to discuss different modes of cognition, all emphasis in the Committee Report is on the cultivation of the dianoetic powers (as opposed to *noesis*) and the *ratio* (as opposed to the *intellectus*) for the purposes of dealing with rapid change competitively and innovatively. However, as we have seen both in our study of the ancients and in the warnings of modern writers like Robert Sternberg, simply ratcheting up our “intelligence quotients” and honing our critical-analytic skills for the purposes of problem-solving and innovating will not suffice; on their own, such machinations *may* help us secure the means to the various ends we desire; but the movements of the *ratio*, no matter how adept, cannot tell us which innovations are good and which are not, nor can they tell us to what end we ought to innovate. Indeed, without also attending to and cultivating the noetic component of our rationality, we are left with only our own diverse passions and appetites as the means to make decisions about such things. This fact is particularly alarming in light of the Committee’s praise for the confidence and boldness of the innovative future Albertan who, eschewing the need for all restraint in the pursuit of one’s passions and dreams, announces: “to hold back is to be held back.”<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 11.

<sup>437</sup> What constitutes a “knowledgeable” person in 2030 is stated in fairly straightforward Bloomian terms by the Committee as follows: “A person is considered knowledgeable if they can gather, analyze and synthesize information ... in order to create knowledge or find solutions to problems” (25).

<sup>438</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 20.

Professor Barry Cooper has written helpfully about these two aspects of “Western rationality” and their peculiar manner of embodiment in modern technological societies. Whereas we have thus far spoken of them using the Greek terms *dianoia* (thought) and *noesis* (intellection) on the one hand, and the Latin terms *ratio* (discursive reasoning) and *intellectus* (direct apprehension or understanding) on the other, Cooper speaks of “calculative, technical, or pragmatic reason” on the one hand, and “noetic reason” on the other:

Technical-pragmatic reason guides rational action in the sciences of the external world of nature, in technological developments, and, in general, in the efficient and calculative coordination of means and ends. Noetic reason guides rational action in the sciences of human, society, and history, and in the formation or development of the psyche and of social order. Technical-pragmatic rationality is an absolute minimal requirement of the existence of a social or political order, however defective it might be by the criteria of noetic rationality. More specifically, *an ideological sectarian government that has effectively destroyed the public visibility of noetic reason is entirely capable of constructing an industrial, technological society*. On the other hand, a highly developed sense of noetic rationality within a community does not necessarily entail the growth of technological activity. The Soviet Union might serve as an example of the first kind of emphasis and the Athens of Plato the second (my italics).<sup>439</sup>

Professor Cooper’s comments here speak of the Soviet Union as the most obvious and extreme case of the technological society in its lopsided penchant for technical-pragmatic reasoning. However, the writing in this passage is equally instructive in the Albertan example; we too must be careful not to destroy the “public visibility of noetic reason” in our own race towards the modern “knowledge-based society.” Cooper’s discussion of the sidelining of noetic reason – *noesis* being, incidentally, the prime *modus operandi* of philosophy -- ought to serve as a warning to us about our own provincial “vision” of education, particularly in its hypertrophied concern with “the pace of change” in transitory, man-made things on the one hand and its concomitant neglect of those unchanging elements of reality that are not the result of human effort and making on the other. Cooper is careful to point out that although these two facets of rationality – the technical and the noetic -- may be spoken of as distinct from one another, it is incorrect to suppose that the

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<sup>439</sup> See Barry Cooper, *Action into Nature: An Essay on the Meaning of Technology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 68-69.

separation between them might be absolute; the realm of technical-pragmatic reason is in fact not autonomous. Cooper explains:

[T]echnical-pragmatic reason is part of human existence that, in turn, includes noetic reason. The claim to autonomy, which ... is a major assumption of technology, amounts to a desire to suppress noetic reason. But noetic reason is what orders the psyche; if it is suppressed, as we know from classical political philosophy, the soul becomes governed by the irrationality of the passions. Because noetic and technical-pragmatic reason are not autonomous, the efficiency of the latter, which coordinates ends and means, will invariably be impaired as the passions (or will) choose ends that cannot be realized, that are self-defeating, and so on.<sup>440</sup>

Cooper's assessment of the shortcomings of focusing solely upon technical-pragmatic reason are similar to the warnings of Sternberg about focusing on critical-analytic skills and competencies to the detriment of wisdom. Vamping up our achievement levels according to Bloom's taxonomic objectives is educationally insufficient, for without their grounding in noetic reason, the innovations of the "21<sup>st</sup> century learner" in the modern technological, "knowledge-based" society will serve passions leading to unrealizable, self-defeating, and harmful ends.

The claim to autonomy in technical-pragmatic reasoning is alive and well in the Report's "transformational vision" of education as inspiring "innovation," and it can be seen most clearly in the Committee's impatience with what it considers to be "irrelevant" education. Indeed, the primary goal of the "vision" articulated in the province-wide dialogue with Albertans and espoused by the Committee is "innovation." The Committee calls the "vision" articulated in the Report "transformational,"<sup>441</sup> and it states that, "to truly transform education, the education system must empower innovation throughout the province."<sup>442</sup> This focus on transformation through innovation especially underlies the document's concern to cultivate the "entrepreneurial spirit" – one of "the Three E's" of "education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"<sup>443</sup> -- for it is in the realm of work and business ventures that the real nature of the "transformation" sought by Albertans becomes clear. When asked "how educated Albertans would describe themselves in 2030," they respond with "I am resilient and adaptable, and have the ability and determination to *transform* my discoveries

<sup>440</sup> Cooper, *Action into Nature*, 69.

<sup>441</sup> "The vision of *Inspiring Education* is transformational" (5), and "*Inspiring Education* is transformational in nature" (14).

<sup>442</sup> "*Inspiring Education*," 5.

<sup>443</sup> "*Inspiring Education*," 18.

into products and services.”<sup>444</sup> The “innovations” sought by such an education are, ultimately, in order to serve the diverse passions and desires of Albertans – whatever those passions might be – and to secure access to those goods and services as the Albertan “birthright.”

The “transformational” nature of the education envisioned in the Report is therefore concerned with future prosperity, competitiveness, and the ability to adapt to global marketplace forces. Because the pace of technological change is so rapid, the Report voices a certain impatience with any sort of education that might cause Albertans to fall behind or to lag internationally; education for 2030 therefore has no time for irrelevancies. In fact, the importance of “relevance” in education is stated frequently by the Committee in remarks like “the importance of *relevant* education increases as technologies develop and societal institutions experience the strain of rapid change.”<sup>445</sup> Relevance in education is explicitly linked in the Report to responsiveness and flexibility in dealing with societal change: “To ensure the learning opportunities are *relevant*, the education system must be nimble in responding to the changing needs of communities and the world.”<sup>446</sup> However, the measure of “relevance” throughout this document appears to be the extent to which whatever is taught spurs Albertans to deal ever-more competently with “the pace of change”; such an education is “relevant” if it prepares “our children and youth for work,” but it must, say the authors, also transcend this basic relevance by encouraging “learners to discover and pursue their passions”<sup>447</sup> and to “achieve their highest potential.”<sup>448</sup> Education must, in short, enable Albertans to achieve the things that Albertans desire.

Education is largely instrumental in the Committee’s “transformational” approach. It is not a liberal education; that is, education for 2030 is not an end in itself, but a means to the diverse ends that Albertans value. Indeed, the “new vision” articulated in “Inspiring Education” is said to “reflect Alberta values and aspirations.”<sup>449</sup> Interestingly, elsewhere in the document, when discussing the “entrepreneurial spirit,” the Albertan educated for 2030

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<sup>444</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 20 (italics added).

<sup>445</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 11 (italics added).

<sup>446</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 32 (italics added).

<sup>447</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 18.

<sup>448</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 20.

<sup>449</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 14.

is made to say: “I am **competitive** and ready to challenge the status quo.”<sup>450</sup> It is doubtful, however, that what is meant here is really a challenge to the status quo since the document itself claims to be based upon and to reflect what it calls Albertan “values”; the entrepreneur’s challenge is simply a manifest competitiveness that operates according to the rules accepted by the status quo. The entrepreneur in this document abides in the status quo’s acceptance of the importance of innovation in order to secure whatever goods and services the entrepreneur (in successfully harnessing market demand) sees fit. Indeed, he cannot exist otherwise. Here, there is no sign of an *actual* quarrel with the contention that the “innovation” model of education offered as the status quo view of the majority of Albertans is itself open to question. That would, in fact, be a *philosophic* endeavour that would disrupt and jeopardize the fixation with innovation itself. Philosophy, in this regard, does not readily find itself amenable to the pre-determined, government-imposed learning “outcomes” for which educators and the educational system must be held “accountable.”

Indeed, the philosopher might pose the following questions to Albertans and to the Committee: “What if what you desire is not really desirable, but you only suppose it is due to your ignorance? What if the most important things to be educated about are not those things which change but that which does not change? What if your ‘potential’ is not to be measured by successfully acquiring the disparate and mortal ends that you have chosen for yourself but by the degree to which you have attained your true potential through the immortalization of philosophizing? What if there are activities that are higher than work, and that transcend those ‘passions’ you most cherish? What if there exist activities neither you nor your ‘learners’ have ‘discovered’ or ‘pursued,’ lacking as you do in any guidance about more profound passions that are ‘irrelevant’ to the program of innovation which you purvey? What if the point of education is not to speed everything up to remain competitive in the race for supremacy in the development, delivery, and maintenance of ever-changing goods and services, but rather to slow things down, to question, even to stop further ‘progress’ in that direction?”

In an atmosphere such as Alberta where heightened concerns for “accountability” to preconceived “objectives” or “learning outcomes”<sup>451</sup> trump all other prerogatives, what

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<sup>450</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 20 (boldface in the original).

<sup>451</sup> The Committee stresses the need for what it calls “shared responsibility and accountability for results” (7); it demands that “accountabilities for learning excellence should be clear,” and that “accountability processes



room is there for philosophy as the genuine pursuit of wisdom? Where concerns with “accountability,” “relevance,” and “learning outcomes” are coupled with a general distrust of teachers – and indeed, *anyone* who is a teacher can experience this distrust first-hand quite readily -- how will a teacher’s call for philosophy resound? Will it not sound suspiciously like someone asking for permission to behave irresponsibly, to isolate himself and to not be a “team player”? What effect does the aggressive demand for accountability have on noetic activities like philosophy, particularly when philosophy cannot exist in an atmosphere of seriousness about the “outcomes” of our work and accountability, but rather only in an atmosphere of *scholē* or leisure? Indeed, do not all such aggressive demands for “accountability” in “learning outcomes” -- experienced daily by teachers in Alberta, and not unlike those voiced in the Report -- kill *scholē*? Is not philosophy everyday forced to drink hemlock in such an educational milieu?

## 2. A Philosophic-Augustinian Response to the Albertan Initiatives

### (i) Albertan Reforms in Education as a “Trifling Game” (*Nugae*)

Despite the contention of the Steering Committee that its “vision” is “transformational” there is, in fact, nothing new or transformational about the “Inspiring Education” document. Indeed, a little familiarity with history shows that the ambitions and “values” espoused by Albertans and which drive the recommendations in the Report are identical to those that drove achievement in schools during the time of the Roman Empire when Augustine was a boy. In his *Confessions*, Augustine records his earliest memories of his own experiences of school:

But, O God my God, I now went through a period of suffering and humiliation. I was told that it was right and proper for me as a boy to pay attention to my teachers, so that I should do well at my study of grammar and get on in the world. This was the way to gain the respect of others and win for myself what passes for wealth in this world.<sup>452</sup>

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should reflect the appropriate degree of complexity and formality required by learners, educators, leaders, funders, and communities” (8). Also see the Report’s discussion of “governance” as the process by which the government “assures outcomes,” and of “governors” as leaders who are responsible for “assuring optimal outcomes” (33; cf. 34).

<sup>452</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pinecoffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), I.9.14.

Foremost, even in Augustine's day, was the societal and parental hope and expectation that children attending school would, by doing so, be trained for success in worldly affairs.

Modern Alberta and ancient Rome or Thagaste are not much different in this regard.

In Augustine's day, teachers were a rather brutal lot, administering frequent beatings to their charges at the behest of parents in order that students might take their schoolwork all the more seriously. Augustine remarks that, "parents scoffed at the torments which we boys suffered at the hands of our masters."<sup>453</sup> In this regard, he is critical of both teachers and parents for the hypocrisy of their harshness towards children:

We sinned by reading and writing and studying less than was expected of us. We lacked neither memory nor intelligence [*memoria vel ingenium*], because by your will, O Lord, we had as much of both as was sufficient for our years. But we enjoyed playing games [*delectabat ludere*] and were punished for them by men who played games themselves. However, grown-up games [*maiorum nugae*] are known as 'business' [*negotia*].<sup>454</sup>

Note the powerful way that Latin contrasts "business" (*negotium*) with "leisure" (*otium*).

The "business" of chasing after worldly success, as delineated by Augustine, is a kind of

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<sup>453</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* I.9.15. Rather amusingly, the *one* valuable thing that Augustine says he learned to do while in school was precisely due to these beatings: namely, to pray – and this in the hopes that it might protect him from the whippings administered by his teachers!

<sup>454</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* I.9.15. For a good modern analysis of the connection between the competitive business world and games, see Roger Caillois' fine book, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1958). Caillois builds upon (and at times contends against) Huizinga's analysis of play by distinguishing four categories of games: *agon* or competitive games of skill involving merit, *alea* or games of chance, mimicry or simulation, meaning games of pretend, and *ilinx* or games involving the pursuit of vertigo and ecstasy. Each of these four categories can, according to Caillois, be plotted along a spectrum of play. At the one end of this spectrum lies *paidia* or play-proper; this is activity that is entirely free improvisation and fantasy. At the other end of this spectrum lies *ludus*, such that the taste for difficulty and challenge, solving problems and facing challenges or difficulties becomes ever more important the closer one draws to this extreme. Business, when analyzed in terms of its qualities as a game (as Augustine does here) clearly falls under the category of *agon* and lies closer to the *ludic* pole than to that of pure *paidia*. Caillois, however, departs from Augustine's stance of criticizing business solely on the basis of its character as game or play; rather Caillois finds reason to be critical of business as a "perversion" of *agon* inasmuch as it occurs without benefit of the rules, a playing field, and the time limits afforded to all legitimate competitive gaming. Caillois writes: "Outside of the arena, after the gong strikes, begins the true perversion of *agon*, the most pervasive of all the categories. It appears in every conflict untempered by the rigor or spirit of play. Now competition is nothing but a law of nature. In society it resumes its original brutality, as soon as it finds a loophole in the system of moral, social, and legal constraints, which have limits and conventions comparable to those of play. That is why mad, obsessive ambition, applied to any domain in which the rules of the game and free lay are not respected, must be denounced as a clear deviation which in this case restores the original situation. There is no better example of the civilizing role of play than the inhibitions it usually places upon natural avidity" (46). In Caillois' view, then, business is not problematic by reason of its being a game, but rather because it is a perversion of the competitiveness of true *agon*; it lacks the disciplined, civilizing (and therefore educational) aspect that games provide; agonistic games, unlike business, provide room for competition and excellence while at the same time curbing avidity or greed.

play (*ludus*) that negates our participation in *scholae*, *otium*, or leisure; and leisure, as we have seen, is the precise spiritual activity and requisite “wisdom atmosphere” that renders possible all philosophizing and contemplative activity. In the passage above, Augustine views the education he received at the hands of his schoolmasters – the type demanded for him by his father, and the type demanded to this day by parents in Alberta and everywhere else -- as nothing more than preparation for the “trifling games” (*nugae*) of adults in the world of success and achievement, of work, and business (*negotium*). He wonders at how such an education was treated as though it were something of grave seriousness – so serious, in fact, that it warranted such brutal beatings from his teachers – when, in fact, the worldly affairs of adults were no better than the childhood games sought out by Augustine and the other boys on pain of the whip.

As a philosopher looking back on his childhood, Augustine is concerned with the pursuit of wisdom; that is, he does not seek out the lesser goods of wealth, notoriety, and power which parents even today want most for their children inasmuch as they suppose that success in these things will bring their children happiness; rather, as a philosopher, Augustine’s concern is to know, to *see*, and to love the highest Good. It is for this reason that he describes the worldly ambitions that parents and teachers pursue and that they foist upon children as frivolous diversions (*nugae*). He judges such pursuits to be trifling games masquerading as what is of utmost importance, and he views any education that promotes these things as truly worthy of seriousness as a corruption of a true education that would lead human beings to their highest and most real happiness.

Augustine is principally critical of the education he received and that his father demanded for him on the grounds that it did not teach him to know himself; it did not engage him in self-reflection or introspection: “What can be more pitiful than an unhappy wretch unaware of his own sorry state?” Rather than teach him to know his own heart and that, “You, O God, are the light of my heart,” it taught him instead “to love the world.”<sup>455</sup> Indeed, the purpose of schools that is broadly acknowledged by parents, school administrators, teachers, and government overseers -- whether 1600 years ago in Thagaste, or in modern-day Alberta -- is to ensure the worldly success of their students. And who today would seriously argue with this ambition? But Augustine puts the matter quite

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<sup>455</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* I.13.21.

starkly: “human children are pitched into this hellish torrent, together with the fees which are paid to have them taught lessons like these.” The “roar” (*sonor*) of public debate surrounding education, which Augustine likens to the sound of “boulders” (*saxi*) crashing against one another, has always been to provide parents and students with schools most capable of bringing success to those attending; effectively, schools must be made to compete with one another, as must both parents and students vie against one another for attendance at their specific “school of choice.”<sup>456</sup> Even today, schools must market themselves to the ambitions and hopes of parents by saying: “This is the school where men are made masters of words. This is where they learn the art of persuasion, so necessary in business and debate.”<sup>457</sup> And what is most horrible about such a system of instruction in ambition, according to Augustine, is that it rewards students who “buy in” to the status quo view that these goods are most serious rather than “trifling games” (*nugae*). Augustine writes, “If we refused to drink” as students from what he calls “the wine of error,” then “we were beaten for it”; hence, in order to avoid beatings, and in order that he might be praised by his teachers, his peers, and his family, the young schoolboy Augustine found himself delighting in the prospect of “buying in.” He writes: “It is true that I learned all these things gladly and took a sinful pleasure in them. And for this very reason I was called a promising boy.”<sup>458</sup> Indeed, according to all the measures and assessments of his teachers, his peers, and his family, Augustine *was* a brilliant student at the top of his class; but on his own assessment in later life – from the standpoint of the philosopher, and as one who had lived to see the vanity of all of his worldly ambitions – Augustine confesses: “Let me tell you, my God, how I squandered [*atterebatur*] the brains [*ingenio*] you gave me on foolish delusions [*deliramentis*].”<sup>459</sup> In short, the education sought by parents even today, and chased after even by the most excellent students who assent to the status quo ambitions of their society – whether it be ancient Thagaste or modern Alberta – is delusional from Augustine’s perspective; such an education is a terrible waste of both childhood and intellect.

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<sup>456</sup> Indeed, the Alberta educational system is particularly praised in the *Economist* article cited earlier for its promotion of “school choice” through its charter system.

<sup>457</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* I.16.26.

<sup>458</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* I.16.26.

<sup>459</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* I.17.27.

## (ii) Modern Education and Ancient Sophistry

By investigating the spirit of current “educational reforms” across Alberta in light of their similarity to mass attitudes towards education even in ancient societies, we come to see just how out of place and unwanted noetic studies (and philosophy in particular) *must be* in any educational system. Parents today – like parents in Augustine’s day – want teachers who will guarantee that their sons and daughters will be made successful in worldly affairs, that they will be able to achieve the goals of their passions and desires, and by doing so become happy.<sup>460</sup> In Augustine’s day, such purveyors of success were called “sophists” – literally “wise men.”<sup>461</sup> Briefly, the character of the sophist came to prominence in Greek educational circles once the contention that virtue (*arete*) was the sole possession of aristocratic bloodlines as their exclusive birthright came into question among the people (*demos*), and when the citizens of the city (*polis*) began “to look for a method of educating their sons into the new citizen-ideal.”<sup>462</sup> A new democratic desire began to grow in the *polis* that *all* of its citizens should have a wider intellectual education; the sophists rose up in response to this desire, particularly as it became manifest among the more wealthy citizens who were not part of the aristocracy, but who nevertheless wanted their sons to be trained in “political virtue” -- that they might become successful leaders in their respective cities.<sup>463</sup>

Werner Jaeger points to the notion that virtue can be taught as the origin of sophistic instruction when he writes in his seminal work on education that “a class of educators arose who publicly professed that in return for money they would teach ‘virtue’” to whoever could pay for it in an Athens where “now more than ever before the end of life was achievement, success.”<sup>464</sup> This same desire for an education in success continues to be foundational in modern-day public education, with the main difference being that the democratic ideal of an education for successful citizenship is no longer thought to be the

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<sup>460</sup> A good example of how violently the failure of this desire to bear its promised fruit in America has seized public discussion of educational “reform” is the recent documentary film, *Waiting for Superman*, DVD, dir. Davis, 111 min (Electric Kinney Films, 2010).

<sup>461</sup> In more idiomatic, modern parlance such men might be termed “wise guys.”

<sup>462</sup> See Werner Jaeger’s excellent chapter on the contributions of the sophists to education in volume one of *Paideia*, 287.

<sup>463</sup> Jaeger writes: “From its first appearance ... the aim of the educational movement led by the sophists was not to educate the people, but to educate the leaders of the people.” See Jaeger, *Paideia*, I:290.

<sup>464</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, I:291-292.

sole prerogative of a select few among the citizenry who can pay for it; rather, in modern times this notion of education and its demand for success has grown ubiquitous among democratic populaces. In short, no longer is virtue held to be the hereditary trait of an aristocratic elite; nor ought it be available only to the richest among the citizenry; such an education for success is now considered to be the “birthright” of every citizen in a democratic state. The “Inspiring Education” document states this fundamental belief quite emphatically, as we have seen.

Our modern schools – whether or not they are reformed by the “Inspiring Education” document – are modelled upon the teacher-as-sophist rather than upon the genuine philosophic spirit of the Academy. Jaeger remarks that, “the sophists have been described as the founders of educational science. They did indeed found pedagogy, and even today intellectual culture largely follows the path they marked out.”<sup>465</sup> Indeed, “in many ways we do not begin to feel at home in Greece until the rise of the sophists.”<sup>466</sup> Just as the ancient Greeks turned to the sophists to ensure the success of their own sons, so too is the modern school system concerned with the same thing, except on a massive democratic scale of service delivery; for it too concerns most efficiently and effectively delivering the educational means towards the goods and services, the hopes, dreams, and passions of those in attendance.

Augustine loved success and acclaim as a student and as a teacher. It is not surprising, then, that being at the top of his school in rhetoric, he found himself associating with sophists, known widely at the time as the “Wreckers” (*eversores*),<sup>467</sup> these “Wreckers” were wandering (mostly foreign) teachers who, for a large sum of money, would guarantee to fathers any sort of success that they sought for their sons. Unlike the mathematician, the craftsman, or the expert horseman, for instance, who had a kind of “wisdom” in his narrow field of endeavour and who could, by extension, teach this knowledge to his students, the sophist claimed a basic disinterest in such matters, instead purporting to possess a more

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<sup>465</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, I:298. Jaeger points out in his chapter devoted to the sophists that their Trivium of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric was combined historically with the Quadrivium (based upon the Pythagorean *mathemata*) of harmonics (or music), astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry to form the “seven free arts” which to this day serve as the basis for liberal arts education (316).

<sup>466</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, I:304.

<sup>467</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* III.3.6. These men were called (and even spoke of themselves as) *eversori* because of their adept use of words to win any argument and to destroy any assertion offered up as truth in debate. Augustine finds the name “Wreckers” particularly appropriate for sophists on the grounds that “they were already adrift and total wrecks themselves.”

compelling and potent wisdom that might secure the more attractive goods of wealth, prestige, and power for his students.<sup>468</sup> The ancient sophist Protagoras, for instance, was anxious to distinguish his own sophistic art (*techne*) from all other professions that are technical in a narrower sense; he sharply differentiated his idea of a “universal” education from “purely factual instruction” which, in his opinion, ruined young men.<sup>469</sup> Rather than instruct his students about any specific knowledge in a particular discipline or area of inquiry, Protagoras purported to teach his students “political virtue” that did not rely on such lowly technical instruction, but transcended it completely.

It is tempting to see a parallel between the contention of Protagoras that the teacher-sophist need not be an authority in any particular field of knowledge in order to teach for success on the one hand, and the Committee Report’s claim on the other that “less emphasis” must be placed on “knowing something, and more on knowing how to access information about it.”<sup>470</sup> However, the resemblance between these two claims at this level is superficial; for the modern teacher – though no longer envisioned as an “authority” in his or her field of study – is nonetheless still concerned with instruction in a specific discipline; now, however, the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher is commanded by the Committee to rely upon the “memory” of technologically-constructed databanks rather than his or her own faculty of remembering; by contrast, Protagoras eschews all interest in these more technical areas of learning in favour of expounding upon his higher wisdom; in particular, he presumes to inculcate in any student the virtue of knowing “how best to order his own home” and to “have most influence in public affairs both in speech and in action.”<sup>471</sup>

Nonetheless, the resonance of modern education with ancient Protagorean sophistry remains at a deeper level inasmuch as the claim to teach for the successful attainment of happiness is at the heart of both schemes; the modern teacher still instructs in the disciplines that are said by Protagoras to “maltreat the young” (*lobontai tous neous*);<sup>472</sup> but

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<sup>468</sup> Not that this claim prevented sophists from expounding their knowledge of the arts and sciences as well. Hippias of Elis, for instance, was famed for his polymathy, teaching mathematics, music and astronomy – subjects derided by Protagoras – as well as showing off his techniques for memory training and his knowledge of the handicrafts. See W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 45. Guthrie notes that Hippias’ peculiar interest among the sophists in natural science, while a source of pride for him, must nevertheless “have been extremely superficial” (46).

<sup>469</sup> See Jaeger, *Paideia*, I:300; cf. Plato’s *Protagoras* 318d-319a.

<sup>470</sup> “Inspiring Education,” 25.

<sup>471</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 318e-319a.

<sup>472</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 318d.

the modern education system does so with the belief that knowledge of what is taught in these studies – the “wisdom” of achieving its “outcomes” – will result in greater potential for success and happiness. Knowledge of worldly things is mistakenly understood in both the modern and the ancient sophistic education systems as “virtue” – as the means to acquire a higher happiness. Among ancient sophists, the “wisdom” or “virtue” that was taught concerned effective speaking in order to attain one’s deepest desires; in contemporary educational circles, the promise of “real time” access to all the world’s wisdom for the purposes of attaining success through constant innovation is made available by means of modern information technology. Whether ancient or modern, all sophistic education – in its promise to render unto its students the means to attain the multitudinous objects of their desires -- claims to teach virtue as the means to happiness.<sup>473</sup>

Augustine critiques all such sophistry-based education for its pride and conceit. In his recollection of his time in the company of “the Wreckers,” he records that his affinity with these sophists rested in his own pleasure at his “superior status” (*superbe*); he recognized that he, like these men, was “swollen with conceit” (*tumebam typho*).<sup>474</sup> The sophist’s self-aggrandizement or pride (*superbia*) arises from his presupposition that he is wise, and *superbia* is the distinguishing feature that marks off the sophist from the philosopher;<sup>475</sup> for the philosopher, as a “lover of wisdom,” knows that he lacks wisdom. In

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<sup>473</sup> The one ancient exception to this rule often cited is Gorgias of Leontini. Guthrie remarks that, “all the Sophists indulged in disparagement of their competitors.” For this reason, and no doubt with an eye particularly on Protagoras, Gorgias “disclaimed any intention of teaching virtue.” See Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 271; Plato has Meno, in his dialogue by that name, make this point in praise of Gorgias to distinguish him from all the other sophists (95c); and in his dialogue named for Gorgias, Plato has the sophist himself offer a defence of his art of rhetoric as a neutral weapon capable of good or ill use by the one to whom it is taught (456a-457c). Guthrie writes of Gorgias that “he held that rhetoric was the master-art to which all others must defer” (39); however, he also views Gorgias’ disclaimer about not teaching virtue as “a little disingenuous,” since “his teaching of rhetoric was aimed at securing for his pupils the same kind of success in life that Protagoras promised as a teacher of *politike arete*” (45). At any rate, Gorgias’ brand of sophistry is not without its modern counterpart in education; there is no condition placed upon those entering the modern school system that they must use their learning for good ends; rather, as the “Inspiring Education” document makes clear, the purpose of education in Alberta is to “help children discover and pursue their passions” (4) in order that they might contribute to a “prosperous society and economy” (5).

<sup>474</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* III.3.6

<sup>475</sup> That is not to say, however, that the philosopher is not regularly accused of overweening pride. In fact, Socrates was continually called hubristic by many of his interlocutors. However, such accusations are not well-founded, since they rest rather upon the feelings of hurt and embarrassment that others suffer to their own pride when they profess to know what they do not know and are shown up for it by Socrates; additionally, Socrates’ analysis of his own community’s deeply-held convictions often led to accusations of *hubris*; he was accused, after all, of undermining belief in the city’s gods. However, these charges of *hubris* too are not so much a result of pride as they are of simply inquiring into what is true and, in the process,



contrast to the philosopher's knowledge of his own ignorance,<sup>476</sup> the sophist's conceit causes him to misconstrue the nature and extent of his knowledge; he identifies his knowledge with knowing the highest things; he claims that he possesses knowledge of the means to happiness, and moreover, that he can teach this knowledge to his students. In short, the conceit of the sophist lies in supposing that his knowledge – certainly useful in the realms of business and politics, and in attaining the objects of personal ambition – is truly wisdom, when it is not.

Similar to Augustine, Josef Pieper has remarked poignantly on the self-centredness that distinguishes the sophist from the philosopher:

The difference consists in this: the true philosopher, thoroughly oblivious of his own importance, and “totally discarding all pretentiousness,” approaches his unfathomable object [namely, wisdom] unselfishly and with an open mind. The contemplation of this object, in turn, transports the subject beyond mere self-centred satisfaction and indeed releases him from the fixation on selfish needs, no matter how “intellectual” or sublime. The Sophist, in contrast, despite his emancipation from the norms of “objective” truth and the resulting claims to be “free,” remains nevertheless imprisoned within the narrow scope of what is “usable” – precisely because he chases after novelty, and desperately, obsessively, tries to effect surprise by thought and expression and thus to contribute to a certain form of “higher entertainment.” ... Wherever such “selfishness” dominates the existential arena, there we should not expect true philosophy to flourish, if it can come about at all.<sup>477</sup>

Building upon Augustine's critique of our educational heritage, Pieper points out that the selfish conceit of the sophist lies in his narrow concern with what is “usable” – with what can bring him success or acclaim; he seeks what contributes to his undying pursuit of “novelty” or, as the Committee describes it, his need for continuous “innovation.” Such an education is described as selfish because it has as its objective the gratification of the multifarious desires and passions for the fluctuating things of this world as opposed to a genuine desire for the unchanging, Eternal truth that the philosopher pursues as Wisdom. Within such an “existential arena” – and in our study, this arena is the education system -- Pieper doubts that “true philosophy” could ever flourish, or even come about at all. Following Pieper's observations in this regard, and given the sophistic foundation of our own society's hopes in the education that it proffers to its youth, we are led to wonder

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exposing the falsity of what others claim to be true. Nonetheless, the accusations of *hubris* against the philosopher certainly make him hard to distinguish from the sophist for the many who make such allegations.

<sup>476</sup> Cf. Plato, *Apology* 21d.

<sup>477</sup> Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 38-39.

whether “true philosophy” or noetic studies could ever realistically be a part of education in the modern school system.

Pieper’s insights about the antagonism between philosophy and sophistry can be carried fruitfully into the realm of educational philosophy. He makes the conflict between philosophy and an education grounded in the sophistic drive for what is usable to bring about success, accountability, and pre-conceived “outcomes” even more clear in his definition of philosophy:

What does it mean to philosophize? Philosophizing means precisely this: to experience that the proximate environment corresponding to the workday of everyday life, which is governed by the immediate necessities of life, can be disrupted time and again by the disquieting interjection of the “world,” of reality as a whole ... The act of philosophizing consists in ... taking the step from the cross-sectional milieu of the workaday world in the *vis-a-vis* de *l’univers*. It is a step that leads to a state of “unhousedness.”<sup>478</sup>

Philosophy “disrupts” productivity; it renders uncertain the value of the achievements of those seeking accountability in education for pre-determined, government-mandated outcomes; it “un-houses” us from our work-a-day existence, and it calls into question the pursuit of all the successes expected of our children by the current educational system. In our system of education, the philosopher – whether a student or a teacher – necessarily becomes a misfit:

[H]e ... will not fit naively into the functioning of the workaday routine; he as well will not be “fit” for this world; he as well will look at things differently from those who primarily are dominated by the pursuit of practical purposes. This discrepancy, this incommensurability can – so it seems – never be eliminated; it has always been with us; and there is quite some evidence that it is becoming ever more acute.<sup>479</sup>

Derisive laughter has, since time immemorial, been heaped upon the philosopher for his ridiculous appearance,<sup>480</sup> and Plato has Socrates remark that “anyone who gives his life to philosophy is open to such mockery.”<sup>481</sup> Indeed, the “vision” of education praised by the

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<sup>478</sup> Pieper, “What Does It Mean to Philosophize?” in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 52.

<sup>479</sup> Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 26. Indeed, Plato makes clear this conflict between the ordinary, worldly ambitions of most people for a successful *life* on the one hand and the philosopher’s love of wisdom on the other when he describes philosophy in the *Phaedo* as “the art of dying” (67e) rather than as “the art of living.”

<sup>480</sup> Here one thinks of Thales, for instance: the stargazing philosopher who fell into a well while gazing up at the heavens.

<sup>481</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 174a. Aligned with Socrates’ comment to Theaetetus, Pieper envisions how, if Socrates were around today, he would still encounter the same reaction from “people who would turn their backs on him, if they did not do something worse.” He writes that this is an entirely natural reaction, and that “it is to

Committee in its esteem for “relevance” renders the figure of the philosopher -- as well as the exhortation in this paper towards a philosophical education -- ever more *irrelevant*, if not socially irresponsible and repugnant to the conscience of progressive educators keen on making the world a better place:

All the more, and with full force, does its “irrelevance” come to the fore as soon as philosophy is contrasted with the principles and hidden drives of the modern world of production. And if we call to mind that we are confronted – not by accident, after all – with new and acute challenges to our very existence, then we might easily waver somewhat in our defence of philosophy. Not only does the fight against hunger compel us to employ ever more intensive techniques for the exploitation of all available resources; the preservation of freedom as well, in this our world divided and overshadowed by competing powers, seems to demand all our energies, and rightly so. How can it be justified, then, to insist that it is essential for a truly humane existence to keep present and confront the question as to the ultimate and fundamental meaning of all that is, in short: to philosophize?<sup>482</sup>

In asking questions of no practical utility such as “Why is there something at all rather than nothing?” the incommensurability of the philosopher with the workday world of usefulness and serviceability is brought to the fore. Pieper asks rhetorically, “If this question were uttered quite unexpectedly and without any form of explanation among achievement- and success-oriented people, would the questioner not be thought a madman?” In his view, as soon as one philosophizes, a step has been taken that transcends the world of work and leads beyond it: “The genuinely philosophical question pierces through the dome that encloses the world of the bourgeois workday.”<sup>483</sup>

Practical-minded educators have long criticized philosophy on the grounds of its ineptitude in practical things -- like education. Indeed, there is a good deal of truth to the statement that whoever undertakes to live the life of the philosopher “will have to prepare himself for the fact that he might some day lose his bearings in the workday world,” and that the person for whom everything encountered has become a wonder (*mirandum*) “may sooner or later forget how to wield those very same things that he encounters on an everyday basis.”<sup>484</sup> This being the case, philosophy’s critique of sophistic education has, since its first utterance, been met with the rejoinder that the philosopher’s alternative to

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be expected every time a philosophical question rises unexpectedly with the world of practical man.” See Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 27-28.

<sup>482</sup> Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 28.

<sup>483</sup> Pieper, “What Does It Mean to Philosophize?” in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 32.

<sup>484</sup> Pieper, “What Does It Mean to Philosophize?” in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 58.

sophistry would mean the stultification of action, of innovation and achievement, and therefore the subsequent destruction of civilization.

Perhaps the best-known example of the sophist's rebuttal to the philosopher's criticisms is the response of Isocrates. A pupil of Protagoras, Prodicus, and especially of Gorgias, Isocrates has been recognized by generations of classical scholars and historians as the true father of "humanistic culture"<sup>485</sup> and as the founder of our modern "liberal arts" education system.<sup>486</sup> Like Gorgias, throughout his life Isocrates aimed at teaching the art of rhetoric; however, Jaeger notes that, "he preferred to apply the title 'sophist' only to theorists [i.e. philosophers]," and "his own ideal he called 'philosophy.' Thus, he completely inverted the meanings given by Plato to the two words"<sup>487</sup> while maintaining the negative connotation of the term "sophist" and the positive connotation of "philosopher." In Isocrates' view, the philosophers (namely, Plato and the Socratics) were the true sophists because their educational project of disputation and dialectic – their ostensible yearning for "truth" and order in the soul – could only stultify decisive and effective political action in the world by rendering it problematic rather than promote a unified Greek nation under Athens that could protect itself from its enemies. To this day, following Isocrates, the spirit of philosophy -- which calls into question the sophistic pursuit of worldly goals and ambitions -- is deemed unrealistic, impractical, and dangerous to both public order and prosperity. Whereas a philosophic education might be fine for "idiots" or "private men" (*idiotēs*), Isocrates' teachings are meant "for the whole polis"; as teacher, he tries to persuade his fellow citizens "to undertake enterprises which will make

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<sup>485</sup> Jaeger, *The Conflict of Cultural Ideals in the Age of Plato*, vol. 3 of *Paideia*, 46.

<sup>486</sup> For an excellent article that argues this position, see James R. Muir, "Is our history of educational philosophy mostly wrong?: The case of Isocrates" *Theory and Research in Education* 3, no. 2 (2005): 165-195. Muir points out rather provocatively that "some of the best known (and perhaps all) accounts of the history of educational philosophy and ideas produced by educationists and philosophers of education over the past century are historically inaccurate" (166). He points out that classicists and historians have for generations thought that "Isocrates' educational ideas were – and still are – more influential in the history of educational thought and practice than those of any other classical thinker" (167-168), and he voices his astonishment at the fact that "when we turn to the historical works of educationists and philosophers of education, including reference textbooks, we find that Isocrates is rarely mentioned at all" (168). Bruce Kimball makes a similar point, writing that our true educational heritage stems not from Plato and Socrates, but rather from Isocrates through the Romans. See Bruce A. Kimball, "Founders of 'Liberal Education': The Case for Roman Orators against Socratic Philosophers" *Teachers College Record* 85, no. 2 (Winter 1983): 225-249.

<sup>487</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, III:48.

themselves happy and free the rest of the Greeks of their present troubles.”<sup>488</sup> The philosophic urge must be quelled -- not only in the name of the individual worldly successes guaranteed by the sophistic education of his predecessors, but in order to safeguard more civic-minded concerns for the survival of the public good against hostile neighbours and competitors for power as voiced by Isocrates. Noetic studies like philosophy – those studies which, rather than applying first principles (*archai*) downward dianoetically, “take up” (*anairein*) these principles towards their Beginning<sup>489</sup> -- have always been criticized as impeding worldly success, thwarting ambition, and jeopardizing security. Moreover, when the choice is given between philosophy and sophistry, the historical results are less than heartening for the philosopher. As James Muir remarks in his survey of scholarship on the history of education, “on the level of history Plato had been defeated”; he points out that “it was Isocrates who defeated him, and who became the educator first of Greece, and subsequently of the whole of the ancient world.”<sup>490</sup>

### 3. The Problem of Introducing *Schole* into Modern Schools

One need not be a philosopher, of course, to recognize the hollowness of strict pragmatism and the self-concerned demand that all things contribute to and be useful for our own successes. Thankfully, much of what we do and a good deal of what we enjoy about our lives – our true friendships, our love for our intimates, and our pleasure in music, just to name a few examples -- has little or nothing to do with utility. Following Aristotle, James Schall points out that “we are ‘rational’ beings,” and that our rational nature transcends calculative reasoning; that is, by nature we seek to know the truth, and “we do not want to know this truth about ourselves for any particularly utilitarian purpose, for what we might ‘do’ with it,” though certainly there is nothing wrong with knowing how things work, or with “doing” things. Schall cites Pieper in this regard, writing “we would be desolate if we had to live in a world containing only things which we could dispose of and use, but nothing which we could simply enjoy, without thought of any utilitarian end.”<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, III:136.

<sup>489</sup> See our discussion of these terms in the section of this thesis that examines Aristotle’s understanding of the pursuit of wisdom.

<sup>490</sup> Muir, “Is our history of educational philosophy mostly wrong?” 167.

<sup>491</sup> Schall, “The Whole Risk for a Human Being” in *The Life of the Mind*, 127. Elsewhere, Schall writes, “Paradoxically, ‘utility,’ as a philosophy, is not useful. A universe of utility is a universe with no real

Indeed, beauty, as such, is not useful; yet, without it, Schall writes, “we would not be who we are.”<sup>492</sup>

“What is best in us,” writes Schall, “is ‘useless.’”<sup>493</sup> Among those activities without utility, yet which nonetheless make us “who we are,” Schall lists play, prayer, philosophy, and contemplation (*theoria*). In his view, it is important that we experience the highest pleasures as they are associated with appreciation of the highest forms of beauty since, if we do not experience them, “it is quite likely that we will lapse into what are called lower ones, that is, into activities that are disordered, separating their purpose from the pleasure connected with them.”<sup>494</sup> The pleasures of *theoria* or contemplation are therefore integral to our correct assessment and enjoyment of all other pleasures, since “if we do not experience this pleasure, we really have no idea of that to which we are directed in our being as the ‘rational animal.’”<sup>495</sup> Drawing Schall’s insights into the orbit of our own study, how much more important is it, then, that children in a democratic public education system be exposed often and with great reverence to the pleasures associated with the seeing (*theoria*) of higher things in order that they not simply follow the lower desires with which they have become all too familiarized in the “democratized” classroom where each child pursues whatever it is that is of interest to him and his peers? Whatever is of interest to children – not having been exposed to these higher things – might indeed be pleasures in very low things that are taken as though they were worthy of far greater esteem and significance. The seeing (*theoria*) of higher things as a way to educate children also about the lower things is therefore very important in education; moreover, *theoria* is not an activity beyond the scope of children inasmuch as it may be characterized as a form of play, for like the child’s play, it too is engaged in for the sheer delight of the activity itself. All children love to play, and as Schall points out, “to play is to contemplate [*theorein*].”<sup>496</sup>

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meaning. One dubious attraction of a philosophy that logically makes the world meaningless, however, is that it exempts us from responsibility and allows us to do what we will.” See Schall, “On the Things That Depend on Philosophy” in *The Life of the Mind*, 143.

<sup>492</sup> Schall, “*Ludere Est Contemplari*” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 3.

<sup>493</sup> Schall, “Philosophy: Why What is Useless is the Best Thing about Us” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 158.

<sup>494</sup> Schall, “Philosophy: Why What is Useless is the Best Thing about Us,” 159.

<sup>495</sup> Schall, “On Knowing Nothing of Intellectual Delights” in *The Life of the Mind*, 82.

<sup>496</sup> This is, in fact, the English translation of the Latin title of his essay, “*Ludere Est Contemplari*” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 1-14.

During our review of ancient literature on the pursuit of wisdom, we argued (following Huizinga) in favour of likening philosophy to a kind of play (*paidia*) or game. Schall makes a similar case for understanding philosophy as a form of play that invites us to take pleasure in the highest things for themselves rather than for any extrinsic purpose. Just as games require a physical and temporal space to exist (ex.: a time limit, a game board, or a playing field), so too does philosophy require a kind of prescribed space for its transpiration; this space we described above as a “wisdom atmosphere,” and we identified that atmosphere with a certain kind of friendship (*philia*) in the practice of leisure, *scholē*, or *otium*. I suggest here that, in order to give philosophy or “the pursuit of wisdom” effect in a school setting, this space must not be conceived solely in metaphoric terms; that is, it is not just a spiritual space -- although that is indeed its most important quality; rather, in order for it to run its course like other games, it must also be delineated both spatially and temporally.

Why is such a space necessary? Philosophy, writes Plato, has its origin in wonder (*thauma*).<sup>497</sup> If philosophic wondering may be likened to a game, then a playing field of sorts is needed for such wondering in order to protect it from the external demands of the meddlesome and the industrious, the serious who deplore games-for-themselves, and those demanding accountability in education. In short, as a game or a form of play (*paidia*), philosophy must be protected from the “spoil-sport” who denies any credence to the game-as-game at all. Of the “spoil-sport,” Huizinga writes:

The player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a ‘spoil-sport’. The spoil-sport is not the same as the false player, the cheat; for the latter pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle. It is curious to note how much more lenient society is to the cheat than to the spoil-sport. The is because the spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself.<sup>498</sup>

The resemblance between the “spoil-sport” and those modern education reformers who demand greater “accountability” to “outcomes” is made clear by this passage; for to make the games and the playing that occurs within the “magic circle” that is philosophy (and that, arguably, is also the heart of education) accountable to the world outside of that circle is, as Huizinga puts it, to shatter the “play-world itself.” This project of shattering the play-world

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<sup>497</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d.

<sup>498</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 11.

is precisely what is afoot in the Committee's expectation that education be harnessed to the all-consuming and serious task of "innovation" for success. The Committee wishes that "[a]ctivities that encourage play, creativity and imagination should become the norm"<sup>499</sup>; however, it only harbours such a wish as a means to build "competencies" *outside* of the game; play-for-the-sake-of-play is denied any legitimacy as joyful participation in beauty; what the Committee seeks rather is a surrogate for play -- its semblance, -- or using Roger Caillois' word, its "perversion."<sup>500</sup> Unless philosophy can be made useful outside of the game -- that is, unless philosophy cannot be its true self as "philosophy-as-play" but rather its sophist-image -- philosophy will have to be ejected from the business (*negotium* or *ascholia*) of schooling.

Indeed, it may be the case that the only realistic way for philosophy to survive in the modern education system -- inasmuch as the system itself bears semblance to a game with its own specific rules -- is to do so as "a cheat." That is to say: if the entire education system itself is a kind of "perversion" of play -- much as business (*negotium* or *ascholia*) is called by Caillois a "perverted" form of competitive play (*agon*)<sup>501</sup> -- then the philosopher-cheat might enter into that game, ostensibly playing by its rules, but through his own cleverness subverting those rules to win small victories in a different direction; and hopefully Huizinga is correct in his assessment that "the cheat" will be tolerated more readily than "the spoil-sport" if such is the case; however, the philosopher who is caught in the act of cheating the education system -- if his accusers are shrewd and insightful -- might himself be identified as a spoil-sport and forced to drink hemlock; indeed, perhaps the philosopher -- inasmuch as he philosophizes and therefore refuses to abide in the sophistic

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<sup>499</sup> "Inspiring Education," 6.

<sup>500</sup> See Chapter Five entitled, "The Corruption of Games" in Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*. Caillois *does* recognize that games serve a civilizing function, being a source for education and discipline: "Games discipline instincts and institutionalize them. For the time that they afford formal and limited satisfaction, they educate, enrich, and immunize the mind against their virulence" (55). However, the game undergoes "corruption" and is "perverted" when the "real world" infringes upon it with its real world demands. Caillois writes: "If play consists in providing formal, ideal, limited, and escapist satisfaction ... what happens when every convention is rejected? When the universe of play is no longer tightly closed? When it is contaminated by the real world in which every act has inescapable consequences? Corresponding to each of the basic categories there is a specific perversion which results from the absence of both restraint and protection. The rule of instinct again becoming absolute, the tendency to interfere with the isolated, sheltered, and neutralized kind of play spreads to daily life and tends to subordinate it to its own needs, as much as possible. What used to be a pleasure becomes an obsession. What was an escape becomes an obligation, and what was a pastime is now a passion, compulsion, and source of anxiety" (44). Caillois' description of the perversion of the game certainly describes the typical anxious and beleaguered feelings of students very well!

<sup>501</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* 46.



claims commonly made about education -- is more accurately identified as “the spoil-sport” in the *perverted* game while simultaneously being the truest and best player in the best and most immortalizing game for human beings – namely, philosophy.

Given the jeopardy in which the philosopher must necessarily find himself when he enters into the education system, it seems reasonable to counsel caution; we point out that the asking of philosophical questions requires a kind of space or boundary that separates it from the world of work; for as we have seen, the work world does not appreciate or accept the asking of such questions, but considers them mad, pointless, and even destructive. An actual physical-temporal space is therefore needed to designate and to protect philosophy’s legitimate right to exist for its own sake as the pursuit of wisdom. Without such an inviolable space, demands external to the play activity of philosophy will over-run and destroy it.

Such a space -- or “wisdom atmosphere” as we have called it throughout this thesis -- would at least provide the possibility for *scholē*, *otium*, or leisure, much like a playing field provides the space for games to transpire. A spatial-temporal playing field is required for the cultivation of contemplation (*theoria*) and wisdom’s pursuit because contemplation of the Eternal is itself an activity that takes place within space and time. Indeed, the temporary character of *theoria* is recognized by Pieper in his remarks about wonder; namely, that “man cannot live indefinitely in this state”; the world of work and action always calls us back. The working world ought not be allowed to be of total concern for us, and yet the tendency among those obsessed with accountability, outcomes, and success is precisely to make that work world primary. Philosophy undercuts these ambitions, however, since philosophic “wonder does not make one industrious, for wonder implies that one has been shaken.” Philosophy is consequently pushed out of any atmosphere of total work – hence the need to protect philosophy from this urge to eradicate it by offering to make manifest a “wisdom atmosphere” in which philosophizing might transpire unmolested. This precious space ought to be inviolable in our educational institutions, since as Pieper remarks “it remains true that the capacity for wonder belongs to the highest possibilities of man’s nature.”<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Pieper, “What Does It Mean to Philosophize?” in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 58. All of our studies of ancient thought on the nature of wisdom concur with Pieper’s statement.

### (i) On the Foibles of Mandating a Space for *Schole*

But even if we are willing to admit that *schole* is (or rather *ought* to be) an important -- if not *key* – element to education, the implementation of such a conviction raises even greater difficulties. First of all, most of what we do in schools actually shuts down philosophizing, or the pursuit of wisdom. People are not commonly disposed to reflect on the ultimate meaning of reality as such. As a rule, therefore, we should not expect that the philosophical experience and the philosophical quest would be such a common occurrence. Pieper writes:

“How is it with the world as such?” – this is not a question one asks while building a house, while going to court, while taking an exam. We cannot philosophize as long as our interest remains absorbed by the active pursuit of goals, when the “lens” of our soul is focused on a clearly circumscribed sector, on an objective here and now, on things that are presently “needed” – end explicitly not on anything else.<sup>503</sup>

The goal- or outcome-oriented attitude towards the world that we cultivate in schools is the antithesis of the “wisdom atmosphere” of *schole* that I am suggesting is a pre-requisite for philosophizing. Hence, unlike the recommendations of the Committee, the introduction of *schole* into school would require a *genuine* transformation of the way that we think about education.

Pieper writes about *schole* as a kind of “free space” not overtaken by particular goals or concerns; *schole* can only exist where political interests do not dictate its content:

A space of precisely this kind is meant by the ancient term *schole*, which designates “school” and “leisure” at the same time. It means a refuge where discussion takes place, in total independence – that is, without interference of practical goals ... this free space, true, must be safeguarded and protected from without by political power, but the possibility, even the very constitution of its freedom derives primarily from within – from nothing else than the irrepressible determination to search for the truth.<sup>504</sup>

In order for *schole* to exist in schools, then, there must be carved out within the institutional structure of the school system, as well as within the hearts and minds of both students and teachers, a space untrammelled by concerns with outcomes, goals, and accountability. The “wisdom atmosphere” that is *schole* exists not for the development of skills or

<sup>503</sup> Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 24.

<sup>504</sup> Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 44-45.

competencies or mastery of the *ratio*'s movements through Bloom's taxonomy; rather, *scholē* exists for the sole purpose of contemplation or "theorizing" which is, as all the ancient writers in our study have argued, the highest capacity and greatest happiness for human beings. Pieper explains:

*Theoria* and "theoretical" are words that, in the understanding of the ancients, mean precisely this: a relationship to the world, an orientation toward reality characterized entirely by the desire that this same reality may reveal itself in its true being. This, and nothing else, is the meaning of truth; nothing else but the self-revelation of reality. Thus we may state that the contemplation of reality is properly called "theoretical" whenever the aim is to discover the truth and nothing else. ... Never and nowhere else, except in the living and actual *theoria* of philosophy, is there found such a radical independence with regard to every imaginable subordination under practical goals. This very independence is meant when we speak of the "freedom" of philosophy.<sup>505</sup>

Mandating that such a space be secured from all outside interference, that it be sheltered from accountability structures, outcomes and goals external to itself, and expectations about achievement, would certainly be a "hard sell" in the current educational environment where all ambitions for reform are in exactly the opposite direction.

## (ii) The Problem of Celebration in *Scholē*

A second, and perhaps more difficult objection to establishing a "refuge" for the activity of *scholē* is that simply convincing a school system to allot time and space in the already busy school day to "philosophizing" is not enough to bring about philosophizing. Establishing an atmosphere of *scholē* in a school is not as simple as providing a time and a physical space for events to transpire freely without the pressure of marks, outcomes, and accountability for results. Leisure means more than simply having time and being free to do as one pleases with one's time; more is required if the purpose of leisure is to be realized. Pieper emphasizes that, above all, leisure implies celebration:

Leisure derives its sense from the very same source that the festival and the holiday [holy-day] derive theirs: there is no festival that does not draw its lifeblood from the cultic. And the ultimate legitimation for leisure as well lies in its having a living relation to the cultic festival.<sup>506</sup>

<sup>505</sup> Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 45-46.

<sup>506</sup> Pieper, "Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labour" in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 24. For a more extended discussion of the significance of celebration and festival in leisure, see especially Chapter III in Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*.

According to Pieper, the celebrative component that is of crucial importance to *scholē* necessarily implies “giving over specific days and times to the exclusive ownership of God.” Certainly the religious language needed to discuss the character of *scholē* poses a snarl of problems in a secularized public school system where -- particularly in Alberta with its Bill 44 legislation -- discussion of such elements of reality is strictly forbidden without a waiver; it may be possible by careful wording to tone down such language so that it appears less religious, less doctrinal or dogmatic -- less “cultic” as Pieper calls it. But the central problem remains that philosophy and its activities of *noesis* and *theoria* reach out towards these elements of reality; moreover, we lack any other language than the religious to speak about them.

We may perhaps rephrase Pieper’s Christian insights about *scholē* as celebration in less religious language by saying that, when we speak of *scholē* as celebration, we mean that “rest” is needed from ourselves, our wants, our thoughts, and even from the world of good things around us in order that we might become contemplative; it is in this state of rest that we directly encounter those higher realities on which our whole existence depends. Bertrand Russell makes a similar point in his promotion of philosophic contemplation when he writes that, “philosophy has a value – perhaps its chief value – through the greatness of the objects which it contemplates, and the freedom from narrow and personal aims resulting from this contemplation.”<sup>507</sup> Russell too emphasizes the weaning away from self-concern that is involved in contemplation, where “we start from the not-Self, and through its greatness the boundaries of Self are enlarged; through the infinity of the universe the mind which contemplates it achieves some share in infinity.”<sup>508</sup> For Russell, an awareness and understanding of our participation in the greater whole of things cannot arise until we cease demarcating ourselves and our concerns from all that transcends our own finite existence. Indeed, according to Russell, true philosophic contemplation finds its satisfaction “in every enlargement of the not-Self, in everything that magnifies the objects contemplated, and thereby the subject contemplating”:

Everything, in contemplation, that is personal or private, everything that depends upon habit, self-interest, or desire, distorts the object, and hence impairs the union

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<sup>507</sup> Bertrand Russell, “The Value of Philosophy” in *Problems in Philosophy* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 157.

<sup>508</sup> Russell, “The Value of Philosophy,” 159.

which the intellect seeks. By thus making a barrier between subject and object, such personal and private things become a prison to the intellect.<sup>509</sup>

In saying that leisure is necessarily “celebratory,” however, Pieper recognizes that the reach of *theoria* extends even further than Russell is willing to admit in his attempt to make philosophy palatable to a secular audience; for the activity of “leisurizing” must always be related not only to seeing our own manner of participation in the infinity of the universe, but also to the search for that ground and source of all that is: what Aristotle referred to as the *Ariston*, or the Supreme Good. Despite Russell’s best intentions to invite his readers to philosophize using the most non-religious terms, we still -- in seeking out leisure with its concomitant activities of philosophizing, theorizing, and contemplating – cannot escape the need to speak using terms that are unsavoury and in many ways forbidden in a public school system; for even Aristotle’s true account of philosophizing, or “the pursuit of wisdom,” as “immortalization” (*to athanatizein*) smacks, as it should, of the admission that religious language does indeed name something real and of the utmost significance to what makes us human.

Pieper puts the matter of *scholē*’s celebratory nature quite plainly in Aristotelian terms, but necessarily using religious language in order to do so when he writes that: “man leads a life of leisure, ‘not as a human being, but in virtue of something divine within him.’”<sup>510</sup> In other words, if in the name of the strict secularization of education we were to attempt to remove the divine or “cultic” element from *scholē*, leisure would immediately be emptied of its immortalizing value:

When leisure is deprived of its proximity to the cultic festival and its emancipatory power, it cannot flourish any more than can the festival itself. Even in such cases, it is possible, of course, to enjoy a break from work, vacation, recreation – relaxation from work for the sake of more work. But here the place reserved for leisure remains empty. Instead, its space is taken up by the sheer killing of time and that boredom which stands in an immediate relation to the unleisurely.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> Russell, “The Value of Philosophy,” 160. While citing Russell here as a proponent of philosophizing and contemplation, I do not mean to suggest that he shares the views of Pieper, Schall, or any of the ancients surveyed earlier in this thesis with regard to the divinity of Wisdom. Rather, for Russell, as a self-confessed atheist, contemplation is restricted to gazing upon the infinite expanse of the universe; it is through doing so that human beings are made, in his words, “citizens of the universe.” In this regard, Russell is most like the ancient Stoics.

<sup>510</sup> Pieper, “Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labour,” 24.

<sup>511</sup> Pieper, “Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labour,” 25.

Hence, even if a space might be carved out for “philosophizing” in the modern classroom, wherever the quality of celebration is not admitted entry into this space, *scholē* will never develop; instead, all the worst fears of government overseers, administrators, parents, and teachers will have borne their fruit in the boredom, the restless idleness, and *akedia* of students who do not know what to do with their “free time” – who, instead of philosophizing, resort to “killing time,” “goofing off,” or simply recharging their strength for more “schoolwork.” Indeed, these unsavoury prospects seem to be the main challenges to introducing the pursuit of wisdom into schools, and they arise as real problems given the state in which our secularized society finds itself in its distrust of genuine celebration; in such circumstances, *scholē* is prevented from occupying its proper place as a corrective to work. Pieper writes rather ominously that, in such a society, where work is without the holiday (or rather, the “holy-day”), “it becomes something other than just work without a pause,” for even if work is punctuated by pauses (i.e., break-times, days off, vacations, and weekends), a holiday is more than just a “pause” from work. “In such a situation,” writes Pieper, “work itself assumes the character of the cultic.”<sup>512</sup>

Given Pieper’s enucleation of the need for joy in festivity or celebration, it seems reasonable to say that the rigid secular nature of our education system with its intolerance and distrust of religious language ensures that *scholē* will never be a wide-spread activity; however, it is also important to emphasize at this point that neither is religion any sort of a panacea; religiosity does not necessarily promote *scholē*, particularly if it too lacks the celebrative component spoken of by Pieper; indeed, religiosity can equally as well be meddlesome in its activism, and therefore destructive to *scholē*.<sup>513</sup> Max Weber makes the

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<sup>512</sup> Pieper, “Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labour,” 25.

<sup>513</sup> The ambiguity of religion in securing an opportunity for *scholē* is attested to, for instance, by the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, who writes about the constant charge levelled against contemplatives by their “active” counterparts. Citing Luke 10:38-42 -- a favourite passage in contemplative Christian mystical texts concerning Christ’s meeting with Mary and Martha -- the author draws a parallel between Martha’s chastisement of Mary and the way in which contemplatives are consistently reproved for their laziness and lack of concern for their neighbour by actives: “Just as Martha complained about her sister Mary, in the same way, even to this day, all actives complain about contemplatives. Whenever a man or a woman living in any company in this world – whether it be religious or secular, it makes no difference – is aware that he is being moved through grace with the advice of his director to forsake all outward business and set himself entirely to live the contemplative life, as best he knows how, and according as his conscience and his spiritual director advise him, then straightway his brothers and sisters, all his best friends, and many others who are ignorant of his inward movements and of that manner of life which he sets himself to live, turn upon him with many complaints. They reprove him sharply, tell him stories, true as well as fictitious, of men and women who have fallen away giving themselves to the contemplative life; but they never say anything about

anti-contemplative element of certain forms of religiosity quite clear in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, where he carefully tracks the “cultic” development of work following the logic of its religious foundations in Protestantism. According to Weber, work first took on the cultic character of a “calling,” or a religious conception, during the Reformation.<sup>514</sup> During this period, a new valuation of work sprang into being, wherein “the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs” was seen “as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume.”<sup>515</sup> However, this fact alone does not render work “cultic,” to use Pieper’s term; labour in a “calling” could most certainly be the joyous service of one’s neighbour, and hence maintain its celebratory or festive element wherein God is loved through one’s neighbour. Rather, Weber explains how work becomes “cultic” under the religious conditions of Puritanism beginning with its peculiar form of asceticism.

Briefly, the Puritans viewed success in work -- one’s “calling” -- as proof of one’s “election” to the numbers of God’s chosen few who will be saved from damnation. Obviously, such a view of work permitted – even glorified – the acquisitiveness encouraged by a strong “work ethic”; but it did so as long as no joy, celebration, or festivity accompanied such acquisitions. Weber writes:

The real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life. In fact, it is only because possession involves this danger of relaxation that it is objectionable at all.<sup>516</sup>

Work, and work alone, barren of joy or festivity became the only true way of being “called” by God, and success in work became a cultic pre-occupation among those who viewed it as

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those who persevere.” See Anonymous. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), XVIII, pp. 158-159. The anonymous author then entreats “actives” (i.e., those who work and serve the neighbour as Martha served Christ) to allow their “contemplative” counterparts (i.e. those sitting at the feet of Christ in quiet contemplation) some respite to engage in *schole*: “Actives, actives, busy you now as best you can in the first part and in the second, now in the one and now in the other; and if you so desire and feel yourselves so disposed, in both at once. But do not meddle with contemplatives, you do not know what they are about. Let them sit at their rest and at their play, with the third and the best part of Mary.” (XXI, 165)

<sup>514</sup> See Chapter III entitled, “Luther’s Conception of the Calling” in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930).

<sup>515</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 80.

<sup>516</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 157. Elsewhere, Weber writes: “Wealth is thus bad ethically only in so far as it is a temptation to idleness and sinful *enjoyment* of life, and its acquisition is bad only when it is with the purpose of later living merrily and without care. But as a performance of duty in a calling it is not only morally permissible, but actually enjoined” (163).

the one true indication of one's "election" or salvation. Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity was seen as serving to increase "the glory of God," according to the Puritans. It is therefore within a religious, as opposed to a secular rubric, that leisure was first discarded as a "waste of time"; indeed, it is within a religious rubric that the ancient and medieval religious distinction between *scholē* and *akedia* is erased such that *scholē* is accounted "the first and in principle the deadliest of sins."<sup>517</sup> Every hour lost from labour becomes an hour gained by the Devil, and "inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work."<sup>518</sup> Indeed, Weber's analysis demonstrates that our own secularized culture with its intolerance of *scholē* and its propensity towards "total work" (as Pieper calls it) actually arose from religious roots.

### (iii) On "Free Time" and The Modern Inability to Conceive of the Meaning of *Scholē*

In his book, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, Thomas Green has commented on a third difficulty that is posed by the prospect of incorporating leisure into school studies. When leisure is simply understood as "free time," we have seen how swiftly it deteriorates into idleness; and as idleness, it is not amenable to excellence in education, let alone to the focus of our society on the virtues of work. At its worst, our modern estimations of leisure render it intolerable; while at best, our work-based society seems willing only to accept the concept of leisure as "leisure-time" – that is, as time away from work that provides us with much-needed recreation; we require such "down-time" to "re-create" or recuperate our working selves in order to steel our resolve for more work. In Green's view, then, "we lack the intellectual capital even to think about leisure as a conception that is meaningful in its own right."<sup>519</sup>

Green correctly points out that "leisure in the classical view is unrelated to time, clock-time, in the same way as love is unrelated to time." Love is a condition, and therefore is not "clockable."<sup>520</sup> Just as we must not "pencil in" loving our husbands, wives, friends, and children, so too must we not suppose that contemplation or *scholē*, as the pursuit of wisdom and the adoration of what is most Lovable can be so scheduled, for there is *never* a

<sup>517</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 157.

<sup>518</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 158.

<sup>519</sup> Thomas F. Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools* (New York: Random House, 1968), 59.

<sup>520</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 71.



time when we should not love our dear ones, just as there is *never* a time when we should not adore what is Lovable. *Schole* is, like love, extra-temporal; it implies continuous attending to an undying now, or an Eternal. And so when we demanded earlier in this thesis that time be set aside, and that a space be preserved for *schole*, are we not effectively treating *schole* as though it were indeed “clockable”? Are we not, in fact, approaching the problem of cultivating *schole* in school from a wrong-headed direction by treating *schole* as though it were something that it is not?

In order to understand the conundrum that Green explores in his book, we must first examine the distinctions he draws between “diurnal time” and “clock-time.” A diurnal motion is one that is completed within the cycle of a single day; time is measured in relation to cycles of fairly large dimensions. Green remarks that diurnal time “is measured in relation to the constant and recurring passage of the sun, the fluctuations of the tides, the stages of the moon, or even the cycles of the seasons.” Most important in Green’s explanation of diurnal time is that, from within its rubric, “one cannot speak of ‘wasting’ time.” He explains:

The time that has passed is never really lost; it will come again. From this it follows also that time is not cumulative – that is, the idea that one might now undertake something that will reach its completion at some time in the distant future is not dominant.<sup>521</sup>

According to this conception of time, the future is not distant or removed; it will be very much like the past, so one does not really plan for the future, “except as one plans for much the same future as has already passed.” Green suggests that in societies characterized by a widespread conception of diurnal time, “there is not the sense of development that emerges as a consequence of human effort.” Unlike in modern society with its stress on the future, novelty, and innovation, there is no notion in diurnal time “that something radically new may take place.”<sup>522</sup>

Co-opting a term developed by Sebastian de Grazia,<sup>523</sup> Green states that, “our society is based upon clock-time”<sup>524</sup>; he contrasts the circularity of diurnal time with the

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<sup>521</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 49.

<sup>522</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 49.

<sup>523</sup> See “The Story of Time Pieces,” in Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1962), 303-328.

<sup>524</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 73.

linear nature of clock-time, which he says “contains the possibility of something new.”<sup>525</sup> Once a society is overtaken by a fixation with clock-time, says Green, it becomes possible to speak of “wasting” time, “using” time, and letting time “escape.”<sup>526</sup> Moreover, with the rise of clock-time comes anxiety about the future, and “urgency that it be shaped well.”<sup>527</sup> The power of clock-time, Green writes, is largely a function of the mass availability and use of timepieces, which he says at last became feasible during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

With the organizational power of clock-time comes the possibility of massive planning and precision in the coordination of the activities of human beings. Industrialization was made possible by the clock,<sup>528</sup> as are modern transportation schedules, space flight, and the assembly line; and of course, “in nearly every school nowadays, the schedule of activities is set for intervals of odd minutes, such as 8:36 to 8:42 or 2:52 to 3:27.”<sup>529</sup> Thus, one now begins to learn at the earliest age that time, in a very literal sense, is valuable. Time is money: “it can be budgeted, saved, wasted, and spent.”<sup>530</sup> The crux of Green’s conundrum is that “free-time” can now be earned and enjoyed by the majority of the population due to the ubiquitous power of clock-time, but it is the ubiquity of clock-time that has made leisure impossible for us to understand or to practice anymore. Green remarks that the modern concept of “free-time” first appears with industrialization, and he explains that it is within this new, modern context of “free-time” as the result of clock-time that “the problem of leisure” is now understood.<sup>531</sup>

In Green’s view, the “modern problem of leisure” arises from the fact that now leisure, as “leisure-time,” is treated under the rubric of clock-time: as a sub-category of

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<sup>525</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 52.

<sup>526</sup> Given our preceding study of Aristotle’s comments about “killing time” and “past-times” as opposed to *scholē*, as well as our basic knowledge of ancient Greek, Green’s claim that the ancients knew nothing of “wasting time” seems rather dubious. Indeed, one of the first verbs that one becomes familiar with upon learning ancient Greek is *diatribō*, which is frequently used in its meaning “to waste time.” As to the claim that the concept of “time-wasting” was not possible prior to the wide use of time pieces with the rise of industrialization, one need only look at the way that contemplative writers such as St. John of the Cross in the sixteenth century wrote to defend their own contemplative activity against such accusations. See, for instance, St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2008), II.xii.7; xiv.4,11; III.ii.15; cf. *Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), I.x.4.

<sup>527</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 52.

<sup>528</sup> Here, Green cites Lewis Mumford’s *Technics and Civilization* in its contention that the “The clock, not the steam-engine, is the key machine of the modern industrial age.” See Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 55.

<sup>529</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 55.

<sup>530</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 56.

<sup>531</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 57.

clock-time, it is time not-to-be-wasted; it is time for which we must be held accountable. Whereas leisure in the ancient sense was contemplation and consequently not tied to the idea of accomplishing anything, we nowadays look to our leisure-time and ask, “What shall we do with this time?” “How shall it be filled?” and “How shall we use it?” Green notes a contradiction in the way that we approach understanding our time away from work as “free-time” or “leisure-time”:

The problem involves how to use our free-time profitably, productively, and efficiently. The educational problem thereby receives its definition. It is the problem of educating people so that they will use their free-time profitably.<sup>532</sup>

In other words, the entire conception of leisure itself becomes redefined in modern thought in terms of “free-time,” and therefore according to the logic of work. The mass availability of “free-time” with industrialization provides most citizens in modernized countries with vacation-time or “leisure-time”; but now we find that our “leisure-time” suddenly becomes something that we must work at! Green writes:

One could perhaps argue that we must educate people to use their free-time in order to attain the ideal of leisure in its traditional sense [that is, as contemplation or *theoria*]. So stated this proposal is so shot through with profound contradictions that it seems almost absurd even to entertain it. A people whose social existence is based upon the reality of clock-time will have enormous difficulty even conceiving of leisure in the traditional sense. To expect them to actually live it and express it in their social life seems altogether unreasonable.<sup>533</sup>

In examining the problem of introducing genuine leisure or *scholē* into a modern education system, Green isolates a kind of paradox; namely, the attainment of free-time on a grand scale appears to be dependent upon the mass, social adoption of clock-time. Clock-time, in other words, makes “time” available for many more people to exercise their leisure; “Yet,” writes Green, “the commitment to clock-time in our social arrangements is precisely what makes leisure in the modern sense attainable and leisure in the classical sense impossible.”<sup>534</sup> For this reason, Green looks with great scepticism at authors like Josef Pieper and Sebastian de Grazia who counsel a return to and a recovery of ancient *scholē* as a response to “the modern problem of leisure.” According to Green’s assessment, such views “are not ... wrong so much as they are hopelessly romantic and simply irrelevant,”

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<sup>532</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 58.

<sup>533</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 73-74.

<sup>534</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 74.

and he sees “little value in urging upon the educator the need to return to the attitudes and social existence of an earlier time.”<sup>535</sup>

#### (iv) A Defence of *Schole* in Education from these Three Objections

The Steering Committee Report announces that success and prosperity are the “birthright” of every Albertan, and that it is the task of education to protect this birthright. And yet we are not simply Albertans with a “birthright” to continued prosperity; in fact, no one really has any such “right” to be prosperous; prosperity, like all things in the world, comes and goes, and it is sheer vanity to suppose that anything we build up is not destined for decay and destruction.<sup>536</sup> As human beings, however, we do have a *real* “birthright” that is not recognized by the Committee. This birthright concerns that “true happiness” (*eudaimonia* or *beatitudo*) that is the end (*telos*) of our nature as rational beings who may “immortalize” (*to athanatizein*); such happiness is, as we have seen, an activity of the soul in accordance with “the highest virtue” (*ten kratisten*) in the best part of us<sup>537</sup>; put another way, it is the continuous excellent activity of the best part of us in relation to its highest object.<sup>538</sup> The true “birthright” of Albertans as human beings, then, is that we are granted a brief existence in which the possibility of pursuing wisdom (*philosophia*) through *schole* is laid open for us.

The first objection examined above to the prospect of wisdom’s pursuit in schools is that it bears no positive relation to our understanding of education, and that it actually serves to undercut our educational aims. However, this objection can be overcome if we simply focus on the idea that education involves the cultivation of our cognitive faculties as rational beings. This assertion is something that most educators and education policy-makers could readily accept; the development of these cognitive faculties is itself the object of government accountability measures according to measurements based on Bloom’s taxonomy, and the orthodoxy of Bloom’s taxonomy is widely accepted and enforced in the design of both school curricula and student assessment. However, earlier in our thesis we carefully delineated the serious deficiencies in this taxonomy: in particular, how it focuses

<sup>535</sup> Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools*, 91.

<sup>536</sup> Here one is reminded of the immortal words of the *Teacher* who announces: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (*Ecclesiastes* 1:1-2).

<sup>537</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.vii.1.

<sup>538</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.vii.14-16.

on a certain understanding of the *ratio* and its development while denying credence to an entire realm of cognition in the *intellectus*; put another way, we investigated how dianoetic applications of the reason have been cultivated to the exclusion of noetic movements. If the reality of the *intellectus* and the cognitive movements of *noesis* could be made clear and convincing to educational policy-makers, it seems likely that the appropriateness of *scholē* – perhaps its rediscovery on a grand scale and throughout the educational curriculum – might be recognized and its practice rendered more frequent. Jeffrey Morgan appears to view this truly transformational attitude towards education as a genuine possibility when he writes:

[P]ractical life is not merely practical, insofar as it presupposes ends that are not productive. By all means, teach children in such a way that they are equipped to live useful, socially constructive lives, yet do not limit their upbringing by such goals. Indeed, production is vicious if it provides no space for *theoria*. Any discipline can provide scope for *theoria*, even such ad hoc constructions as environmental education or peace education, but there are clearly some subjects – namely philosophy – that in virtue of their more perfect objects, provide more worthy objects of contemplation. If we take seriously the well-being of our children, then we will not abandon those worthy pursuits.<sup>539</sup>

The second objection to the introduction of wisdom's pursuit in education we investigated is that, as Pieper says, "the feast is the origin of leisure, and the inward and ever-present meaning of leisure."<sup>540</sup> However, just as "the soul of leisure ... lies in 'celebration'" of a festival, neither can there be any feast "without gods."<sup>541</sup> As Pieper writes,

Separated from the sphere of divine worship, of the cult of the divine, and from the power it radiates, leisure is as impossible as the celebration of a feast. Cut off from the worship of the divine, leisure becomes laziness and work inhuman.<sup>542</sup>

We looked closely at how both staunch secularism as well as certain forms of religiosity serve to destroy *scholē*. However, neither of these situations need give rise to despair over ever inviting *scholē* into the classroom. There remains a good deal of room between these two extremes for the hope and possibility of *scholē* to erupt.

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<sup>539</sup> Jeffrey Morgan, "Leisure, contemplation and leisure education" *Ethics and Education* 1, no. 2 (October 2006): 146.

<sup>540</sup> Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 43.

<sup>541</sup> Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 56.

<sup>542</sup> Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 59.

An inkling of such hope is available in Pieper's writings where he remarks that leisure is really about celebrating the end of work by allowing the "inner eye" to dwell upon the reality of the world, the cosmos, or the universe, and in doing so, to affirm that it is good:

To hold a celebration means to affirm the basic meaningfulness of the universe and a sense of oneness with it, of inclusion within it. In celebrating, in holding feasts upon occasion, man experiences the world in an aspect other than the everyday one.<sup>543</sup>

There is certainly no prohibition in any classroom of which I am aware against encouraging students to appreciate the goodness and the beauty that they find in living. Inasmuch as we train ourselves *to see*, to love, or to appreciate the goodness and beauty that we find in the world, to that extent, at least, we are engaging in *theoria*.

As a teacher who has started philosophy programs at a number of high schools, I have found teaching Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* helpful for awakening students to the sense in which their own real experiences of beauty bear within them intimations of a higher Beauty; it is in this ascent towards Beauty through love of the beautiful things and people and pursuits in our immediate experience that all of us in some way are made to feel joy, celebration, and a genuine sense of festivity. The dialogues of Plato are a wonderful means to reach students of all sorts on a deeply philosophic level; whether they profess faith in some creed, agnosticism, or atheism, all students have felt love; all have some experience of beauty, and it is from within this experience of beauty<sup>544</sup> that the teacher-philosopher might begin to evoke that awareness of celebration which Pieper states must be present for any true *scholē*. Indeed, the possibility of evocation – even where the overt sense of celebration of the divine is initially *lacking* -- is the precise virtue of philosophizing in the classroom; for the movement of *noesis* "upwards" from what is principle, axiomatic, or just given in our erotic experiences of beauty is the movement of philosophy; and it is through this upward noetic movement that we begin to get the "feel" for what is festive or worth celebrating in Pieper's sense of the word. Unlike religion, philosophy implies no creed, and so is open to more students in a public school system than overtly religious- or faith-based instructions; moreover, students who might, for various

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<sup>543</sup> Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 43.

<sup>544</sup> Let us not forget that Plato has Socrates speak of the "lover of beauty" (*philokalos*) as akin to the "lover of wisdom" (*philosophos*) in *Phaedrus* 248d.

reasons, initially be closed to *theoria* in relation to its highest object may be opened to its possibility through encouraging their participation in noetic exercises such as philosophy.

The third and final objection examined above to encouraging the pursuit of wisdom in schools concerns what I shall call here “Green’s Paradox.” The Paradox takes two forms. First, it suggests that attempting to recover an ancient sense of leisure as *scholē* in a modern school setting is ridiculous because the potential for the existence of mass leisure (*scholē*) presupposes the very notion of “leisure-time” or “free-time” as a product of the clock-time notion that renders *scholē* itself impossible. In its second form, the Paradox suggests that to seek a “time” in which to “work” at *scholē* is to misconstrue the very nature of *scholē*, since *scholē* is neither an activity subject to time schedules, nor is *scholē* laborious or set upon any sort of accomplishment; rather, it is free from work and always requisite.

The first formulation of Green’s Paradox can be overcome by recognizing that the possibility for *scholē* has always existed on a mass level to various degrees for all human beings by virtue of their nature (i.e., it has always been possible for human beings to *see* and to appreciate what they *see*). Humanity has not been transformed, transfigured, or denuded by historical events like the invention of the clock or industrialization; although the categories of “free-time” and “leisure-time” may be modern inventions, they need not result in the sort of spiritual impasse suggested by Green; even though, in modern times, we may not know or seek as readily to realize our full potential as beings capable of immortalization through philosophy or prayer, we nevertheless remain human despite our ignorance.

Green’s notion that *scholē* is rendered problematic because the time and space carved out for leisure in society has been made possible through the adoption of a notion of time that undercuts and undermines our awareness of *scholē* has some credibility; indeed, we can certainly be conditioned no longer to be aware of the meaning of the term *scholē* in our daily lives; the way that we live and the way that we are taught can have an adverse effect on the depth and breadth of our awareness of the world, as well as on our ability and willingness to attend to the spectrum of what is;<sup>545</sup> but the possibility of *scholē* as “rest”

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<sup>545</sup> Green’s Paradox concerning leisure is paralleled by what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has called “the paradox of work.” Csikszentmihalyi remarks: “On the job people feel skilful and challenged, and therefore feel more happy, strong, creative, and satisfied. In their free time people feel that there is generally not much to do and their skills are not being used, and therefore they tend to feel more sad, weak, dull, and dissatisfied. Yet they

from our work-a-day lives remains. For instance, many modern people still congregate in places of worship and recognize “sabbath” days; we still remain hungry for *seeing* and taking time away from our busyness to *see* deeply; and even in our modern ideas about school, there remains some allowance for viewing school as a time and a space divorced from the “real world” of work that is devoted to studies and learning (dare I say, *seeing*?) for its own sake. There is no reason to suppose that the modern emphasis on clock-time has irreparably stymied all possibility for *scholē*.

The second formulation of Green’s Paradox – namely, that the object of *scholē* is extra-temporal, that genuine leisure is neither laborious nor set upon any sort of accomplishment, and that to treat it as something that might be scheduled as part of the schoolwork-day is entirely to misconstrue its character – may be addressed by first pointing out that although the object of *scholē* is eternal, and therefore that there is never a time when we should *not* be concerned with it, nonetheless, human beings are temporal beings; when we philosophize, we do, in fact, “immortalize” (*to athanatizein*); but we immortalize as mortal beings subject to time. Green’s concerns about setting aside time in which to cultivate leisure, then, need not dishearten us and force us to suppose that *scholē* is not a

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would like to work less and spend more time in leisure.” See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1990), 159. His manner of accounting for this “paradox” is to say that people “feel” the tasks of work as being against their will and as “a burden imposed from the outside,” such that “even though the momentary on-the-job experience may be positive, they tend to discount it, because it does not contribute to their own long-range goals” (160). While there is some truth in Csikszentmihalyi’s assessment of why we generally feel more at ease in our work than in our “leisure-time,” his appraisal of the reason for our dissatisfaction lacks the depth of the classical and medieval philosophers we have studied. For Csikszentmihalyi, the problem seems to lie in the fact that, unlike at work where our daily goals are structured, brought under our control, and actualized, during our “leisure-time” we lack any such structure for the actualization of our “long-term” goals. We simply do not know what to do with ourselves; we are restless and uncomfortable, and we tend to fill our time up with trifles. For Csikszentmihalyi, the “modern problem of leisure” as Green calls it could be solved by bringing the structuring and the channelling of effort that we demonstrate in the achievement of our short-term work goals to bear upon our leisure-time in the development and actualization of our long-term goals. Csikszentmihalyi’s solution to the “paradox of work” is therefore to make provident, constructive use of our leisure to “re-create” ourselves – essentially, we ought to alleviate our restlessness with more work. In the wise “use” of our leisure-time, we ought to seek out pursuits that cultivate what he calls “optimal experience,” or the feeling of increasing our strength in exercising control over our consciousness. However, in ancient and medieval terms, the experience of restless idleness in the absence of work was not to be alleviated or cured through more work towards the successful completion of long-range goals; this state of not being willing to be what one really is – the incapacity to affirm one’s own being – was called *akedia*. For the ancients and medievals, its only remedy lay not in the accomplishment of either short- or long-term goals, but rather in setting these things aside – in giving up one’s desire to exert control over the world and oneself, and in putting to rest the movements of the self-will entirely.



possibility for temporal beings; it simply invites us to acknowledge an aspect of our nature that has its share in the divine, and that transcends our strictly mortal being.

Green's other claim in this second formulation of the Paradox is that the practice of *scholē* in schools is undermined when we treat leisure as "work," or as something that involves the attainment of a goal. This objection requires some further elaboration before it can be countered intelligently. Green is correct in stating that the characterization of philosophy as "work" misconstrues its nature. Reasoning is certainly toilsome, and inasmuch as philosophy involves reasoning, it necessarily involves a kind of mental labour. The discursive thought of the *ratio* is indeed a form of work, but the passive, receptive gaze of the *intellectus* is not; rather, it is an effortless and immediate grasping of (or perhaps being grasped by) what is *seen* in a union of knower with what is known. As we have seen, the ancients understood knowing as a unity of *ratio* and *intellectus* -- as a simultaneous functioning of the two. Pieper notes the same is fundamentally true of philosophy:

[S]omeone who assumes that intellectual knowledge includes, apart from rational discursive thought, a receptive gazing upon Being, an intellectual (perhaps even higher-order) seeing – someone who is able to recognize a contemplative strain especially in philosophical knowledge itself, which aims at the ground of Being and at Being as a whole – will have to conclude that the characterization of philosophy as labour is not exhaustive, indeed, that it fails to go to the heart of the matter.<sup>546</sup>

If we analyze thinking, and if we recognize that thinking – even philosophic thinking – involves both the *ratio* and *intellectus*, then Green's Paradox concerning the inadmissibility of mixing work with leisure is addressed inasmuch as the laborious movements of the *ratio* are not contrary to philosophizing, or wisdom's pursuit – even if the *ratio* "fails to go to the heart of the matter."

Nonetheless, Green's warning about the error of treating *scholē* (and therefore its concomitant activities of contemplation and philosophizing) as though it were work is well justified; we always seek to attain some end through our toil; but at the heart of *scholē* and its activities is the recognition that the mind's labours are inadequate to attain to their ultimate object;<sup>547</sup> this Lovable transcends all conceptions, all discursive reasoning, all

<sup>546</sup> Pieper, "Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labour" in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 15.

<sup>547</sup> St. John of the Cross explains "THE WAY NOT TO IMPEDE THE ALL" when he writes:

When thou thinkest upon anything,  
Thou ceasest to cast thyself upon the All.  
For, in order to pass from the all to the All,

images and forms, all ideas and language. In *schole*, the self *itself* becomes an impediment – a “lump” between “yourself and your God” in the words of the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*<sup>548</sup> -- to the union of knower and known, since nothing imperfect can be joined to what is Perfect. For this reason, all the contemplative writers with which I am familiar argue that the self must be emptied of its content – all of its sensations, its desires and goals, its learning and rational discourse, and its self-will -- in order that the “eye of the soul” might possess, or rather be possessed by, its beloved object in a union of seer with seen. In *schole*, then, not only must the sensing and passionate self first be put to sleep or “mortified”; so too must the reasoning activity of the intellect in its attempts to understand and to accomplish understanding – i.e., one’s own “self-will” -- also be silenced.<sup>549</sup>

Green’s Paradox poses a problem that has long been known to philosophers and contemplative practitioners -- that paradox being working towards something that can never be achieved by our own efforts, where the activity of work or seeking accomplishment itself is an impediment to *schole* as its contrary. The philosopher who, as a “lover of wisdom,” can never be wise recognizes this conundrum very well, knowing that wisdom is neither teachable nor attainable by our own efforts; rather, as Plato writes of all virtue, wisdom is the gift of the god through divine apportionment (*theia moira*).<sup>550</sup> Similar discussions about the nature of leisure as an activity to attain something also arose in China and Japan in the context of Ch’an and Zen Buddhism; for instance, the Southern Zen School maintained -- ostensibly contrary to its Northern counterparts -- that enlightenment (*satori*) was “sudden” rather than “gradual”<sup>551</sup>; the implication of the “Sudden” doctrine is

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Thou hast to deny thyself wholly in all.

See St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I.xiv.12.

<sup>548</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, XLIII.

<sup>549</sup> St. John of the Cross refers to these two “mortifications” as the two of the three “dark nights of the soul.”

See *Ascent of Mount Carmel* I.ii.1, where the first is called the “night of sense,” the second “the night of faith,” and the third, being the destination point for the journey into the first two nights, is God, who “is dark night to the soul in this life”; for a more succinct discussion of the nights of sense and faith, see St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of The Soul*.

<sup>550</sup> Plato, *Meno* 99e-100a; 100b.

<sup>551</sup> For a discussion of the distinction between “sudden” and “gradual” enlightenment, see Yuho Yokoi and Daizen Victoria, *Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings* (New York: Weatherhill, 1976), 214. The deep truth of “sudden” enlightenment and the deficiencies of its “gradual” counterpart are humorously explored in Buddhist lore. According to one such story, the fifth patriarch Hung-jen passed over his most senior and diligent disciple Shen-hsiu in favour of Hui-neng, an uneducated layman and rice-thresher who attained enlightenment “suddenly.” For a discussion of the manner in which the lore around the Platform Sutra demonstrates the superiority of the concept of “Sudden Enlightenment” over “Gradual Enlightenment,” see John R. McRae, “The Story of Early Ch’an,” in *Zen Tradition and Transmission: A Sourcebook* by

that no amount of hard work, study, or practice accumulated over time could bring about enlightenment -- that enlightenment does not come through self-effort; in fact, the self and self-striving implied in “gradual” understandings are widely acknowledged in Buddhist thought as impediments to enlightenment.<sup>552</sup> The teachings of Shinran (1173-1263 CE) in the Jodo-Shinshu (or Pure Land) sect similarly suggest that human beings are powerless to attain Buddhahood through their “Own Power” – in Shinran’s view, due to their sin -- and that we therefore require the “Other-Power” of Amitabha for our salvation in chanting the *nembutsu*.<sup>553</sup> Christian understandings of grace also teach that human efforts are incapable of attaining to their divine object.

Green’s elucidation of how *schole* is irreconcilable to effort, toil, and accomplishment therefore has a considerable pedigree throughout the world’s philosophic and religious traditions. Nonetheless, his Paradox – along with its attending exhortation to abandon all hope of pursuing wisdom in schools – disappears if care is taken that we do not treat *schole* abstractly, but rather look to the meaning of the term as it is grounded in our own real experiences of thinking, and in particular, if we attend to how its gradations are differentiated in the accounts of real contemplative writers. St. John of the Cross, for instance, describes the process whereby human beings can come to a state of perfect union with the divine in contemplation or *theoria*, and his writings are particularly helpful in

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*Contemporary Zen Masters and Scholars*, ed. Kenneth Kraft (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 125-139. This recognition of the deficiencies of work and self-effort in favour of the “sudden” position is most recently and humorously portrayed in Disney’s *Kung-fu Panda*, where the unstudied and irreverent Po succeeds to the position of Dragon Warrior over Master Shifu’s star pupil, Tigress.

<sup>552</sup> McRae warns us that much of the discussion of “gradual” versus “sudden” enlightenment is misleading and rather polemical. For instance, the “Sudden” teachings of the Southern Zen school are still *practiced* in monasteries, and sutras are still studied; hence, the “gradual” nature of daily practice is recognized. Similarly, “we now know that Shen-hsiu [first in the line of the Northern school] did not, contrary to Southern polemicists, advocate a gradualist method of approaching enlightenment, but rather a “perfect” teaching that emphasized constant practice.” See McRae, “The Story of Early Ch’an,” 129.

The folly of a strictly “gradual” notion of attainment is explored by Sheng-Yen in his article entitled, “Zen Meditation,” where he records a humorous episode in Zen lore about the futility of effort to attain: “Huai-jaing [677-744, a disciple of Hui-neng] observed a monk named Ma-tsu (709-788), who had a habit of doing *zazen* [sitting meditation] all day long. Realizing this was no ordinary monk, Huai-jaing asked Ma-tsu, ‘Why are you constantly doing *zazen*?’ Ma-tsu answered, ‘To attain buddhahood.’ Huai-jaing picked up a brick and started rubbing it vigorously. After a while Ma-tsu asked, ‘What are you doing?’ Huai-jaing said, ‘I’m making a mirror from this brick.’ Ma-tsu said, ‘That’s absurd. You can’t make a mirror from a brick.’ Huai-jaing said, ‘Indeed. And how is it possible to become a buddha by doing *zazen*?’” See Sheng-Yen, “Zen Meditation,” in *Zen Tradition and Transmission*, 36.

<sup>553</sup> Recitation of the Buddha’s name: *Namo Amida Butsu*. The word *nembutsu* literally means “thought on Buddha.” See the section on Shinran Shonin in Paul Williams’ excellent book, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), 269-276.

dissolving Green's Paradox. Briefly, he divides contemplative exercises into a series of stages, or "dark nights of the soul." During the first stage – referred to in his writings as "the night of sense" – the contemplative practitioner exerts efforts to "mortify" his or her lower nature: that is, attention is drawn away from all the sensations, passions, and desires in the appetitive part of the soul in order that they might be silenced. However, during the soul's journey through this "first night," the faculty of the understanding is still active, and the practitioner may still meditate discursively by means of images and words. Indeed, the soul's own yearnings and its efforts are deemed essential during this "first night" as the impetus for making such a spiritual journey in the first place: "in order to journey in the first night of sense, and to strip itself of that which is of sense, it [the soul] needed yearnings of sense-love so that it might go forth perfectly."<sup>554</sup>

Within the darkness of this first night, St. John writes that "something can always be seen." Although the lower soul is "mortified," the higher, rational part remains active for inquiry; thus, "in the night of sense there still remains some light, for the understanding and reason remain, and are not blinded."<sup>555</sup> During the "first night" the soul gains through its reasoning and meditation "some knowledge and love of God, and each time that the soul gains this through meditation, it is an act"; clearly then, at this stage of contemplation, the soul is not entirely passive. Moreover, it is important, writes St. John, that the soul act thus since many acts of this nature "end by forming a habit in the soul" that makes progress into the second night possible. Where during the first stage, the soul continues to toil in meditation in order to "mortify" the senses, the soul that enters into the second stage – referred to variously as "the night of the spirit" or "the night of faith" – already finds itself in a state of freedom from its passionate and sensory nature, such that further meditative work is superfluous.<sup>556</sup> It is this second night that more closely resembles what Green has referred to as the passive, receptive aspect of *scholē* that is irreconcilable to notions of work and accomplishment. In this second night not only the lower, passionate soul is mortified, but also the soul's rational movements, or its self-will, are silenced. St. John writes:

I say, then, that the soul, in order to be effectively guided to this state by faith, must not only be in darkness with respect to that part that concerns the creatures and

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<sup>554</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.i.2.

<sup>555</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.i.3.

<sup>556</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.xiv.1-2 especially; for a broader discussion of when one is fit for contemplation and ought to leave meditation behind, see II.xii-xv.

temporal things, which is the sensual and the lower part ... but that likewise it must be blinded and darkened according to the part which has respect to God and to spiritual things, which is the rational and higher part ... For, in order that one may attain supernatural transformation, it is clear that he must be set in darkness and carried far away from all that is contained in his nature, which is sensual and rational. For the word supernatural means that which soars above the natural; so that the natural self remains beneath. For, although this transformation and union is something that cannot be comprehended by human ability and sense, it must completely and voluntarily void itself of all that can enter into it, whether from above or from below, -- I mean according to the affection and well -- so far as this rests with itself.<sup>557</sup>

In short, Green's failure to recognize the activities and efforts exerted on the part of the soul during its "first night" as the precursor to its "second night" is the root of the confusion -- and hence, of his call to reject *schöle* as an impossibility -- voiced in his Paradox.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.iv.2.

<sup>558</sup> Like St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila distinguishes between the active and passive elements of contemplation; her work too can help us to dispel the power of Green's Paradox to frustrate us from inviting *schöle* into our classrooms. Teresa begins by recognizing the importance of effort and hard work in the contemplative life. She writes that "it is of the greatest importance" to remember that "the sole aim of one beginning to practise prayer" is to "endure trials, and resolve and strive to the utmost of her power to conform her own will to the will of God." See St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, ed. Benedict Zimmerman (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2006) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/castle2.html> (accessed March 16, 2011), II.i.15. Obviously, the endurance of suffering or trials involves labour on the part of the practitioner, and she lists the meditative forms of both "mental" and "vocal prayer" as necessary first steps towards the acquisition of the virtues on which, she writes, "the very life of all Christians depend" (98). See Chapter 16 of St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, trans E. Allison Peers (London: Random House, 2004). St. Teresa calls these two kinds of prayer "active," and she writes that through each of them, "with God's help, we may accomplish something ourselves." However, while affirming that toil is necessary in the contemplative life -- hence dispelling the power of Green's paradox in this regard -- she contrasts such active exertions on the part of the practitioner with the pure activity of contemplation itself, in which she admits "we can do nothing"; rather, "[i]t is His Majesty Who does everything; the work is His alone and far transcends human nature" (158). See *The Way of Perfection*, Chapter 25.

While recognizing the importance of diligent effort or hard work in the contemplative life, she also points out that all such efforts have their own natural limits. For instance, in *The Interior Castle*, Teresa remarks on the haplessness of trying by one's own efforts to empty the mind completely and thereby to attain contemplation. She comments that, "the imagination would be made more restless than before by its very effort to think of nothing." While human effort certainly has some effect in meditation, all such exertions "avail nothing in these matters [i.e., in contemplation]." In fact, "any painful effort does us more harm than good," such as holding the breath to focus the attention or to gain control over one's consciousness. While such techniques might have effect in the mastery of the lower soul's passionate or sensate nature, Teresa observes the futility of all such human efforts to be rid of the self-will, for "how can we be self-oblivious, while keeping ourselves under such strict control?" In her view, "God gave us faculties for our use; each of them will receive its proper reward. Then do not let us try to charm them to sleep, but permit them to do their work until divinely called to something higher." See *The Interior Castle*, IV.iii.5-6.

Elsewhere, in *The Way of Perfection*, she distinguishes between the active and passive components of prayer in the contemplative life, calling the former a "prayer of recollection," and the latter "the prayer of quiet." The "prayer of recollection" involves "collecting" the soul's attention away from worldly things and drawing it rather towards God. The "prayer of quiet," by contrast, is Teresa's special term for contemplation-proper. Like St. John, then, Teresa distinguishes quite clearly between meditation and contemplation; this

Green's Paradox falls apart not only when we test it against the accounts of contemplative experiences provided by monastics, but also if we simply look to the role that *scholē*'s main activity – namely, seeing or *theoria* – plays in everyday cognition. Indeed, it is not the purpose of this thesis to transform students and teachers into monastics, nor is it my contention that an educational system could spur mass experience of the *visio beatifica*; rather, my hope throughout this work is to argue that *scholē* and its theoretic activity ought to play a larger, enhanced role in institutionalized education than it does now. Contrary to Green's Paradox, which asserts that the operations inherent in *scholē* are no longer viable in a modern school setting, careful attention to the nature of cognition suggests quite the opposite: even when our understanding of *scholē* is distorted by modern confusions, even when the ultimate object of *scholē* is dismissed and when our endeavours are all directed towards the goals of a society consumed by innovation and “total work,” any sort of basic “understanding” (*intellectus*) that we have gleaned about *anything* already presupposes the operations of the *intellectus* which *sees* or apprehends the truth. As we have already seen, the *intellectus* is active in the student's immediate grasp of the axioms and principles (*archai*) of mathematics and the various sciences; the *intellectus* therefore stands at the beginning (*arche*) of all our thinking; but it also appears at the end of a line of reasoning when the *ratio* moves us towards yet another *seeing* of a truth; and of course, the *intellectus* is active in the student's witness to beauty, whether that beauty takes a physical or non-physical form; moreover, the joy of the *intellectus* in the union of beholding its object is especially sought out by students in relation to their friends, in music, in art and dance, or in any other pursuit they love for the beauty that they find in it.

Since the operation of the *intellectus* is omnipresent in thinking, the challenge of *scholē* is not simply to see, but to take what one sees upward (*anairēin*) towards its source noetically. Put another way, the challenge of *scholē* is to offer the *intellectus* ever more beautiful sights and ever more joyful experiences of beholding the Lovable. The danger for students is not so much that they will not see, but rather that they will suppose that they have already seen everything there is to see – that they will suppose their own cognition of beauty has shown them what is truly Beautiful; in short, the danger for students in thinking

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distinction in practice helps to dissolve Green's Paradox by demonstrating that *scholē* has both a lower and a higher -- an active and a passive -- element.

is for them to suppose that they know what they do not know due to their ignorance or unfamiliarity with higher and better sights worth seeing. In education, then, it is imperative that we always encourage students – and perhaps this is done best through our own example – to question what it is that they think that they have seen, and the nature of the pleasure they derive from what they suppose they have understood. Put another way, we ought to encourage them to delight not simply in what they themselves see and find appetizing in the “democratized classroom” where students pursue whatever it is that, in their limited experience, has sparked their interest; rather, we must draw their sights of these things -- whatever they may be -- upward, not allowing students to rest in these perceived goods as though they were sufficient, or as though their delectability were sacrosanct simply because these goods were chosen as what is best by the students themselves. And we too, as teachers, must not take our own seeing as what is highest; rather, like our students who we would have philosophize, we too must seek a true measure of our own sights, and of the joy that we experience in these things. Both teacher and student bear this uncomfortable responsibility in a true “wisdom environment.” Hence, contrary to the suggestions of some of our modern commentators on wisdom and its “atmosphere,”<sup>559</sup> if we wish to accomplish this objective of “taking up” whatever is seen towards a higher vision of the true *Arche*, then such an “atmosphere” cannot be a place of comfort and safety. A “wisdom atmosphere” requires quite the opposite inasmuch as it lays everything we suppose we know at risk. Wisdom’s pursuit necessarily shakes us up and unsettles. As Pieper remarks, the effects of philosophizing are unsettling in very much the same way as are the experiences of death and falling in love, or *Eros*.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> See our discussion of Meacham above; also see Richard Reeve, Richard Messina and Marlene Scardamalia, “Wisdom in Elementary School,” in *Teaching For Wisdom*. The authors write that “For such work [what they call “knowledge creation”] to prosper, the culture must be one of psychological safety, so that people feel safe in taking risks – revealing ignorance, voicing half-baked notions, giving and receiving criticism” (81). While this may be true, it is also true that the “safety” of which the authors speak cannot entice students to simply treat what they are exploring as though it were nothing of any significance; truly philosophical questioning shakes up, challenges, perplexes, and throws into confusion; pursuing wisdom will alter the way that most of us live if we take it seriously.

<sup>560</sup> Pieper writes that a jolt is necessary to press us out of our comfortable, ordinary train of thought towards the asking of philosophical questions: “More likely than not ... a challenge is required that shakes the common and ‘normal’ attitude dominating – by nature and by right – man’s everyday life; a push is needed, a shock, in order to trigger the question that reaches beyond the sphere of mere material needs, the question as to the meaning of the world and of existence: to trigger the philosophical process.” Pieper, *In Defence of Philosophy*, 24-25; cf. Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 92.

*Scholé*, then, is not only *possible* in the modern-day school, contrary to Green's contention: its prime activity of *theoria* or *seeing* is ever-present anywhere that thinking exists. However, *scholé* is not simply about seeing, but rather about seeing what is best; but to see what is best entails *not* supposing that lesser goods are what is best of all (*Ariston*). In his dialogue, *The Sophist*, Plato has the Stranger describe education as the precise means of being rid of this "greatest source of all the errors of the intellect": namely, the failure to recognize one's own ignorance.<sup>561</sup> For Plato, true education is necessarily a kind of *scholé* inasmuch as it is driven by the noetic urge towards the highest of all sights in the Truth Itself. The question, then, is not how to bring *theoria* into existence – for *theoria* exists anywhere we see what *is* in some fashion -- but how to heighten or elevate the significance of *theoria* in the daily business of education; how do we make the joy of thinking – and this joy arises from our experience of union in beholding what is beloved in our thinking, namely the truth<sup>562</sup> – the focus of schooling as opposed to the extrinsic ends, "goals," achievements, and "outcomes" prescribed to students and demanded of them by their parents, teachers, and provincial superiors?

In his remarks about the nature of learning as coming to *see*, Schall writes that "any sort of learning, in the beginning, will have drudgery connected with it. We can simply call it a kind of work. We need to come to a point where we begin to delight in what we are knowing."<sup>563</sup> Here, Schall points out that we do not always – or even very often -- see immediately into the nature of things; we must apply our reason to things in order to see them more clearly, and this seeing very often requires hard work. Like the immediate apprehensions of the *intellectus* in grasping principles and what is axiomatic, so too do the labours of the mind through the discursive reasoning of the *ratio* have as their aim a knowing or seeing (*theoria*) of their object. Here too Green's Paradox dissolves when we recognize that work is indeed the precursor to seeing more, and especially to seeing what is of greater ontological rank (i.e., what is better).

There is no paradox in the conjunction of work and *scholé*, for competence in the activity of ranking what is seen or "theorized" in *scholé* requires preparatory spiritual work.

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<sup>561</sup> Plato, *Sophist* 229cd.

<sup>562</sup> Pieper writes that although there are countless reasons for joy, "they can all be reduced to a common denominator: our receiving or possessing something we love." See Josef Pieper, "Joy is a By-Product," in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 33.

<sup>563</sup> Schall, "On the Joys and Travails of Thinking," in *Life of the Mind*, 4.



Moreover, it seems reasonable to say that a “wisdom environment” would be one that assists in such psychic preparations; such an environment would not be one of *schoolwork*, but a different sort of work that might ready us for receiving higher things since, as Schall notes, “our souls must be involved in the education we receive – or better, in the one we allow ourselves to receive.”<sup>564</sup> Just as the “first night” of toil must precede the “second night” as preparation for the soul’s movement towards its beloved object (or rather, that the soul might receive its beloved object by being emptied first of its own defects), so too does the theoretic enterprise involve a kind of conditioning or disciplining of the soul such that it might be receptive to higher sights. The spiritual *work* implied by *scholē* is therefore not the contrary to genuine leisure, but rather its precursor; this sort of spiritual labour is not of the sort that we are used to as teachers and students; it is not what we typically conceive of as “schoolwork”; that is, we do not test for it, and it does not register on Bloom’s taxonomy; it does not involve the gathering of yet more information or developing more skills in the critical-analytic machinations of the *ratio*; rather, it has more to do with un-learning and emptying ourselves of our own pretensions to all the knowing that such formal tests and modes of assessment are designed to measure. As preparation for the receipt of higher sight, the spiritual work of *scholē* is a form of purification; it is for this reason that the pursuit of wisdom has been called by Socrates, rather uncomfortably and un-safely, “the art of dying.”<sup>565</sup>

The work of *scholē* is contrary to the work of school. It involves the difficult task of setting aside what we have been acclimatized to believe is most important in the “objectives” and “outcomes” of school. It involves not delivering the definitive answers demanded by those who would have us “accountable” in our education; in pursuing wisdom, it is not necessary that we displaying mastery of our subjects, and contemplative writers such as Thomas à Kempis warn about misconstruing the “much knowing” of the various disciplines with wisdom for this reason<sup>566</sup>; indeed, exclusive concern with the

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<sup>564</sup> Schall, “Truth and the College of Your Choice,” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 34.

<sup>565</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 67e.

<sup>566</sup> Undercutting Aristotle, Kempis writes: “Every man naturally desires knowledge; but what good is knowledge without fear of God?” Against knowing many different subjects and studies well, he argues: “If I knew all things in the world and had not charity, what would it profit me before God Who will judge me by my deeds?” Kempis warns his readers about the unfettered thirst for knowledge of worldly things when he writes: “Shun too great a desire for knowledge, for in it there is much fretting and delusion. Intellectuals like to appear learned and to be called wise. Yet there are many things the knowledge of which does little or no

mastery of our subjects will actually serve to hinder our noetic development.<sup>567</sup> Rather than competency-building and thinking skills, the work of *scholē* is to open ourselves up to wondering, since wonder is the gateway to *noesis*.

#### (v) Philosophy & Contemplative Education: an Infusion of Joy in Education

In my memories of being a high school student, as well as in my current situation as a teacher, the problem of learning seems mostly to gravitate around the experience of learning as drudgery and work, as test upon test and assessment upon assessment, as hoop-jumping and curriculum-running.<sup>568</sup> Learning in school, it seems to me, is very often devoid of any joy; this is why students so often loath school, and it is why very little of what is taught ever “sticks” with students, for just as Plato has Socrates say in the *Republic*, “no forced study abides in the soul.”<sup>569</sup> Students take delight in seeing, but if the aim of education is, indeed, to divest us of the ignorance of supposing that we *see* (and therefore that we *know*) what we do not see, the question then becomes, “How does one go about inspiring, cajoling, or inciting students to take an interest and delight in seeing the highest things, thereby instructing them also about the lower so that they do not suppose the lower to be the higher?” If Aristotle and the other thinkers we have studied in this thesis are correct that immortalization is the true aim of education, then the single most important

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good to the soul, and he who concerns himself about other things than those which lead to salvation is very unwise.” Against this much-knowing, Kempis counsels knowledge of one’s ignorance: “The more you know and the better you understand, the more severely will you be judged, unless your life is also the more holy. Do not be proud, therefore, because of your learning or skill. Rather, fear because of the talent given you. If you think you know many things and understand them well enough, realize at the same time that there is much you do not know. Hence, do not affect wisdom, but admit your ignorance. Why prefer yourself to anyone else when many are more learned, more cultured than you?” See Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) [www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.html) (accessed March 21, 2011), I.ii.

<sup>567</sup> There is a provocative discussion of the relation between wondering and *noesis* in Plato’s *Republic* at 523b-526c. Throughout this passage, *noesis* is said to be sparked by the experience of perplexity (*aporia*), or when we are led to wonder about things. In particular, noetic activity occurs when we question fundamentals or are puzzled by contradictions. Contradictions and puzzlement can occur at any level of mental awareness, but they just as easily may not. An identical point is made by Pieper when he writes that, although ordinary school study trains the mind in discipline and precision, “It can ... very easily happen that its actual object is not achieved despite the most precise intellectual techniques – because the soul lacks the ability to let itself be affected and its questioning gaze lacks simplicity, without which the object of philosophizing cannot be brought to light and kept in view.” See Pieper, “On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy” in *For the Love of Wisdom*, 168. The philosophic education must therefore entice towards puzzlement and wonder in order to spark *noesis*.

<sup>568</sup> The Latin meaning of this term rooted in the verb *curro* refers to the running of a horse race, in fact.

<sup>569</sup> Plato, *Republic* 536e.

thing we can do to provoke students to want to learn is to confront them with this challenge to immortalize.

However, neither teachers nor students – in accord with the aspirations of their administrative and governmental superiors – take much interest at all in immortalizing. Schall reflects that “the reason we do not reflect on the highest things – the reason why we do not know what we could about our ultimate end or highest good” is that “we allow ourselves to be stupified, to be deflected by what are admittedly many interesting and absorbing things,” and “we do not order our lives so that we are taken beyond what is before us.”<sup>570</sup> In other words, lesser sights transfix our attention in the pleasure that they bring, with the result that we take inordinate delight in and lust after things that are not as good as we suppose them to be; likewise, we are moved to fear and pain inordinately at suffering from the loss (or the prospective loss) of these same things through not understanding their nature due to our lack of knowledge about the higher things. As Schall notes, “we are not complete as human beings if we do not have a real taste for learning and take a real delight in it,” and “if we neglect the higher pleasures, we will consequently be prone to mislocate other pleasures.”<sup>571</sup> The task of education, following Plato’s call to leisure in philosophy, is to “take up” our seeing with its associated fears and joys, and to seek out a true measure for what we see in a higher seeing.

Apart from the animosity between the philosopher and his or her surrounding society – a fact we have already thoroughly investigated -- yet another difficulty with pursuing wisdom in an education system seems to be that, on the one hand, philosophy’s highest object is wisdom, or the most beautiful of sights; it is important for all of us to see what is most beautiful in order that we might best judge between the beautiful things in the world of our daily experiences, ranking them properly and not confusing them. Hence, from the earliest age, it is essential that, as much as we are able, we should concern ourselves with seeing what is best so as not to be misled into supposing that we know what we do not know; this, it seems to me, is the best argument for an education in the pursuit of wisdom. However, on the other hand, it also seems to be the case that the sight of what is best is not readily available to us without considerable preparation and hard work on our

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<sup>570</sup> Schall, “On Teaching and Being Eminently Teachable” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 18.

<sup>571</sup> Schall, “On Knowing Nothing of Intellectual Delights” in *Life of the Mind*, 76.

part; pursuing wisdom, or the highest of sights, involves purifying ourselves, and for this reason it is aptly named the practice of “dying” or “mortification.” So by advancing the claim that children ought to be exposed to the most beautiful sights from the earliest age, aren’t we under-estimating the importance of making appropriate preparations for the seeing of such sights? Are children and youths really apt participants in the pursuit of wisdom? Are they sufficiently mature? This, it seems to me, is a major conundrum for pursuing wisdom in schools.

As we have seen, most of the greatest thinkers in our study have counselled against supposing that an education aimed at *philosophia*, or the pursuit of wisdom, could ever be a mass possibility; they would hold my ambition to promote philosophy in the public school highly suspect. Indeed, as we have seen, there are many good reasons to be suspicious of such an ambition. Nonetheless, we have offered many counter-arguments to their concerns; moreover, Plato himself gives us reason to suppose that philosophizing *is* a possibility for both youths (*neanioi*) and children (*paides*) in an institutional setting; even James Schall – who frequently voices his own concerns about introducing philosophy to students too early – nonetheless writes that “everyone is a philosopher” inasmuch as “it is possible for everyone to know the truth”: “Since we are all in immediate contact with being, with what is, it is possible for ordinary folks to see the truth of things, even if they may not exactly be able to explain what they see in complicated or technical language.”<sup>572</sup> Philosophy, as the pursuit of wisdom, is the pursuit of joy and happiness (*eudaimonia*) that is the perfect end (*telos*) of our human nature. As the proper end of all human beings, it is not the sole prerogative of a “few,” but is available to everyone. Moreover, the above conundrum that arises from the need to be exposed to the highest things early so that we do not take inappropriate joy in the lower things on the one hand, and the need to undergo spiritual preparations before such sights can be readily received on the other finds its resolution for us in the writings of Plato; in particular, in his frequent use of story (*mythos*) as a means of showing the highest things to interlocutors not yet spiritually-prepared or disposed to seeing them through noetic means.

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<sup>572</sup> Schall, “Philosophy: Why What is Useless is the Best Thing about Us,” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 156.

In the final two sections of this thesis, then, our aim will be to examine ways in which teachers have sought to introduce philosophy and contemplative practices into their classrooms as means to educate their students. I suggest that, whereas in contemporary classroom practices philosophy and contemplative education have been separated, a dovetailing of these practices – quite common in ancient philosophic enquiry -- would be most fruitful. Perhaps due to the unfamiliarity of classroom teachers and practitioners with genuine philosophy, contemplative education is not often associated with philosophizing; yet I wish to argue that true philosophy – even more so than the excellent meditative practices adopted in some schools -- offers greater possibility for contemplative development, particularly if combined with exercises more widely practiced in contemplative education programs.

## II. Current Philosophy Instruction in Schools and the Pursuit of Wisdom

As we have seen, children have been invited to philosophize at least since the time of Socrates' discussions with *paides* and *neanioi*. In modern times, attempts to promote philosophizing with children and youth in an institutionalized school setting have been proliferating around the world since the 1970's with the inception of Matthew Lipman's "Philosophy for Children" (P4C) program. Numerous institutes and associations<sup>573</sup> as well as academic journals<sup>574</sup> now exist that are devoted to the development and implementation of philosophy curricula for both children and youth based on Lipman's original contributions. P4C programming has been used in Alberta schools,<sup>575</sup> and optional philosophy courses are included in the Alberta curriculum at the grade 11 and 12 levels of

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<sup>573</sup> For example, there is the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC), the Institute for Critical Thinking at Montclair State University, the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC), the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERRE), the North American Association of Community of Inquiry (NAACI) <http://www.naaci-philosophy.org>, the Federation of Australasian Philosophy for Children Associations (FAPCA), as well as Dialogueworks (for resources to teach the Philosophy for Children program) [www.dialogueworks.co.uk](http://www.dialogueworks.co.uk), and the European Foundation for the Advancement of Doing Philosophy with Children (SOPHIA) <http://sophia.eu.org/>.

<sup>574</sup> For instance, see *Analytic Teaching: The Community of Inquiry Journal*; also see *Childhood and Philosophy: Journal of the International Council of Philosophical Inquiry With Children*; and *Critical & Creative Thinking: The Australasian Journal of Philosophy for Children*. Also see *Questions: Philosophy for Young People*. There is also the IAPC publication, *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*.

<sup>575</sup> See the Philosophy for Children Alberta website: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~phil4c/>.

study.<sup>576</sup> Although very many teachers may find P4C programming most helpful, I myself have started philosophy programs at two different high schools without the aid of P4C materials or P4C pedagogy.

Internationally, philosophy is offered to students at the primary and secondary school levels, both *formally* as part of prescribed national or local curricula, and *informally* as an *ad hoc* supplement. Recent research conducted by Michael Hand and Carrie Winstanley indicates that it is very uncommon for philosophy to be included among the core or mandatory subjects in schools, and “the overwhelming majority of children in Europe, North America and Australasia have no statutory or otherwise established entitlement to encounter philosophy during the period of compulsory schooling.” There are, however, a few noteworthy exceptions; at the upper secondary level, students in France, Spain, Italy, and Hungary are compelled to study philosophy; similarly, in Brazil, “philosophy is a compulsory curriculum subject in many secondary schools and some primary schools.” Turkish secondary schools also make a course in philosophy, history, religion, and ethics mandatory, and Norwegian schools have been considering the possibility of establishing philosophy as a statutory school subject both at the primary and secondary levels of study. However, the researchers note that “opportunities to study philosophy at upper secondary level in the English-speaking world are fewer and further between,” and “only a minority of US and Canadian high schools offer elective classes in philosophy.”<sup>577</sup> Indeed, there was some reluctance at my last school to offer philosophy at all because they feared it might detract from student numbers enrolled in already established elective courses.

Hand and Winstanley point out that the real flowering of philosophy in schools has occurred not so much through formal programming, but rather by informal means:

Thanks in large part to the commitment, industry and effective international networking of key players in the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement over the

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<sup>576</sup> Consult the Program of Studies document for Philosophy 20: “The Origins of Western Philosophy” and Philosophy 30: “Philosophies of Man.” See <http://education.alberta.ca/media/850871/phil.pdf>. The Alberta government has thankfully left these documents wide open and vague, and wonderfully unrestricted for teacher interpretation, such that the possibilities for philosophizing are very rich and exciting for the classroom. I have always enjoyed teaching both the 20 and 30 level courses in a mixed classroom with students learning at both levels simultaneously in grades 10 through 12, and with students from both the “academic” and “non-academic” streams.

<sup>577</sup> Michael Hand and Carrie Winstanley, “Introduction” to *Philosophy in Schools*, ed. Michael Hand and Carrie Winstanley (London: Continuum, 2008), xi.

last forty years, philosophy is currently offered as a supplementary or extra-curricular activity in a remarkable number of schools around the world.<sup>578</sup>

Since Lipman, the father of the P4C movement, began advocating that philosophy be considered a legitimate subject for children in the late 1960's, and through the Institute of the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) which he established in 1974, the P4C pedagogy of using "philosophical stories" and "the community of enquiry" model has been promoted very successfully; at the time of the Hand and Winstanley study, there were some 75 P4C centres across the U.S., and IAPC "affiliates" existed in 45 countries around the world. With the spread of P4C programming some diversification of approaches has arisen,<sup>579</sup> but "P4C" is still used as an umbrella term for all these various strands as an acknowledgement of their shared ancestry in Lipman's ideas.

## 1. Gareth Matthews' Defence of Philosophizing with Children

### (i) Matthews Contra Piaget

The prospect of philosophizing with children and youths is not without its modern detractors and sceptics. Perhaps the most notable and pervasive objection – and one that I myself have heard from parents on occasion -- is the contention that philosophy is simply too hard for children. The most powerful recent proponent of this objection is very likely the great developmental psychologist, Jean Piaget.<sup>580</sup> Briefly, through careful experimentation, Piaget developed a body of evidence to suggest that there are three stages of increasing sophistication in the development of children's thinking and in their

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<sup>578</sup> Hand and Winstanley, "Introduction," xii.

<sup>579</sup> Among these are Philosophy with Children (PwC) and the Community of Philosophical Inquiry method (CoPI). For a useful discussion of some of these distinctions, see Catherine McCall, "Philosophical inquiry and lifelong learning: Life, the Universe, and Everything" in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Dialogue, Culture and Philosophy* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2007).

<sup>580</sup> It should be noted that the acceptance of developmental psychology *does not* necessarily prohibit philosophizing with children. For instance, the developmental psychologist Janet Astington – herself a critic of Piaget -- has written about the importance of "metacognition" for the development of the mind, and how "thinking about thinking" is important not only for youths, but for small children as well. In her view, "children need to think and talk about their thinking" (184). Philosophy is in large part conceived of by P4C programs as such a "metacognitive" activity. Janet Wilde Astington, *The Child's Discovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); see especially her discussion of readying children for thinking in school at 182-190.

understanding of what it means to think.<sup>581</sup> According to this view, prior to a specific age of development, children are not sufficiently mature or psychologically equipped for the sort of thinking that is involved in philosophy. Following Piaget's "stage theory," it is natural to conclude that we must not teach children anything unless it is "age-appropriate": just as the bodies of children need time to grow, mature, and develop, "[m]ental bones and psychological muscles need to mature too."<sup>582</sup> If philosophy is a "cognitively mature activity," then "to encourage children to do philosophy would be as pointless, perhaps even as damaging to the child, as trying to get newborn infants to walk."<sup>583</sup>

Gareth B. Matthews has written extensive, poignant responses to Piaget's objections against philosophizing with children.<sup>584</sup> Of particular concern to him is how Piaget's experiments "encourage undeserved condescension towards children,"<sup>585</sup> and that the allure of these experiments invites us to distrust the experiences of dialogue and discussion we

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<sup>581</sup> Of these three stages, Piaget writes: "During [the first] stage children believe that thinking is 'with the mouth.' Thought is identified with the voice. Nothing takes place in the head or in the body ... There is nothing subjective in the act of thinking. The average age for children of this stage is 6.

The second stage is marked by adult influences. The child has learnt that we think with the head, sometimes it even alludes to the 'brain' ... This type of answer is always found about the age of 8. But more important is the continuity existing between the first and second stages. Indeed, thought is often looked on as a voice inside of the head, or in the neck, which shows the persistence of the influence of the child's previous convictions. Finally, there is the way in which the child materializes thought: thought is made of air, or of blood, or it is a ball, etc.

The third stage, the average age of which is 11-12, shows thought no longer materialized." See Jean Piaget, *The Child's Concept of the World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), 38-39; see especially Chapter 4 of Gareth B. Matthews' book, *Philosophy and the Young Child* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 41-42. Matthews offers a most excellent analysis of this precise passage, and a scintillating critique of Piaget's developmental psychology from the philosopher's perspective.

<sup>582</sup> Gareth B. Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 32.

<sup>583</sup> Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood*, 33. Against the modern developmental psychologist's claim, it is important to note that philosophy has not always been so esteemed as a "cognitively mature activity." Indeed, in his *Gorgias*, Plato has Callicles sneer at Socrates' philosophizing as the past-time of children and the ruination of a grown man who is serious about engaging in worldly affairs. Callicles remarks to Socrates: "Philosophy is no doubt pleasant enough, Socrates, taken moderately and in youth, but it is the ruination of a man if he stays in it too long. However well endowed his nature, if he dwells in philosophy much past youth he necessarily becomes a stranger to affairs in which he ought to be experienced, if he is to be well regarded and a gentleman, noble and good. Philosophers in fact are inexperienced in the laws of their city, inexperienced in the language to be used in business contracts, public and private, inexperienced in human pleasures and desires, utterly inexperienced, in a word, in human character. So when they come to action, public or private, they make fools of themselves, just as, I think, politicians do when they turn to your discussions and disputes" (484ce). Also see Matthew Lipman's discussion of this passage in *Philosophy Goes to School* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>584</sup> See, for instance, his chapter on Piaget in *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 37-55; also chapter three of *The Philosophy of Childhood*, 30-40; and "Getting beyond the Deficit Conception of Childhood: Thinking Philosophically with Children," in *Philosophy in Schools*, 27-40. Matthews has offered similar critical analyses of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development as well. See, for instance, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 54-67.

<sup>585</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 12.



have had with children; we know our own children through long experience of watching them, raising them, loving them, and speaking with them. We have heard them wonder and puzzle philosophically; we have heard them ask genuinely philosophical questions. Matthews' critique of Piaget is largely based upon this disconnect that he finds between his real world experiences with children and Piaget's theory.<sup>586</sup> Indeed, the problems with Piaget's "deficit model of childhood"<sup>587</sup> first came to Matthews' attention when he realized that Piaget "made no allowance whatsoever for the philosophical thinking" he had witnessed in his own daughter, who, according to Piagetian theory, "still lingered in the antechamber of 'pre-operational thought.'"<sup>588</sup>

Despite this disconnect, Piaget's ideas continue to be attractive as a theory of development. After all, as Matthews remarks, Piaget's experiments "have arresting results"; they are "replicable"; and they reveal an "age-related sequence"<sup>589</sup> that makes sense to us, since children certainly *do* change in their understanding of the world and themselves as they grow older; moreover, these changes in understanding *do* seem to occur in stages as they mature. However, Matthews writes that the "stages/maturation model" of childhood development "has an evaluational bias built into it" because it treats preceding stages as inferior to those that follow in temporal sequence; it guarantees "early stages are superseded by later stages that are automatically assumed to have been less satisfactory."<sup>590</sup> Matthews admits that this "deficit model of childhood" seems quite appropriate in many areas of human development; we recognize that children are too young for many kinds of activities and decisions,<sup>591</sup> just as mature adults are too old for certain childhood

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<sup>586</sup> Writing about the arresting results of Piaget's experiments and their power to cloud our ability to trust our own experiences with children, Matthews remarks that Piaget's theory "easily convinces us that, knowing our children well, we don't in fact know them at all. It convinces us that our children are, in important ways, strangers to us. It's not enough, we quickly conclude, to be with our children all day long to get to know them. We need a *theory* about them. The expert, the theoretician, needs to tell us parents and teachers what our children are really like." See Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 31.

<sup>587</sup> See Matthews, "Getting beyond the Deficit Conception of Childhood" in *Philosophy in Schools*, 27-40.

<sup>588</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 2.

<sup>589</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 30.

<sup>590</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 16.

<sup>591</sup> For instance, young children do not vote; they do not drive; they are not considered fully able to make their own decisions, such that their welfare is placed in the hands of parents, guardians, or in the absence of these, they become wards of the state. Neil Postman has written an excellent book on the "discovery" and subsequent erosion of childhood. His thesis is that our awareness of childhood waxes and wanes, that our sense of childhood as a different stage of life from adulthood is of vital importance for our cultural development, and that in modern times – particularly with the rush to make children into adults and the rise of mass media which destroys the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, the opportunity for children to

behaviours. As Matthews remarks, “We don’t want grown-ups, or even adolescents, to have to chew their adult-sized steaks with baby teeth.” The assumption that children develop in stages, and that in some ways childhood behaviours and childhood understanding might be legitimately discussed in terms of the “deficit model” rings true in many respects; but in Matthews’ view, “when it comes to philosophy, the assumption is quite out of place.”<sup>592</sup>

Matthews’ refutation of Piaget’s theory as it applies to philosophizing takes three basic forms. First, he provides copious anecdotal evidence in transcripts and analysis of his own extensive discussions with children to demonstrate that they do, in fact, philosophize.<sup>593</sup> Second, he attacks Piaget’s work dialectically, exposing its assumptions and assertions about children to philosophic questioning.<sup>594</sup> His analysis of the conclusions Piaget derives from his “clay ball experiment” is particularly entertaining, for it not only demonstrates how children are able to recapitulate on their own the classical atomism and metaphysical speculations of Democritus and Leucippus in the fifth century BCE; Matthews’ analysis also clearly isolates Piaget’s own assumptions about what constitutes knowledge and understanding on the part of his child-participants, only to demonstrate that these assumptions are *not* knowledge at all, but rather Piaget’s own false presuppositions about the world.<sup>595</sup> Third, he combs Piaget’s transcripts of his conversations with children

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be children is slowly disappearing. Postman’s book, written in the early 80’s, is particularly prescient of the adverse effects of IT, communications and computer technologies on children and their development – particularly as these fetishes have overtaken education policy, school administrators, parents, students, and teachers. See Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982).

<sup>592</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 17.

<sup>593</sup> Matthews’ extensive work demonstrates that “even after children have been socialized out of doing philosophy naturally, say between the ages of eight and twelve, they respond beautifully to the opportunity to engage in philosophy when it is presented to them with some imagination. See Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 34. Also see Matthews’ extended account of such discussions in his book, *Dialogues with Children* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>594</sup> For instance, Matthews’ logical analysis of Piaget’s dismissal of a little nine-year-old girl’s argumentation about whether or not God exists given that there are names for God is delightful. He shows how the girl’s argumentation takes the valid *modus tollens* and *modus ponens* forms, and how Piaget “was dismissive, even contemptuous, of the little girl’s reasoning” when “he should not have been.” See *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 30-31.

<sup>595</sup> Briefly, Piaget expects that a fully developed child who watches a clay ball being cut in half, twisted or flattened, or submersed in water would ascribe to basic “principles” of knowledge concerning the “conservation of substance (CS),” the “conservation of weight (CW),” and the “conservation of volume (CV).” His experiments show that as children grow older, they adopt each of these three points of view in stages. However, as Matthews makes clear, there are excellent philosophical grounds for disputing the legitimacy of each of these claims to knowledge. For instance, it is not matter, but mass/energy that is guaranteed to be conserved. So (CS) is false; similarly, young school children also know about space travel

to find instances of where Piaget has simply proven himself insensitive to childhood wonder dismissing it as “mere romancing,”<sup>596</sup> “immune to philosophical puzzlement,”<sup>597</sup> and “given the chance to do some philosophy with a child” he “passes it by.”<sup>598</sup>

## (ii) Cultivated Naiveté and Pretentious Learning

It is not my ambition here either to recapitulate Matthews’ fine arguments in a shorter space than his original exposition or to outdo his definitive philosophic responses to Piagetian objections concerning the viability of philosophizing with children.<sup>599</sup> I only wish to draw out what insights Matthews’ philosophizing with children contributes to our current study of the pursuit of wisdom in education. Matthews states his thesis well in *The Philosophy of Childhood*:

My informal research suggests that such spontaneous excursions into philosophy are not at all unusual for children between the ages of three and seven; in somewhat older children, though, even eight- and nine-year-olds, they become rare, or at least rarely reported. My hypothesis is that, once children become well settled into school, they learn that only “useful” questioning is expected of them. Philosophy then either goes underground, to be pursued privately, perhaps, and not shared with others, or else becomes totally dormant.<sup>600</sup>

In Matthews’ experience, “children of five, six, or, perhaps, seven years are much more likely to ask philosophical questions and make philosophical comments than children of twelve or fourteen years.”<sup>601</sup> We have already explored a literary illustration of this observation in the character of Brian O’Connell in W.O. Mitchell’s *Who Has Seen the Wind*, where growing up seems to bring with it a loss of wonder only recapitulated and rediscovered later in life by Brian through his exposure to philosophy as practiced by the town shoemaker and the school principal. Similar observations about the end of childhood

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these days through story books and movies; so they know well that (CW) is false because we are weightless in outer space; and as Matthews notes, there is no such law as (CV) since unlike energy, “volume is not a quantity that needs to remain constant in a physical system.” See Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 41-53.

<sup>596</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 39.

<sup>597</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 54.

<sup>598</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 53. For an example of Matthews’ exposition of how Piaget avoids opportunities to wonder, to be puzzled, and to philosophize with children, see his analysis of Piaget’s interactions with an eight-year-old child named Fav. Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 48-55.

<sup>599</sup> For another good rebuttal to Piaget’s developmental theory and its implications for philosophizing with children, consult Lynn Glueck and Harry Brighouse, “Philosophy in Children’s Literature” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 119-131; see especially the subsection “Are children capable of philosophic thinking?” 125-129.

<sup>600</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 5.

<sup>601</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 73.

wonder and the refusal of both grown-ups and school systems to provide room for leisure in which one might “do nothing” are voiced by Christopher Robin at the end of A. A. Milne’s classic, *The House at Pooh Corner*:

Then, suddenly again, Christopher Robin, who was still looking at the world, with his chin in his hands, called out “Pooh!”  
 “Yes?” said Pooh.  
 “When I’m – when – Pooh!”  
 “Yes, Christopher Robin?”  
 “I’m not going to do Nothing any more.”  
 “Never again?”  
 “Well, not so much. They don’t let you.”<sup>602</sup>

How does this deadening to philosophy occur? Matthews argues that adults discourage children from asking philosophical questions, “first by being patronizing to them and then by directing their inquiring minds toward more ‘useful’ investigations.” As Matthews points out, most adults are not themselves interested in philosophical questions; indeed, “They may be threatened by some of them. Moreover, it doesn’t occur to most adults that there are questions that a child can ask that they can’t provide a definitive answer to and that aren’t answered in a standard dictionary or encyclopaedia either.”<sup>603</sup> However, to refuse to admit the child’s philosophical questions -- and Matthews calls such questions a form of “play” due to the delight that children take in them<sup>604</sup> -- is to impoverish their intellectual lives, as well as our own. In several places Matthews explicitly links childhood to adulthood through philosophy, which he refers to as the “adult attempt to deal with the genuinely baffling questions of childhood.”<sup>605</sup>

Matthews’ writings suggest that philosophy comes naturally to children since there is “a certain innocence and naiveté about many, perhaps most, philosophical questions”; moreover, where such naiveté and innocence is natural to children, it “is something that adults, including most college students, have to cultivate when they pick up their first book of philosophy.”<sup>606</sup> Matthews points out that, with regard to this naivete, children have a

<sup>602</sup> A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* (New York: Dutton Children’s Books, 1928), 178.

<sup>603</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 73.

<sup>604</sup> See chapter two of Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child* entitled “Play,” 11-22. Matthews begins this chapter with the observation that “Philosophy may indeed be motivated by puzzlement. But to show that and stop there is to suggest, quite mistakenly, that philosophy is inevitably something terribly serious. In fact, it is often play, conceptual play” (11).

<sup>605</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 13; cf. 16.

<sup>606</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 73.

certain aptitude for philosophizing not shared by their older, adult counterparts; whereas adults may have developed the rigour, the discipline, and the analytic mind that is valuable for certain aspects of philosophic inquiry, “all too often, maturity brings with it staleness and uninventiveness.” Citing Descartes, Matthews contends that philosophy involves “starting over,” or refusing to take for granted all the things that we suppose we know through long familiarity with them. For adults, this “starting over” and learning to be comfortable once again with “naive” questions is not easy, but for children, it is “far less of a problem.”<sup>607</sup> In this way, both the adult and the child come to philosophy with deficits and aptitudes that complement one another:

The combination of assets and liabilities that an adult brings to a philosophical encounter with a child makes for a very special relationship. The adult has a better command of the language than the child and, latently at least, a surer command of the concepts expressed in the language. It is the child, however, who has fresh eyes and ears for perplexity and incongruity. Children also have, typically, a degree of candour and spontaneity that is hard for the adult to match. Because each party has something important to contribute, the inquiry can easily become a genuinely joint venture, something otherwise quite rare in encounters between adults and children.<sup>608</sup>

Following Matthews’ insights about the complementary nature of the adult-child relationship, it seems reasonable to suggest that the opportunity to philosophize with children offers both adult and child interlocutors possibilities that could not otherwise be made present, since each participant might model very well a component of the philosophic nature not readily available to the other.

Some final clarification is needed concerning Matthews’ desire “to encourage in adults ... a style of ‘naive’ questioning that comes naturally to many children,”<sup>609</sup> but that comes only with difficulty for most grown-ups. While it is true that there is something characteristically “naive” about philosophy, “it is a profound naiveté, not a cognitively immature sort.”<sup>610</sup> Matthews writes:

An adolescent or adult who writes poetry or does philosophy has to cultivate innocence to be able to puzzle and muse over the simplest ways we have of saying

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<sup>607</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 18.

<sup>608</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 85. Similar remarks about the rigidity of adult thinking as an impediment to philosophizing are made by Plato’s Stranger in the *Laws* when they are discussing the importance of drinking as a means to soften the metal of the soul in the Dionysian chorus. See Plato, *Laws* 671b.

<sup>609</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 41.

<sup>610</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*, 34.

and seeing things. Cultivated innocence has many advantages over its natural counterpart. One is that it is not so easily thrown off balance by pretentious learning. But cultivated innocence is not the same as natural innocence. For at least this reason the poetry of children is different from the poetry of adults, and for at least this reason philosophy in children can't be exactly like philosophy in adults.<sup>611</sup>

"Pretentious learning," as Matthews calls it, is everywhere in the education system; we test for it and we reward it on government exams where students are expected to demonstrate "mastery" of their subjects; it underlies the lack of docility (*docilitas*) among many teenagers at the high school level who appear to be immune to learning anything new because they already claim to know everything that is important to them; in fact, it seems to be the case that the wonderful "natural innocence" and naiveté that we treasure among little children most commonly is extinguished on reaching adolescence, when children begin to harbour great pretensions to knowledge, and hence become difficult to teach. Whereas young children experience wonder (*thauma*) as a delight, for older students, wonder often brings with it great alarm and anxiety (*anxietas*), since it compels them to face the uncertainty of their own presumptions to knowledge. Moreover, they know that if their ignorance is exposed to scrutiny (or even their awareness of their own ignorance) they will not be lauded, praised, or rewarded by our educational system; rather, they are certain to incur harsh punishment in the form of very bad grades. If students could be protected from threat of such punishments – at least for a portion of the school day -- Matthews' exhortation to "cultivated innocence" might offer a remedy for such pretence to knowledge; as Plato has the Stranger remark in his dialogue, *The Sophist*, it is this pretence to know what one does not know that is "the great source of all the errors of the intellect"; such pretence is the greatest impediment to education. "Cultivated innocence," as Matthews envisions it, is the true nature of *paideia* inasmuch as genuine education is the means whereby one is rid of pretensions to know what one does not know.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 94. Matthews' observation that philosophizing among adults, on the one hand, and philosophy with children on the other resonates well with Plato's depictions of Socrates' discussions among adults in the *Republic*, for instance, as compared to those he has with children in the *Lysis*. The flavour of the two dialogues is quite different.

<sup>612</sup> Plato, *Sophist* 229cd.

Adopting the term from Robert Spaeman,<sup>613</sup> Matthews conceives of philosophy in school as a kind of “institutionalized naiveté”:

To institutionalize naiveté is, presumably, to provide an institutional setting in which people will be encouraged to ask questions so basic that grappling with them seems to all of us some of the time, and some of us all of the time, quite naive.<sup>614</sup>

The concept of “institutionalized naiveté” speaks to the question we have asked throughout this thesis concerning the sort of “environment” or “atmosphere” that would best cultivate the pursuit of wisdom in schools. We have thus far suggested that such an atmosphere must be one of leisure or *schole* in the ancient sense of the word; Matthews’ work with children suggests that such an atmosphere must foster “profoundly naive” questioning; that is, students must feel both safe to ask such questions and invited to pursue answers to such questions; arguably, the ordinary classroom with its demands for assessment and accountability, and its onus on the achievement of outcomes and goals, makes such “naive” questions besides-the-point; such an environment discourages philosophy, and is not a “safe” place for philosophizing; as Matthews writes, it either pushes philosophy “underground” or it renders philosophizing dormant altogether.

### (iii) The Question of Atmosphere for a Wisdom Environment Revisited

While it is true that a “wisdom environment” must be protected and secured from the anti-philosophic tendencies that are broadly embraced and enforced in schools, it is also nonetheless true that a “wisdom environment” in which students and teachers might engage in *schole* ought never be conceived of as “a safe place”; indeed, it is from within this atmosphere of *schole* that all the pretensions to knowledge that underlie the larger concerns of schools and society with achievement and success are laid wide open for scrutiny. The “wisdom atmosphere” of genuine *schole* and “institutionalized naiveté” *must not* protect students and teachers from the suffering that is necessarily involved in *seeing* the truth; rather, on the one hand, such an atmosphere ought to expose learners to the fact that ignorance is the cause of their suffering, that their ignorance about their own ignorance is the most pernicious source of suffering of all, and that it is important for them to toil

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<sup>613</sup> Robert Spaemann, “Philosophie als institutionalisierte Naivität,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 81 (1974): 139-142.

<sup>614</sup> Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, 94.

ardently in order to eradicate all such pretensions to knowledge. On the other hand, such an atmosphere ought also to encourage students to *embrace* a certain kind of suffering that drives their “naive questioning”; that is, when students ask such questions, they are driven to do so by a love or desire (*eros*) to see (*theorein*) the beautiful, the sight of which is itself a kind of suffering (*pathos*) or experience (*pathos*) of the highest things.<sup>615</sup> The wisdom environment, therefore, must embolden learners to be willing to suffer the hardships of rooting out their ignorance and pretence to knowledge on the one hand, while hearkening them to suffer love, the experience of lack or deficiency, and the pain of gazing upon the Lovable on the other hand.

The qualities of a genuine “wisdom atmosphere” are succinctly expressed in the gnomic utterance (*gnome*) of Heraclitus that, “The way up and the way down are the same.”<sup>616</sup> That is, on the one hand, such an atmosphere involves the soul of the learner in an *ascent* (*anairesis*) towards the source of psychic order through the pursuit of wisdom wherein one is reminded of (*anamnesis*) and seeks out (*zetesis*) the Beautiful through each experience or suffering (*pathos*) of the beautiful; on the other hand, such an atmosphere simultaneously initiates learners in a *descent* (*katabasis*) into the investigation of the disorder that exists within the soul; both ascent and descent involve a purgation or purification of the spirit, and it is in this regard that the movements of the soul in wisdom’s pursuit are *not* safe. This purgation entails suffering through death and rebirth -- whether that process be understood in philosophic terms as “the art of dying”<sup>617</sup> through which the soul undergoes the painful process of sprouting wings,<sup>618</sup> in shamanic terms as being rent apart by demons and subsequently reconfigured spiritually,<sup>619</sup> or in religious-contemplative

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<sup>615</sup> The suffering involved in “turning around” (*periagein*, 515c) to seeing the beautiful is most famously depicted in Plato’s *Republic*, particularly in the image of the ascent from the cave’s darkness into the light of the sun, during which the eyes are pained and momentarily blinded by the sun’s brilliance (515c-516b).

<sup>616</sup> See John Mansley Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933), 94; cf. DK 22 B 60.

<sup>617</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 67e.

<sup>618</sup> See especially the story told about the soul sprouting wings as it gazes upon the beloved in Plato, *Phaedrus* 251a-252c.

<sup>619</sup> Shamanic ascent-descent always involves the sojourner in a spiritual ecstasy through which the soul is first felt to undergo a kind of destruction or “death” – a purification that is sometimes experienced as a rending-apart, a burning away, or a disembowelment, for instance; this death is then followed by a kind of re-birth, transformation, or re-configuration of the self in a new spirit body. For the authoritative account of shamanism, see Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 76 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964). The intimate connection between philosophic ascent-descent and shamanic ascent-descent has been noted by several authors. See, for instance,



terms wherein the soul is cast like Jonah into “the belly of the beast of the sea” to abide in the dark “until the spiritual resurrection which it hopes for.”<sup>620</sup> Regardless of the formulation used, the “immortalizing” (*to athanatizein*) that occurs through wisdom’s genuine pursuit always involves a humbling of the soul in order that it might be exalted.<sup>621</sup> As St. John of the Cross writes:

[E]ven as the ladder has those same steps in order that men may mount, it has them also that they may descend; even so is it likewise with this secret contemplation, for those same communications which it causes in the soul raise it up to God, yet humble it with respect to itself. For communications which are indeed of God have this property, that they humble the soul and at the same time exalt it. For, upon this road, to go down is to go up, and to go up, to go down, for he that humbles himself is exalted and he that exalts himself is humbled.<sup>622</sup>

The ladder images used by St. John of the Cross,<sup>623</sup> by Plato<sup>624</sup> and St. Bonaventure,<sup>625</sup> as well as by various shamanic societies<sup>626</sup> depict the pursuit of wisdom simultaneously as an *anairesis* and a *katabasis*; moreover, the upward-downward motion of *philosophia* is at the

Steel, “*Katabasis* in Plato’s *Symposium*”; Barry Cooper, “‘A Lump Bred Up in Darknesse’: Two Tellurian Themes of the *Republic*” in *Politics, Philosophy, Writing: Plato’s Art of Caring for Souls*, ed. Zdravko Planinc (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 80-121. Also see especially Walter Burkert, *Love and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. Edwin L. Minor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). Burkert writes: “The significance of the idea of shamanism for the history of philosophy lies in the conjecture that the new conception of the soul, which was to become the dominant one through the influence of Plato, is to be traced to this source. The independence of the soul from the body is immediately experienced and depicted in the shaman’s ecstasy” (163). Burkert offers insightful arguments that not only Pythagoras, but also other “pre-Socratic” philosophers like Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles, were rather more shamans than philosophers. J. S. Morrison likens Parmenides’ shamanistic descent to the underworld to the journey of Er in Book X of Plato’s *Republic*. See Morrison, “Parmenides and Er” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 75 (1955): 59-68. Eliade, rejects the notion that Pythagorean ascent-descent is shamanic in character; however, he *does* find structures similar to shamanic ascent and descent in Plato’s account of the Pamphylian myth of Er. See Eliade, *Shamanism*, 392-394.

<sup>620</sup> St. John writes: “The Divine assails the soul in order to renew it and thus to make it Divine; and, stripping it of the habitual affections and attachments of the old man, to which it is very closely united, knit together and conformed, destroys and consumes its spiritual substance, and absorbs it in deep and profound darkness.” St. John contends that this psychic descent is “in truth” like going down “alive into hell, being purged here on earth in the same manner as there.” St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, II.vi.1-6.

<sup>621</sup> See *Matthew* 23:12 where Christ says, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

<sup>622</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, II.xviii.2.

<sup>623</sup> St. John relates “the science of love” through his image of “the secret ladder.” See *Dark Night of the Soul*, II.xv ff.

<sup>624</sup> See the “ladder of love” image in Plato’s *Symposium* 209e-210e.

<sup>625</sup> See St. Bonaventure, Chapter One, “The Steps in the Ascent to God and the Consideration of Him Through His Vestiges in the Universe,” in *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1956).

<sup>626</sup> Shamans across a variety of cultures construct ladders upon which they symbolically ascend and descend into the realms of heaven and hell. See examples throughout Eliade, *Shamanism*, but especially “The Ladder – The Road of the Dead – Ascension,” 487-494.

same time an inward and transformational motion. For this reason, Meister Eckhart refers to the innermost part of the soul as a “citadel”; he writes that it is this part of the soul that is like God, and no other.<sup>627</sup> Divested of all its mortal trappings, its thoughts, its passions, and its self-will, the soul is immortalized, or rendered divine by participation.<sup>628</sup> In Eckhart’s formulation, “He [God] is found within”; that is to say, the upward-downward-inward movement locates God “in the ground of the soul, in the innermost part of the soul, in the intellect, not going out and not looking at any thing.”<sup>629</sup> Speaking of this same inward movement, Plato writes in his *Phaedrus* that it is “upon the soul of the learner” (*en tei tou manthanontos psychei*) that “the living word” (*ton ... logon ... zoonta kai empsychon*) which is of “unquestioned legitimacy” (*gnesion*) is written.<sup>630</sup> St. Teresa of Avila likewise addresses the inward motion involved in wisdom’s pursuit. She likens the soul to an “interior castle” with many “mansions” or chambers, where in the centremost chamber resides “the King,”<sup>631</sup> or God. In all such “wisdom literature,” the pursuit of wisdom entails the practice of dying. Citing St. Gregory, Eckhart writes: “it is good advice that we should behave in this world as if we were dead,” for “only those who are entirely dead to the world can possess God in full measure.”<sup>632</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> Meister Eckhart, “Sermon 13 (DW 2, W 8)” in *Selected Writings*. Trans. Oliver Davies. London: Penguin 1994. 163-164.

<sup>628</sup> St. John of the Cross remarks: “Not because the soul will come to have the capacity of God, for that is impossible; but because all that it is will become like to God, for which cause it will be called, and will be, God by participation.” See St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul* II.xx.5.

<sup>629</sup> Meister Eckhart, “Sermon 15 (DW 10 W 66)” in *Selected Writings* 174.

<sup>630</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 276a. These infallible words (*logoi*) written on the soul are akin to the Logos of which Heraclitus speaks and according to which all things come into being (DK 22 B1); this Logos is Wisdom, and according to Heraclitus, “Wisdom is one thing: to understand the thought which steers all things through all things” (DK 22 B 41).

<sup>631</sup> Teresa writes: “Now let us turn at last to our castle with its many mansions. You must not think of a suite of rooms placed in succession, but fix your eyes on the keep, the court inhabited by the King. Like the kernel of the palmito, from which several rinds must be removed before coming to the eatable part, this principal chamber is surrounded by many others. However large, magnificent, and spacious you imagine this castle to be, you cannot exaggerate it; the capacity of the soul is beyond all our understanding, and the Sun within this palace enlightens every part of it.” See St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle* I.ii.8. Elsewhere, Teresa writes about this “palace of priceless worth” as follows: “I think, if I had understood then, as I do now, how this great King really dwells within this little palace of my soul, I should not have left Him alone so often, but should have stayed with Him and never have allowed His dwelling-place to get so dirty. How wonderful it is that He Whose greatness could fill a thousand worlds, and very many more, should confine Himself within so small a space” (179). See St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*. Chapter XXVIII.

<sup>632</sup> Meister Eckhart, “Sermon 14 (DW 8 W 82)” in *Selected Writings* 165.

#### (iv) The Pursuit of Wisdom and the Need for Courage

At this point, it is important to emphasize a key distinction between the ancient and medieval writers in our study on the one hand, and the modern writers on the other. The most striking difference that arises between these two groups concerns the modern silence about the ancient-medieval understanding of philosophy as “the art of dying” in order to “immortalize.” Even the most excellent modern philosophers of education like Gareth Matthews -- concerned as they certainly are with the role of wisdom’s pursuit in education – are reluctant to acknowledge the relationship between dying (*to apothneskein*), immortalizing (*to athanatizein*), and *philosophia*; however, their silence about the practice of dying for the purpose of immortalizing may result in a failure to come to terms with the fact that genuine philosophy – even when it is done with children – must be an exercise in courage (*andreias*); by failing to address the importance of courage in philosophizing, we surely overlook what Friedrich Nietzsche knew about philosophy when he wrote of Wisdom in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that “she is a woman and always loves only a warrior.”<sup>633</sup> When philosophy is so conceived of as “the art of dying” in order to “immortalize,” there is a need for courage among both teachers and students as they embark upon philosophic enquiry.

Philosophy is unlike other studies that students undertake in school which do not presume commitment to the development of character; philosophy demands more of us. For instance, in order to be able to answer the questions of mathematics or science, of social studies or language arts, apart from developing competencies in the machinations of the intellect and the knowledge cultivated by these studies, “it is quite inconsequential what kind of person I am.” However, in philosophy, “mental acuteness will not achieve very much, no matter how much intelligence is involved.” Pieper writes:

What is demanded here is a total and serene unfolding of the most intimate responsive powers of the soul, a process that does not yield to man’s disposing will. It seems that the traditional wisdom of the Far East has preserved this awareness much more vividly than our Western *ratio*.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Reading and Writing” in the First Part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 153. Even Thomas à Kempis speaks of the “manliness” required for the contemplative life, exhorting his reader to “fight like a man.” See Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, XX.

<sup>634</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 49-50.

In other words, philosophic enquiry demands the “total shedding of all pretensions” and the adoption of “the guileless eye”<sup>635</sup>; the death of the self to all pretense and to all selfish concern underlies the pursuit of wisdom, and renders it unlike other pursuits in its peculiar spiritual energy:

It is, above all, the energy of the soul that allows it to persist implacably in its questioning, which, as a living spiritual act, is directed toward the world in its totality and depth; it is an openness for that which arouses wonder – wonder at the fact that something exists at all – an openness that must continually be reconstituted anew.<sup>636</sup>

Unlike when we study math, science, or language arts, if we are to practice philosophy, we necessarily involve ourselves in the cultivation of virtues such as courage, for “moral faults ... can in fact hinder or prevent us from having the freedom from ourselves that enables us to see what is not ourselves, to see *what is*.”<sup>637</sup> Here I am of course not suggesting that P4C programs or Matthews are unconcerned with engaging students in enquiry regarding virtue, morality, and ethics. Certainly students of P4C are led in “communities of ethical enquiry” to their benefit. There is, in fact, a vast body of literature and research on how P4C programming concerns itself with ethical enquiry and “moral education.”<sup>638</sup> However, thoughtful discussion of moral and ethical questions does not necessarily involve those engaged in such questioning with the “practice of dying” in order to “immortalize”;<sup>639</sup> as

<sup>635</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 50.

<sup>636</sup> Pieper, “On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy,” 167.

<sup>637</sup> Schall, “On the Joys and Travails of Thinking,” 4.

<sup>638</sup> A few examples include Matthew Lipman, “Caring as Thinking” *Inquiry: Critical Thinking across the Disciplines* (1093-1082) 15, iss. 1 (Fall 1995): 1-13; Matthew Lipman, “The Role of Stories in Moral Education” *Proceedings of the South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society* 38 (1993): 1-7; Matthew Lipman, and Ann Margaret Sharp, “Can Moral Education Be Divorced from Philosophical Inquiry?” *Viewpoints in Teaching and Learning* 56, iss. 4 (Fall 1980): 1-31; Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, “Some Educational Presuppositions of Philosophy for Children” *Oxford Review of Education* 4, no. 1 (1978): 85-90; Matthew Lipman, “Ethical Reasoning and the Craft of Moral Practice” *Journal of Moral Education* 16, no. 2 (1987): 139-147; Will Robinson, “Why ‘Philosophy for children?’” *Early Child Development and Care* 107, no. 1 (1995): 5-15; Matthew Lipman, “Moral education higher-order thinking and philosophy for children” *Early Child Development and Care* 107, no. 1 (1995): 61-70; Ann Margaret Sharp, “Philosophy for children and the development of ethical values” *Early Child Development and Care* 107, no. 1 (1995): 45-55; Lori A. Roggman, Ann M. B. Austin, and Andrea D. Hart, “Critical thinking experiences for students of child development: outcomes in values and attitudes” *Early Child Development and Care* 107, no. 1 (1995): 97-103.

<sup>639</sup> As we have seen, Aristotle makes a similar remark about studying the nature of prudence and “what is noble and good for a man,” since having studied these things or simply knowing about them does not make us any more capable of doing them. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.xii.1-2. Matthew Lipman too seems to grasp this point as it applies to the foibles of simply teaching students about “critical thinking skills” when he writes: “Teaching students about critical thinking is about as unlikely to create a nation of critical thinkers as having students learn research results about bicycle riding is unlikely to create a nation of bicycle riders.” See Matthew Lipman, “Misconceptions in Teaching for Critical Thinking” *Resource Publication*, series 2, no. 3 (Montclair State College, 1989), 4.

St. John of the Cross puts it, the genuine pursuit of wisdom through the practice of contemplation involves hazarding “all” in order to gain “the All” that is Wisdom.<sup>640</sup> Hence, although Matthews is correct that it is important to foster an environment in which the practice of philosophy might be secured from the “busybody-ness” (*polypragmosnyne*) of what passes for education in schools, it is nonetheless the case that philosophy is *not* a safe activity. The practise of philosophy presupposes a kind of danger that must be met by a trajectory of character development that transcends mere discussions on ethics and moral conundrums.

## 2. Matthew Lipman and the P4C Movement

Ironically, Gareth Matthews’ own personal strengths as a philosopher who can engage and lead children in philosophic inquiry have been grounds for criticism among some writers on the subject of pursuing wisdom in schools. Matthews’ vast knowledge of philosophic literature and traditions informs both his dialogues with children and his use of children’s books to encourage philosophic wondering, but it does so in a way that academics like Lynn Glueck and Harry Brighouse doubt would be replicable *en masse* among teachers who are being trained in P4C programming for schools:

He [Matthews] is, himself, a fine philosopher, and it is not inconceivable that his success with the children he discusses in the book turns on his own skills in drawing out the latent capacities of the children, in a way that could not be widely replicated by teachers in schools.<sup>641</sup>

Lipman too distinguishes Matthews’ approach from his own P4C model. He views Matthews’ writings as demonstrating well “how adults attuned to philosophy can engage children in conversations that disclose and enlarge upon the philosophical dimensions of the child’s thinking”; however, he seems to view Matthews’ successes with children as being possible only for adults who are – unlike the vast majority of teachers -- already familiar with what it means to philosophize. Although he writes that Matthews’ work is helpful for teachers and “quite complementary with the P4C approach,” Lipman nonetheless supposes that the settings for Matthews’ conversations “are much more likely to be the home rather than the school, and the adult is a bit more likely to be a parent rather

<sup>640</sup> “In order to pass from the all to the All, / Thou hast to deny thyself wholly in all.” See St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I.xiv.12.

<sup>641</sup> Glueck and Brighouse, “Philosophy in Children’s Literature,” 129.

than a teacher.”<sup>642</sup> What Lipman and the others involved in the P4C movement seek to create is a kind of systematized philosophy training program for teachers as well as for students.

### (i) Philosophy as Trans-Disciplinary Metacognition

In order to assess how well Lipman’s P4C movement embodies genuine philosophizing, we must first examine what he takes philosophy to be, and next how he professes that philosophy might be taught. Lipman defines philosophy as “self-corrective thinking”; that is, philosophy “is thinking inquiring into itself for the purpose of transforming itself into better thinking.”<sup>643</sup> Understood as “thinking about thinking,” philosophy is often referred to using the term, “metacognition.” Lipman writes that, “The metacognitive act is what makes self-correction possible. It is one thing for mental acts and thinking and inquiry skills to be directed at the world, but it is something else again for them to be directed at themselves.”<sup>644</sup> Metacognition, or “thinking about thought,” becomes philosophy’s highest pursuit in P4C, and Lipman holds that “just as the perfection of the thinking process culminates in philosophy, so too is philosophy, *par excellence*, the finest instrument yet devised for the perfection of the thinking process.”<sup>645</sup>

Having as its aim the cultivation of excellence in thinking through metacognition, philosophy “attempts to clarify and illuminate unsettled, controversial issues that are so generic that no scientific discipline is equipped to deal with them.”<sup>646</sup> Hence, alongside its metacognitive aspect, Lipman isolates the general or “generic” nature of philosophy’s questions as one of its key features; it is for this reason that he calls metaphysics “philosophy at its most comprehensive,” since it “involves issues of maximum generality.”<sup>647</sup> As the quest for what is “generic,” philosophy is distinguished by its propensity “to transcend the points of view of the individual disciplines”<sup>648</sup>; it is distinct as “a discipline that has traditionally concerned itself with the interrelationship among the

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<sup>642</sup> Matthew Lipman, “What is Happening with P4C?” *Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy* 3 (1999): 22.

<sup>643</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 41.

<sup>644</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 26.

<sup>645</sup> Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, second ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), xi.

<sup>646</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 91.

<sup>647</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 36.

<sup>648</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 36.

different intellectual disciplines”; its “peculiarity” is that “the questions it raises deal with the nature of human knowledge in a way that is, so to speak, directly at right-angles with the distribution of non-philosophical subject matters.”<sup>649</sup> For these reasons, philosophy is called “transparochial” or “trans-disciplinary.” Lipman and his associates point out that being “trans-disciplinary” also marks philosophy out as “a countervailing force to the overspecialization rampant in the educational system,”<sup>650</sup> and they view philosophy as a unifying force against the “fragmentation” of the school curriculum.

## (ii) Philosophy as “the Parent Discipline”

Besides identifying philosophy as a metacognitive, trans-disciplinary activity, Lipman isolates what he takes to be another characteristic of philosophy. Citing Socrates’ exchange with Thrasymachus in Plato’s *Republic*,<sup>651</sup> he makes the claim that on their own, the arts and sciences are incapable of improving themselves. In Lipman’s view, “no discipline or form of inquiry ever seeks its own improvement,” for either a discipline “is already perfect (in which case it needs no improvement) or it is imperfect (in which case it is the responsibility of some other discipline to improve it).”<sup>652</sup> But then Lipman asks:

What if there were a discipline that concerned itself with the problematic and contestable aspects of every discipline, fastening upon just those perplexing aspects of the disciplines in which they had become a problem to themselves?<sup>653</sup>

Philosophy is just such a discipline, in Lipman’s view. By cutting across all other studies, and by entering into any of them to pose questions of maximum generality, philosophy is thought to possess the unique ability to improve thinking in all the disciplines. This capacity is yet another of the key and defining attributes of philosophy, according to Lipman; it leads him to call philosophy “the parent discipline.” That is, in his view, philosophy is not something that is borne from or arises out of lesser studies, or through exposure to the other disciplines; rather, none of the other disciplines – the arts and

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<sup>649</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 27.

<sup>650</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 29.

<sup>651</sup> Plato, *Republic* 342ab.

<sup>652</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 31. As we have already seen, Aristotle writes about “political science” (*he politike*) as precisely this master-art (*architectonike*) that rules all other arts whose disparate ends must be suborned to the one ultimate end in the Supreme Good (*Ariston*). See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.ii.1-6.

<sup>653</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 32.

sciences – can arise without the “thinking skills” that philosophy first provides as the proper foundation for them. Lipman writes:

Since the skills needed to think in the other disciplines must be perfected before the other disciplines themselves are encountered, we see why philosophy had to cease being exclusively a college or university subject and become as well an elementary school subject – the discipline whose task it is to prepare students to think in the other disciplines.<sup>654</sup>

These remarks best capture Lipman’s reasons for philosophizing with children; in his view, philosophy teaches sound reasoning and critical thinking without which none of the other disciplines could exist. Philosophy is viewed as the handmaiden of the arts and sciences in this regard.

It is certainly true that the ancient thinkers in our study would agree that wondering and the “desire to know” lie at the beginning of all enquiries in the arts and sciences; consequently, they might agree with Lipman’s characterization of philosophy as “the parent discipline.” However, Lipman’s depiction of philosophy is, in at least one important respect, an inversion of what the ancients supposed about a genuinely philosophic education – namely, they considered the arts and sciences important subjects only inasmuch as these studies presented human beings with the opportunity to philosophize. In their view, philosophy does not exist to cultivate, to serve, or to labour for the arts and sciences; philosophy, in this regard, is not “the parent discipline” whose “task it is to prepare students to think in the other disciplines.” Rather, studies in the arts and sciences exist to serve as a springboard to philosophizing. Lipman’s emphasis on metacognition and the development of critical thinking skills through P4C programming appears to invert this relation since it privileges the development of competencies with the *ratio* over the cultivation of the *intellectus* and its involvement in the activity of *theoria*.

To be fair, Lipman’s inversion of the relation between the arts and sciences on the one hand, and philosophy on the other is only half-hearted; for although he recognizes “the instrumental function of philosophy,” and although studies of the beneficial effects of his P4C programming for “enhanced academic achievement” abound,<sup>655</sup> Lipman nonetheless is

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<sup>654</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 34.

<sup>655</sup> For instance, see S. Trickey and K.J. Topping, “‘Philosophy for children’: a systematic review” *Research Papers in Education* 19, no. 3 (Sept. 2004): 365-380; Philip Jenkins and Sue Lyle, “Enacting dialogue: the impact of promoting Philosophy for Children on the literate thinking of identified poor readers, aged 10”



uncomfortable with selling philosophy simply as handmaiden to the other disciplines. He recognizes that philosophy is one among the “humanistic subjects” whose acquisition “represents an enrichment that needs no other justification”<sup>656</sup>; and yet he also realizes that such an argument “is not likely to be persuasive to the vast majority of school administrators who must make the actual decisions as to which new courses to introduce and which to cut back.” Lipman’s emphasis on philosophy as the “parent discipline” addresses such non-philosophic concerns, since “if philosophy is to be admitted into the curriculum under present-day conditions, it will succeed in doing so only if it can demonstrate to those who run the schools that it can make a significant difference in the child’s overall performance.”<sup>657</sup> Elsewhere, Lipman is critical of the importance schools place upon assessment and achievement,<sup>658</sup> and he is candid about how philosophy might even problematize academic performance by incapacitating students who come to discover

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*Language and Education* 24, no. 6 (November 2010): 459-472; Marie-France Daniel, Louise Lafortune, Richard Pallascio, and Michael Schleifer, “Philosophical Reflection and Cooperative Practices in an Elementary School Mathematics Classroom,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 24, no. 4 (1999): 426-440. Joanna Haynes cites research in Chapter 15 of her book, *Children as Philosophers*, that indicates P4C training improves students’ use and understanding of metaphors, enriches and diversifies their ideas, enhances children’s overall use of English, and improves reading, reading, and learning. See Joanna Haynes, *Children as Philosophers: Learning through enquiry and dialogue in the primary classroom* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 135-139. Excellent bibliographies of research that discusses the effects of P4C on student academic performance accompany each of these articles and book chapters. For an extensive list of articles attesting to the positive effects of P4C programming on student performance, consult the IAPC website at <http://cehs.montclair.edu/academic/iapc/research.shtml>.

<sup>656</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 44. Karin Murris echoes this sentiment by deliberately resisting the temptation to offer instrumental reasons for philosophizing. See Karin Murris, “Autonomous and Authentic Thinking Through Philosophy with Picturebooks” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 105-118.

<sup>657</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 44.

<sup>658</sup> Lipman writes about how “our culture characteristically defines intelligence in terms of the ability to answer questions rather than the ability to ask them, and in terms of competence in solving problems rather than competence in recognizing and formulating them.” See Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 60. “Very often,” he observes, “we measure children’s abilities to do things we want them to do, rather than assess their capacities to do what they themselves choose to do,” and “we set them tasks and then measure their responses” (62). Our hypertrophied concern with assessment is, from his perspective, an example of “the tail wagging the dog.” He remarks, “Testing, which should have only ancillary status at best, tends to be the driving force of the system.” See Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 19. However, unlike the solutions continually foisted upon Alberta teachers in their “professional development” obligations through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS), Lipman argues that “this does not mean that we need to begin by producing better tests”; rather, in his view, we must begin by ourselves philosophizing. We must ask ourselves “what kind of world we want to live in, what kind of education is most likely to contribute to the emergence of such a world, and what kind of curriculum is most likely to produce such an education?” (19-21).

perplexities that others do not.<sup>659</sup> Nevertheless, even though Lipman's acceptance of philosophy's status as "handmaiden" is only half-hearted – and perhaps some form of acceptance of this status is necessary given his interest in promoting P4C programs to schools with their non-philosophic concerns – it nonetheless leaves up for question whether this half-heartedness does not also render his zeal for genuine philosophy also half-hearted; for philosophy cannot rightly exist as a labouring handmaiden to the arts and sciences; as we have seen, the genuine pursuit of wisdom only exists in an atmosphere of *scholē*, or leisure. Yoked to accountability structures for enhanced "student performance," and put to work in the service of developing "critical thinking skills," philosophy loses its grounding in *scholē*, and hence loses its spirit or soul.

### (iii) Philosophy as Training in Reasoning and Logic

This brings us to the next identifying characteristic of philosophy for Lipman. Apart from its status as the quintessential trans-disciplinary, metacognitive activity that alone is able to improve all the other arts and sciences, "there is ... something else of significance that philosophy brings to the quest for excellence in thinking, and that is its subdiscipline of logic."<sup>660</sup> Lipman writes:

Since its inception, philosophy has been the only discipline to provide the criteria – the principles of logic – that make it possible to distinguish better reasoning from worse. Philosophy has long been concerned with the improvement of reasoning proficiencies, clarification of concepts, analysis of meanings, and fostering of attitudes that dispose us to wonder, inquire, and seek meaning and truth.<sup>661</sup>

Lipman remarks that in schools "we hardly devote any time at all to teaching children to tell better reasoning from worse," and he suggests that this is "because we ourselves are generally unacquainted with logic."<sup>662</sup> On the surface, Lipman's claims about reasoning and logic as "subdisciplines" of philosophy that have been neglected by teachers have some resonance. I know of few teachers who actually carve out within their busy schedules a time in which to discuss logical fallacies or basic, logical forms in argumentation, for

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<sup>659</sup> Lipman *et al.* write that philosophy "might even make a decision harder to make by *widening* the range of alternatives from which to choose, rather than letting it stand as a decision between two courses of action." See Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 76.

<sup>660</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 91.

<sup>661</sup> Matthew Lipman, "The Cultivation of Reasoning Through Philosophy" *Educational Leadership* (0013-1784) 42, iss.1 (Sept 1984): 51.

<sup>662</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 18.

instance. However, when I reflect on my own teacher practice, and when I examine the various stipulations placed upon the assessment of student achievement by the Alberta government, I am less than convinced that Lipman is correct about the way we teach; I rather agree with Judith Suissa that emphasizing the fact that the study of philosophy involves developing critical thinking skills, reasoning, and logical abilities does not seem to be a particularly powerful argument for its inclusion in the curriculum. As Suissa points out, “surely good teaching in any curricular subject is such that it encourages critical thinking.”<sup>663</sup> Indeed, mathematics teaches students elementary (as well as quite complicated) mathematical logic and deductive reasoning; scientific inquiry trains students in the use of inductive reasoning and scientific method; the mainstay of social studies is argumentation, including the weighing and analysis of arguments, as well as the formulation of arguments; and English Language Arts, perhaps more than any other core school subject, affords students the opportunity to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate complicated texts, concepts, and ideas. Moreover, student work in each of these areas of study is meticulously assessed using provincially mandated rubrics that demand a certain rigour of argumentation, reasoning, and logic from students.<sup>664</sup> Hence, if philosophy must be made “relevant” as handmaiden to the arts and sciences, its ability to encourage critical thinking or to teach reasoning certainly is not as unique as Lipman seems to claim.

#### **(iv) Philosophic Education as Training for Critical Thinking vs. “The Critical Thinking Approach”**

Lipman’s promotion of P4C rests on philosophy’s status as the definitive means by which to improve thinking, and he sees P4C as addressing most effectively the modern educational concern with “thinking” as opposed to “learning.” In Lipman’s view, “the great paradigm shift in the history of education has been the redesign of education to have thinking rather than learning as its target.” That is to say, where “the chief concern of education was traditionally held to be the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another” and therefore “the initiation of the child into the understanding of the adult

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<sup>663</sup> Judith Suissa, “Philosophy in the Secondary School – A Deweyan Perspective” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 133.

<sup>664</sup> Unfortunately, the Government of Alberta refuses to publish these rubrics in a simple form for public use or scrutiny. For a link that I have created to provincial rubrics for English Language Arts, consult my teaching website at <http://www.mrsteelsclass.com/rubrics/rubricshome.htm> (accessed June 10, 2011).

world” in order that he or she might learn “what adults already know or claimed to know,”<sup>665</sup> philosophy, in its metacognitive focus upon thinking and the improvement of thinking, is situated like no other discipline to respond to the “new paradigm” of education in which the development of “critical thinking skills” is paramount. Indeed, other P4C advocates besides Lipman have written about philosophy in a way that appears to fulfill the aspirations of the Steering Committee in the “Inspiring Education” Report that we have already examined:

The enthusiasm for thinking skills as a solution to our difficulties with the curriculum stems partly from concern that what is offered in schools today fails to keep up with current ideas about effective work practice, leisure pursuits and the desire for good-quality relationships. We know that youngsters today will need a plethora of skills to survive as adults and we also know that some of those skills have yet to be invented. We are also fond of the past, and some of the traditional values of schools sound very attractive to us in our less secure moments. But is it possible to forge an education for children that will help them in the twenty-first century, using a curriculum that has many features of the nineteenth century still firmly embedded in it? If we teach thinking, it is argued, we will create a currency that can be exchanged in unimagined or unpredictable futures.<sup>666</sup>

The appeal of conceiving of education as the cultivation of transferable “critical thinking skills” is that “it trades on nuances of empowerment”<sup>667</sup> where “critical thinking” is loosely defined as “being able to distinguish between different ideas and to identify the assumptions, inconsistencies and weaknesses in thinking and reasoning.”<sup>668</sup> A critical thinker is deemed one who is “able to reason well” and “disposed to believe, judge and act in accordance with such reasoned evaluations.”<sup>669</sup> Moreover, without the ability to think critically, there can be no possibility for wisdom, Lipman argues; for wisdom is “the characteristic outcome of good judgement,” and good judgement is “the characteristic of critical thinking.”<sup>670</sup>

Lipman and his P4C associates embrace the notion of transferable “thinking skills.” They write, “Thinking is natural, but it can also be recognized as a skill capable of being

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<sup>665</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 141.

<sup>666</sup> Haynes, *Children as Philosophers*, 39-40.

<sup>667</sup> Haynes, *Children as Philosophers*, 40; cf. Matthew Lipman, “Critical Thinking – What Can it Be?” *Educational Leadership* (Sept. 1988), 42.

<sup>668</sup> Haynes, *Children as Philosophers* 35.

<sup>669</sup> Siegel, Harvey. “Why Teach Epistemology in Schools?” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 80.

<sup>670</sup> Lipman, “Critical Thinking – What Can it Be?” 38. Here, one might query Lipman, “Is wisdom the *outcome* of good judgment? Or is good judgement the *outcome* of wisdom?” and “If one can teach good judgement, can one also teach wisdom?”

perfected.”<sup>671</sup> However, they are quite critical of “pseudo-philosophical approaches”<sup>672</sup> to teaching such skills, which they refer to using a blanket term: “the thinking skills approach.” Within this “approach,” there are many ways in which critical thinking skills are presumed to be taught that P4C advocates claim do not hit their mark. As Lipman writes in one of the resource publications for his Institute for Critical Thinking, “teaching for critical thinking” is not achieved simply by firing questions at students that will make them think, nor is critical thinking encultured by teachers who know a great deal and who ensure their students can demonstrate mastery of as much knowledge as possible; nor is being taught *about* critical thinking the same as thinking critically; even offering students courses in logic does not ensure the cultivation of critical thought.<sup>673</sup>

Philosophy, by contrast, is viewed as the best way to promote critical thinking. First, as was previously noted, Lipman and P4C advocates view philosophy as the “optimum pedagogy” for teaching reasoning and logic, which they deem its “subdiscipline.” They object to the “thinking skills approach” in part because they suppose that “its advocates (such as Benjamin Bloom) so seldom include reasoning skills in their purview.”<sup>674</sup> A second objection they harbour against the “thinking skills approach” is that they do not suppose that “critical thinking” can be encouraged or cultivated by “conventional methods of instruction,” such as classroom drills or rote seatwork, which they view the “thinking skills approach” as encouraging. In such a “conventional” atmosphere, neither teachers nor students need be involved in inquiry:

The teacher can retain the guise of omniscient authority. The students can sit in silent rows, giving answers when called on and doing paper-and-pencil exercises.

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<sup>671</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 14.

<sup>672</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 28.

<sup>673</sup> Lipman, “Misconceptions in Teaching for Critical Thinking,” 1-8.

<sup>674</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 41. I do not share the views of Lipman and the other P4C advocates in this regard; I think there is ample evidence in Bloom’s taxonomy that considerable concern is devoted to the development of students’ critical reasoning skills. However, I have earlier in this paper offered my own critique of Bloom’s taxonomy. Lipman too views Bloom’s “Gibraltar-like pyramid” of educational objectives as pedagogically suspect, since “from this it was all too easy for teachers, professors of education, and curriculum developers alike to infer that education must necessarily proceed from lower-level to higher-level functions.” He writes that such an inference “has been singularly unhelpful, and it is evident that educational progress will henceforth depend on our ability to invert such mischievous pyramids so as to inject analytical skills into every layer of the curriculum” (4). Other writers in the P4C movement have likewise criticized the propensity of the “thinking skills approach” for producing long, often “arbitrary” and “self-referential” taxonomic lists and orderings of “thinking skills” that have not been tested dialectically. For a good example, see Carrie Winstanley’s discussion of these lists in “Philosophy and the Development of Critical Thinking,” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 85-95; see especially 88-89.

Philosophy, on the other hand, cannot be done in that fashion. The doing of philosophy requires conversation, dialogue, and community, which are not compatible with the requirements of the traditional classroom.<sup>675</sup>

A third objection to the “thinking skills approach” made by P4C advocates is that it does not address the significance of student motivation, interest, or the desire to think critically:

The concentration on the sharpening of isolated skills provides no procedure leading to the convergence and orchestration of these skills. Little may be done to motivate the students to improve their cognitive skills or to engage in inquiry, either because they are presented with nothing that grips their attention and curiosity or because the problems presented are not ones they have discovered for themselves but rather problems posed by the teacher.<sup>676</sup>

Put another way, the “thinking skills approach” teaches reasoning skills without providing any passionate impetus to engage in the life of reason itself. Such an approach is devoid of enjoyment for the learner; it does not address what Dewey has identified as the significance of “interest” in education; that is, a genuine education results in students who are not just *able* to perform the machinations of reason adeptly and to demonstrate mastery of these operations for the purposes of assessment on achievement tests; students devoid of “interest” or the disposition to seek out what is reasonable often simply learn material for a test only to forget it promptly afterwards; rather, someone who is truly educated is actually reasonable as a result; or at least, such a student *desires* to be reasonable; he or she genuinely *wants* to know and to inquire. Winstanley calls this missing element in the “thinking skills approach” “the *propensity* or *disposition* to think critically”; although the “thinking skills approach” teaches one how to reason, it does not develop in students a “critical attitude” or a “critical spirit”; citing Bailin and Siegel, Winstanley remarks that “merely ‘fostering in students the ability to assess the probative strength of reasons’ is not enough to make them critical thinkers, which requires both ‘the ability to reason well and the disposition to do so.’”<sup>677</sup> Here, Winstanley and others critical of the “thinking skills approach” correctly identify the flaw in supposing that thinking might be wholly understood as a “skill.” On the one hand, thinking is certainly something at which we can

<sup>675</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 41.

<sup>676</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 40.

<sup>677</sup> Winstanley, “Philosophy and the Development of Critical Thinking, 90; cf. S. Bailin, and H. Siegel, “Critical thinking,” in N. Blake, P. Smeyers, R. Smith and P. Standish (eds), *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 182.

improve with practice; it is therefore like a skill; but on the other hand, thinking must not be considered simply as a skill, for a skill is something that we can choose to exercise or not; it is something that applies to some situations but not to others; critical thinking -- in contrast to the skill of the shoemaker, the housebuilder, or the speechwriter, for instance -- is always pertinent, and if we are to be critical thinkers, such thinking must become habitual, or dispositional. Winstanley writes:

This dispositional aspect of critical thinking is largely missed by most thinking skills programmes, which tend to focus on improving cognitive processes, building strategies for generating ideas or speeding up decision making, rather than forming the habit of acting and believing in accordance with reasons.<sup>678</sup>

It is the view of P4C advocates that philosophy overcomes each of the three pitfalls in the “thinking skills approach.” First, philosophy is thought especially to provide training in reasoning and logic as its “subdiscipline” unlike the “thinking skills approach”; second, philosophy is held to engage students in genuine inquiry by inviting them to pursue their own questions, unlike the rote seatwork and drilling promoted by the “thinking skills approach”; and third, philosophy in the classroom cultivates the disposition among students to be reasonable by appealing to their “interest.” P4C advocates see philosophy’s primary mode of overcoming each of these three pitfalls as arising from its atmosphere of dialogic discussions.

#### **(v) Philosophic Dialogue as “Distributed Thinking” for a Transformative Democratic Education**

Lipman sells philosophic discourse as the best mode of encouraging not only critical thinking *skills* but also the *disposition* to think critically:

Ask yourself if this is not true. What are the most memorable and intellectually stimulating events of the school day? Study hall? Lectures? Presentations? Paper and pencil tests? Or classroom discussions where everyone is involved and talking about what matters to them as human beings?<sup>679</sup>

Lipman remarks how, when we evaluate student performance in schools, we are apt to focus all our attention on scrutinizing their writing samples and their test results as the best

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<sup>678</sup> Winstanley, “Philosophy and the Development of Critical Thinking,” 90.

<sup>679</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 22.

means of gauging and developing their critical thinking abilities. The significance of conversation for better thinking is commonly overlooked. Lipman writes:

The casual observer may dismiss what seems to be happening in such a classroom [that is, the class in which students are philosophizing] as “just talk.” But this ignores the fact that nothing sharpens reasoning skills like disciplined conversation. It ignores the fact that children love to talk, and wise educators have always tried to build on what children are already motivated to do rather than what they have to be made to want to do. And finally it ignores the fact that conversation ... is the minimal condition for civility.<sup>680</sup>

Lipman’s comments in this passage about the centrality of conversation suggest that not only is the “disciplined discussion” provided by P4C programming the best tool for honing “reasoning skills”; conversation also serves an important civilizing – and a particularly democratic -- purpose. That is, philosophic discourse does not simply encourage “higher order thinking” or metacognition among disparate individuals; rather, by engaging students in collective discussion it cultivates what Lipman refers to as “distributed thinking” or “shared cognition,” wherein a particular instance of thinking is “distributed” or “spread out among a number of different individuals.”<sup>681</sup> In this way, philosophic discourse serves a particularly civic and democratic function.

Lipman writes that a classroom discussion can be a good example of distributed thinking “because the members of the class answer one another’s questions, emulate others’ questions, build on one another’s inferences, furnish each other with examples and counterexamples, help others construct definitions, and so on.” Once students have engaged in the “primitive stage” of “distributed thinking” that takes place through disciplined discussion, Lipman argues that participants must next “internalize”<sup>682</sup> or “introject” the reasoning behaviours they have gleaned from interaction with others in the group whom they wish to emulate, as well as “externalize” what they have “introjected” of these behaviours for others to emulate. This process of “internalizing” and “externalizing” the

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<sup>680</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 48.

<sup>681</sup> Matthew Lipman, “Teaching Students to Think Reasonably: Some Findings of the Philosophy for Children Program,” *The Clearing House* 71, no. 5 (May-June 1998): 277.

<sup>682</sup> Elsewhere, Lipman writes that through “disciplined dialogue” a “community of inquiry begins to develop in the classroom. As the participants in such a community fully appreciate the process, they internalize it and use it to approach every academic discipline in school.” This “self-corrective” behaviour among members of the group who have “internalized” the group’s rational discourse then becomes modelled outwardly or “externalized” for others, showing itself “behaviourally in increased capacity for self-control.” See Lipman, “The Cultivation of Reasoning Through Philosophy,” 52.



effects of “distributed thinking” is seen by Lipman as the means whereby “philosophy in the school curriculum can directly improve the quality of life in a democratic society.” It is the combination of distributed and higher-order thinking embodied in philosophy that “is also characteristic of the citizens in those societies that exhibit higher-quality democracy.”<sup>683</sup>

In their stress upon the dialogic nature of philosophy, Lipman and his co-authors underline what they see as the social and political significance of introducing philosophic inquiry into schools. The aim of a thinking skills program like P4C “is not to turn children into philosophers,” but “to help them become more thoughtful, more reflective, more considerate, and more reasonable individuals.”<sup>684</sup> Becoming more reasonable is the prime objective of education, in Lipman’s view; reasonableness is of central importance to any healthy democracy, and as the embodiment of collective inquiry, a philosophic education would be the pre-eminent “preparation for democracy.”<sup>685</sup> Indeed, Lipman feels that by introducing philosophy into schools, democratic society might be transformed into what he calls “a participatory community of inquiry.” In order to bring about such a society,

inquiry must be the dominant feature of education. The inquiry process, which is neither indoctrinational nor relativistic, can then be internalized by every future citizen. In sum, if we are to approach more closely to the kind of democracy we want and the kind of world we want, the classroom has to be converted into an inquiring, dialogical community, and this in turn should be recognized as portending the society of the future.<sup>686</sup>

In short, Lipman views philosophy as the primary and “optimum pedagogy” for a genuinely transformational education wherein the objective of education is not so much innovation or success or higher achievement scores on tests, but rather excellence in thinking through disciplined, collectively-engaged dialogue.

#### **(vi) Teaching P4C: Modelling Philosophic Dialogue with “Transitional Texts”**

Having outlined what Lipman understands philosophy to be, we must next examine how he conceives that philosophy might be taught in schools. The question of how to introduce philosophy into the classroom raises at least two difficult issues: first, if indeed

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<sup>683</sup> Lipman, “Teaching Students to Think Reasonably,” 277.

<sup>684</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 15.

<sup>685</sup> Matthew Lipman, “Education for Democracy and Freedom” *Wesleyan Graduate Rev.* 1, no. 1 (1997): 36.

<sup>686</sup> Lipman, “Education for Democracy and Freedom,” 34.

philosophy *is* a teachable subject, Lipman concerns himself with the question of how can it be taught to children at varying levels of study and maturity, and who have little or no familiarity with philosophic discourse. Second, Lipman must tackle the thorny problem of how teachers might themselves be taught to lead philosophic discussions when part of the problem, it seems, is that teachers do not generally know what it means to philosophize.

As we have seen, Lipman and P4C proponents hold up philosophic conversation as the most engaging and dynamic mode of learning and reasoning. They write that, “for most children, learning to think philosophically takes place primarily in the process of interpersonal discussion, and in the reflection that follows such a discussion.”<sup>687</sup> But then the problem arises of how to distinguish a non-philosophic discussion from a philosophic one. In Lipman’s view, how to *do* philosophy – that is to say, what philosophic discussion *looks* like – must be modelled for children to emulate. Moreover, the sorts of questions and problems that are investigated philosophically with children must, in some fashion, match the level of difficulty with which they are able to engage. Lipman’s P4C programming addresses these concerns through what he refers to as “the rationalization of the curriculum.” That is to say, in order to introduce children to philosophy, Lipman feels that it is necessary “that the massive corpus of philosophy ... be reviewed in outline to determine how it can be sequenced into the successive grade levels of elementary and secondary schools.”<sup>688</sup>

Rather than suggesting that individual teachers interested in teaching philosophy within particular schools to particular groups of students make decisions themselves as to what specific philosophic readings to teach and what to leave out, Lipman supposes that a standardized collection of sequenced reading materials with accompanying teacher manuals will provide the best means of initiating a mass movement in philosophizing with children.<sup>689</sup> Lipman and his associates argue that such “transitional texts” are necessary since they do not believe that classic works of philosophy are readily accessible to children. “Having observed few children eager to browse through Kant or even to peruse the livelier passages of Aristotle,” and realizing that “one of the greatest obstacles to the practice of

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<sup>687</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 65.

<sup>688</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 22.

<sup>689</sup> Indeed, Lipman and his co-authors write that leaving such decisions to the teacher concerning the matter of “translating” philosophy to the classroom would constitute “a burden no teacher should be asked to support.” See Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 47.

philosophy by children is the formidable terminology of the tradition,”<sup>690</sup> they reject what Michael Hand has called “the canonical view of philosophy,” wherein doing philosophy is equated with reading and studying the classics.<sup>691</sup> Certainly there is a grain of truth to Murris’ remark that, “Traditionally, philosophical texts are surprisingly devoid of wonder, complexity and mystery, and are inattentive to the concrete and the everyday.”<sup>692</sup> In other words, much of the traditional philosophic canon is inaccessible not just to children, but also to most adults. Perhaps due to these difficulties, Lipman and his colleagues deny any pedagogical value to introducing students to the classical works of philosophy, even counselling against any mention of philosophers’ names or their associations with certain questions:

So that children can come to grips with ideas and not merely with labels, no mention is made of philosophers’ names in the philosophy for children program (although their ideas are certainly introduced), and the teacher would be better off not using these names in class.<sup>693</sup>

Alternatively, Lipman concludes that, “a vast literature of original but prepatory texts will have to be produced as a stepping stone to the less accessible landmarks in our humanistic heritage.”<sup>694</sup> He offers his P4C textbooks as “staged” or “sequenced readings” in order to fill this niche market, and he distinguishes his own books from “secondary texts,” which he criticizes as “barriers” between children and their “humanistic heritage, just as ‘methods’ courses are a barrier between teachers and the academic disciplines.”<sup>695</sup> Unlike “secondary texts” which attempt to *explain* to students what philosophy is, his series of novels such as *Pixie*, *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery*, *Tony*, *Lisa*, *Mark*, and *Suki* is meant actually to *show* them “what has to be done and then asks them to emulate what they have just seen and heard.”<sup>696</sup> The “novel-as-text” approach taken by Lipman requires that students in the classroom read his books aloud “so that they can take turns expressing what the fictional characters have to say” as though they were following a script. The idea is that,

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<sup>690</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 42-43.

<sup>691</sup> Michael Hand, “Can Children be Taught Philosophy” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 9.

<sup>692</sup> Murris, “Autonomous and Authentic Thinking Through Philosophy with Picturebooks,” 107.

<sup>693</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 84.

<sup>694</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 24.

<sup>695</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 23.

<sup>696</sup> Lipman, “Teaching Students to Think Reasonably,” 278. For a helpful explanation of Lipman’s sequencing of these novels and their accompanying teacher manuals, see Chapter 5 of Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom* entitled, “The Philosophy for Children Curriculum,” 51-81.

as children follow the story, they too will engage and delight in discovering “the power of logic as a discipline for their inquiries” alongside the novel’s characters.<sup>697</sup>

### **(vii) P4C and the Rejection of Myth, Storytelling, and Tradition**

Whereas others in the P4C movement such as Karin Murris and Gareth Matthews demonstrate how authentic children’s books can be used to excellent effect for philosophic inquiry,<sup>698</sup> Lipman and his co-authors are firm in their commitment to exclusive use of the IAPC textbooks in P4C programming, such that they eschew use of all other readings; and not only are philosophic texts rejected in the P4C program; the authors even criticize the notion that either “fairy tales” or stories improvised by parents for the delight of their children are pedagogically suitable. They write that “the parent who invents stories for children ... runs the risk of so indulging his own imagination as to pre-empt the child’s imagination.” If we nevertheless dare to tell stories to children, whether they are concocted from our own fancy on-the-spot, or if they are passed down generationally in the form of myths, fairytales, or traditions, the authors would have us ask ourselves, “to what extent do we rob children of their creativity by doing their imagining for them?”<sup>699</sup> Of course, the irony of cautioning against telling stories to children does not escape Lipman as a children’s author; his “excuse,” he writes, is that “there is nothing wrong with adult stimulation of the powers of children – but such stimulation should be encouraging rather than overwhelming.” The P4C authors contend that “if adults must write for children, then they should do so only to the extent necessary to liberate the literary and illustrative powers of those children.”<sup>700</sup>

Lipman’s cautioning against the use of any other readings than his own novels seems, on the surface, a bit self-serving, and even smug inasmuch as he writes that, “Prior to the advent of Philosophy for Children, these questions [about how to teach philosophy to

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<sup>697</sup> Lipman, “Teaching Students to Think Reasonably,” 279.

<sup>698</sup> See in particular, Murris, “Autonomous and Authentic Thinking Through Philosophy with Picturebooks”; also see Karin Murris, *Teaching Philosophy with Picturebooks* (London: Infonet Publications, 1992). Gareth Matthews makes frequent reference to having used children’s books in *The Philosophy of Childhood*. For a website devoted to helping teachers with children’s books recommendations to incorporate into their own philosophy pedagogy, see [http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main_Page). I myself have frequently used children’s books to teach Philosophy 20/30 and to lead philosophic discussions in my English classes at the grade 9, 10, 11, and 12 levels of study.

<sup>699</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 35.

<sup>700</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 35, 36.

children] could not readily be answered”<sup>701</sup>; the advent of his P4C programming therefore seems to take on world-historical significance for philosophy; moreover, Lipman casts himself and his own dialogic writing as the modern equivalent to Plato and the Platonic dialogues, writing that “ever since Plato, efforts to present philosophy in a manner that is popularly accessible and yet that has authenticity and integrity have been few and far between.”<sup>702</sup> Concerns about the vested interest that P4C programmers seem to exhibit when they equate philosophizing with children with their own course materials have been voiced by commentators such as William Proefriedt. Recommending the use of P4C texts to teachers, he nonetheless cautions: “I do have some concern, however, that the myriad possible ways in which philosophy might be introduced into classrooms are coming to be identified with a particular ‘package’ of curricular materials and teacher training.” He writes, “Lipman and his colleagues are not without fault when they sometimes identify philosophy’s possibilities in the schools with their own program.”<sup>703</sup>

I think that criticisms of Lipman’s work as self-serving can be largely dismissed, however, when we plumb his assumptions about what it means for children to philosophize on the one hand, and what relation philosophic activity bears to the things children read and the stories they are told on the other hand. Fundamentally, Lipman’s position on the problematic nature of writing for children arises from his belief that “meaning” cannot be given or handed down; it can only be discovered:

Emphasis upon the term *discovery* is hardly coincidental. Information may be transmitted, doctrines may be indoctrinated, feelings may be shared – but meanings must be *discovered*. One cannot “give” another person meanings.<sup>704</sup>

Lipman and his co-authors remark that many children object to their school life as “meaningless”; he and his associates view philosophy as a way to enable young people to “discover” meanings that their life experiences contain. However, they write that “the only meanings that children will respect are those that they can themselves derive from their own lives, not those that are given to them by others.”<sup>705</sup> Perhaps it is for this reason that Lipman and the others envision a time when the stories passed down to children from

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<sup>701</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 111.

<sup>702</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, xv.

<sup>703</sup> William A. Proefriedt, “Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Philosophically” *The Clearing House* 58, no. 7 (March 1985): 295-296.

<sup>704</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 6-7 (italics in original).

<sup>705</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 67.

adults “may eventually give way to children’s books written by teachers and children themselves, yet incorporating the imagination and insight and understanding that such children acquire at each stage of their development.”<sup>706</sup> Here, one begins to imagine interactive, collaborative, web-based child authorship of online e-books as some sort of response to Lipman’s desire that children’s stories be told by children to children and based solely upon the “discoveries” that they themselves have made.

Lipman’s emphasis on the “discovery” of meaning is refreshing at a time when it is commonly supposed by educators that meaning is not discovered but rather “constructed.” Indeed, I agree with Lipman that philosophic inquiry is fundamentally about discovery; witness the archetypal figure of the philosopher Archimedes jumping up from his washbasin to shout “Eureka!”<sup>707</sup> Philosophy is motivated by the desire to *see* and therefore to know what *is* by discovering it; although many existent things are made, constructed, or imagined by human beings, their actual being or substance is not; the world of being exists independent of our limited creative powers as human beings to manipulate existent things; put another way, it was classically understood that human beings make (*poiesis*), but that we do not create *ex nihilo*; the creation of being – that is, of something from nothing – was always considered to be the sole preserve of the god. Hence, although human beings make a great number of things, the *being* of what we have made is not of our creation, just as a sculptor might fashion a statue, but he does not make the marble. Philosophy, classically-understood, presupposes that reality is a fact, not a conceptual construction or an interpretation; and it is with the love of being *qua* being and the seeing (*theoria*) of all of reality – culminating with the seeing of the All – that philosophy concerns itself.

However, one can agree with Lipman that philosophy is fundamentally about the discovery of reality without subscribing to his rejection of myth, the tradition of storytelling, or the concomitant denial that meaning may be given or handed down to children. Indeed, the English word “tradition” is derived from the Latin verb *trado*, meaning “to give up, hand over, or pass down.” What is “passed down” through story (*mythos*) and tradition is, in fact, a compact expression of “the truth”; that is to say, myth is an articulation of fundamental insights into the full panoply of human experience; it offers

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<sup>706</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 36.

<sup>707</sup> “Eureka!” is from the Greek verb *eurisko*, meaning “I discover.”

us a kind of symbolic seeing of the whole or the All. When we pass down traditional stories, legends, and myths to our children, we do so out of the affirmation that there is some kernel of truth in such stories that both children and adults might absorb and, upon careful inspection and thought, perhaps even discover for ourselves.

Many philosophers have argued that philosophy cannot arise without grounding in myth and tradition, or in what has been “passed down.” For instance, Aristotle famously remarks upon the similarity between the “lover of myth” (*philomythos*) and the “lover of wisdom” (*philosophos*), noting that it is owing to wondering (*to thaumatzein*) that men philosophize, and that myths are themselves composed of wonders.<sup>708</sup> Plato frequently weaves myths into his dialogues, and very often Socrates is shown attesting to the truth of these myths. Eric Voegelin too points to the relationship between myth and philosophy. Myth he describes as the “compact” symbolization of the experience of order; through its symbolization of experience, myth offers us an all-in-one glance at the whole of what *is*. Philosophy presupposes mythic symbolization since it arises from the inspection of myths; indeed, philosophy is the quintessential means of “differentiating” the “blocs of experience” within the compact vision that myth provides.<sup>709</sup> Put another way, the noetic experience of philosophy “does not yield knowledge of a reality hitherto unknown but makes possible differentiating insight into the reality that hitherto [in myth] has been experienced as compact.”<sup>710</sup> Similarly, Josef Pieper writes that philosophy presupposes a tradition of revelation as the source of wonder for its own inquiries into the beginnings of things: “all philosophizing rests on an interpretation of the world that has been passed down

<sup>708</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.ii.9-10, at 982b15.

<sup>709</sup> Voegelin remarks that differentiation as such “is not an unqualified good.” Rather, “it is fraught with the dangers of radically dissociating the experiential blocs held together by the myth, as well as of losing the experience of consubstantiality in the process. The virtue of the cosmogonic myth, on the contrary, lies in its compactness: It originates in an integral understanding of the order of being, provides the symbols which adequately express a balanced manifold of experiences, and is a living force, preserving the balanced order in the soul of the believers.” See Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*, vol. 1 of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 84. In a subsequent volume of *Order and History*, Voegelin writes that “philosophy as a symbolic form” is distinguished from myth “by its reflective self-consciousness.” See Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*. Vol. 2 of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 170. That is, whereas a symbolic articulation of the experience of order is passed down through the tradition of myth, those who philosophize consciously break with its form by turning inward, having “discovered a new source of truth in their souls.” It is through this inward turn and the philosophic unpacking of compact symbolized experience that “man advances from the truth of cosmic-divine order to the differentiated experience of transcendent-divine order,” resulting in what Voegelin refers to as a “leap in being” (2).

<sup>710</sup> See Eric Voegelin, “Linguistic Indices and Type-Concepts” in *Anamnesis*, trans. Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 177.

to it as something ‘always already’ communicated in advance,” and it is precisely the wonder inspired by this tradition that “ignites philosophizing.”<sup>711</sup> Given the remarks of these eminent philosophers, it seems reasonable to advise caution against accepting the fundamental assumption of Lipman’s P4C programming that meaning can only be “discovered” by children, and that it cannot be given or “handed down” to them. Indeed, in his rejection of the traditions of philosophy in P4C programming, Lipman is arguably denying children access to the very foundation of philosophy itself.

Writing from within the P4C movement, James C. Conroy makes a similar point about the dangers of dispensing with tradition. He contends that “Philosophy is a way of thinking deeply rooted in particular historic literary traditions,” and that “the teaching of philosophy requires acquaintance with these traditions from the outset.” In his own attempts to address the question of using philosophical texts and non-P4C literature in the classroom, Conroy judges that the primary concern must be “to nurture, expand and root children’s understanding of how the world is.”<sup>712</sup> In his view, the emphasis in P4C textbooks on recapitulating what it looks like to enter into a philosophic conversation through emulation of characters in Lipman’s novels is insufficient to promote true philosophizing. Conroy observes that, “wisdom does not emerge merely from the repetition of experience or its expansion,”<sup>713</sup> that “wisdom cannot be cultivated by questioning and argument alone, however sophisticated the pedagogy may be,” and that “philosophic wisdom will not be gleaned from mere conversations in the classroom.” In his view, “Something else ... is required.” This “something else” is precisely “the bookcase” of tradition, which he describes as “a repository of thought, reflection, and insight.”

Echoing my own concerns with the Committee Report’s fixation on the future much to the detriment of all things past, Conroy writes in criticism of the P4C movement that it is simply not enough to get children to think analytically, and that “in our anxiety to direct our attention to the future we have too readily turned our back on the cultural resources of the past. Novelty has too easily displaced rootedness.”<sup>714</sup> Conroy employs us to have our

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<sup>711</sup> Pieper, “What Does it Mean to Philosophize?” 69.

<sup>712</sup> See James C. Conroy, “Philosophy, Wisdom, and Reading Great Books,” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 150.

<sup>713</sup> Conroy, “Philosophy, Wisdom, and Reading Great Books,” 151.

<sup>714</sup> Conroy, “Philosophy, Wisdom, and Reading Great Books,” 152. Conroy’s comments about the sort of “wisdom” cultivated by all such future or “novelty-oriented” attitudes towards education encapsulate the Steering Committee’s ambitions in the “Inspiring Education” document very well: “In that future, novelty-



students read the classics if they are genuinely to pursue wisdom: “Reading alone will not save us or make us wise, but without it we will lapse into the death-in-life of the dumbing down in which America now leads the world, as in all other matters.”<sup>715</sup> He writes that “we need to introduce children to the ideas contained in great books.” This is accomplished not by uprooting these ideas from their ancient sources and transplanting them into modern textbooks or “novels” that students read aloud; rather, the problems and quandaries of the ancient writers must be presented to students in their original form, and in their “particular expression.” Conroy sees exposure to the great traditions of thought as protection against leaving students “prey to their solipsisms.” That is to say, exposure to ancient things and time-honoured literary traditions teaches “students to measure their own thoughts against those great thinkers who have wrestled with the intellectual challenges of the ages.”<sup>716</sup> I deeply and fundamentally share Conroy’s sentiments in this regard. I have many times felt the excitement, curiosity, and sense of wonder build in my own classes as my students are pushed by exposure to ancient texts like Plato’s *Symposium*, *The Apology* of Socrates, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, or Sophocles’ *Antigone* to question their own modern suppositions about the world and themselves. I have found that the truth of Conroy’s complaint against P4C programming is borne out experientially in my own teaching practices: “handing down” traditions and stories to children and youth can bear wonderful fruit that would otherwise be lost in the mists of time to students.

### **(viii) In Defence of Philosophy vs. P4C Programming**

As mentioned above, in my own teaching practice, I have not only encouraged philosophic discussions and reading classic philosophic texts with my own students in core subject areas; I have also introduced philosophy programs at multiple high schools. Moreover, I have done so without making use of P4C texts, instead focusing on the study of either actual books from philosophic traditions, or novels written playfully without any

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oriented way ... wisdom is mere transience, an ability to be part of the zeitgeist, to read the signs of the times, to understand fashions and trends whether these be in economics and politics or clothing and music. All we have to do is maintain and sustain what is relevant to the here and now. In this sense we are exhorted by educationalists and politicians ... to accept and predicate our pedagogies on the pragmatic turn” (153).

<sup>715</sup> Conroy, “Philosophy, Wisdom, and Reading Great Books,” 153.

<sup>716</sup> Conroy, “Philosophy, Wisdom, and Reading Great Books,” 156.

pedagogical purpose in mind.<sup>717</sup> My reluctance to use P4C literature in my own teaching stems for the most part from my love of real works of philosophy, and my desire to share the excitement of discovering these texts with my students; but I am also reticent to use P4C texts because I myself cannot bear to read them; they strike me as very often boring, contrived, and self-referential, more like textbooks full of exercises for students masquerading as novels rather than genuine literature.<sup>718</sup> For example, in Lipman's novel *Lisa*, the character Tony is depicted ruminating as follows:

He thought back to the discoveries which he and Harry and the others had made last year [a reference to earlier volumes in Lipman's P4C corpus], like the four possibilities. And the four types of sentences, A, E, I, and O. "Funny," Tony thought, "we never noticed, last year, that there were four in one case and four in the other. I wonder if they're connected." He tried putting them together in his mind. There were four ways of relating A and E:

A and E  
A without E  
E without A  
Neither A nor E.

But there were also four ways of putting a with I, and A with O, and E with I .... Tony began to get sleepy.<sup>719</sup>

As we have seen, Lipman and his colleagues laud philosophy as the best means of training students in critical thinking because of its "subdiscipline" of logic. Here, Lipman implants exercises within his novels for readers to try that will introduce them to basic logical forms; in this particular instance, Tony clearly grows quite sleepy at the thought of having to calculate the permutations and combinations arising from the mixture of the four vowels.

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<sup>717</sup> Karin Murris writes that one of the virtues that children's picture books have over P4C literature is that suitable ones "are interrogative texts that do not moralize or patronize, but communicate to young readers that they are taken seriously as thinkers." She remarks that such books "have no didactic purposes," but are rather "carnavalesque" in their "playfulness." See Murris, "Autonomous and Authentic Thinking Through Philosophy with Picturebooks," 108.

<sup>718</sup> James Higgins makes an observation about the importance of "real stories" with their absence of "pedagogical pretensions" versus the contrived sorts that children most often must read in school books: "Stories provide perhaps the only model for learning which children bring with them when they first arrive at the school door. ... Once inside school, however, they are often presented only with *facsimiles* of stories which appear in their readers, and which are designed for the expressed purpose of helping them to decode print, or to impart to them explicit information or moral precepts. Not only the children, but sometimes their teachers, come to mistake these shadows of stories for the real thing, so that the primary purpose of fiction is never realized. One of education's major goals should be to make each person capable of telling his own story. To do this children must be continually exposed to *real* stories, through which they can grow and develop empathy for all humanity by sharing ... in the revealed 'secrets' of others." See James Higgins, "Traditional Literature: Roots of Philosophy" *Social Studies* 69, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1978): 258.

<sup>719</sup> Matthew Lipman, *Lisa* (Upper Montclair: The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 1976), 9.

Lipman's novels are rife with such exercises, and the teacher's workbook that accompanies Lipman's novels "contains hundreds of thinking exercises and activities."<sup>720</sup> Conroy remarks upon the flavour of Lipman's books as excuses for exercises when he writes: "the exercises in thought which Philosophy for Children (P4C) nurtures are precisely that, exercises in thought." Although education should be predicated on cultivating exercises in thoughtful questioning, "such thinking has, in much of the P4C literature, been transformed into a special kind of process which becomes its own end."<sup>721</sup> Indeed, reading through Lipman's programming, one wonders how his novels escape the criticisms that P4C advocates make against rote seatwork and drilling.

Apart from the contrived, exercise-driven nature of Lipman's novels, a second difficulty arises concerning how, on the one hand, Lipman eschews all use of real philosophic texts or even references to the names of philosophers, while on the other hand he proposes to incorporate the "ideas" of these philosophers into his own textbooks. The following example is, once again, drawn from Lipman's novel, *Lisa*:

After dinner, Lisa went outside. She had hardly reached the sidewalk when Mr. Johnson came along with his dog on a leash. Mr. Johnson was new to the neighborhood; Lisa really didn't know him at all. When he and the dog got in front of Lisa's house, the dog spotted a squirrel by a tree and started after it. Mr. Johnson pulled up on the leash and the dog went sprawling. Then it was up again, growling and straining after the squirrel which had disappeared behind the tree. Mr. Johnson started to walk on, but the dog stayed put. The more the leash was pulled and yanked, the more the dog resisted. Mr. Johnson called to his dog, he shouted at it, but the dog did not move. Finally he picked up a small switch from a nearby bush and began to hit the dog which crouched, motionless, absorbing the blows. Lisa stared at the two of them in horror. She couldn't even cry out. Suddenly she sprang forward and tried to grab the switch. "You stop doing that!" she commanded furiously. Surprised, Mr. Johnson snatched the switch clear and turned, saying: "What's it to you?" Beside herself with rage, she blurted out, "I'm a dog too!" He shrugged his shoulders and began pulling on the leash again. Now the dog ended its resistance and began walking alongside Mr. Johnson; soon they were out of sight.<sup>722</sup>

Here, Lipman's novel echoes a famous episode concerning Pythagoras, as told by Xenophanes and recorded for posterity by Diogenes Laertius: "They say that once when a puppy was being whipped, Pythagoras, who was passing by, took pity on it, saying, 'Stop!

<sup>720</sup> See "Philosophy for Children" in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (First published Thurs. May 2, 2002) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/children/> (accessed April 21, 2011).

<sup>721</sup> Conroy, "Philosophy, Wisdom, and Reading Great Books," 151.

<sup>722</sup> Lipman, *Lisa*, 1-2.

Do not beat it! It is the soul of a friend; I recognize his voice!”<sup>723</sup> Two problems arise from Lipman’s use of Xenophanes’ recollection: First, it is vexing that the original anecdote is excluded from discussion unless it is disassociated from Pythagoras’ name and filtered through P4C programming. Indeed, familiarity with Pythagoras’ name in relation to his famous mathematical theorem is a staple experience for all students at an early age. If it is good for students to know that a certain mathematical formula comes from Pythagoras, that their studies in plane geometry are Cartesian, or that their knowledge of calculus comes from Leibniz, then why the secrecy about Pythagoras in relation to philosophic inquiry? The point of re-tooling the ancient anecdote for his book, I gather, is to make the Pythagorean “idea” that is being presented *relevant* to students in a modern setting, or perhaps to allow students to feel like they have discovered the idea authentically on their own in some fashion that the original anecdote is thought somehow to prevent from happening. However, this re-working of original texts creates a second problem, for it serves to misrepresent what is ancient and unfamiliar as though it were both modern and familiar; in this regard, Lipman’s re-telling might very well serve to thwart rather than encourage the discovery of lost things inasmuch as students are less likely to see anything perplexing, strange, or wonderful in his re-tellings.

The strangeness of the original anecdote and its power to inspire wonder is diminished when treated as an “idea” that may be transplanted into the modern textbook. Lipman’s novels presuppose that philosophy is the study of ideas and concepts – that the *idea* Lisa has concerning Mr. Johnson’s dog is the same *idea* as Pythagoras had about the puppy. However, the ancient fragment does not articulate an *idea* but rather an *experience*. Transmitted to students as though it were an *idea*, the mysterious and surprising experiential quality of the fragment – namely, its ability to challenge students to search within themselves and to re-examine their own experiences for something similar that they have perhaps vaguely felt, and that they may have overlooked or forgotten -- vanishes. For instance, lost in translation is the relation between the genuine Pythagorean account of experience and its grounding in a mythical tradition concerning the transmigration of souls; by disassociating the story from its historical context and by neglecting its mythic

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<sup>723</sup> See Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy*, 61; cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, trans. R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), viii.36; cf. DK 22 B 129.

connections, Lipman's re-tooling of the anecdote circumvents the exciting possibility of awakening students to mythic accounts of reality as something more than fanciful ideas, superstition, or just bad science.<sup>724</sup> Gone also is the intense feeling in the fragment of discovery and wonder at the experience of the soul as somehow separable from the body – a feeling that is still accessible to young readers today, but perhaps overlooked and forgotten in the bustle of the school day; and gone is the relation of the original Pythagorean comment to its experiential context in shamanic ascent and descent; in short, by gutting the original anecdote of its cultural, historical, and personal contexts, a broad array of excellent opportunities for inspiring wonder or philosophic inquiry into the richness of human experiences is lost.

Peter Manicas writes that “philosophy proceeds best when one uses the classic texts, when they can open fresh points of view.”<sup>725</sup> I have found that discussion of ancient fragments like the one mentioned above about Pythagoras has precisely this opening effect on students. Such fragments can produce much wonder and “interest” among students; the foreignness, the great antiquity, and the mystique of ancient texts can inspire students to question what they think they know, what is real, and what is factual. However, I do not suggest here that in teaching ancient texts one teaches what is absolutely dissimilar or foreign to students either; if this were the case, then the teaching of such things would be irrelevant and disconnected to any modern audience. Rather, it is important to teach such ancient texts precisely because of their power to unravel and disclose things about the students' lives and experiences that might otherwise remain hidden or undiscovered.

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<sup>724</sup> Very often, high school students have already closed themselves off to the wonder that myth evokes in much younger children. In order to address this problem of “closed-ness,” I have taught the stories about Pythagoras as a way to introduce older students to the branch of philosophy known as “phenomenology”; I find that such stories lend themselves especially to phenomenological study, since they are so incredible that high school students are naturally pre-disposed to discount them as made-up or ridiculous. However, the challenge offered by phenomenological study is simply to render an account of what is experienced without judgement as to its truth or falsehood. When students can successfully enter into the phenomenological “head-space” of the Husserlian *epoché*, they very often leave class with a more open mind to accounts of experiences of reality with which they themselves are not intimately familiar. In this regard, use of ancient texts *as opposed to their re-tooled images* can be an excellent way to build openness, tolerance, and understanding among students – particularly valuable democratic goods that Lipman seeks through his own P4C programming as well.

<sup>725</sup> Peter Manicas, “The Social Studies, Philosophy and Politics” *Social Studies* 69, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1978): 246.

Michael Hand may be correct in his contentions that “landmark philosophical texts do not belong in the reading corners of primary classrooms,”<sup>726</sup> and that “some philosophical techniques are fairly obviously unsuitable for inclusion in primary school curricula.”<sup>727</sup> However, such a blanket prohibition against use of the “landmarks” of philosophy in the classroom need not be made wholesale; Plato’s myths certainly lend themselves to retelling as children’s stories for the primary classroom;<sup>728</sup> not only have I as a teacher led my own students in grades nine to twelve through the study of many of the Platonic dialogues in both the academic and non-academic streams of the Alberta curriculum; articles by other teachers who have also used the dialogues in their own classrooms successfully have appeared in peer-reviewed journals,<sup>729</sup> and a quick search of the internet for lesson plans designed by teachers to introduce the Platonic dialogues to children yields numerous results.<sup>730</sup>

It is not my aim in this thesis to find fault with Lipman’s impressive efforts at engaging children in the act of philosophizing. Rather, I am here suggesting that alternatives to P4C programming are possible and even laudatory; as Proefriedt remarks, although the P4C curriculum is a viable option for students and teachers, “a variety of approaches to the

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<sup>726</sup> Hand, “Can Children be Taught Philosophy?” 9.

<sup>727</sup> Hand, “Can Children be Taught Philosophy?” 13.

<sup>728</sup> As a sidenote, my own children have often loved hearing the myths of Plato told to them at night as bedtime stories.

<sup>729</sup> See, for instance, Sean Blenkinsop, “The Allegory of the Cave” *Pathways* 13, no. 1 (2001): 15-17; Blenkinsop describes his own use of a shadow-play activity with his students through which they were led into “very fruitful discussions” about “the blindness we all have and the restrictions that may be set upon us without our knowing it.” Also see James Tucker, “Encountering Socrates in the *Apology*” *Journal of Education* 178, no. 3 (1996): 17-30. A high school history teacher, Tucker has been teaching Plato’s *Apology* to ninth graders for ten years. He writes: “I have no doubt that it [studying Plato] is one of the most important things we do in our time together,” and he remarks that “Frequently my students identify it as among their most memorable and valuable educational experiences.”

<sup>730</sup> I heartily recommend reading many of the Platonic dialogues with young people, and I have also used excerpts from Machiavelli’s *Prince* to help students understand Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, as well as his *Discourses on Livy* to help students understand *Julius Caesar*; I have found the use of selections from Berkeley in order to discuss Mitchell’s *Who Has Seen the Wind* helpful at times, and I have used portions of works by Aristotle, Cicero, and Nietzsche with grade 11 students to explore the meaning and significance of friendship in a research writing unit. Obviously, retelling the myths of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Marx lends itself to Social Studies enquiry, and the practice is widespread among teachers, even making its way into many textbooks; selections from Gandhi’s philosophic-biographical works have been stimulating for my student discussions at the grade 10 level, and Thoreau’s *Walden* has engaged many students in my English classes. Also, I have found it helpful to use selections from philosophic texts by Eric Voegelin and Hannah Arendt in various film studies as well as in novel studies. There are many other philosophic texts that I have used in my classes with students, and in my experience these texts are readily accessible and stimulating for students provided they are read with competent leadership from a teacher familiar with them.

teaching of philosophy should be explored.”<sup>731</sup> Moreover, I want to make it clear that the exploration of genuine philosophic texts should *not* be denigrated or discouraged in the manner typical of P4C advocates; instead of reading Lipman’s dialogues as an introduction to philosophy, why not read the Platonic originals with students? The notion that reading Plato is simply too hard for teachers or young people will strike us as less credible if we consider that, “However esoteric physics and mathematics at their best may be, the schools nevertheless recognize the importance of making these subjects available to all students.”<sup>732</sup> In fact, education researchers like Hand show that “philosophy does not make significantly greater cognitive demands on learners than other disciplines commonly found on primary school curricula,”<sup>733</sup> and that philosophy actually lends itself to study with children more than complicated scientific, mathematical, or even historical studies inasmuch as “there is no need for the kinds of specialist knowledge and expertise furnished by the other disciplines.”<sup>734</sup> It is my contention that our unease with the use of Plato’s writings in the classroom will subside once we begin to conceive of his dialogues as plays, and if we remember that study of Shakespeare’s plays is recognized as an important component of every school curriculum. Certainly the plays of Shakespeare – themselves rife with philosophic import -- are no easier to unravel than the dialogues of Plato; and yet the rewards for students who are led through Shakespeare with a competent teacher can be enormous.

Just as reading Shakespeare with children can be a wonderful experience, so too can reading the dialogues of Plato provide grounds for much excitement and self-discovery. The dialogues themselves are full of history and drama, both wonderful and not-so-wonderful characters; there are real life heroes and villains; there is tragedy and sadness, and as in Shakespeare, there are some great dirty jokes to peak student “interest”! Lipman and others in the P4C movement make the important observation that philosophizing with children requires bypassing all jargon; they write that, “As nearly as possible, philosophical thinking among children should be encouraged to take place in the terms and concepts of

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<sup>731</sup> Proefriedt, “Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Philosophically,” 297.

<sup>732</sup> See “Philosophy for Children” in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (first published Thurs. May 2, 2002) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/children/> (accessed April 27, 2011).

<sup>733</sup> Hand, “Can Children be Taught Philosophy?” 6.

<sup>734</sup> Hand, “Can Children be Taught Philosophy?” 11. Winstanley also makes this point when she writes that philosophy, unlike other disciplines, “is not dependent on a substantial empirical knowledge-base.” See Winstanley, “Philosophy and the Development of Critical Thinking,” 91.

the ordinary language with which children are *comfortable*.”<sup>735</sup> Pieper too admits that the jargon that fills many so-called philosophic texts -- rather than opening up access to a reality in itself difficult to grasp -- actually serves to obscure things even further:

“Everybody knows ... that the difficulty of reading a philosophical text derives all too often from nothing else but a misuse of language, so that the very language is the obstacle, the language alone.”<sup>736</sup> However, while jargon is certainly to be avoided, the contention of P4C advocates that only familiar or “comfortable” words ought to be used with children is worth challenging. Neither Plato nor Shakespeare make use of “jargon,”<sup>737</sup> but their use of language is nonetheless challenging and not within the “comfort-zone” of many students. Through reading Shakespeare students gain an appreciation for the different meanings of words and for the playfulness of language; they come to see that our use of words changes historically, that a language can “flatten” or become less rich in meaning, and that many words even disappear over time. Just as Shakespeare’s vocabulary can open up new ways of looking at the world for students, so too can Plato’s dialogues, written in a dead language, render unto students lost (and therefore experientially “new”) and exciting ways for them to discover (or perhaps recover) their own experiences; exposure to the ancient meanings of lost words with their complex connections to student experiences – words like *eros*, *logos*, and *eudaimonia*, for instance – can provoke students to consider alternative perspectives to those they find affirmed everywhere around them. Arguably, reading ancient texts provides students with a means to experience ancient understandings, just as Glueck and Brighthouse remark that reading may be understood as a form of experience:

Children accumulate experience over time through what they do, but they also accumulate experience through what they read. Reading to children is perhaps the

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<sup>735</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 43 (italics added).

<sup>736</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 97. Philosophy cannot, by the very nature of its subject, be a specialist field of study that uses its own technical vocabulary like one of the empirical sciences. Pieper writes: “Within his own proper domain ... the philosophizing person speaks of things that by their very nature concern, not just specialists, but human beings in general, meaning everyone. What he says certainly need not be readily comprehensible to a casual listener, nor need it be available, as it were, at no additional cost; on the contrary, great difficulties in understanding may be involved – to whose resolution the rigors of conceptual thought may perhaps be less necessary than that meditative silence which cannot be brought about through exertion but can certainly be destroyed by it. What is crucial for philosophy is that it make palpable through an extremely cautious handling of language, as distinct from terminology, those powers of expression that arise from the natural and organic evolution of words and with which everyone is basically already familiar so that – beyond all questions of precision – the object of man’s search for wisdom, which is of concern to everyone, becomes and remains clear.” See Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 143.

<sup>737</sup> Pieper offers an insightful defence of Plato’s writings as “non-technical” and free of jargon. See Pieper, “On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy,” 159-160.



most important activity we can engage in with children in order to foster their intellectual capacities, and to give them new intellectual adventures or experiences.<sup>738</sup>

In short, the best defense of using real books of philosophy to lead students in the pursuit of wisdom is that such readings enable both students and teachers to see (and therefore to experience) more of what *is* than the P4C textbooks make available.

### **(ix) P4C and Teacher Training**

Having explored the manner in which Lipman and P4C advocates envision philosophic instruction in schools, one final area of concern must be addressed: namely, the issue of teacher preparation. Lipman writes rather ominously: “If grade-school philosophy has an Achilles’ heel, it would seem to be in the area of teacher preparation.”<sup>739</sup> As we have seen, Lipman portrays philosophy as the quintessential trans-disciplinary, metacognitive activity that alone is able to improve thinking in all the other disciplines through its emphasis on reasoning and logic. The austerity of philosophy is further enhanced not only by Lipman’s claim that philosophy teaches logic and reasoning as its “subdiscipline,” but also in his contention that philosophy alone is able to address questions in its other “subdisciplines” of ethics and metaphysics. Lipman remarks that “it is a reasonable question whether existing elementary school teachers can be entrusted with such responsibility” to teach philosophy. Lipman is under no illusions that teachers *en masse* have any great familiarity with philosophic traditions. In response to his own question as to whether teachers ought to be left to their own devices in the teaching of philosophy, Lipman writes:

The answer is that with rare exceptions they cannot. Without appropriate training, most teachers cannot be entrusted to deal with the rigors of logic, or the sensitive issues of ethics, or the complexities of metaphysics. This is not to say, however, that teachers cannot be educated to handle such issues appropriately at the level at which they teach.<sup>740</sup>

In his view, most teachers are simply not competent to teach philosophy as a subject. “As a subject,” Lipman admits, “philosophy is highly teacher-sensitive; not everyone can be sure

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<sup>738</sup> Glueck and Brighthouse, “Philosophy in Children’s Literature,” 130.

<sup>739</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 151.

<sup>740</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 46.

of teaching it successfully.”<sup>741</sup> But even apart from competence with philosophy as a subject, there is the additional problem that philosophy presupposes a certain attitude or spirit that not all teachers possess. For instance, he points out that, “The teaching of philosophy requires teachers who are disposed to examine ideas, to engage in dialogical inquiry, and to respect the humanity of the children being taught”<sup>742</sup>; although he affirms that certain methods and strategies for philosophizing might be offered to teachers in a training program, he admits that “Teachers who can model an endless quest for meaning ... are the most important ingredient in the philosophy for children program.”<sup>743</sup> Hence, he seems willing to acknowledge that there is no guarantee any such program could actually imbue teachers with a philosophic spirit where one was formerly lacking. Indeed, one might well wonder if perhaps the most important aspect of philosophizing as a teacher is *not* a trainable characteristic. Even if P4C ideas about the nature of philosophy are explained to teachers and understood by them, and even if teachers are provided with P4C materials and strategies for leading philosophic discussions, “In order to be successful, the teacher must not only *know philosophy*, but know how to introduce this knowledge at the right time in a questioning, wondering way that supports the children in their own struggle for understanding.”<sup>744</sup> Is it really possible to teach teachers how to teach philosophy?

Lipman’s P4C teacher training program operates on the belief that teachers *can* be taught how to philosophize, and how to lead philosophic discussions with their students. Lipman is fairly explicit about his approach to training teachers; he asserts that “the same method should be used”<sup>745</sup> to train teachers as teachers will use to train their students:

Unless teachers are trained by means of the identical instructional approaches as those that they will be expected to utilize in their own classrooms, their preparation will be a failure. If teachers are expected to conduct dialogues, then they must be provided with opportunities to engage in philosophical dialogues themselves and exposed to models who know how to facilitate discussions in a philosophical manner.<sup>746</sup>

In other words, just as students are ostensibly taught how to philosophize by emulating the fictional models in Lipman’s books, so too must teachers learn to model these characters

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<sup>741</sup> Lipman, “The Cultivation of Reasoning Through Philosophy,” 53.

<sup>742</sup> Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School*, 151.

<sup>743</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 84.

<sup>744</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 83 (italics added).

<sup>745</sup> Lipman, “Teaching Students to Think Reasonably,” 280.

<sup>746</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 47.

and their manner of inquiry in order to teach philosophy; and by extension, not only must teachers be trained in P4C programming; so too must teacher-trainers or professors in education departments at colleges and universities also be trained to teach using the P4C methods and curriculum that teachers will be expected to use in the schools.

Lipman's system of teacher training has demonstrated considerable resilience over the years, and it has met with broad success internationally.<sup>747</sup> P4C appears to have the virtue of empowering teachers to teach philosophy without any significant knowledge of philosophic traditions, and it is attractive for its undeniably positive effects on critical thinking in other disciplines; it provides teachers with an extensive, sequenced, pre-packaged curriculum, accompanying teacher manuals, as well as access to assistance from a wider (now online<sup>748</sup>) P4C community of educators. To a certain extent, the mass appeal of P4C may be that it takes steps to "teacher-proof" the practice of doing philosophy with children<sup>749</sup>; that is, teachers are not left to their own devices to decide how to teach philosophy to their own students, or what to teach them; rather, P4C teachers are given clear instructions as to what they ought to be doing, how to do it, and with what materials.

The attractions of P4C notwithstanding, it is worth recognizing that "There are all kinds of possible ways in which philosophy is being introduced and might be introduced in classrooms."<sup>750</sup> Indeed, contrary to Lipman's contention that teacher training in philosophy must be standardized, consistent, and systematic, it may very well be the case that a diversity of approaches is needed; as we have seen in the remarks of Schall and Pieper concerning the distinct way that character is related to philosophy as compared to any other discipline, it stands to reason that philosophy enters the classroom with each teacher according to his or her own character strengths and weaknesses. As Proefriedt remarks, "In philosophy as in no other subject, the kind of person the teacher is, the method she uses and the material being taught are thoroughly interwoven."<sup>751</sup> Where P4C texts may be helpful for some teachers, educators like Karin Murriss may prefer to use children's stories designed

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<sup>747</sup> For a list of some of the inroads, successes, or "highlights" of P4C programming over the last twenty years, see Lipman, "What is Happening with P4C?" 23-25.

<sup>748</sup> See, for instance, the website <http://p4c.com>, which bills itself as "a resource and collaboration service for P4C" that "provides teachers with materials, ideas and support with which to help pupils think for themselves through philosophical dialogue with others."

<sup>749</sup> However, Lipman and his associates deny this charge, writing, "The philosophy for children curriculum is in no way designed to be teacher-proof." See Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom* 84.

<sup>750</sup> Proefriedt, "Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Philosophically," 296.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid.

with no pedagogical purpose in mind; others like Gareth Matthews might draw heavily upon their own gifted dialectical abilities for nurturing the latent philosophic capacities of children without use of Lipman's novels, and in a way that, as Brighthouse and Glueck remark, "could not be widely replicated by teachers in schools"; still others such as Higgins, Blenkinsop, and Tucker, might -- like me -- find pleasure and excitement in the use of traditional texts and classic books of philosophy with their students. Given the intimate relation of philosophizing to character, alternatives to P4C in teacher preparation would be extremely valuable. For instance, the Queens College Philosophy in the Classroom Project that ran in 1978 encouraged teachers "to pursue their own philosophical study." Although the Queens Project provided teachers with "some guidance in developing specific lessons," participants in this program were "asked essentially to invent their own approaches."<sup>752</sup> Rather than being told how to do philosophy or what curriculum to follow, teachers trained through a less systematized program like the Queens Project "would be encouraged to experiment for themselves and to learn from their own experience what they could and could not do with philosophy in their own classrooms."<sup>753</sup>

In closing, the difficulties associated with teacher preparation are perhaps correctly identified by Lipman as "the Achilles" heel of grade-school philosophy. However, the problem of teacher preparation may not be solvable by P4C training, or by any other program that professes to "teach philosophy." Indeed, even alternative views of teaching philosophy -- say, for instance, those that emphasize credentialization or the importance of having demonstrated masterful knowledge of traditional literature or classical philosophical texts -- may be likewise fatally affected by this problem of the "Achilles heel." Writing about what he recognizes as a weakness in the Queens Project with which he was involved, as Ralph Sleeper remarks:

It is clear that even years of graduate study devoted to philosophy offers no guarantee of qualification to teach philosophy, so how can these pre-college teachers be expected to acquire that elusive qualification in two short semesters and a couple of weeks of "workshops" -- the allotted time for the "Philosophy in the Classroom" project at Queens?<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>752</sup> Proefriedt, "Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Philosophically," 297.

<sup>753</sup> Ralph Sleeper, "Pre-College Philosophy" *Social Studies* 69, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1978): 237.

<sup>754</sup> Sleeper, "Pre-College Philosophy," 236.

Put another way, simply knowing what philosophers have written does not make one a philosopher, nor is it the same as the activity of philosophizing. Similarly, when Lipman and his co-authors write that it is important for teachers to “know philosophy,”<sup>755</sup> one might well ask exactly what it means to “know philosophy.” In their view, is philosophy a skill? Is it an art, or a body of knowledge that can be “known” and therefore taught in the manner of other arts and sciences? Does the teaching of philosophy therefore presume a kind of knowledge or competence in a field of inquiry? Or is philosophy *not* known as an art, a skill, or a body of knowledge, and therefore – strictly speaking – *not* a teachable subject? Moreover, if philosophy is not something that can be taught to teachers, then how can it be taught to students? Just as Lipman is careful in the development of his P4C program to delineate what critical thinking is *not*,<sup>756</sup> so too is it important for the purposes of our study concerning the significance of the pursuit of wisdom in education to identify what philosophy is *not*.

### 3. What Philosophy is *Not*

#### (i) Philosophy is *Neither Metacognition Nor Critical Thinking*

In P4C literature, philosophy is characterized as “thinking about thinking,” or metacognition. Although philosophy certainly involves “thinking about thinking,” philosophy is not simply metacognition. Rather, philosophy, as the love of wisdom, has knowledge of “reality as such” as its object. Hence, true philosophy concerns not only thoughts – which are certainly *part* of what is real, for we really *do* think – but “everything that is given, within as well as without.”<sup>757</sup> Although wisdom’s pursuit requires that we attend to what we think, as “reflection on reality as such,”<sup>758</sup> philosophy is broader than merely thinking about our thinking; it demands a wider “openness for the whole.”<sup>759</sup> Pieper puts the matter succinctly:

To philosophize means to reflect on the totality of that which is encountered with regard to its ultimate meaning, and this act of philosophizing, so construed, is a

<sup>755</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 83.

<sup>756</sup> See Lipman, “Misconceptions in Teaching for Critical Thinking.”

<sup>757</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 16.

<sup>758</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 41.

<sup>759</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 49.

meaningful, even necessary activity, from which the spiritually existing person can absolutely not desist.<sup>760</sup>

Pursuant to its status as metacognition – as thinking about thinking in order to improve thinking -- the “selling point” of P4C programming is that it demonstrably improves the critical thinking skills of students; indeed, Lipman portrays philosophy as having the development of critical thinking as its primary focus. However, as the genuine “pursuit of wisdom,” philosophy is irreconcilable with a certain understanding of critical thinking that Lipman occasionally seems to accept. In order to distinguish the sort of critical thinking that is associated with genuine philosophy from its false image, we must recall what was learned about philosophy from our ancient and medieval sources; namely, that when we concern ourselves *exclusively* with the development of critical-analytic thinking – that is, solely with adept reasoning, or with honing the movements of the *ratio* alone -- we do so to the detriment of the *intellectus*, which does not move laboriously through a chain of reasoning towards its object, but rather grasps the object of its gaze immediately in a union of seer with what is seen. Lipman’s focus on selling philosophy as a means to build critical thinking skills at times seems to fall prey to this notion of thinking as an exclusively dianoetic operation of the *ratio*.

Philosophy, it must be remembered, is not to be associated primarily with reasoning, or even with reasoning about reasoning, as Lipman would have it. Indeed, all the disciplines, all the arts, and all the sciences involve reasoning; philosophy is not special in this regard. Rather, the pre-eminent activity of philosophy is the heightening of contemplative seeing, or *theoria* through noetic activity. Whereas the discursive reasoning associated with critical-analytic thought is a form of mental labour, *theoria* is not properly understood as work, but as an activity of leisure or *scholē* inasmuch as *theoria* is a simple beholding and enjoyment of what is seen. This is not to say that seeing, as the activity of the *intellectus*, is not part of the other disciplines; certainly anytime that any understanding (*intellectus*) is garnered through the application of reasoning, the activity of the *intellectus*, as a kind of seeing (*theoria*) must be present. However, whereas the various arts and sciences cultivate a kind of theoretic activity by seeking out a precise seeing or understanding of a specific instance of reality within a particular field of study, philosophy

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<sup>760</sup> Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 84.

is not content with this sort of seeing; rather, its desire is not simply to know a *part* of what is real, but to know reality *as such*. Philosophy is resolved to “take up” (*anairein*) whatever is seen towards its true beginning (*Arche*) noetically; it therefore aspires towards a vision of what is Best (*Ariston*).

Critical thinking may be said to be integral to academic performance in the various disciplines; careful dianoetic reasoning, for instance, is required in the application of the principles (*archai*) of the various arts and sciences in their respective fields of investigation. But philosophy is the quintessential noetic activity; it is not simply the masterful application of dianoetic thought, and we must therefore be cautious not to allow philosophy to be too closely identified with a certain notion of critical thinking, inasmuch as such identification might simply feed into the current fixation with the cultivation of the dianoetic powers as opposed to *noesis*, and with the *ratio* as opposed to the *intellectus*.

In her thoughtful book, *Children as Philosophers*, Joanna Haynes offers a similar warning against conceiving of philosophy as “critical thinking,” or the development of transferable “thinking skills.” She contends that, “If we are concerned to develop our thinking, we need to move beyond an overly structured, narrow and rigid tradition of logical thinking and argument.” Her desire to conceive of philosophy instead as an activity transcending “thinking skills” and as a “way of life” arises from her recognition that the *ratio*, when cultivated in separation from the *intellectus*, breeds “a disconnection between thinker and the world.” Indeed, the notion in P4C that philosophy inculcates a set of “thinking skills” that “can be taught and applied to content reflects a fundamental view of our relationship with the world.” Without cultivating our awareness or familiarity with experience of the theoretic activity of the *intellectus* wherein we come to know the fundamental unity between seer and seen, our consciousness of the world as something other than object fades; in its place, the experience of the world as object to our dominion through the masterful movements of the *ratio* looms large. The *ratio*, in its cognitive capacity to work upon the objects of thought and to master those objects with critical-analytic precision, becomes “instrumentalist in its desire to make the environment, including the world of meanings, a resource.”<sup>761</sup> Haynes sees that this “instrumentalist

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<sup>761</sup> Haynes, *Children as Philosophers*, 40.

view”<sup>762</sup> underlies conceptions of philosophy as critical thinking, and she remarks that “Philosophy probably wants to question the whole notion of thinking skills.”<sup>763</sup>

## (ii) Philosophy is *Not* “Conceptual Analysis”

Many academics interested in the role that the pursuit of wisdom might play in education have written about philosophy as “conceptual analysis,” and as “a second-order form of inquiry.”<sup>764</sup> For instance, in his discussion of “What philosophy is,” Michael Hand cites the *Oxford* and *Penguin Dictionaries of Philosophy*, writing: “In philosophy, the concepts with which we approach the world themselves become the topic of inquiry”; he records that “philosophical inquiry is a second-order inquiry which has for its subject-matter the concepts, theories and presuppositions present in various disciplines and in everyday life.”<sup>765</sup> In Hand’s view, “Philosophy ... may be loosely but fairly described as the study of concepts and conceptual schemes.” Likewise, conceptual analysis may be defined as “the attempt to clarify concepts and their relations by attending to the ordinary uses of words.”<sup>766</sup> As conceptual analysis, “the subject-matter of philosophy is not the world itself but the concepts we use to make sense of it.” When “the objects of philosophical investigation are concepts rather than things,” philosophy becomes quite literally “talk about talk.”<sup>767</sup> Hand sees philosophic inquiry as most amenable to children and schools in its capacity as conceptual analysis.<sup>768</sup>

However, we must be careful not to identify philosophy with concept analysis. Certainly philosophy involves the investigation of concepts and the meanings of words in

<sup>762</sup> Haynes, *Children as Philosophers*, 44.

<sup>763</sup> Haynes, *Children as Philosophers*, 129.

<sup>764</sup> For instance, Richard Pring writes about philosophy as “conceptual clarification.” See Richard Pring, “Philosophy and Moral Education,” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 18-26. Michael Hand’s scholarship in “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” examines this view of philosophy as “conceptual analysis,” and is helpful in drawing together various sources for this contention. See, for instance, S. Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 276; T. Mautner, “Philosophy” in T. Mautner (ed.) *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Penguin, 2005), 466; R. S. Peters, “The philosophy of education,” in J. W. Tibble (ed.) *The Study of Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 60.

<sup>765</sup> Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 10.

<sup>766</sup> Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 13.

<sup>767</sup> Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 11.

<sup>768</sup> Hand relies on John Wilson’s book, *Thinking with Concepts* for what he accepts as the “eleven constituent techniques” of conceptual analysis most suited to children’s philosophic inquiry. See Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 14; cf. John Wilson, *Thinking with Concepts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).



relation to one another. But just as certainly, philosophy is not simply “talk about talk,” for to engage in philosophy is, as Pieper contends, “*to reflect on the totality of things we encounter, in view of their ultimate reasons.*”<sup>769</sup> To philosophize is to seek to know “reality as such”; we use symbols both to name and illuminate our experiences of reality, and we may subsequently develop concepts to analyze and to discuss the experiences that underlie those symbols; but reality itself is not a concept.<sup>770</sup> Identifying philosophy simply with conceptual analysis serves to cut philosophy off from its true object – namely, the “totality of things” in view of their ultimate reasons; philosophy is divested of its theoretic component of gazing upon being and instead becomes a matter of scrutinizing words and systems of words for logical consistency. Perhaps for this reason, while some “see conceptual analysis as the be all and end all of philosophy, others reject it out of hand.” Indeed, after himself defining philosophy as conceptual analysis, Hand moves to moderate his stance; he writes about such analysis as “one method among others in the philosopher’s repertoire,”<sup>771</sup> admitting that, “Conceptual analysis is not the whole of philosophy; but it is an indispensable part of it, and one that is accessible to children.”<sup>772</sup>

### (iii) Philosophy is *Not* a Method

Yet another of the dangers in the P4C approach – which is, at the same time, one of its principle attractions -- is its claim to teach philosophy by training students in methods of

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<sup>769</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 12 (italics in original).

<sup>770</sup> Robin Williams pokes fun at this supposition as one of the defining drug-addled and deluded beliefs of his own generation on the classic comedy album, *Reality... What a Concept!* See Robin Williams, *Reality... What a Concept!* (Casablanca Records, ASIN: B001PLFQE8, 1979).

<sup>771</sup> Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 15. Like Hand, many advocates of the view of philosophy as conceptual analysis recognize the foibles of supposing too staunch an identification between the two; for instance, citing Frank Jackson, Hand admits that the serious philosopher or “metaphysician” does not simply “talk about talk,” but is “interested in getting a the ‘basic ingredients’ of reality” (15); cf. Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics: a Defence of Conceptual Analysis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Hand also cites P. F. Strawson as one who defends the position that conceptual analysis is part, but not all, of philosophy (15); cf. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: an essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 1959), 9-10. Also see Robert Fisher’s claims that “Philosophical thinking is fundamentally about the creation of organizing ideas or concepts,” and that philosophy “is about conceptual thinking” (98). Like Jackson and Hand, Fisher’s willingness to admit that “Philosophy begins with the recognition of a problem or a cluster of problems *arising from our experience as beings-in-the-world* and the various claims or beliefs that people make or hold about being in the world” serves to moderate this initially staunch identification between conceptual analysis and philosophy (99, italics added). Philosophy must always remain rooted in the quest to know reality “as such.” See Robert Fisher, “Philosophical Intelligence: Why Philosophical Dialogue is Important in Educating the Mind,” in *Philosophy in Schools*, 96-104.

<sup>772</sup> Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 15.

argumentation and in the forms of logical reasoning as transferable “thinking skills.” Indeed, the successes that P4C programs register in boosting student achievement and academic performance in the other disciplines are, in some measure, a result of this particular component of P4C pedagogy. We have already seen Haynes’ concern with the teaching of transferable “thinking skills” or methods; other authors such as Michael Bonnett likewise see “dangers in viewing thinking as essentially concerned with techniques and strategies”; in particular, Bonnett warns against “the twin dangers of their becoming viewed as ends in themselves and of prowess in using them becoming the criterion of success for thinking.”<sup>773</sup> Our concern here, however, is to draw attention to the error of supposing that teaching philosophy (if such a thing is possible) is the same as teaching a “philosophic method” – say, for instance, “conceptual analysis,” or the “question-and-answer method” – or, in fact, any number of “methods” traditionally seen as “philosophic.”

Philosophers have always been reviled for their methods, for the use they make of these methods, and for the perceived negative effects of these methods on children and youth. For instance, Diogenes Laertius records that Anaxagoras was banished from Athens on a charge of impiety, on the grounds that his manner of argument served to undermine belief in the gods.<sup>774</sup> And Socrates was especially reviled, along with the practice of philosophy, as being indistinguishable from the sophists and the sophistry of his own day on the basis of its methods. Although writers like Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon have stressed the importance of philosophic conversation in teaching, and Mortimer Adler has advocated for the adoption of “Socratic” discussions in the modern classroom,<sup>775</sup> both Socrates and the “Socratic method” of philosophic conversation continue to be held up to much scorn. For instance, Douglas Carmichael remarks that “the Socratic method” of “question and answer” is not well-suited to the modern classroom of thirty-five students,<sup>776</sup> and Anthony Rud views the “Socratic method” of using “withering questions” to

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<sup>773</sup> Michael Bonnett, “Teaching Thinking, and the Sanctity of Content” *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 29, no. 3 (1995): 307.

<sup>774</sup> See volume 1 of Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II.12-14.

<sup>775</sup> See Adler’s discussion of “maieutic” or “Socratic questioning” as the “means” of teaching every student in “the third column” of his vision for education in Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal* (New York: MacMillan, 1982). Also see Haroutunian-Gordon’s use of the Platonic notion of education as *periagoge* in Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul: Teaching through Conversation in High School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>776</sup> Douglas Carmichael, “I’m Sick of Socrates” *Improving College and University Teaching* 23, no. 4 in *Classrooms: Learning Within Walls* (Autumn 1975): 252.

undermine student pretensions to knowledge as “sadistic”; he deems it humiliating for students, and he cites Professor Peter Suber’s experiences with the method as it is often used to teach law classes: “The consensus among students is that the method is not ‘educational’ in any traditional sense.”<sup>777</sup> Moreover, Rud does not agree that the use of such a “method” guarantees that self-knowledge – the purported and principle benefit of Socratic philosophic practice -- will even occur. Certainly, one need only look as far as the Platonic dialogues themselves to affirm Rud’s scepticism here. Socrates has a rather poor track record of ever having “improved” anyone through his “methods” of disputation.<sup>778</sup> For instance, both Critias and Alcibiades were among Socrates’ frequent interlocutors; yet Critias, as is well known, became one of the Thirty Tyrants, and Alcibiades’ actions during the Sicilian campaign arguably led to the destruction of Athens.

Others who are less sceptical of Socrates and “Socratic method” as a destructive, corruptive, and pedagogically-suspect manner of teaching nonetheless have doubts about the utility of “an easy mimicry” of Socrates in the classroom.<sup>779</sup> Haroutinian-Gordon, for instance, has thoughtfully observed that Socrates does not actually conform to a prescribed “method.” She rightly points out that in teaching dialogically, one cannot follow a method or a predetermined dialectical blueprint, since discussions are organic and unpredictable: they are what she refers to as “ill-structured teaching situations.”<sup>780</sup> Others have questioned the legitimacy of even speaking about a “Socratic method” as though it were the peculiar technique of philosophic investigation proffered by Socrates. Sebastian Mitchell, for instance, has written that “the Socratic Method” is not properly attributed to Socrates at all,

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<sup>777</sup> See Anthony G. Rud, “The Use and Abuse of Socrates in Present Day Teaching,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 5, no. 20 (Nov. 24 1997): 7. Also see Carrie-Ann Biondi’s comparison of aggressive “Socratic” question-and-answer to the character Professor Kingsfield from *The Paper Chase* in Carrie-Ann Biondi, “Socratic Teaching: Beyond *The Paper Chase*” *Teaching Philosophy* 31, no. 2 (June 2008): 119-140.

<sup>778</sup> This point is affirmed, for instance, by Hugh Benson, who remarks quite astutely that: “[M]any of the individuals Socrates examines, far from becoming aware of their ignorance, respond to his method “by attacking him or his way of questioning (e.g., Laches, Callicles, and Hippias), while others are merely evasive (e.g., Euthyphro, Protagoras, and Cephalus.) Indeed, almost no individual in the early dialogues displays any indication that he has become aware of his ignorance as a result of his discussion with Socrates.” See Hugh Benson, “The Aims of Socratic Elenchos” in *Knowledge, Teaching, and Wisdom*, 29.

<sup>779</sup> See Rud, “The Use and Abuse of Socrates in Present Day Teaching,” 4.

<sup>780</sup> Haroutinian-Gordon writes that Socrates “does not follow his stated method because he is in an ill-structured teaching situation – a situation where one cannot proceed by following predetermined methods or asking others to do so.” See Sophie Haroutinian-Gordon, “Teaching in an Ill-Structured Situation: The Case of Socrates.” *Educational Theory* 38, no. 2 (1988): 231.

but is rather the invention of the German philosopher Leonard Nelson.<sup>781</sup> Carmichael sees not one, but three methods being used (or rather, abused) by Socrates;<sup>782</sup> David Calhoun provides an analysis of the Platonic dialogues in which he identifies seven different methods at work as well as two “pedagogical modes.”<sup>783</sup> Other academics, such as Michael Hand write that philosophy (Socratic or not) is plainly about more than “raising philosophical questions”; in Hand’s view, to be “competent as a form of inquiry” philosophy must also be “a matter of *answering* questions of a particular kind *by means of appropriate methods of investigation*.” However, as Hand remarks, not all the “techniques of philosophical inquiry” are well-suited to philosophizing with children and youth.<sup>784</sup>

Whether or not philosophers use a specific “method” or “methods” to engage in their various inquiries, and whether or not certain among these methods is beyond the intellectual abilities of children and youth is not, however, the focus of this paper. Rather, the point that I wish to emphasize here is that no particular method or group of methods can specifically be termed “philosophic,” as though adherence to it might distinguish one who philosophizes from one who does not. Indeed, the sophist – as we have seen, the true progenitor of our own educational system -- and the philosopher use the same “methods” of inquiry and discourse. For instance, both the philosopher and the sophist make use of stories;<sup>785</sup> both use long speeches as well as short ones, and both engage in question-and-answer discussions; both at various times speak to large crowds as well as to individuals. Clearly, both are familiar with the art of rhetoric and are not strangers to its methods. Indeed, it has long been recognized that Socrates’ own defence speech in the *Apology* is remarkably similar (if not, in many respects, *identical*) in form to the sophistic speech of Gorgias in his *Defence of Palamedes*<sup>786</sup>; additionally, one might observe that in his

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<sup>781</sup> Sebastian Mitchell, “Socratic Dialogue, the Humanities, and the Art of the Question” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 5 (DOI 10.1177/1474022206063653, Sage Publications, 2006): 181; cf. Leonard Nelson, *Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy: Selected Essays*, trans. T. K. Brown, foreword B. Blanshard, intro. J. Kraft (New York: Dover Press, 1949).

<sup>782</sup> Apart from his “method of question and answer,” Socrates is thought to employ “synthetic hypothesis,” as well as “collection and division.” See Carmichael, “I’m Sick of Socrates,” 252.

<sup>783</sup> See David H. Calhoun, “Which ‘Socratic Method’? Models of Education in Plato’s Dialogues” in *Knowledge, Teaching, and Wisdom*, 49-70.

<sup>784</sup> Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 5 (*italics in original*).

<sup>785</sup> See any number of myths Plato has Socrates tell in his dialogues; compare these stories with, for instance, the Promethean myth as told by the sophist Protagoras in Plato’s *Protagoras* 320c-328d.

<sup>786</sup> See the speech in John Dillon and Tania Gengel (trans.) *The Greek Sophists* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003). The similarities between the speeches are remarkable and easy to see; for useful analyses of the

*Euthydemus*, Plato has Socrates square off against two sophists in the use of *elenchos*, or the methods of cross-examination and refutation; here, eristic – quite literally, “verbal strife” – is exposed as the sophistic image of dialectic.<sup>787</sup> In short, simple mastery of a technique, a skill, or a method of inquiry does not mean that one is philosophizing, since both the sophist and the philosopher might be masters of such methods. Therefore, to “teach philosophy” in schools as though it were a method is, at best, to teach something of ambiguous value for the pursuit of wisdom.

If philosophizing were simply a matter of learning a method, there would be no difference between the philosopher and the sophist. Indeed, the figures of the sophist and the philosopher are most often conflated with one another precisely because they are seen using the same “methods.” For instance, both use *elenchos*; sophists – like “the Wreckers” in Augustine’s *Confessions* -- use it to tear down and “destroy” the arguments of their opponents through eristic;<sup>788</sup> so too does Socrates lead his interlocutors (as well as himself) into a state of perplexity (*aporia*) in which they recognize that they do not know what they presumed to know. Likewise, in the Buddhist tradition of dialectical Madhyamaka

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rhetorical devices used in each of the speeches, see Gerald J. Biesecker-Mast, “Forensic Rhetoric and the Constitution of the Subject: Innocence, Truth, and Wisdom in Gorgias’ ‘Palamedes’ and Plato’s ‘Apology’” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 24, no. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1994): 148-166; James A. Coulter, “The Relation of the Apology of Socrates to Gorgias’ Defense of Palamedes and Plato’s Critique of Gorgianic Rhetoric” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 68 (1964): 269-303; Thomas J. Lewis, “Parody and the Argument from Probability in the ‘Apology’” *Philosophy and Literature* 14, no. 2 (Oct 1990): 359-366; also see Thomas J. Lewis, “Identifying Rhetoric in the Apology: Does Socrates Use the Appeal for Pity?” *Interpretation* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1993-93): 105-114; Kenneth Seeskin, “Is the Apology of Socrates a Parody?” *Philosophy and Literature* 6, no.1/2 (1982): 94-105.

<sup>787</sup> Thomas Chance has written an excellent commentary on Plato’s *Euthydemus*. His thesis is that, “eristic appears similar to, but is really different from, dialectic. Indeed, the similarity is so great that the distinction between the two can and did become blurred in the eyes of many” (18). In his view, Plato does not offer a simple contrast between dialectic and eristic as modes of *elenchos*: “he actually depicts eristic as *the* antithesis to dialectic, in fact, as *the* very paradigm of otherness” (19). Although the methods of *elenchos* are outwardly the same, the inward disposition of the sophist that makes use of them is quite different from that of the philosopher. Writing about the eristical displays of the brothers, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Chance comments: “Lovers of error, not wisdom, these skeptical controversialists are on a mission to destroy whatever they regard as weaknesses in the arguments of others. But in their ignorance of how to question and how to answer, they thrust to one side any consideration of the intention that informs the thought of others and are content with exercising a logical procedure that they hope will refute or at least derail any account that their opponents may offer” (193). See Thomas H. Chance, *Plato’s Euthydemus: Analysis of What Is and Is Not Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>788</sup> Sophistic debate is commonly called “eristic” because of its association with Eris, the Greek goddess of strife. Eristic speech is quarrelsome or contentious debate; it is a form of verbal battle in which rivals in a contest (*agon*) compete for victory.

philosophy, Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika*<sup>789</sup> is written in such a way as to render all discursive thought and all possible "positions" on a problem contradictory and inadequate. The methods employed by philosophers – whether Eastern or Western -- and sophists appear to be the same; however, the objectives of the sophist and the philosopher are quite different. In contrast to the sophist, the philosopher or dialectician does *not* engage in *elenchos* simply to "destroy" every opinion or idea suggested in argument; rather, in order to pursue wisdom, the philosopher must refine what has been said, discarding what has been found as false and "taking up" what is true towards its "metaphysical first principle,"<sup>790</sup> or its Ground beyond all that might be discursively reasoned about. In terms of Madhyamaka philosophy, by tearing down our ordinary suppositions about the inherent existence of all things, Nagarjuna's dialectic provides a positive apprehension of the truth that the reification of all such phenomena is based in error, that our presumption to knowledge is the source of all our suffering, and that all things are indeed "empty" of inherent existence.<sup>791</sup>

The dialectic of philosophy – as distinct from the eristic of sophistry -- is a means of knowing reality "as such." The methods used (*elenchos*, for instance) are themselves neutral; that is, they are neither specifically philosophic nor sophistic; they become either sophistic or philosophic depending upon their respective ends, and the goals of the philosopher and the sophist are indeed antithetical. One might say that eristic is the sophistic manifestation of *elenchos* that satisfies itself with the acquisition of finite ends either unrelated or unconcerned with the relation of these ends to their ultimate or final end (*telos*);<sup>792</sup> whereas dialectic, as the philosophic manifestation of *elenchos*, is the manner in

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<sup>789</sup> For excellent introductions and analyses of Madhyamika philosophy and "emptiness theory," see Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1967); Nagarjuna. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, trans. Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>790</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophic Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 13, 14.

<sup>791</sup> Vincent Shen makes a similar claim about Jizang's "negative dialectics" in the Sanlun School of Buddhism: "In the process of teaching wisdom and of learning to be wise, one should help the students to eliminate any attachment to any finite and dualistic view. This effort has a therapeutic effect in the sense that it could in deed cease or stop in an ultimate sense the 'wheel of suffering.' Once the delusion is thereby cured, there is no need to attach oneself to any form of affirmation or negation. ... To become wise, one should learn to see all things as equally empty and one's spirit should be able to transcend all forms of finitude. Helping students to learn this spiritual equality is most important in the teaching of Buddhist wisdom." See Vincent Shen, "Wisdom and Learning to Be Wise in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism" in *Teaching for Wisdom*, 118.

<sup>792</sup> Frederick Streng writes, "For Nagarjuna, the pursuit after final answers regarding the nature of Ultimate Reality was sophistry (*prapanca*)." See Streng, *Emptiness*, 87. Put another way, the nature of "Ultimate

which intellection or *noesis* expresses itself in speech as it seeks beyond all individual manifestations of the truth, of goodness, or of beauty, for the ground whereby all these things are granted their share in existence by participation (*metalepsis*).<sup>793</sup> Whereas the sophist vies for power and glory through eristic, the philosopher undermines all selfish ends<sup>794</sup> and desires as well as all pretence to knowledge, not out of nihilistic destructiveness, but rather as a means of engaging in intellection or *noesis* – that form of thought that “takes up” everything towards the truest vision of reality (*theoria*).

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Reality” is unknowable to discursive thought which can only know the world of existent things, empty as they are of inherent existence.

<sup>793</sup> Many scholars of Buddhism would disagree with the connection I draw between Madhyamaka, classical Western philosophy, and the noetic pursuit of the Ground of Being. Williams, for instance, writes: “Emptiness is ... not for the Madhyamaka the Ultimate Truth in the sense that it is an ultimately existing or inherently existing entity.” See Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 62-63. Similarly, Streng contends that “Nagarjuna does not use words to refer to an Absolute Reality that is independent of the language system” (139); moreover, Streng is quite adamant that it is inaccurate to link Madhyamaka to any sort of negative theology: “The purpose of Nagarjuna’s negations is not to describe *via negativa* an absolute which cannot be expressed, but to deny the illusion that such a self-existent reality exists.” See Streng, *Emptiness*, 146. Streng and others see an affinity between Nagarjuna’s philosophic writings and the analytic works of Ludwig Wittgenstein. For the authoritative study in this strand of Buddhist scholarship, see Chris Gudmundsen, *Wittgenstein and Buddhism* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1977).

However, in contrast to these scholars, Mircea Eliade offers clarifications that suggest a fundamental affinity between the foundational teachings of Buddhism on the one hand and classical Western philosophy on the other. Eliade remarks that the Buddha took over the “pitiless analysis” to which pre-classic Samkhya and Yoga submitted the notion of “person” and of psychomental life, but that he went even further by declining “to postulate the possibility of discussing any absolute principle.” He thus rejected any prospect of having an experience of the true Self, so long as human beings were not “awakened.” Along with this, Buddha rejected Upanishadic speculation concerning “the postulate of a *brahman*, a pure, absolute, immortal, eternal spirit identical with the *atman* – but he did so because this dogma might satisfy the intellect and thus prevent man from awakening” (163). Eliade insists that the Buddha rejected all the “philosophies” and asceticisms of his day because “he regarded them as *idola mentis* interposing a sort of screen between man and absolute reality, the one true Unconditioned.” He writes that Buddha “*had no intention of denying a final, unconditioned reality, beyond the eternal flux of cosmic and psychomental phenomena, but that he was careful to speak but little on the subject,*” and Eliade sees this viewpoint proven by a number of canonical texts (164, italics added). In his view, Buddha “hesitated to speak of that unconditionality, lest he should fail to do it justice. If he had attacked the Brahmins and the *paribbajakas*, it was precisely because they talked too much about the inexpressible and claimed that they could define the Self (*atman*).” See Eliade, *Yoga*, 166.

<sup>794</sup> Josef Pieper views the selfishness of the sophist and the selflessness of the philosopher as the best way of truly distinguishing between their two characters: “The Sophist looks exactly like a philosopher. He speaks exactly like a philosopher. In fact, it could be said he resembles a true philosopher much more than the philosopher himself. In other words: it has been made extremely easy (precisely the meaning of “counterfeit”!) *not* to recognize the decisive difference.

The difference consists in this: the true philosopher, thoroughly oblivious of his own importance, and ‘totally discarding all pretentiousness,’ approaches his unfathomable object unselfishly and with an open mind. The contemplation of this object, in turn, transports the subject beyond mere self-centred satisfaction and indeed releases him from the fixation on selfish needs, no matter how ‘intellectual’ or sublime. The Sophist, in contrast, despite his emancipation from the norms of ‘objective’ truth and the resulting claims to be ‘free,’ remains nevertheless imprisoned within the narrow scope of what is ‘usable’ – precisely because he chases after novelty, and desperately, obsessively, tries to effect surprise by thought and expression and thus to contribute to a certain form of ‘higher entertainment.’” See Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 38-39.

#### (iv) Philosophy is *Not* Work

In *Philosophy in the Classroom*, Lipman and his co-authors write that “Thinking is work, and it is a kind of work no one can do for anyone else.”<sup>795</sup> Moreover, they contend that it is something we *always* do, and that we cannot stop doing: “We are always thinking: there is no way a living, active human being can obliterate the thinking process.” In their view, the *active life* is ubiquitous, and the movements of the *ratio* – as the form of thought that underlies the *work* of critical thinking and analysis, of calculation and accomplishment – are inescapable, forming the ordinary stream of consciousness that fills our every waking moment. There is, it seems, no free space, no rest or reprieve from working; on Lipman’s account, there is no *contemplative life* that might be cultivated in moments of leisure or *scholē*, since even in these moments when we are “comfortably relaxed,” the *ratio* still occupies us with its “sequence of thoughts, often accompanied by images” that become “the immediate object of our attention.” Lipman and his associates therefore ask incredulously: “Why then is there the illusion that it is only during moments of relaxation, when we attend to the *leisurely movements* of a train of thoughts, that we engage in that peculiar activity people call thinking?”<sup>796</sup>

Lipman’s P4C approach to philosophy as work, as metacognitive training in critical thinking, as conceptual analysis and the application of method, is premised on a dismissal of philosophy’s deepest desire as “the love of wisdom”: namely, the desire of one who pursues wisdom in order to *see* the beloved, that the beloved might consume the lover of wisdom as a passive observer,<sup>797</sup> and through this seeing (*theoria*) of the beloved in the contemplative gaze, that the lover of wisdom (*philosophos*) might experience – inasmuch as it is possible for a mortal being to do so -- an immortalizing union with with the beloved, as seer is united with seen. Certainly, Lipman and the others are correct in one respect when they write that “there is no way a living, active human being can obliterate the thinking

<sup>795</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, xiii.

<sup>796</sup> Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 13 (italics added).

<sup>797</sup> Concerning the passive nature of philosophy as the theoretic activity of gazing, it is useful to remember that the word “philosopher” was coined by Pythagoras, who compared life to a great festal assembly or games (*panegyrei*) during which some went to compete for prizes and others went to sell wares, but “the best” (*beltistoi*) went as spectators (*theatai*): “For similarly in life, some grow up with servile natures, greedy for fame and gain, but the philosophers (*hoi philosophoi*) seek truth.” See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, VIII.8.



process.” *Schole*, as rest from the working, discursive mind, is not a possibility brought about by human effort. As St. Teresa writes in *The Interior Castle*:

Some books advise that as a preparation for hearing what our Lord may say to us we should keep our minds at rest, waiting to see what He will work in our souls. But unless His Majesty has begun to suspend our faculties, I cannot understand how we are to stop thinking, without doing ourselves more harm than good.<sup>798</sup>

I have often joked with my own students -- much to their delight -- that trying to silence your mind is like telling yourself to stop thinking about elephants. However, Lipman’s contention that the cessation of the *ratio* is altogether impossible is falsified by the innumerable experiential testimonies of contemplative practitioners. In the passage above, for instance, Teresa confirms that the movements of the *ratio* might indeed find their cessation through the work of God upon the soul in its passivity; just as we have seen both in Aristotle’s writings, as well as in Socrates’ depiction of philosophy as “the art of dying,” so too does Teresa comment here that the practice of *schole* arises for human beings not as a power afforded to them by their mortal nature, but rather by virtue of their manner of participation in what is immortal.

The falsity of Lipman’s contention that philosophy is work is illuminated not only by the classical Western philosophic tradition; the character of philosophy as leisure is likewise confirmed by both ancient Samkhya philosophy and the Indian practice of yoga as articulated in Patanjali’s *Yoga-Sutra*; indeed, these Indian modes of pursuing wisdom make plain what Lipman’s “philosophy as work” approach overlooks. Mircea Eliade remarks that Indian tradition regards Samkhya as the oldest *darsana*, “seeing,” or “vision” of the true nature of reality.<sup>799</sup> According to this *darsana*, the flux of thought that Lipman identifies as “inescapable” is in actuality that sort of ignorance that makes us confuse “Spirit,” “Self,” or “pure awareness” (*purusa*) with our psychomental experiences; it is what Eliade calls “metaphysical ignorance.”<sup>800</sup> Consciousness (*citta*) is indeed experienced ordinarily just as Lipman describes it: our minds are constantly busy, agitated, moving from thought to thought, and from feeling to feeling. Moreover, we take our experiences of these psychomental states to be the expression of our true self. Human beings know and

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<sup>798</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, IV.iii.4; 53.

<sup>799</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga*, 6. The word *darsana* is derived from the root *drs*, meaning “to see,” or “to contemplate,” and hence bears resemblance to the Greek *theoria*.

<sup>800</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 14.

comprehend by means of what Samkhya-Yoga calls the “intellect,” or *buddhi*, and it is precisely this *buddhi* that Lipman sees as the focal point for all philosophic undertakings. Philosophy, in his view, is the principle and best means to develop the cognitive competencies of the *buddhi*. But as Eliade points out, “this intellect is only a product of nature,” and as a “‘phenomenon,’ *buddhi* can enter into cognitional relations only with other phenomena.” Under no circumstances “could it know the Self [*purusa*], for it could by no possibility enter into any kind of relation with a transcendental reality.”<sup>801</sup> P4C, in its emphasis on honing the skills of the *buddhi*, simply reinforces our inclination to misidentify the Self with these fluctuations of matter (*prakṛti*) and the “innumerable forms of the cosmos”<sup>802</sup>; this misidentification of psychomental phenomena with the Self, born of ignorance (*avidyā*) concerning the true nature of reality, is the precise cause of the soul’s “enslavement.” The means towards “liberation” or absolute freedom (*mokṣa*, *mukti*) from this enslavement is not more adept mastery of the intellectual activity of the *ratio* or the movements of the *buddhi* – for this would simply be to compound our *avidyā* – but rather the cessation of all such movements in the realization or “awakening” knowledge that unveils the essence of *purusa* to itself. This occurs when consciousness (*citta*) is stilled or settled from its agitated state and becomes reflective like a mirror, a jewel, or a pool of limpid water in which *purusa* might recognize, *see*, or know itself.<sup>803</sup> This “metaphysical knowledge” is wisdom, or *prajñā*.

Philosophy -- whether it is envisioned by Socrates as “the art of dying,” or articulated in Samkhya dialectics as liberation from the delusions of self -- is the core of any true liberal education, where “liberal education” means “to be free, especially to be free of oneself, to be free of those passions and habits within us that might deflect us from

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<sup>801</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 18.

<sup>802</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 9.

<sup>803</sup> In its agitated state, *citta* is not unlike “water in waves, which turn the surface opaque and non-reflective.” See Chip Hartranft’s commentary on the *Yoga-Sutra* in Patanjali, *The Yoga-Sutra*, trans. Chip Hartranft (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 4. However, when it is utterly motionless, *citta* “becomes jewel-like, reflective enough to help awareness [*purusa*] overcome this case of mistaken identity and recognize its true nature.” See Patanjali, *The Yoga-Sutra* 1. The comparison of ordinary consciousness or *citta* to a pool of turbulent water that, in a state of contemplation, becomes calm, transparent, or mirror-like is also found in St. Teresa’s *Interior Castle*; she writes, “In a state of grace the soul is like a well of limpid water, from which flow only streams of clearest crystal.” The image of the crystalline or jewel-like reflection is also found in Teresa’s remark that a soul in such a contemplative state “is like a crystal in the sunshine.” See St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, I.ii.3.

grasping what is there.”<sup>804</sup> As the most liberal of all the arts, philosophy must also entail the freedom to pursue the highest objects of seeing. But this means necessarily that all lower aims and all lower sights – i.e. all those aims or ends not commensurate with knowing “reality *as such*” or with “absolute freedom” (*moksa*) – must be put aside. Time and time again, contemplatives therefore warn against engaging in wisdom’s pursuit for money,<sup>805</sup> or in meditative and contemplative practices for the various powers that one might acquire.<sup>806</sup> Philosophy cannot be put to work in the service of worldly attainments and ambitions without bringing about its own destruction, or without turning into sophistry. Indeed, the sophist Protagoras proclaimed that the purpose of pursuing wisdom – something he claimed for himself -- is to teach others how to deal successfully with the world; in his view, it is the business of the wise to teach others how to take proper care of their personal affairs.<sup>807</sup> Protagoras’ attitude towards wisdom’s pursuit, in this regard, coincides with the ambitions of most of the modern writers on wisdom that we explored earlier. However, as Josef Pieper remarks, philosophic inquiry into “the totality of things” cannot properly be made commensurate with the world of work and its finite aims: “Whoever seeks to eliminate the fundamental incommensurability between philosophy and the world of work only serves to

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<sup>804</sup> James V. Schall, “Liberal Education” *Liberal Education* (Fall 2006): 46.

<sup>805</sup> One is reminded here of the ancient sophists who charged a fee for their instruction versus the philosopher Socrates who spoke with anyone at no charge. Indeed, the reason Socrates was so poor was because he knew that there was something beyond riches. James Schall writes helpfully about the relation between the genuine teacher-philosopher and his pocketbook: “Properly speaking ... teachers cannot be paid for what they teach. For what they teach, if it is true, is not theirs. They do not own it. They did not make it or make it to be true. This fact is why any financial arrangement with a true teacher ... is not a salary or a wage but an ‘honorarium,’ something offered merely to keep the teacher alive, not to “pay” him for ownership of a segment of ‘truth’ said to be exclusively his. What he who teaches knows, then, is known for its own sake, not for his sake – even when the knowing is, as it should be, his. Truth is not like private property, something we should own and cherish. Rather it is something that, when passed from teacher to pupil, makes both something more and neither any less. Truth is of the spirit, the ‘conformity of mind and reality,’ as Aquinas said. The motivation of the teacher has to be something intrinsic, some ‘love of wisdom’ for itself. ... Besides, teachers do not need much in the way of material goods, as their delight is really not to be found in financial rewards; if a teacher does seek wealth, his teaching is suspect.” See James Schall, “On the Mystery of Teachers I Never Met” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 64.

<sup>806</sup> Indeed, a good deal of what St. John of the Cross writes in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (see II.xi onwards) is really a warning to his readers to reject any of the “benefits” or special powers that arise from practice. In *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa too warns: “let no one think on starting of the reward to be reaped” (II.13); throughout her discussion of “the Sixth Mansion,” she describes the various visionary powers one might accumulate, and offers her reasons for not desiring them. Similarly, chapter 3 of Patanjali’s *Yoga-Sutra* offers an extensive list of the extraordinary mystical and shamanic powers acquired through practice, but all of which are to be spurned by the true yogin inasmuch as “the goal of yoga, and indeed the whole point of existence, is not to cultivate power in the phenomenal world but to end suffering by realizing the nature of pure seeing for its own sake.” See Patanjali, *The-Yoga Sutra*, 55.

<sup>807</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 318e.

make the philosophical act improbable of achievement or even impossible.”<sup>808</sup> Hence, one cannot properly engage in philosophizing as a means to improve critical thinking, to enhance academic performance, or to boost test scores; indeed, where Winstanley demands that philosophy be “presented as a *useful* and *relevant* subject” that offers children “*benefits*” which may be demonstrated by “fair empirical *assessment*,”<sup>809</sup> it would seem to me to be most dangerous for philosophy that it be associated with any grades at all; not only do grades serve as rewards and punishments that very often deflect students – particularly the keen, the ambitious, and the competitive ones who wish very much to please their parents and teachers -- from learning what they are learning for its own sake; as we have already seen in our examination of Thomas’ writings, in the “circular movement” of the soul engaged in contemplation, “there is no error,” just as there is no error in the knowledge of first principles which we know by simple intuition (*simplici intuiti*)<sup>810</sup>; and certainly, without the possibility of error, how could grades make any sense at all? Consequently, in a true wisdom environment, students and teachers must be liberated from all concern with grades and the assessment of student *work* in order to make “space” for the possibility of leisure. As Pieper writes:

A space of exactly this sort is what is meant by the ancient term *scholē*, which designates “school” and “leisure” at the same time. It means a refuge where discussion takes place, in total independence – that is, without the interference of practical goals – on just one question: “How are things, “what are the facts?”<sup>811</sup>

### **(v) Philosophy is *Not* Science**

In his essay, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” Michael Hand explores what he calls “Three misconceptions about philosophy.”<sup>812</sup> We have dealt extensively with one of these so-called “misconceptions” already – namely, the “canonical view” that equates philosophizing with studying the great books of philosophy; however, in partial

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<sup>808</sup> Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 97.

<sup>809</sup> Winstanley, “Philosophy and the Development of Critical Thinking,” 95 (*italics added*).

<sup>810</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.180.6. Briefly, whereas the discursive movements of the *ratio* may be evaluated for their adeptitude, the circular movement calms these learning priorities, seeking their effective cessation. Whereas reasoning and typical classroom thinking involves the measurement and “progression” of rational capacities according to certain skill sets in thinking and cognitive development, the circular movement of the soul cannot be so evaluated, since by its nature it is separate from all discursus and therefore “free of error.” Indeed, the circular movement has no measure other than the Measure in which it participates by pursuing Wisdom in contemplative gazing.

<sup>811</sup> Josef Pieper, “Liberal Arts” in *Joseph Pieper: An Anthology*, 114.

<sup>812</sup> Hand, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” 6-10.

disagreement with Hand, we have offered evidence that careful study of *certain* writings within this “canon” -- even with children – is *not* misconceived at all, and that familiarity with the classical tradition can in fact bear wonderful fruit. Hand claims to have isolated two other “misconceptions”; these he refers to as “the no right answers view,” and “the no progress view.” I suggest that Hand’s critique of these two “misconceptions” is itself the result of a misconception about philosophy – namely, that philosophic inquiry ought to be understood on the model of scientific inquiry. Although it should by now be clear from our earlier argumentation that philosophy is *not* science, some discussion of Hand’s misconceptions about what he perceives to be “misconceptions” will be clarifying for our current study.

Hand articulates each of the two remaining “misconceptions” about philosophy as follows: according to the “no right answers view,” “a philosophical question is, either characteristically or by definition, a question to which there is no right answer.” He cites scholarship by Sara Stanley, Steve Bowkett, and Mandy Hextall as examples of this “misconception,”<sup>813</sup> and he contends that such a view renders philosophical inquiry both “futile” and “logically incoherent”; in opposition to this error, he insists that “it is necessarily true that questions are answerable, in the same way ... as it is necessarily true that propositions are verifiable or falsifiable.”<sup>814</sup> Hand observes that the “no right answers view” is very often allied with the remaining “misconception” -- the “no progress view” of philosophy according to which “philosophers have failed to make progress on questions with which they have been grappling for hundreds, if not thousands of years”; when these two “misconceptions” are put together, the failure to advance towards a solution for philosophical questions is seen as a natural result of such questions being “unanswerable.”<sup>815</sup>

It is important to recognize that there is some truth in Hand’s critique of the “no right answers view.” One cannot ask a question honestly without also hoping for an answer that approaches the truth of things. As Pieper remarks, “Whoever thinks it makes sense to explore what has so far been unknown implicitly affirms the comprehensibility of the

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<sup>813</sup> S. Stanley, and S. Bowkett, *But Why? Developing Philosophical Thinking in the Classroom* (London: Network Educational Press, 2004); M. Hextall, “Leicester’s youngest philosophers,” in *SAPERE Newsletter* (Oxford: Westminster Institute of Education, May 2006): 8-9.

<sup>814</sup> Hand, “‘Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?’” 7.

<sup>815</sup> Hand, “‘Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?’” 8.

world.”<sup>816</sup> Thus, philosophy is not merely questioning, but also answering. At least in partial agreement with Hand, James Schall writes: “The real discovery is not that we have questions, but that we have answers to such questions. Our minds cannot be satisfied with mere questioning, even though to question is to start to seek an answer.”<sup>817</sup> Indeed, all things about which we might ask honest questions must be, as Hand suggests, capable of being known. To this effect, the ancients said that our minds have a *capax omnium*, or a “capacity” to know “all things.” In theological terms, “All things can be known by us because they spring from God’s thought”<sup>818</sup>; in non-theological terms we might say *ens et verum convertuntur*, or “being and truth are interchangeable.”<sup>819</sup> That is, to the extent that something is true, it is real; and if real, then true; and if true, then *knowable* as truth.

However, at the same time as our minds have a *capax omnium*, it is also important to remember that there is what Pieper calls an “incomprehensible comprehensibility” to all things.<sup>820</sup> He writes:

being true and being unfathomable go together, and ... the comprehensibility of a thing can never be fully exhausted by any finite mind – for all things are created, which means that the reason they are knowable is by necessity also the reason they are unfathomable.<sup>821</sup>

My students and I have often encountered this deep mystery in our classroom discussions: we have, for example, studied how the poet’s words necessarily fail to encapsulate their objects, how the lover Romeo can never truly say enough about his love for his beloved Juliet, as well as how a painting – say, for instance, Rene Magritte’s “*Ceci n’est pas une pomme*” – cannot truly render that part of reality articulated by the artist; similarly, amidst the stress and trauma that marks and assessment create for students, they are always glad to

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<sup>816</sup> Pieper, “Incomprehensible Comprehensibility” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 94.

<sup>817</sup> Schall, *The Life of the Mind*, 98.

<sup>818</sup> Pieper, “Things Can Be Known Because They Are Created” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 97.

<sup>819</sup> See, for instance, the second contrary response to St. Thomas Aquinas’ first question, “What is Truth?” in *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate* 1, 5. (Online version available at <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/QDdeVer.htm>). Similar articulations of the mind’s *capax omnium* can be found in Plato’s depiction of recollection or *anamnesis*, wherein the mind is capable of knowing all things by virtue of realizing or remembering its participation in all things. Additionally, according to the *yoga-darsana*, the constraints of matter do not apply to pure awareness, or *purusa*; as Chip Hartranft writes in his commentary on Patanjali’s *Yoga-Sutra*, “When it is no longer overshadowed by the commotions of consciousness and knows its own nature, *purusa* is capable of insight into every sphere of *prakrti*, or creation.” See Patanjali, *Yoga Sutra*, 30.

<sup>820</sup> Pieper, “Incomprehensible Comprehensibility” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 93-95.

<sup>821</sup> Pieper, “Things Are Unfathomable Because They Are Created” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 99.

hear that knowing their marks – although it tells me a bit about them as students -- certainly *does not* and *cannot* define them; indeed, each and every one of them must remain fundamentally a wonderful mystery beyond these petty things. Thomas Aquinas says much the same thing in his famous remark that “All the efforts of the human mind cannot exhaust the essence of a single *fly*”; perhaps for this reason, at the end of his life Thomas is said to have admitted that all he ever wrote was like straw. In his view, the essence of a thing must remain unknown to us.<sup>822</sup> It is indeed this “incomprehensible comprehensibility” that Aristotle acknowledges as the genuine heart of philosophic inquiry when he writes that such questions as “What is Being?” (*tis he ousia*) have been asked “since time immemorial” (*to palai*), that they now and forever will be asked, and that they will always baffle us (*aei aporoumenon*).<sup>823</sup> Hence, there is some truth to the “no right answers view” that Hand criticizes, inasmuch as such a view recognizes the element of “the incomprehensible” – something that Hand overlooks; and certainly there are many questions that do not afford definitive or “correct” answers. We encounter such conundrums when we try to conceive of a non-repeating decimal such as *pi*, or when we explore “Russell’s Paradox”; even when we ask the most basic of philosophic questions, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” we run up against a conundrum that takes us to the deep and fundamental mystery of “incomprehensible comprehensibility.”<sup>824</sup>

The importance of recognizing both the mind’s *capax omnium* and the fundamental incomprehensibility of things is best articulated in Pieper’s remarks about the “unanswerability” of philosophic questions:

Does this question[ing] not find an answer? Does not all this questioning at least search for an answer? ... Of course it does! Otherwise it would not be true questioning at all! Still, if such an answer is understood as imparting knowledge that satisfies and eliminates the question, and therefore takes away the very reason to ask the question, then we certainly have to say that philosophy’s question does *not* find an answer.<sup>825</sup>

Inasmuch as philosophy does *not* find an answer to its questions, it necessarily differs from scientific questioning. Indeed, the scientist proceeds on the assumption that the mind has a

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<sup>822</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* 10, 1.

<sup>823</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7, I: 1028b 2ff.

<sup>824</sup> Indeed, the Rinzai Zen practice of koan study, such as “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” demonstrates to us that our minds cannot grasp what *is* through logic and reasoning. For a useful collection of these koan found in *The Gateless Gate* (a.k.a., the Mumonkan) as well as other Zen stories, see Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (Toronto: Anchor Books, 1989).

<sup>825</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 13-14.

*capax omnium* – i.e.: that it *is* possible to answer the specialized questions of science -- while at the same time mitigating any need to recognize the “incomprehensibility” of what *is* by restricting and focusing inquiry within a specific field or branch of scientific endeavour. The philosopher, by contrast, accepts no such restriction and hence must always encounter the unfathomable nature of being.

In both their mutual acknowledgement of the *capax omnium* and their mutual disregard for the fact of the incomprehensibility of being, the scientist and Hand share a remarkable similarity. However, where the scientist is *correct* to proceed thus – for scientific questions are specific and not about being *as such* – Hand is incorrect; for he professes not to be concerned with how to teach *science* to children, but rather with the question, “Can Children Be Taught Philosophy?” It is therefore imperative to ensure that we do not conflate scientific questioning with philosophic questioning. Where scientific inquiry involves the asking of a specific question about a specific aspect of being (for instance, the chemist asks questions about the chemical composition of things), philosophy, by contrast, asks questions about the “totality” of being;<sup>826</sup> moreover, through attentive study the scientist might come into possession of a definitive knowledge “that satisfies and eliminates” the need to ask a specific question;<sup>827</sup> but the philosopher’s question is *never* so answered, since philosophic inquiry does not simply attend to a single aspect of what can be known but is rather a seeking out (*zetesis*) of full knowledge concerning “the totality.”

Pieper discusses the difference between scientific and philosophic inquiry as a function of their respective openness or receptivity to things; in science – unlike in philosophy -- this openness is necessarily incomplete since each branch of science selects the range of objects in its field as well as the methods by which it chooses to investigate

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<sup>826</sup> This is not to say that the scientist’s questions cannot give rise to philosophic questioning. As soon as the scientist crosses the boundary that marks off the special province with which science and technology are otherwise exclusively concerned and begins to ponder “the totality” of things, everything that otherwise applies to the philosophizing person also applies to the pondering scientist with equal force. Pieper writes: “As the question, first prompted by something quite concrete, changes slowly or suddenly into a philosophical question, there occurs a movement involving several dimensions. Not only do we move away ever more from considering any ‘practical’ aspects ... we also see at the same time the horizon of our questioning extended to a point where its limits are no longer discernible.” However, in keeping with what has already been said, any answers provided for the scientist’s philosophic questions necessarily must lose their definitive scientific flavour as “right answers,” since “Our question, above all, becomes all the more unanswerable, the more it involves the totality of all there is and its meaning.” See Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 68-69; cf. Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 93-94, and “A Plea for Philosophy,” 138.

<sup>827</sup> This is not to say that asking a single scientific question does not breed exponential growth in other scientific questions!



those objects. Pieper speaks of this difference between science and philosophy in terms of their contrasting propensities to listen and to be silent:

*Theoria* [that is, the goal and activity of philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom] aims at the unqualified cognition of reality, at truth and nothing else. ... But then: *to perceive means to listen in silence*. ... [O]nly in silence is hearing possible. Moreover, the stronger the determination prevails to hear all there is, the more profound and more complete the silence must be. Consequently, philosophy (as contemplation of reality as such and as the highest possible actualization of *theoria*) means: to listen so perfectly and intensely that such receptive silence is not disturbed and interrupted by anything, not even by a question.

This precisely constitutes the difference between the individual sciences and philosophy. Science does not remain silent; it asks questions. It is the very nature of its questions that establishes a particular branch of science.<sup>828</sup>

Here, Pieper does not mean to suggest that seeing (*theoria*) and listening, or the cultivation of attention to silence is not also a crucial element of science. Indeed, all knowledge that we acquire about reality demands that we become “absorbed in listening silence,” and inasmuch as we see what *is*, we too are engaged in *theoria*. However, in the case of science, Pieper contends that this silence is not perfect:

[I]t is interrupted and limited by the explicit formulation of a specific and particular aspect under which the object, “the world” – in itself infinitely complex – shall be questioned. It pertains to the nature of such a formulated question that the direction of the answer is already determined. In other words: entire realms of reality are expressly “of no interest” right from the start. Seen from this angle, the philosopher’s question, strictly, is no question at all: *What is it all about?* It rather articulates, as it were, the very attitude of silence, a silence that in total and undistracted openness extends into the world, listening. In this respect, the objection on the part of the exact sciences, that there is altogether not even the possibility to express such a question, is right on target. Whoever reflects on the world “under every conceivable aspect” ... obviously does not consider it “under a particular aspect”! Nevertheless, this is precisely the manner in which philosophy approaches its object, this object being reality and existence as such.<sup>829</sup>

In contrast to scientific endeavour, genuine philosophy, in its unparalleled receptivity, its openness, and its willingness to listen in silence, lacks that attitude of mastery towards its object of which Haynes was so critical; instead, philosophy resembles what Thomas Merton says of prayer when he writes: “It is not enough to apply our minds to spiritual things in the same way as we might observe some natural phenomenon, or conduct a

<sup>828</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 47.

<sup>829</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 47-48.

scientific experiment.” As in mental prayer, so too in philosophy do “we enter a realm of which we are no longer the masters and we propose to ourselves the consideration of truths which exceed our natural comprehension and which, nevertheless, contain the secret of our destiny.”<sup>830</sup>

From Hand’s perspective, the problem with the “no right answers view” is that it serves to preclude “critical thinking.” Indeed, how can one engage in critical thought -- in sorting out right from wrong -- if there is no possibility of a correct answer, or if everything at bottom is incomprehensible? Like Lipman and the others, Hand too holds philosophy up as a precious tool for the cultivation of “critical thinking.” However, the unscientific nature of philosophy suggests a different meaning altogether for “critical thinking”:

[B]eing “critical,” for the philosopher, *means diligently taking care not to ignore anything*. Yet the whole of reality, which is the object of such care, is not the same as the sum total resulting from adding up each and every thing. Rather it means the *totum*, the ordered structure of the world, containing a hierarchy, greater and lesser actualizations of being, and above all a highest reality that at the same time is the most profound foundation and origin of everything, of every single thing and of the whole as well.<sup>831</sup>

Put another way, A. N. Whitehead has written that the true problem facing the philosopher is “to conceive a complete fact.”<sup>832</sup> However, as Pieper points out, as soon as someone sets out to pursue this, “he is concerned with the universal interwovenness of all human existence, therefore with the totality of all that is, with ‘God and the world.’” Consequently, he has turned into a philosopher, and is then essentially different from the scientist “who by definition approaches his object under a clearly specified and particular aspect, and who therefore has no business talking about ‘God and the world.’” Indeed, as Pieper remarks, “To talk this way would be as unscientific as it would be unphilosophic *not* to do so.”<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>830</sup> Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1960), 79.

<sup>831</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 88 (italics added).

<sup>832</sup> Here, Whitehead writes about how modern physics has abandoned the “doctrine of Simple Location,” with the result that “if we endeavour to conceive a complete instance of the existence of the physical thing in question, we cannot confine ourselves to one part of space or to one moment in time.” Rather, with the denial of Simple Location, “we must admit that within any region of space-time the innumerable multitude of these physical things are in a sense superposed. Thus the physical fact at each region of space-time is a composition of what the physical entities throughout the Universe mean for that region.” Whitehead’s famous statement that “the final problem is to conceive a complete [*panteles*] fact” stems from these observations. See A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 157-158.

<sup>833</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 68.

Hand's observation that "the no right answers view" is naturally allied with the "no progress view" is astute. However, given that philosophy is distinguished from science by its concern with conceiving a "complete fact," and consequently with the unfathomable nature of existence, it is not surprising that philosophy, unlike science, does *not* progress.

Pieper writes:

It makes sense to speak of "science" as one multifaceted endeavor throughout the centuries, almost using it as a collective term, "Science has determined ... " – it is entirely justified to talk this way. It is meaningless, on the other hand, to declare that "philosophy" has discovered or explained this or that. ... [T]here can be no teamwork in philosophy. No philosopher can in any way use the "results" of Plato's philosophy, except if he repeats, by and for himself, Plato's thinking. In the realm of science, in contrast, the results achieved by an individual researcher can be used by anybody without the need to repeat the scientific journey of this individual."<sup>834</sup>

"Progress" is a problematic category in the philosophical realm if what is meant by progress is "a steady enrichment of our collective knowledge that increases *eo ipso* in a manner commensurate with the passage of time." Pieper remarks that philosophical progress certainly exists, "but not so much across generations as in the inner life experience of the philosophizing person";<sup>835</sup> moreover, such philosophic "progress" is not a function of one's credentialization, of one's vast learning, or even of having developed astute critical thinking proficiencies; rather, it is the result of a "spiritual energy that drives the kind of pure questioning that holds out to the end."<sup>836</sup>

In philosophy – as opposed to science -- "not much can be accomplished simply by using one's head, regardless of how intelligent that head might be." What is necessary is "a completely relaxed opening up of the soul's secret responsive powers, which cannot be initiated by an act of will."<sup>837</sup> Indeed, we have all, at various times, "powered" our way through a problem or a task put before us that challenges the strength of our body, or the rigour of our analytic mind; however, philosophic inquiry cannot really proceed in this fashion. Where the scientific disciplines are active and may be characterized as a kind of

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<sup>834</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 79-80.

<sup>835</sup> Pieper, "A Plea for Philosophy," 136.

<sup>836</sup> Pieper, "A Plea for Philosophy," 168-168. Elsewhere, Pieper remarks about the "spiritual energy" that distinguishes philosophy from science: "In this we find again one of the differences between science and philosophy: in philosophy the individual person and his power of cognition carry incomparably more weight." As we have seen, Pieper links "cognition" always with the capacity to listen and to see. See Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 79-80.

<sup>837</sup> Pieper, "A Plea for Philosophy," 108-109.

work, philosophy is characteristically passive as contemplation. In philosophy, Pieper writes:

[I]t is not so much a question of doing as it is one of receptivity, of being willing to let something befall oneself. What is meant is an extreme – a seismographic, as it were – ability to be attentive, which does not require exertion so much as it does a silence that penetrates one’s innermost being and that cannot be induced by any activity, no matter how disciplined, but that can very well be disrupted by it.<sup>838</sup>

In closing, although philosophy and science both involve *theoria*, they are nonetheless distinct. Where scientific discoveries progress through great exertions and are built upon cooperatively from one scientist to the next, development or “progress” in philosophy occurs on the individual level alone;<sup>839</sup> unlike in science where the same discovery need not be made over and over again, in philosophy, each “discovery” is, in fact, experienced as a kind of “recollection” (*anamnesis*) that must be recapitulated by each individual lover of wisdom;<sup>840</sup> moreover, unlike in science, where progress in discoveries are made through the narrowing of attention to specific questions about specific aspects of being, in philosophy progress is made in the same proportion in which the lover of wisdom, “silent and attentive, catches sight of the depth and breadth of his at once new and primeval object.”<sup>841</sup>

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<sup>838</sup> Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 168-168.

<sup>839</sup> We are tempted always to suppose that philosophy must be a kind of group activity – in its dialogic form, perhaps it is the height of “cooperative learning.” Conceiving of philosophy as primarily a group or team activity, we are also tempted to suppose that philosophy is a noisy sort of affair. However, Pieper’s enunciation of philosophy as silent contemplation challenges this view. Indeed, as *theoria* or contemplation, philosophy is *not* a group activity involving “teamwork”; it is *not* noisy chattering but silent listening; and rather than being a social activity, it involves a more fundamental exposure to solitude. James Schall also writes thoughtfully on the relation of philosophy to solitude and silence: “I am mindful of the beginning of the Third Part of Cicero’s *De Officiis*, where he cites the famous passage about his “never being less alone than when he is alone.” A certain unexpected strength lies behind this remark. Being alone is the condition, ultimately, of not being alone. Wisdom and information are not the same thing. We need a certain space, a certain lapse of time in which we are alone – actively alone in that “never less alone” sense that Cicero set down for us.” See Schall, “A Last Lecture: On Essays and Letters” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*,” 141.

<sup>840</sup> Pieper cautions against using the term “discovery” to refer to philosophic “recovery” or “recollection.” His circumspection here – quite legitimate – arises from the danger that the use of the term “discovery” will lead to philosophic inquiry being confused with scientific inquiry. As Pieper remarks: “What is above all uncharacteristic for philosophizing is a form of progress where the more it penetrates into its object, the more the ‘white spots on the map’ are made to vanish.” See Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 128.

<sup>841</sup> Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 136.

## (vi) Philosophy is *Not* a Teachable Subject

It is the nature of philosophy to be aporetic, and in a philosophic dissertation on the pursuit of wisdom in education, one cannot avoid the uncomfortable perplexity of philosophizing. Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to make a case for the importance of encouraging wisdom's pursuit in schools; however, in the process of doing so it has become clear that many commonly-held opinions about what wisdom is are misguided; consequently, our notions of what it looks like to pursue wisdom in schools have also "missed their mark" and so register as a "sin" (*hamartia*) towards philosophy. Perhaps one of the most widely accepted assumptions about philosophy – particularly among *teachers* of philosophy – is that philosophy is itself a teachable subject. Indeed, how could one deign to introduce philosophy into the schools if it were *not* a teachable subject? How could one call oneself a "teacher of philosophy," develop a "Philosophy for Children" curriculum, or organize courses in philosophy if philosophy were *not* teachable? To question such a basic assumption while at the same time attempting to make a case for wisdom's pursuit in schools seems counter-productive and preposterous. Nevertheless, we must allow ourselves to be unsettled by the figure of the philosopher Socrates who, standing before his accusers and his judges on the capital charges of corrupting the youth and teaching falsehoods about the gods, insists: "I have never been anyone's teacher."<sup>842</sup>

Here, Socrates was not simply lying or being ironic. He was, in fact, telling the truth. As we have already seen, one must first know a subject in order to teach it; math teachers know and teach the subject of mathematics, as do physics teachers know about physics and its methods; each teacher works very hard to pass on knowledge of his or her respective field to students. And yet the thing that is famously said to have made Socrates "wiser" than others – referred to in the *Apology* as his "human wisdom" (*anthropine sophia*) -- is not any purported knowledge of some subject, field, methodology, or "parent discipline" that might be taught to others, but a rather low thing "worth little or nothing"<sup>843</sup>: namely, his awareness of his own ignorance.<sup>844</sup> However, being aware of his ignorance, Socrates would never deign to teach that of which he is ignorant; and philosophy, as the genuine love of wisdom, is necessarily an acknowledgement of one's own deficiency in that which

<sup>842</sup> *Ego de didaskalos men oudenos popot' egenomen.* Plato, *Apology* 33a.

<sup>843</sup> *hoti he anthropine sophia oligou tinos axia estin kai oudenos.* Plato, *Apology* 23a.

<sup>844</sup> Plato, *Apology* 21d.

one seeks after: namely, that divine Wisdom which is referred to by Pythagoras when he says, “Only the god is wise.”

Philosophy is evidently not something one could learn by acquiring a specific knowledge, by methodological practice, by repetition, or by any of the modes we commonly associate with teaching the subjects that students must study in school. Carrie Winstanley expresses concerns that as a subject, philosophy will either be “relegated to an after-school, extra-curricular option add-on,” or else the “infusion approach” will be taken wherein philosophy will be incorporated into all existing subjects; she instead rallies for teaching philosophy as a core or “full curriculum subject.”<sup>845</sup> However, although philosophy most certainly ought to be a “core” *concern* in education -- which emphatically it is *not*! -- it can *never* be a “core subject”; indeed, philosophy is not really a subject at all since each of the subjects sets itself apart from the others by being concerned with a particular aspect of what is, whereas philosophy is concerned with the “totality” of what is. As Pieper writes:

Philosophy betrays itself at the very moment it begins to construe itself as an academic subject. The philosophizing person is not characterized by the fact that he is interested in philosophy as a “subject”; he is interested in the world as a totality and in wisdom in its entirety.<sup>846</sup>

Indeed, philosophizing and *studying* philosophy are two different things, “so much so that one may even stand in the way of the other.”<sup>847</sup> A study is something that we can pick up and put down at our own bidding. We enter math class to study math, for instance; we then leave math behind to go to English class; afterwards, we leave English class to go to Music, or perhaps Physical Education. However, philosophy is *not* an attitude or a subject that we may pick up and leave at any doorstep; rather, in order for it to be genuine, it *must* be a way of life:

In philosophy ... you do not decide to step up to a certain standpoint, and then step down again; or else, you do not turn on a special spotlight, as it were, which then would illuminate your object as to its philosophic interest. All philosophy rather flows from man’s basic existential disposition toward the world, an attitude largely beyond any willful determination and decision. To approach a subject matter philosophically, to philosophize therefore – this is not a process simply at our disposal.<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> Winstanley, “Philosophy and the Development of Critical Thinking,” 94-95.

<sup>846</sup> Pieper, “On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy,” 161.

<sup>847</sup> Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 91. Cf. Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 23.

<sup>848</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 23.

As a way of life that flows from our “basic existential disposition toward the world,” it is plain that there are many things that might impede or thwart such a disposition. For instance, in the *Republic*, Plato depicts an educational system in which mathematical study is used as a precursor to philosophy; the rigors and discipline of mathematical thinking are thought by Glaukon to train the mind for the stringent, disciplined thinking that he, as a geometer, associates with philosophy. However, as any teacher knows who has taught students who have been rigorous in their mathematical studies and who have cultivated a degree of discipline generally in their schoolwork, this is no guarantee that wonder, openness, receptivity, or for that matter, philosophy will arise in a classroom. It is for this reason that Socrates speaks to Plato’s brothers of the necessity of teaching mathematics only as a “prelude” (*prooimia*) to dialectic, being “the song” (*nomou*) itself.<sup>849</sup> Only as a means towards asking philosophy’s wondrous questions, only as a spur to *noesis* (rather than solely as training in the strict, rigorous application of our dianoetic capacities) is mathematical study of any philosophic value.

But if philosophy is not a subject that may be taught either to teachers or to students, if philosophy is potentially impeded by the vigorous sort of study that regularly brings with it success and accolades, how then are we to pursue philosophy in schools? Reviewing what we have thus far learned about the pursuit of wisdom in relation to *scholē* and its concomitant activity of *theoria*, a few remarks may reasonably be made. First, in order to begin practicing the pursuit of wisdom as a society, it will be necessary to curb our current fixation with improved modes of assessment on the one hand, and with standardized testing on the other. These concerns certainly have their place in terms of measuring student proficiencies; but they hinder teachers, students, administrators, and parents from ever developing any awareness of what it means to exercise one’s *scholē*, or leisure. Second, along with our hypertrophied penchant for assessment, the totalitarian<sup>850</sup>

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<sup>849</sup> Plato, *Republic* 531d. The word *nomos*, normally translated as “law” or “custom,” is in this passage translated by Bloom as “song” in keeping with an alternate meaning of *nomoi* as “religious songs.” See endnotes to Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 448.

<sup>850</sup> I use the word “totalitarian” here purposefully. Josef Pieper writes about our culture as one of “total work”; that is, it is one that overvalues work and is adamantly opposed to (and in fact, set upon the destruction of) leisure. His discussion of the Soviet “five-year plans” and their attempts to “order everything” along with their claim to “provide the exclusive value standards for all aspects of life” strikes me (on bad days!) as remarkably similar to the way that school boards and the government envision “accountability” in education.

fixation with work and accountability in education must also be curtailed. A genuine “wisdom environment” must be carved out somewhere within the school day in which both students and teachers might begin to explore what it means to “leisurize,” to contemplate, or to practice *scholē*. The prime directive here ought to be the cultivation of *noesis* (intellection) as opposed to *dianoesis* (thinking); not rigorous application of the reason necessarily, but rather an attitude of openness and receptivity must be made of paramount significance. Love of what *is* – whether students find themselves attracted by bodily beauty or the beauties of soul, whether they are drawn towards beautiful ideas or enthused (literally “filled with spirit”) by music or art, mathematics or literature, any thoughts, seeings (*theoria*), or cognitions of any and all sorts related to these beauties -- must be “taken up” (*anairesis*) in such an environment.

As we have previously noted, this “taking up” of the love of what *is* should not be thought of as the sole prerogative of the philosopher; it is our true and shared heritage, not just as Albertans, but as human beings who may immortalize; moreover, Plato makes it quite clear that people of all sorts and interests may engage in such noetic behaviour; in his *Phaedrus*, Plato has Socrates speak about the “lover of wisdom” (*philosophos*) and the “lover of beauty” (*philokalos*) as equals alongside “one of a musical or loving nature” (*mousikou tinos kai erotikou*).<sup>851</sup> Aristotle speaks of the philosopher alongside the “lover of myth” (*philomythos*).<sup>852</sup> Clearly there are as many routes towards wisdom as there are myriads of things that might be “taken up” towards their true Beginning (*Arche*). The remaining section that follows examines how current day “contemplative education” programs in schools offer yet another alternative mode of incorporating the love of wisdom into classroom practices.

### III. Contemplative Education Programs in Schools and the Pursuit of Wisdom

We have thus far demonstrated that the sophistic education with which we are so familiar is hostile to the “pursuit of wisdom” (*philosophia*), and that our modern emphasis on “total work” serves to undermine (with the intent of *eradicating*) the possibility for

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For an excellent discussion of the manner in which the totalitarian urge manifests itself in liberal democratic societies, see Pieper, “Leisure and its Threefold Opposition” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 137-143.

<sup>851</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 248d.

<sup>852</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.ii.10; 982b18.



*scholē* and its concomitant activity of *theoria*, or contemplation. However, the practice of philosophy not only encounters enemies from one side of the fence, as it were; within the contemplative tradition itself, philosophy is often held up to ridicule as less than genuine contemplation, and as an impotent means of approaching the true object of its love in Wisdom. For instance, it was quite common among some of the Fathers and apologists of the Early Church – even among the mystical “Desert Fathers” – to berate Socrates and “pagan” philosophy.<sup>853</sup> We have already seen how, to a certain extent, this belittling of philosophy is present in the works of Thomas Aquinas, where the “intellectual virtue” of wisdom – ostensibly the highest concern of the pagan philosopher – is distinguished from the “gift” of Wisdom that can only be accessed through Christian practice and Christian faith.<sup>854</sup> A similar attack on philosophy can also be found in the remarks of Albertus Magnus, who contrasts the contemplation of the philosopher with the contemplation of the saints:

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<sup>853</sup> The criticisms of philosophy by St. Albert the Great -- the most well-known of the Desert Fathers -- are reproduced below. Additionally, Theophilus of Antioch criticizes Socrates for “swearing” by various gods; Tertullian is particularly hostile towards Socrates as one possessed by a daimon, and Cyprian too voices suspicions about Socrates’ affiliation with the demonic. Minucius Felix similarly berates Socrates for his association with a daimon, and he calls Socrates “the buffoon of Athens.” Eusebius adopts Aristophanes’ accusation against Socrates as one who “makes the worse cause appear the better,” and he lambasts him as an eristical “hair-splitter.” John Chrysostom accuses Socrates of “mock modesty,” sham moralizing, and idolatry, and John Cassian accuses Socrates of having vile pederastic tendencies and desires, but keeping them in check. Cyril of Alexandria too berates Socrates for his supposed sexual perversions and adulterous affairs with multiple wives and prostitutes, as well as for his ostensible idolatry. See John Ferguson, *Socrates: A Source Book* (Suffolk: The Open University, 1970).

<sup>854</sup> Even the best and most balanced Christian philosophers and theologians waffle on this point. Take, for instance, Josef Pieper who writes, on the one hand, that “it would never have occurred to me to equate philosophical *theoria* with the *visio beatifica*.” See Pieper, “A Plea for Philosophy,” 118; Pieper sometimes attempts to distinguish philosophy from contemplation with remarks like: “the reflection on the whole of reality and its ultimate meaning, an endeavor properly called ‘philosophy,’ proceeds rather through inquiry than through contemplation.” See Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 63. Such statements, akin to Thomas’ distinction between *sapientia* as *virtus intellectualis* and *sapientia* as *donum*, reinforce the notion of philosophy’s impotency and consequently serve to maintain the need for Christian practice and faith, making it the only true Way to God and therefore to Wisdom. However, on the other hand, Pieper recognizes that this assessment of philosophic *theoria* as inferior to contemplation (*theoria*) is problematic, if not disingenuous. To this end, he writes elsewhere that, “being able to perceive what there is – the totality of that which is,” is certainly the prerogative of the philosopher. Moreover, he acknowledges that the inscription upon our souls of the “order of the totality of existing things” is “the highest perfection to which we may aspire” in ancient philosophy, and that this thought is taken up in the Christian tradition in the notion of the *visio beatifica*; essentially, philosophic *theoria* and the Christian *visio beatifica* are no different, for “What do they not see who see him who sees all?” See Pieper, “What Does It Mean to Philosophize?” 41. Pieper writes most explicitly of the fundamental identity of Christian *contemplatio* with philosophic *theoria* when he confesses: “The philosophical *theoria*, at least in its fullest expression, may in its actual occurrence indeed be almost indistinguishable from ‘contemplation’ as conceived by the later era, the Christian West. I personally am convinced of this.” See “To Use and to Enjoy” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 119.

Even in this one should bear in mind the difference between the contemplation of faithful Catholics and that of pagan philosophers, for the contemplation of the philosophers is for the perfection of the contemplator himself, and consequently it is confined to the intellect and their aim in it is intellectual knowledge. But the contemplation of the Saints, and of Catholics, is for the love of Him -- that is, of the God they are contemplating. As a result, it is not confined in the final analysis to the intellect in knowledge, but crosses over into the will through love.<sup>855</sup>

Similarly, Thomas Merton writes derisively of “the contemplation of philosophers” as “merely intellectual speculation on the divine nature as it is reflected in creatures,” and he uses the rather phallic image of “a skyrocket that soared into the sky but never went off” to describe the philosopher’s impotence.<sup>856</sup>

Throughout this thesis, we have taken great pains to show how these polemical assessments of genuine philosophy are quite unfair and unwarranted; rather than seeing philosophic inquiry (*zetesis*) as a fundamentally impotent form of contemplation (*theoria*), I have consistently suggested that there is a basic unity – if not an *identity* – between the genuine practice of philosophy on the one hand, and practices such as meditative prayer, Buddhist meditation, Hindu yoga, or Christian contemplation on the other. As an alternative to our Western traditions, which very often juxtapose philosophy and contemplative practice antagonistically, we might turn instead to Eastern traditions where philosophy and meditative practice are generally seen as working in concert with one another. For instance, the premise behind the dialectics of Indian Samkhya philosophy is that ignorance (*avidya*) is at the heart of all suffering. *Avidya* “consists in confusing the motionless and eternal purusa with the flux of psychomental life,”<sup>857</sup> and Samkhya posits metaphysical knowledge of the Truth or wisdom (*prajna*) as the means to liberation (*mukti*) from *avidya*. As we have already seen, such knowledge is construed as a simple “awakening” that unveils the essence of the Self, of Spirit. It is a knowledge that does not “produce” anything; instead, it reveals reality immediately to one who *sees*. Eliade writes that “This true and absolute knowledge – which must not be confused with intellectual activity, which is psychological in essence – is not obtained by experience but by a

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<sup>855</sup> Albertus Magnus. *On Cleaving to God*, trans. John Richards (Christian Classics Ethereal Library) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/albert/cleaving.ii.html> (accessed April 25, 2011).

<sup>856</sup> Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 57.

<sup>857</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 27.

revelation.”<sup>858</sup> Classic Yoga takes up the stress in Samkhya concerning the prime importance of *prajna*; it offers one who pursues wisdom a *means* to implement this search through the adoption of a formal practice, or a “way of life” -- much as genuine philosophy from the classical Greek perspective must be conceived of also as a way of life. From Patanjali’s perspective, however, the liberation afforded through wisdom’s pursuit “must, so to speak, be conquered by sheer force, specifically by means of an ascetic technique and a method of contemplation, which, taken together, constitute nothing less than the *yoga-darsana*.”<sup>859</sup>

Similarly, in the dialectical Madhyamaka philosophy of Nagarjuna the objective is a true knowledge of the emptiness (*sunyata*) of all things, “For by understanding clearly the nature of the self and of the entities to which it is related, Nagarjuna believes that one can attain buddhahood.”<sup>860</sup> However, the Buddhists -- like their Indian counterparts in the Yoga and Samkhya traditions, and like the genuine practitioners of Western philosophy for whom wisdom’s pursuit is *not* simply a matter of intellectual activity but rather a “way of life” -- recognize that “simply by resolving to abandon attachment one cannot thereby succeed in shedding it.” Indeed, the shedding of attachment is difficult; it requires great effort and is even -- as St. Teresa of Avila makes known to us -- in a deep sense beyond our strictly human abilities (like trying not to think about elephants!). Jay Garfield writes:

Attachment arises as a consequence of the persistent, pervasive psychological, verbal, and physical habits that together constitute what Buddhist philosophers call the “root delusion,” the ignorance of the true nature of things. ... Only through extensive meditation on the nature of phenomena and on the nature of emptiness can these habits be abandoned, and only through an understanding of the ultimate nature of things can the fruit of actions done through abandonment -- that is, liberation from the suffering of cyclic existence -- be attained.<sup>861</sup>

Nagarjuna demonstrates how philosophic insight and meditative practices inform one another. He shows us, on the one hand, that philosophic inquiry into the nature of things can help us to understand the emptiness of all things, which in turn will lead us to grasp less and to become more detached. Conversely, it also becomes plain from his writings that meditative practices through which one learns to relax one’s tendency to grasp can also lead

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<sup>858</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 29.

<sup>859</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 36.

<sup>860</sup> See Jay Garfield’s commentary in Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, 253.

<sup>861</sup> Nagarjuna. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, 236-237.

to a realization of emptiness. Hence, in Buddhist practice – as in the fundamental unity between Samkhya and Yoga *darsanas* – philosophy and meditative or “contemplative” practices go together. It is perhaps for this reason that modern philosophers of education like Joanna Haynes have advocated for the dovetailing of philosophy and contemplative-meditative exercises in schools.<sup>862</sup> So too does A. G. Sertillanges recommend that the thinker meditate as a source of nourishment for the contemplative mind.<sup>863</sup> This is precisely the stance taken in our thesis as well.

## 1. Contemplation as a Corrective to Technological Education

### (i) On the Deformations of Contemplation in the Allure of Technological Homogeneity

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that contemplation or *theoria* ought to take greater precedence in education than is currently the case; more specifically, I have been careful to emphasize that, most of all, it is important that there be a noetic “taking up” (*anairesis*) of whatever is *seen* towards its ground in what is the highest or best (*Ariston*) of sights. As I have already pointed out, it is incorrect to suppose that *theoria* or the immediate seeing of the *intellectus* is not currently a component of our educational efforts; rather, anytime that “understanding” (*intellectus*) is acquired, the capacity of the *intellectus* for seeing is certainly involved. Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman makes a similar point when he remarks that “contemplative mind” exists in all cultures, and that it can be quite misleading to speak of our own culture as lacking contemplative mind. He explains that, “When we make that claim, we are rather lamenting the deplorable contemplative states within which the common mind is absorbed.” Thurman offers television as an example of the sort of “contemplative trance” in which millions of people imbibe “for hours on end, day after day, year in and year out.” Unfortunately, he explains, it is a trance “in which sensory dissatisfaction is constantly reinforced, anger and violence is imprinted, and confusion and the delusion of materialism is constructed and maintained.” Hence, “when we talk about seeking to increase and intensify contemplative mind in our culture, we are

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<sup>862</sup> See particularly Chapter 8 of Haynes, *Children as Philosophers*, 68-80.

<sup>863</sup> A. G. Sertillanges, O.P. *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, trans. Mary Ryan (Washington: The Catholic University Of America Press, 1946), 90.

actually talking about methods of transferring contemplative energies from one focus to another.”<sup>864</sup>

I would add that Thurman’s astute observations about television also apply to our modern fascination with computers and the internet – especially in educational circles where the fulfillment of “ICT outcomes” is mandated and strictly enforced both in curriculum documents and as part of Teacher Professional Growth Plans (TPGPs). Teachers are under constant and ever-increasing pressure to bring the latest technologies to bear upon their pedagogy,<sup>865</sup> and the fervour of this pressure becomes all the more peculiar when we recognize, for instance, that it is doubtful if teachers anywhere have ever experienced similar pressures and threats that they *must* use television or radio broadcasts (let alone books, paper, pens, and pencils) with their students. Indeed, there seems to be a special kind of *seeing* that computer technologies are believed to afford, such that their use has taken on a strange power in our understanding (*intellectus*) of ourselves and of what it means to know. I think that the peculiar allure of computers, of the internet, and of “information technology” arises on two counts. On the one hand, computer technology offers us the false promise of “knowing everything,” or at the very least, of gaining access to seemingly infinite information about the world-as-object; on the other hand, it purports to make available an *ersatz* transcendence, or a kind of substitute for the joy experienced

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<sup>864</sup> Robert Thurman, “Meditation and Education: Buddhist India, Tibet, and Modern America” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 9 (Sept. 2006): 1766 (also available at [www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org)).

<sup>865</sup> I am increasingly unimpressed, for instance, with how often “PD Days” actually become enforced, day-long infomercials and sales opportunities for representatives of “educational technology” companies to ply their wares to teachers who are unable to leave or to voice objections without being accused of unprofessional conduct. I also remember the look of disgust on the face of a high-ranking administrator in my own school division who, upon touring our school, was surprised to see that I was one of the two remaining teachers who still used a black board; her disgust and disappointment was compounded when I informed her that I actually enjoy having a blackboard, that the students like it too (it provides them with a tactile experience, and there is *real* chalk!), and that a black board actually has many benefits over the “Smart Boards” and “Promethean Boards” that other teachers use which consume energy, frequently crash, and must be constantly updated and maintained. Indeed, this rush towards all things technological is particularly aggressive in my school division and at my own high school, where there is a move to have cameras installed in every classroom so that “lectures” might be streamed online to increase “accessibility”; the hope is perhaps that not as many real, in-person teachers will be needed when courses can be broadcast in “real-time” using the internet to connect classrooms across the district. Many administrators are particularly keen on promoting a “One-to-One” policy whereby it will be mandated that every school child will always have access to a laptop with internet capacities. This drive to embrace novelty has similarly affected school libraries; many jurisdictions across Canada have already surplused their teacher-librarians, deeming actual hard copies of books obsolete in the “digital age” when “virtual copies” might just as easily be read. Some teachers are even encouraging students – who they deem “digital natives” -- to bring their cell phones and internet-compatible devices to class as a means to encourage “connectivity” and to enhance “communication.”

relationally in a true community of being with others, with the world, and with the divine; put more simply in terms already developed and clarified by Martin Buber, computer technologies promise us a form of “omniscience” in the realm of “I-It” experience while at the same time offering us assurances about our connectivity to all other *users* in a communal “I-Thou” world-wide web of being. Computer technologies have, in this regard, become a widely accepted substitute for the genuine spiritual exercise of pursuing wisdom, or “immortalizing.”

With a high degree of prescience at the beginning of the age of personal computers, the Venerable Chan Buddhist Master Hsuan Hua referred to computers – like their predecessors in television and radio – as “people eaters” and “man-eating goblins” inasmuch as their use typically causes human beings to “forget about everything else.”<sup>866</sup> Ironically, the promise of computers – literally “electric brains” in Chinese – to increase student engagement and educational accessibility may actually serve most powerfully to undermine our awareness of and attention to *what is* – the “everything else” of which Hsuan Hua speaks. Also writing at the beginning of the age of computers, the Canadian philosopher George Grant has commented on the falsehood of the statement: “The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used”; he challenges the notion that computers are simply neutral instruments in our hands:

The phrase “the computer does not impose” misleads, because it abstracts the computer from the destiny that was required for its making. Common sense may tell us that the computer is an instrument, but it is an instrument from within the destiny which *does* ‘impose’ itself upon us, and therefore the computer *does* impose.<sup>867</sup>

The “destiny” of which Grant speaks is that dominant form of knowing that treats the world strictly as an object for mastery by the critical-analytic intellect, which understands everything only in terms of its use. Following Grant’s insights about technology, we might say that our modern educational penchant for “information technologies” has been formed from within this “destiny” wherein “information is about objects, and comes forth as part of that science which summons objects to give us their reasons.” Moreover, Grant calls the

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<sup>866</sup> Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, “‘Electric Brains’ and Other Menaces,” transcript of a Dharma Talk (Vancouver, 1985) <http://gbm-online.com/online/dharma/brains.html> (accessed May 18, 2011).

<sup>867</sup> George Parkin Grant, “Thinking about Technology,” in *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1986), 23. Also see George Parkin Grant, “The Computer Does Not Impose on Us the Ways It Should Be Used (1976)” in *The George Grant Reader*, ed. William Christian and Sheila Grant (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 418-434.

technological “destiny” that brought forth the computer “homogenizing”<sup>868</sup>; that is to say, when the only legitimate way of knowing the world is to treat it as an object, then what is known must always be “thrown over against” oneself<sup>869</sup>; in such an homogenizing environment, what is known is *not* known through a relation of love in which the beloved is known by the lover -- as Romeo knows Juliet, as the philosopher loves wisdom, or in *theoria*, as seer and seen are united such that the human soul in its knowing becomes identical with the things known such that it is, as Thomas puts it, “all in all.”<sup>870</sup> Quite the opposite: in technological society, true knowledge of any object is premised upon the suspension of love in “objectivity.” As “the ontology of the age,”<sup>871</sup> technological knowing – the knowing in which the computer finds its origin -- is founded upon the denial of love as a legitimate way of knowing<sup>872</sup>; using Martin Buber’s well-known distinctions, modern technological knowing is an all-encompassing “I-It” knowing that dominates to the exclusion of “I-Thou” knowing.<sup>873</sup> Most important for our study is Grant’s insight that, at the heart of the technological ontology from which has arisen our modern penchant for computers necessarily lies the rejection of both philosophy and contemplation – of what Arthur Zajonc has referred to as “an epistemology of love.”<sup>874</sup>

There is a “true lie” (*alethos pseudos*) at the heart of our fervour and our faith in technology that has resulted in a mass deformation of consciousness; it is a lie about “the things that are” (*ta onta*), or what Socrates calls a lie about “the most sovereign things” (*ta kyriotata*) to what is “most sovereign” (*to kyriotato*) in ourselves.<sup>875</sup> Certainly, an infinite number of things may be known as objects, just as an infinite number of things might also be used. The sort of “infinite” knowing that computer technologies offer us in this regard

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<sup>868</sup> Grant, “Thinking about Technology,” 24.

<sup>869</sup> Our word “object” is derived from the Latin *ob-iectum*, meaning “thrown against.”

<sup>870</sup> For a useful explanation of Thomas’ understanding in this regard, see Pieper, “Reality and the Knowing Mind” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 91-93.

<sup>871</sup> Grant, “Thinking about Technology,” 32.

<sup>872</sup> Grant works out the relation between knowing and loving thoroughly as it arises from ancient thought in his fine essay, “Faith and the Multiversity” in *Technology and Justice*, 35-78. For my further analysis of Grant’s understanding of this relation, see Sean Steel, “George Grant: A Critique of Geertz’s View of Religion” *Religious Studies and Theology* 21, no. 2 (December 2002): 23-35. Parker J. Palmer makes similar observations about the relation between knowing and loving in *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper One, 1993), 1-16.

<sup>873</sup> See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970).

<sup>874</sup> See Arthur Zajonc, “Love and Knowledge: Recovering the Heart of Learning Through Contemplation” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 9 (September 2006): 1742-1759.

<sup>875</sup> Plato, *The Republic* 382ab.

depends upon our becoming “users.” The lie and consequent deformation of consciousness in our acceptance of computer technology’s alluring promise is *not* that a myriad of things might be known as use-objects by computer “users”; nor is it that computer technology can provide us with access to this sort of knowing. The lie is rather that adopting the stance of the “user” is the *only* way of knowing the world, that being “cut off” from the network is akin to being cut off from all-knowing, and that all knowledge and enjoyment is necessarily mediated to us through our status as “users” and specifically, by our use of computer technologies.

In order better to understand the deformation of consciousness that has occurred, it will be valuable to examine St. Augustine’s famous distinction between “use” (*uti*) and “enjoyment” (*frui*). In his work, *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine writes:

There are some things, then, which are to be enjoyed, others which are to be used, others still which we enjoy and use. Those things which are objects of enjoyment make us happy. Those things which are objects of use assist, and (so to speak) support us in our efforts after happiness, so that we can attain the things that make us happy and rest in them. We ourselves, again, who enjoy and use these things, being placed among both kinds of objects, if we set ourselves to enjoy those which we ought to use, are hindered in our course, and sometimes even led away from it; so that, getting entangled in the love of lower gratifications, we lag behind in, or even altogether turn back from, the pursuit of the real and proper objects of enjoyment.<sup>876</sup>

To enjoy a thing means to accept it for and by itself and to find joy in it. To use a thing, by contrast, is to make it the means to obtain what we enjoy. According to Augustine, the world of “things” must be used, but not enjoyed; only God may be enjoyed; put another way, we ought only to enjoy the things of this world inasmuch as we use them to enjoy God, in which all “things” participate by virtue of their *being* – that is, by virtue of their goodness, their beauty, and their truth. The claim I am making here is that our fascination with computer technologies has led us to confuse use (*uti*) with enjoyment (*frui*). Certainly, human beings are regularly beset by temptations and confusions whereby we “set ourselves to enjoy those things which we ought to use”; indeed, the inappropriate enjoyment of worldly things is not a specifically technological development. However, the particular danger of computer technology lies more in its similarity with sorcery as a magical means of supposing that we might enjoy by use what must not be used through becoming its

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<sup>876</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.html>, I.iii.



“users.” That is, when we relate to the transcendent – i.e. that which may be enjoyed but never used – through the medium of use as computer “users” who seek out true community through a relation of technological mastery, we are essentially engaged in the same activity as the ancient sorcerer who attempts to compel the gods to work favours for him. I suggest that genuine contemplative practices are the best way to extricate both students and teachers from this delusion.

The allure of computer technology confuses us in two respects about use (*uti*) and enjoyment (*frui*); first, it purports to offer us all knowledge of “the things that are” (*ta onta*). Indeed, the internet is believed to make all the world’s knowledge immediately accessible at the click of a few buttons. It offers “users” access to seemingly infinite information – certainly more than can be contained in any book – that may be found instantly and that is constantly being updated in “real time.” This technological promise of infinite knowledge is best illustrated by the web’s most popular search engine, Google, whose name is a misspelling of the mid-twentieth century term “googol.” Officially defined as “10 raised to the hundredth power,”<sup>877</sup> the term (along with its variant “googolplex”) was originally coined in 1938 by the nine-year-old nephew of mathematician Edward Kasner in order to name the largest countable number this side of infinity, or “one, followed by writing zeroes until you get tired.”<sup>878</sup> Google Corporation self-consciously sells itself as a kind of God-like knowing of all that human beings have ever come to know or understand. This practically “infinite” knowledge of the world is made available only to “users” such that *knowing by using* is held to be the exclusive means towards omniscient -- and in this regard, “immortalizing” – knowledge. However, by making our participation in divine omniscience conditional upon our status as “users,” computer technology obscures our awareness of what constitutes genuine “immortalization” – namely, the pursuit of wisdom; we are duped into believing that becoming “users” is the *only* way to know *ta onta*; indeed, there is a deeper and more fundamental knowing that is lost to our consciousness when it becomes over-ridden with the fervour of such technological promises. This obscured form of knowing does *not* entail use, and it arises as a testimony to the truth that not all things must be used in order to be enjoyed. This realization is experientially available to all of us

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<sup>877</sup> See, for instance, *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

<sup>878</sup> See Edward Kasner and James Newman, *Mathematics and the Imagination* (Redmond, Wash: Tempus Books of Microsoft Press, 1940).

whenever we adopt the relational “I-Thou” attitude wherein the *one who sees* is united by loving gaze with the *seen*; it is this relation that is cultivated and embodied in genuine contemplation or *theoria*, and it is precisely this sort of knowing that the “googol-knowing” or the “all-knowing” of computer technology implicitly denies. Hence, in its offer to provide us with access to all knowing, computer technology *appears* to tell the truth, but in fact invites us to suppose we know what we do not know; as students and teachers, when we are enticed by the fervour surrounding technological innovation, we easily become ignorant of our own ignorance, and hence liable to what Gareth Matthews has called “the pretence of knowing.” In this regard, our faith in computer technology serves to impede the pursuit of wisdom in schools.

Second, at the same time as it offers us omniscient, world-as-object knowledge, computer technology simultaneously proposes to deliver an *ersatz* or substitute mode of *theoria*. Particularly among young people, constant interface with networked communications provides them with a feeling that they are connected in an “I-Thou” relation to their friends, to their intimates, and more generally to “the things that are”;<sup>879</sup> moreover, such technologies provide this theoretical substitute as something that is mediated by use (*uti*) – that is, inasmuch as we become “users” of technology, we are connected to everyone and everything else; the geometric compliment of this claim, of course, is that inasmuch as we are *not* “users” of technology, we are *not* connected to anyone or anything else. I surmise that it is for this reason that so many of the young people I have taught report that they feel a deep spiritual need for their technological devices.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>879</sup> For instance, while reading Thoreau’s *Walden* with my grade eleven students, I encouraged them to engage in their own “experiments in economy” by relinquishing the use of their cell phones, iPods, and internet communication devices for a week. Students who tried this experiment most frequently reported feeling disconnected, alienated, and alone; they very often did not know what to do with themselves, and reported being bored. Some, however, found that by engaging in the contemplative exercises I suggested such as quiet, mindful walking in nature, quiet looking, or quiet listening out-of-doors, they were able to find alternative connections with the world not mediated by technology.

<sup>880</sup> The mass appeal of such experiences of *ersatz* transcendence is most poignantly depicted in the modern societal myth told through James Cameron’s 2009 blockbuster *Avatar* in which the Na’vi find themselves in constant communion with the world of Pandora through organic-technological interfaces; it is not surprising that many of my own high school students proudly report having watched this film upwards of 10 times, nor is it astonishing that so many young people relate stories of having been deeply affected by its narrative. In conjunction with my anecdotal observations, one might investigate numerous news items and pop culture reports of “Avatar Depression Syndrome,” in which people report “suicidal’ feelings after seeing ‘Avatar’ because they miss the beauty of its hyper-realistic world.” See *The Week* (posted Jan. 12, 2010) <http://theweek.com/article/index/105003/avatar-depression-syndrome> (Accessed May 20, 2011). Cf. Eliezer

Indeed, the allure of technology for young people – far more than its claim to offer us infinite knowledge of the world-of-objects, which perhaps entices teachers to a much greater degree -- is that it espouses the ability to render the enjoyment (*frui*) of a transcendent “I-Thou” relation through the mode of use (*uti*) that is associated with “I-It” experience. Computer technology claims for itself, in this regard, magical powers to render known through use (*uti*) what *cannot* be known through use, but only through enjoyment (*frui*). This, however, is a delusion.<sup>881</sup> Josef Pieper’s philosophic writings from 1966 are particularly enlightening when read in light of what has become the mass phenomenon of *ersatz* transcendence in the googolplex of technology:

Where considerations of pure ‘usefulness’ reign supreme, there will appear, almost inevitably, certain phony replicas, counterfeit imitations of the genuine religious, artistic, and philosophical endeavour. The danger lies in the difficulty of recognizing the deception, or rather, the self-deception; it seems, since all areas are “covered,” there is nothing missing. The place of genuine prayer, for instance, may be taken by some “magical” practice, the attempt to put supernatural powers at our disposal, even to make God himself into a mere functional potency that becomes part of the utilitarian purposes of worldly calculations.<sup>882</sup>

It is important to remember that genuine *theoria* can never be cultivated through the medium of “use”; as Pieper points out, “We can only be theoretical in the full sense of the word ... so long as the world is something other (and something more) than a field for human activity, its material, or even its raw material.”<sup>883</sup> *Theoria* is rather destroyed by the medium of use, and inasmuch as we are simply “users,” we are not theoretic in our disposition towards reality. As long as we conceive of ourselves solely as “users” – and even if we crave transcendence as so many young people do, but are duped into believing that transcendence is a matter of “use” – we are necessarily incapacitated for the pursuit of wisdom. In this regard, our fascination with “ICT outcomes” may serve as perhaps one of the greatest impediments to the cultivation of wisdom in schools. As Pieper remarks, “the

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Sobel, “Post-Avatar Depression” *Reality Sandwich*. <http://www.realitysandwich.com/node/40341> (accessed May 20, 2011).

<sup>881</sup> The psychological effects of supposing that a surrogate form of I-Thou experience might suffice for genuine community of being is examined in studies such as Regina J. J. M. van den Eijnden, Gert-Jan Meerkerk, Ad A. Vermulst, Renske Spijkerman, and Rutger C. M. E. Engels, “Online Communication, Compulsive Internet Use, and Psychosocial Well-Being Among Adolescents: A Longitudinal Study.” *Developmental Psychology* 44, no. 3 (2008): 655-665. This study in particular investigates the relationships between adolescents’ online communication and compulsive internet use, depression, and loneliness.

<sup>882</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, 35.

<sup>883</sup> Josef Pieper, “The Self-Destruction of Philosophy” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 116-117.

suicide of philosophy is this – once the world begins to be looked upon merely as the raw material of human activity, it is only a step to the abolition of the theoretical character of philosophy.”<sup>884</sup> When offered as a function available only to “users,” the promise of technological transcendence serves as a deformation of consciousness and marks the destruction of *theoria*. It distorts our sense of what it means to engage in the contemplative life by deluding us into believing that our “I-It” experience of computer-use might be a genuine replacement for enjoyment of the “I-Thou” relation that arises only where use is *not* present; in diverting us from genuine theorizing – an activity *not* arising in the atmosphere of use (*uti*) but in the leisure (*scholē*) of simple enjoyment (*frui*) – our faith in technology cuts us off from that highest activity of the best part of ourselves in relation to its most perfect object. As we have seen, Aristotle calls this activity “happiness” (*eudaimonia*); and this happiness is identical with *theoria* as the true mode of our “immortalization.”

Academics such as R. W. Burniske have suggested that these technological dangers can be avoided simply by limiting computer use in schools, by exposing students more consistently to the non-cyberspace world of nature, by using computers to access information about the “real world” of nature, and by using online discussion boards to discuss the relation between technology and nature.<sup>885</sup> However, I suggest that philosophic, meditative, or contemplative practices among both students and teachers are, in fact, the best cure for our technological delusions; for such practices involve the recognition of all that is refused by the homogenizing technological ontology. Simply by seeing the truth that is beheld through contemplation, we are released from all the technological delusions that might befall both students and teachers in the modern school. The Ven. Hsuan Hua remarks:

Don’t get scared when you hear me call television, radios, and computers man-eating goblins. No need to be afraid. My hope is that you will clearly recognize these things for what they are. Once you recognize them, then electric gadgets lose their power to confuse you. That’s enough to know. But if you’re confused by them, then they can gobble you down.

The same principle applies to beauty. If the sight of a pretty figure has the power to confuse you, then you’ve been swallowed by a man-eater. If the sight of money

<sup>884</sup> Pieper, “The Self-Destruction of Philosophy,” 117.

<sup>885</sup> R. W. Burniske, “Sharing the Sacred Fire: Integrating Educational Technology without Annihilating Nature” *TechTrends* 49, no. 6 (2005): 50-52.

confuses you, then you've just been devoured by a man-eater. If your purpose is to establish a big reputation, and fame confuses you, then you've just been swallowed by the goblin of fame. If good food confuses you, although you feel you've just enjoyed a tasty dish, in fact, the food has eaten you. The food has eaten your spiritual soul, your Dharma-body. It has eaten up your wisdom, and left you as stupid as can be.<sup>886</sup>

## (ii) Contemplation and the Danger of Seeing Only What We Have Made

A second problem that arises when we accept the technological ontology is that if we assume that all of our knowing depends upon our becoming “users,” we also come to accept that we only really know those things that we ourselves have made. As makers and as users of what we have made, our gaze is narrowed and fixed upon the products of our own “creative” powers; consequently, it is diverted from what we have *not* made – the “everything else” of which Hsuan Hua speaks. Our technological gaze therefore lacks the openness of the philosophic gaze which seeks to know reality *as such*; but the very possibility for *theoria* rests upon our ability to be receptive to what *is* apart from our own making and control; what Pieper refers to as the “precondition” for wisdom’s pursuit – namely, the acknowledgement that reality is “*good in itself*”<sup>887</sup> even apart from being mastered, “made,” or transformed by human efforts – is absent where the goodness of what *is* depends upon its being made by us according to our specifications and personal preferences. James Schall writes:

Teachers and students are in the same condition with regard to truth – they stand before something neither the one nor the other made. The modern idea that the only truth is the ‘truth’ we ourselves make is a narrow view that quickly cuts us off from *what is*.<sup>888</sup>

We should therefore be much more cautious about the pervasive manner in which technology is being incorporated into classroom learning among our young, impressionable students; the narrowing of their gaze that occurs as a result of their continual immersion in the technological paradigm of knowing-as-making affects not only the way that they see the world, but also the way that they see and interact with each other.<sup>889</sup>

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<sup>886</sup> Hsuan Hua, “‘Electric Brains’ and Other Menaces.”

<sup>887</sup> Pieper, “To Use and To Enjoy” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 120.

<sup>888</sup> See Schall, “On the Mystery of Teachers I Never Met,” 65.

<sup>889</sup> See, for example, Dominic E. Madell, and Steven J. Muncer, “Control over Social Interactions: An Important Reason for Young People’s Use of the Internet and Mobile Phones for Communication?” *CyberPsychology and Behaviour* 10, no. 1 (2007): 137-140. The authors find that young people often like to

For instance, the technologies with which students are most familiar and which they employ for their most intimate relations are designed to empower them as “users” in order that they might exert a high degree of control over their social interactions; indeed, the allure and marketing success of these technologies lies, at least in part, in their ergonomical capabilities – that is, in the ease with which all features of the technology might be “personalized” or shaped according to individual “user” preferences. Students become easily acclimatized to the high degree of control that these technologies afford, and it is precisely from within this atmosphere of control that they aspire as “users” to communicate and to “commune” with one another in a world-wide web of being. However, a true I-Thou relation is not possible where the need to control and to shape everything according to one’s own preferences -- to tailor everything according to one’s own individual, “psychomental” identity -- remains paramount. Indeed, the “personalized” atmosphere of technological mediation between “users” only reinforces what all contemplative traditions refer to as “the illusion of self”; by contrast, immersion in a true I-Thou relation necessarily involves *not* the reinforcement of the psychomental “I” – that is, the “i” in the iPhone, the iMac, the iPad, and the iPod, for instance -- but rather the *loosening* of our attachments to ourselves and our own preferences; just as true education (like genuine dialogue) can never be “child-centred” or “teacher-centred” but must be “*truth* centred,” so too must we be wary of the arc of educational reforms which express too great a fervour for the individualization of education according to psychomental preferences through technological making and mastery.

James Schall writes that, “We become luminous to ourselves only when we know what is not ourselves.”<sup>890</sup> Schall bids us to look beyond ourselves for a measure of ourselves. Rather than remaining in the 2500 year-old stream of education that arises from Protagoras’ sophisticated claim that “Man is the measure of all things,” rather than being dazzled by modern educational “reforms” that ostensibly “transform” education, but in fact simply offer novel ways of measuring all things according to our own psychomental states,

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use communication media such as the internet and mobile phones to communicate because these afford them greater control over their interactions. For a study of how young people use communications technologies to address their anxieties about face-to-face social interactions, see Tamyra Pierce, “Social anxiety and technology: Face-to-face communication versus technological communication among teens” *Computers in Human Behavior* 25 (2009): 1367–1372.

<sup>890</sup> Schall, *The Life of the Mind*, 11.

one who genuinely pursues wisdom must seek a true Measure (*Metron*) of all things. It is for this reason that Plato writes against Protagoras in his *Laws* that “the god is the measure of all things in the highest degree” (*ho de theos ... panton chrematon metron an eie malista*).<sup>891</sup> Protagoras allowed that “Man” (*ho anthropos*) as a species ought to be considered as this measure, and neither modern educational reforms nor the computer technologies that support them are accurately described as a revolution in Protagorean education; rather, they are only “more of the same”; indeed, they are more aptly characterized as a kind of hyper-actualization of the Protagorean dictum, wherein not the generic “Man” but the atomized individual – or for that matter, the individual’s own fluctuating psychomental states – is, and ought to be, the measure of all things. James Conroy expresses similar concerns over finding the correct measure in education when he criticizes “growing calls for an individualized, negotiated curriculum” wherein “not man but the individual is to be the measure of all things.”<sup>892</sup> Burniske’s solution to the sophistic of modern technological education is to say neither “Man” nor the individual, but rather Nature is the true *Metron*. However, following the ancients and medievals in their genuine pursuit of Wisdom, I submit that even Nature cannot be its own measure. Contemplative seeing – that unbounded seeing that seeks the true *Metron* and to know reality *as such* -- is the most powerful and best way of overcoming the dangers of the technological attitude which sees only what it has made.

### **(iii) Contemplation (*contemplatio*) as opposed to Lust of the Eyes (*concupiscentia oculorum*)**

Our fascination with computer technology, like our penchant for gazing upon the television, is problematic for a third reason. As we have seen, Thurman remarks that when we talk about seeking to increase and intensify contemplative mind in our culture, “we are actually talking about methods of transferring contemplative energies from one focus to another.” Students who gaze into the screens of their laptops, their iPads, and other communications devices are certainly engaged in a kind of seeing; however, their “surfing” on these devices is by and large a distracted and inattentive gaze “in which sensory dissatisfaction is constantly reinforced, anger and violence is imprinted, and confusion and

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<sup>891</sup> Plato, *Laws* 716c.

<sup>892</sup> Conroy, “Philosophy, Wisdom, and Reading Great Books,” 148.

the delusion of materialism is constructed and maintained.”<sup>893</sup> Indeed, the very term “surfing” implies sliding along the “surface” of things for the stimulation that it provides, never “going down” (*katabasis*) into the depth of things or deriving any insight into the things that are (*ta onta*). Our proclivity for such technological “surfing” arises as a result of our not knowing what to do with ourselves in our “free time” – that is, with this precious time of life in which, as students, we are not compelled to work for a living, or as teachers, in which we are granted the most wonderful of all gifts in having an occupation that provides us with the opportunity to share our eagerness to pursue wisdom with our students and to beckon them towards this same study and search for what *is*.

Students in school do not generally know what it really means to *be* in school; I frequently break into a smile when I pick up my youngest child from kindergarten; at the sound of the bell that marks the end of the day, a troupe of young boys very often bursts through the school doors (barely stopping to open them!) with a cheer and a roar of delight as though they were being released from prison. Schools – our only non-religious institutionalized places of leisure or *schole* -- do not cultivate the experience of leisure (*otium*), with the result that the possibility for *otium* is replaced by experiences of enmity or aversion (*odium*). Indeed, both teachers and students are so unfamiliar with what it means to engage in leisure or *schole* that the liberty of the “free space” that our society has carved out in which true “schooling” might take place becomes a problem for us – a problem we most often address with “busy work,” with evermore diverse modes of stimulation, and with numerous distractions that masquerade as “engaged learning.” However, what is needed in this situation is not *more* stimulation to “engage learners,” but rather *less* stimulation in order to develop more careful attention so that awareness of the significance of *schole* might be generated, and so that we might begin to cultivate the experience and practice of *schole* in the classroom. What is needed is something akin to the silence I spoke of earlier that enables us to listen, to be open and receptive. Marilyn Nelson has commented on how the “noise” of technology might actually serve to impede this sort of listening:

How can we teach young Americans to listen to silence? The noise of our lives is – sometimes literally – deafening. Technology has given us the 24-hour soundtrack, our own background music, our “score.” ... When do young Americans ever experience

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<sup>893</sup> Thurman, “Meditation and Education,” 1766.



silence? Perhaps only when they are glaring reproachfully at their parents with their arms folded.<sup>894</sup>

In our current school environment, “the demands for constant activity, the habit of electronic stimulation, and the production orientation of modern society make it very difficult to keep the contemplative alive”;<sup>895</sup> in such an “era of fragmentation, ever-increasing speed, multi-tasking, and continuously interrupted attention,”<sup>896</sup> what is needed, as Thurman suggests, is the “re-direction” of our natural desire to see. Essentially, what is needed is the introduction of some form of contemplative practice into the classroom.

Much of what passes for learning, in my experience of student “inquiry” in the classroom, is best described by the Latin term *curiositas* as opposed to *studiositas*. The contrasting psychological meanings of these words are “intemperate inquisitiveness” (*curiositas*) and the “temperate desire for knowledge” (*studiositas*) respectively. Both *studiositas* and *curiositas* arise from the natural wish *to see*; however, *studiositas* distinguishes itself as “zealous attention” in the “desire” to know what *is*; *studiositas* remains true to its objective of seeing what *is*, and perhaps it is for this reason that our word “study” has been called “a prayer to truth.”<sup>897</sup> By contrast, *curiositas* is associated with meddlesomeness – the *polypragmosyne* or “doing-of-many-things” that the Greeks took as their definition of injustice; *curiositas* is a kind of “many-knowing” that seeks out the experience and the stimulation of seeing rather than what is seen. *Curiositas* runs amok in the modern technological classroom where “one-to-one” policies make it every child’s right to have a networked computer at all times. Instead of being “studious,” students engage in all sorts of distractions and “multi-tasking,” such as playing computer games, social networking, watching mindless spectacles on Youtube, or even shopping online. Essentially, *curiositas* arises wherever the desire to see is not rooted in the desire “to take up” whatever is seen towards the most beautiful (*kallistos*) of sights. The allure of technology for many young people is *not* that it “engages” them in learning about what *is*, but rather that it provides them with a means of escape from themselves and from the

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<sup>894</sup> See Marilyn Nelson, “The Fruit of Silence” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 9 (Sept 2006): 1734.

<sup>895</sup> Tobin Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom” *Journal of Transformative Education* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 2004): 43.

<sup>896</sup> Deborah Haynes, “Contemplative Practice and the Education of the whole Person” *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 16, no. 2 (2005): 8.

<sup>897</sup> Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 69.

hollowness of the experience of being “rootless” in school which, prior to computer technologies, found its release along other routes. Indeed, Pieper’s comments on the nature of *curiositas* are particularly apt descriptions of many classrooms:

The degeneration into *curiositas* of the natural wish to see may be much more than a harmless confusion on the surface of the human being. It may be the sign of complete rootlessness. It may mean that man has lost his capacity for living with himself; that, in flight from himself, nauseated and bored by the void of an interior life gutted by despair, he is seeking with selfish anxiety and on a thousand futile paths that which is given only to the noble stillness of a heart held ready for sacrifice and thus in possession of itself, namely the fullness of being.<sup>898</sup>

Citing the *Journals* of André Gide, Pieper remarks that, lacking cultivated exposure to the experience and practice of leisure, we tend to encounter time that is not filled with work as “deadly emptiness” and “endless ennui.” School – but also life outside of school -- becomes for us a kind of spiritual “desert” as a result of “the destruction of the *vita contemplativa*.”<sup>899</sup> We become prone in our freedom (now experienced as spiritual displeasure and discomfort) to seek escape -- or perhaps I might coin the term “e-scape”<sup>900</sup> as it relates here to the use of computer technologies among students and educators specifically – in the distracted movements of the interested eye that careens from one object to the next in search of novelty and titillation. This desire to see resembles contemplation (*contemplatio*) inasmuch as it is a kind of gaze. However, whereas the contemplative gaze seeks to know reality, the gaze of the unleisured eye is, by contrast, concerned with the pleasure to be derived from seeing rather than the seeing of what *is* for its own sake.

This unleisured seeing is, effectively, what is meant in Christian philosophy by the phrase “lust of the eyes” (*concupiscentia oculorum*). Pieper writes: “There is a gratification in seeing that reverses the original meaning of vision [i.e., contemplation] and works disorder in man himself. The true meaning of seeing is perception of reality. But

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<sup>898</sup> Josef Pieper, “Concupiscentia of the Eyes” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 86.

<sup>899</sup> Josef Pieper, “The Purpose of Politics” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 122.

<sup>900</sup> I derive the term “e-scape” in this context from its appearance in gerontological literature in which the use of internet communications by seniors to escape their bodily infirmities and mobility challenges has been studied. See Christina E. Buse, “E-scaping the ageing body? Computer technologies and embodiment in later life” *Ageing and Society* 30 (2010): 987-1009. The term is also used in “corporate training” literature, where management personnel are trying to find ways to ensure that their underlings do not shirk their responsibilities to learn the skills taught to them through online training programs. See Jim Moshinskie, “How to Keep E-Learners from E-Scaping” *Performance Improvement* (July 2001): 30-37.

‘concupiscence of the eyes’ does not aim to perceive reality, but to enjoy ‘seeing.’”<sup>901</sup> Augustine has written an extensive psychology of *concupiscentia oculorum* in his *Confessions*. He contends that all sins are derived either singularly or from any combination of “lust of the flesh” or “carnel desire” (*concupiscentia carnis*), the “lust of the eyes” (*concupiscentia oculorum*), and the “empty pomp of living” or the “pride of life” (*ambitione saeculi*).<sup>902</sup> Numbered among these three root categories of sin, *concupiscentia oculorum* is a “vain” or “unhealthy curiosity” (*curiosa cupiditas*)<sup>903</sup> that seeks not what is truly desirable, but rather the satisfaction of its own inquisitiveness.<sup>904</sup> Augustine sees this sort of inquisitiveness at the heart of scientific investigations when they are divested of any concern for their relation to the Highest Good (*Summum Bonum*), and he likens such pursuits to a kind of sorcery or magic (*artes magicas*) that seeks to obtain knowledge for perverted purposes: “not in the hope of salvation, but simply for the love of the experience” (*non ad aliquam salutem, sed ad solam experientiam desiderata*).<sup>905</sup>

Augustine’s psychological analysis locates the root cause of *concupiscentia oculorum* in the inordinate love of worldly things: in misjudging the nature of things through not seeking out the true Measure of all these goods in their Supreme Good, or *Summum Bonum*. Augustine’s psychology is therefore deeply rooted in the tradition of Christian contemplative practice, which involves not the heightening of our sense of self-importance, self-regard, or self-love (*amor sui*), but rather a turning of the soul (*periagoge*),<sup>906</sup> or a “re-directing” of our gaze away from all these finite goods towards the one true good to be found in the love of wisdom (*amor Dei*)<sup>907</sup>:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of

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<sup>901</sup> Pieper, “Concupiscence of the Eyes,” 86.

<sup>902</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10.30.41; cf. 3.8.16 where Augustine writes that “These are the main categories of sin which sprout from the lust for power, the gratification of the eye, and the gratification of corrupt nature – from one or two of these or from all three together” (*haec sunt capita iniquitatis quae pullulant principandi et spectandi et sentiendi libidine aut una aut duabus earum aut simul omnibus*).

<sup>903</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10.35.54; cf. 10.35.55 where he refers to *concupiscentia oculorum* as *morbo cupiditatis*.

<sup>904</sup> St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10.35.54.

<sup>905</sup> St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10.35.55.

<sup>906</sup> Indeed, education is described as this “art of turning around” (*techne ... tes periagoges*) See Plato, *The Republic* 518d ff.

<sup>907</sup> At the beginning of Bk VIII of his *City of God*, Augustine writes that “the true philosopher is the lover of God” (*verus philosophus est amator Dei*). See St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. John O’Meara (London: Penguin, 1972), VIII.1; 298. Latin text available online at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/august.html>.

the eys, the pride in riches – comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.<sup>908</sup>

For Augustine -- as for *all* who pursue wisdom -- a genuine education *must* be “immortalizing.” Aristotle writes that the “immortalization” (*to athanatizein*) brought about through contemplative practice is the precise activity of our highest happiness (*eudaimonia*); according to Anaxagoras, contemplative practice (*theoria*) is what we were born for;<sup>909</sup> in Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima remarks that “it is in contemplating (*theomenoi*) the Beautiful Itself (*auto to kalon*)” that “human life is to be lived,”<sup>910</sup> for only “when a human being looks (*blepontos*) *there* and contemplates (*theomenou*) *that* with that by which one must contemplate it, and be with it” that true virtue is begotten in him, making him “dear to god” (*theophilei*), and “if any other among men is immortal (*athanato*), he is too.”<sup>911</sup>

## 2. The Challenge of Contemplative Education Programming in Schools

### (i) What is Contemplative Education?

Brian Stock has commented thoughtfully on the long-standing Western bifurcation of academics from contemplative traditions. In particular, he questions the frequent supposition that the break between contemplative, spiritual practice on the one hand and academic study on the other occurred during the Reformation or the Scientific Revolution. In reality, he contends, “the decisive changes occurred during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the first European universities emerged from monastic and cathedral schools and undertook to complete a largely Aristotelian program in logic, the natural sciences, and theology.” He points out that “virtually none of the ‘mystics’ of the early modern period ... worked within what was taking shape as the modern humanities.”<sup>912</sup> Rick Repetti similarly

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<sup>908</sup> 1 John 2:15-17.

<sup>909</sup> Aristotle records in his *Eudemian Ethics*: “They say that when Anaxagoras was asked why anyone should wish to have been born rather than not, he answered, “In order to *contemplate* the heaven and the structure of the world-order as a whole.” See Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* i.5 1216a11; cf. Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy*, 191.

<sup>910</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 211d.

<sup>911</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 212a.

<sup>912</sup> See Brian Stock, “The Contemplative Life and the Teaching of the Humanities” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 9 (Sept. 2006): 1761-1762 (also available at [www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org)); cf. Tobin Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom” 29; also Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* 39.

observes that “until recently there has been little contemplative pedagogy within the Western academy,” and that “contemplative pedagogy remained largely outside mainstream higher education in the United States prior to about 2000.”<sup>913</sup> However, Thurman points out that this bifurcation never occurred in Asia, where contemplative institutions at times received their licenses from governments “by creating a second society – ritually outside the ordinary society – wherein contemplation in the directions we consider positive was encouraged, and by tacitly promising not to interfere too much with the dominant culture’s ongoing contemplation of its own necessity.”<sup>914</sup>

“Contemplative education” names the movement to re-integrate these two strands of learning in Western educational institutions – especially at the post-secondary level, but also in primary and secondary schools. Stock remarks that the ambition driving this re-integration is fraught with difficulties since “Humanities methods have been extraordinarily stable over something like five centuries,” and “all attempts to introduce alternatives have been successfully rebuffed.” Moreover, Stock writes:

[W]hat one wants, ideally, is not an increased academic interest in meditation ... but the reestablishment of a tradition in which, along the model of some Eastern cultures, meditative practices and other intellectual activities are mutually supportive: a situation in which the person who meditates is not stepping out of the mainstream of his or her society, but is engaging in something normal and unremarkable, like being fit.<sup>915</sup>

Nevertheless, in order to foster these attitudinal changes, a vast literature has arisen in a short period of time concerning the nature and benefits of contemplative education. Within this body of scholarship, Tobin Hart’s definition of contemplation as “a third way of knowing that complements the rational and the sensory”<sup>916</sup> enjoys broad acceptance. Definitions of contemplative education, however, vary in both their focus and precision.

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<sup>913</sup> Rick Repetti, “The Case for a Contemplative Philosophy of Education” *New Directions for Community Colleges* 151 (Fall 2010): 6. Arguably, the 1974 founding of Naropa University in Boulder, CO by the Tibetan Buddhist teacher and Oxford University scholar Chögyam Trungpa marks a watershed moment in the contemplative education movement. Bai, Scott, and Donald see the contemplative education “movement” beginning to emerge in the late 1960’s with such publications as George Leonard’s 1968 book, *Education and Ecstasy*, and Michael Murphy’s 1969 article, “Education and Transcendence” in the first issue of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. See Bai, Charles Scott, and Beatrice Donald. “Contemplative Pedagogy and Revitalization of Teacher Education” *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 325.

<sup>914</sup> Thurman, “Meditation and Education,” 1767.

<sup>915</sup> Stock, “The Contemplative Life and the Teaching of the Humanities,” 1762.

<sup>916</sup> See Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 29; cf. Eleanor Rosch, “Beginner’s Mind: Paths to the Wisdom that is Not Learned” in *Teaching For Wisdom*, 155.

For instance, following Hart's definition of contemplation, Patricia Jennings writes that, "Contemplative education refers more to *how* one learns than *what* one learns." Aligned with what we have already identified as the Socratic practice of becoming aware of our own ignorance, Jennings observes that, "in some cases," contemplative education "refers to how one unlearns unhealthy habitual patterns."<sup>917</sup> This dual aspect to contemplative education as a way of both *unlearning* one's own habitual pretence to knowledge as well as *learning* to see things with a greater receptivity is also noted by Eric Kyle. He contends that these two "primary elements" are recognized by all the literature on contemplative education.<sup>918</sup>

Other academics such as Mackler, Aguilar, and Serena follow Thich Nhat Hanh in his stress on the practice of mindfulness as the foundation for contemplative education. According to Hanh's understanding, mindfulness is best described as "our ability to be aware of what is going on both inside us and around us. It is the continuous awareness of our bodies, emotions, and thoughts."<sup>919</sup> When mindfulness is applied to education, "it becomes what today is called contemplative education."<sup>920</sup> Roeser and Peck build their own definition of contemplative education upon this stress on the importance of mindfulness. They differentiate the "particular forms of awareness"<sup>921</sup> or mindfulness that are associated with this "third way of knowing" drawing special attention to the two basic types of meditative practice -- these being "calming" or "one-pointedness" meditation (*samatha* or *samadhi*) which develops concentration, and "seeing-through" or "insight" meditation (*vipassana*) wherein the mind watches the flux of consciousness and learns of the inherent

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<sup>917</sup> Patricia Jennings, "Contemplative Education and Youth Development" *New Directions for Youth Development* 118 (Summer 2008): 103.

<sup>918</sup> "For the first element, contemplative education is asserted to foster a state of complete awareness, openness, and receptivity to each moment and whatever arises therein. ... The second element that the literature highlights in defining contemplative education is that these aspects of openness and receptivity then allow the contemplative practitioner[s] to engage their surroundings in novel ways." See Eric Kyle, "Being Mindful of Mindlessness: An Overview of Contemplative Education Programs for Secular Settings" Paper from the Religious Education Association (REA) Annual Meeting (Denver, CO., Nov. 7-9, 2010): 1-2 (available at [www.religiouseducation.net](http://www.religiouseducation.net)).

<sup>919</sup> See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Mindful Movements* (California: Parallax Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>920</sup> Jane Mackler, Argelia Pena Aguilar, Karina Camacho Serena, "What is contemplative education and what are some ways to introduce it into higher education in Mexico?" *Memorias Del Iv Foro Nacional De Estudios En Lenguas* (Fonael 2008), 262.

<sup>921</sup> Robert W. Roeser, and Stephen C. Peck, "An Education in Awareness: Self, Motivation, and Self-Regulated Learning in Contemplative Perspective" *Educational Psychologist* 44, no. 2 (2009): 119.

“emptiness” (*sunyata*) of all things.<sup>922</sup> In their view, contemplative education may be defined as

a set of pedagogical practices designed to cultivate the potentials of mindful awareness and volition in an ethical-relational context in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living, and caring for others are also nurtured. ... At minimum, contemplative education involves active student participation with a competent teacher ... and a set of experiential learning opportunities designed to help students develop clear, calm, and concentrated states of awareness ... The element common to “contemplative education” is the presence of a disciplined practice ... in which the shifting and sustaining of the focus of awareness on particular objects over time ... or the shifting and sustaining of the focus of awareness on the moment to moment flow of phenomenologically represented content ... is the central practice.<sup>923</sup>

In this definition, Roeser and Peck portray the “disciplined practices” of *samatha* and *vipassana* meditation primarily as means of “self-regulation” to cultivate ethical or moral behaviour. Eleanor Rosch, however, does not focus on contemplative practice solely in terms of its benefits to the practitioner, or its instrumentality for the promotion of social harmony. She observes that contemplative education programs tend to be directed towards “three main areas”: namely, “meditative relaxation and mindfulness,” the cultivation of “social-emotional intelligence and compassion,” and “the ability to tap into and communicate about the serious concerns of life and death that are usually considered off limits for discussion by young people in our society.”<sup>924</sup> Here, Rosch acknowledges that although contemplative activity may be used to enhance “social-emotional intelligence and compassion,” “meditative relaxation and mindfulness” may also be engaged in for its own sake, just as certain “serious questions” may be asked which have no moral, ethical, or societal value in terms of personal utility or their ability to enhance social harmony.

Other academics have sought to bring clarity to the use of ancillary terms in discussions about contemplative education. For instance, Rick Repetti explains that discourses about “contemplative education” may be divided into the three categories of “contemplative practices,” “contemplative pedagogies,” and “contemplative studies.” Briefly, Repetti defines contemplative practices as “metacognitive exercises in which attention is focused on any element of conscious experience.” Contemplative pedagogies

<sup>922</sup> For a good, basic explanation of these two forms of meditation, see Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1959), 68.

<sup>923</sup> Roeser, and Peck, “An Education in Awareness,” 127.

<sup>924</sup> Eleanor Rosch, “Beginner’s Mind: Paths to the Wisdom that is Not Learned,” 155.

are distinguished from such practices inasmuch as they are said to be “philosophies of education that promote the use of contemplative practices as valid modes not only of teaching and learning but of knowledge construction and inquiry.” In this way, the term “contemplative pedagogy” names our various explanations and reasons for *why* we engage in contemplative practice. Finally, contemplative studies are said to “involve the pursuit of scholarly research about the traditions, epistemology, mechanics, and scientific effectiveness of contemplative practices.”<sup>925</sup> Contemplative studies certainly involve the investigation of traditional philosophic and religious “wisdom literature,” but Harold Roth adds that they also include the “fields of humanities, sciences, and creative arts.”<sup>926</sup>

In its own massive undertaking to map out the current status of programs utilizing “contemplative techniques,” the Garrison Institute points to the virtue of offering both a “broad” as well as a “narrow” definition of contemplative education in order to account for the two types of contemplative programming that they discover at work in “K-12 Educational Settings.” In the Institute’s view, “a narrow definition of contemplation in education could include only those programs that directly foster mindfulness”; however, “a more general definition could include those programs that foster contemplation through various techniques.”<sup>927</sup> Applying these broad and narrow definitions alternately, the Institute finds that “Programs using contemplative techniques in mainstream educational settings seem to fall into one of two pedagogical categories”; they are either *bona fide* “contemplative programs” – i.e., their prime focus is to develop what Hart calls a “third way of knowing” – or they are programs “that use contemplative techniques but are not contemplative programs”; in other words, they “foster contemplation in support of other, typically broader goals, such as the development of social and emotional skills.”<sup>928</sup>

Clearly, a broad array of definitions for “contemplative education” exists within the current literature. Amidst this diversity, the Garrison Institute’s distinction between genuine contemplative programming and non-contemplative programming that makes use of contemplative techniques is extremely important in terms of developing our understanding of the relationship between what is called “contemplative education” and the genuine

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<sup>925</sup> Rick Repetti, “The Case for a Contemplative Philosophy of Education,” 10.

<sup>926</sup> Harold D. Roth, “Contemplative Studies: Prospects for a New Field,” 1787.

<sup>927</sup> Garrison Institute, *Garrison Institute Report: Contemplation and Education - Current Status of Programs Using Contemplative Techniques in K-12 Educational Settings: A Mapping Report* (June 2005): 8.

<sup>928</sup> Garrison Institute, *Garrison Institute Report: Contemplation and Education*, 3.



pursuit of wisdom. We can expect that programs of the former sort will most closely model the pursuit of wisdom, whereas programs of the latter sort will serve purposes at best peripheral to wisdom's pursuit. In programs of the latter sort, we encounter the same problems that we discovered in the relationship between P4C programming and genuine philosophizing. Namely, just as philosophy – being the genuine pursuit of wisdom -- cannot simply be metacognition, neither can “contemplative practice” – as genuine *theoria* – simply be a metacognitive activity, or thinking-about-thinking; it cannot be solely concerned with observing the self, with watching the thoughts and the emotions fluctuate, with “seeing through” them (*vipassana*), or perhaps with learning to steady and still them (*samatha*); nor can it simply be about the development of good reasoning skills, good social behaviours, or the cultivation of virtue, since even virtue is not its own end.<sup>929</sup> True contemplative practice involves leaving all thoughts about the self and all self-assessment behind; ultimately, it is a form of “self-transcendence”<sup>930</sup> that, like genuine philosophizing, is a seeking-to-know (*zetesis*) through seeing (*theoria*) the whole of reality *as such*.

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<sup>929</sup> This statement is contrary to the Stoic teachings of Seneca, for instance, who writes that “virtue is its own reward” in Letter 74 of his *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* concerning “Virtue as a Refuge from Worldly Distractions.” Marcus Aurelius too speaks of virtue as its own reward in his *Meditations* (for examples, see V.6; VII.73; IX.42, and XI.4). In his assessment of the Stoic view, Pieper asks, “Do we not agree? Does not the moral act truly confer a satisfaction which makes for deeper happiness than any gift that one man can transmit to another?” While certainly a great deal of happiness can be derived from the exercise of virtue, Pieper concludes that “man cannot live by such happiness. The deepest thirst cannot be allayed in this way,” and “the true expectation of the human heart will not accept such a substitute” (34). Rather, “we must recognize that the whole of morality points to something beyond itself” and “that it makes arrangements for something else.” See Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 92. Indeed, the virtues – when conceived of as “self-made ethical perfections” might actually interfere with the pursuit of wisdom, “although these virtues belong to the very notion of an orderly man!” See Pieper, “On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy,” 168. Buddhist mythology echoes Pieper’s assessment of virtue when it depicts rebirth into the life of a human being as far better than even being reborn into one of the Heavenly Realms as a god, since even gods in all their virtue are prone fall back into lower existences and are not themselves free from rebirth on the wheel of suffering (*samsara*). Plato depicts a similar lesson when he has Socrates recount the myth of Er in Book X of the *Republic*. In this tale of the afterlife, all sorts of good and virtuous men who have spent their term of enjoyment in the Isles of the Blessed return to the great plain of Hades to draw lots for their next life, but they make wicked and unwise choices (just as those returning from Tartarus make better choices). Only the philosopher consistently knows and chooses which life is best; hence, only the philosopher is liberated from the great wheel of suffering.

<sup>930</sup> Robert Altobello thoughtfully observes that this contemplative capacity for “self-transcendence” is necessary not simply in philosophic gazing upon the whole of what is, but also for masterful study in any of the academic disciplines: “To do the kind of work necessary to master the complexities animating our disciplines at the highest level of academic development, we had to think deeply about, and become immersed in, the material we were studying. After all, if we are distracted by the persistent voice of self-assessment, the effectiveness of our contemplation proportionately declines.” Citing Csikszentmihalyi, Altobello remarks that, “Optimal performance and creative breakthroughs consistently occur in moments of self-transcendence.” In Altobello’s view, “the moment of unselfconscious immersion in contemplation” is of the greatest significance, since it marks the “moment when genuine ownership of the field of discourse

That contemplative practice cannot rightly be conceived of simply as metacognition is acknowledged not only by the Samkhya and Yoga *darsanas* (which explicitly distinguish *purusa* from all such psycho-mental activities), but also by the Buddhist tradition, which disavows any misconstrual of Ch'an practice as a strictly psychological exercise since there is, in fact, no soul (*anatman*) that thinks or feels, nor is there any soul to "psychologize"; similarly, St. Teresa writes that Christian meditation cannot truly be called "metacognitive" thinking-about-thinking, or watching oneself and one's inner states; for "while we are continually absorbed in contemplating the weakness of our earthly nature, the springs of our anions will never flow free from the mire of timid, weak, and cowardly thoughts."<sup>931</sup> Teresa explains that contemplation of our strictly mortal nature cannot provide us with the highest sight of what is most lovable as the object of genuine *theoria*. Therefore, when we contemplate, our gaze must not be distracted by any lesser goods; contrary to Repetti's definition of "contemplative studies," the genuine pursuit of wisdom through contemplative practice cannot simply be "the pursuit of scholarly research about the traditions, epistemology, mechanics, and scientific effectiveness of contemplative practices," for scholarly research and writing – no matter how profound – is *not* Wisdom's equivalent; also in disagreement with Repetti's definition above, we must not misconstrue "contemplative practice" simply as the metacognitive exercise of thinking about our thinking, our reasoning, and our emotional states;<sup>932</sup> rather, genuine "contemplative practice" always seeks beyond all such cognitions for the *Summum Bonum*. St. Teresa therefore counsels those who would pursue Wisdom: "I maintain, my daughters, that we should fix our eyes on Christ our only good, and on His saints; there we shall learn true

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occurs." See Robert Altobello, "Concentration and Contemplation" *Journal of Transformative Education* 5 no. 4 (October 2007): 364.

<sup>931</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, I.ii.11.

<sup>932</sup> All the world's contemplative traditions are in general agreement about the manner in which *theoria* must transcend strictly meta-cognitive or psychological exercises. For instance, the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* writes: "Understand that in this exercise you are to forget all other creatures besides yourself, or their deeds or yours; and in this exercise, you must also forget yourself and your own activities, as well as all other creatures and their activities, because of God." Indeed, even in a metacognitive state, after all else has been put down in a "dark cloud of forgetting," "what remains between you and your God is a simple knowing and feeling of your own being. This knowing and feeling must always be destroyed, before it is possible for you to experience in truth the perfection of this exercise." See Anonymous, *Cloud of Unknowing*, XLII.

humility, and our minds will be ennobled, so that self-knowledge will not make us base and cowardly.”<sup>933</sup>

## **(ii) The Need for Contemplative Education Programs and Where they “Fit” in Schools**

Richard Brady has most poignantly discussed the importance of introducing contemplative educational practices into the classroom from a Buddhist perspective. In particular, he writes about how the educational structures of our current school system thwart the cultivation of each of the “seven factors of enlightenment” in the Buddha’s teachings -- these being joy, rest, concentration, curiosity, diligence, equanimity, and mindfulness:

Education at younger and younger ages is seen today primarily as a means for obtaining success in the future. This focus on future attainment works against the first factor of enlightenment, experiencing joy in the present. Joy is further eroded by the sense of competition and isolation that some students experience. Because students believe that the possibility of happiness in the future depends on how much they are able to accomplish in the present, they are continually engaged in doing, shortchanging and devaluing the second factor, rest. Due to multi-tasking, with many things to attend to, and thinking ahead to the results they hope to attain, the quality of many students’ concentration, the third factor, is poor.

The results that students hope to achieve are often dependent on their success on examinations of prescribed knowledge and skills. This has a negative impact on their natural curiosity, the fourth factor. As students grow older, these conditions lead to an increase in negative mind states such as anxiety and anger. The antidotes, inner awareness and habits that promote well-being on an ongoing basis, constitute the fifth factor, diligence. However, education typically focuses students’ attention outward and places no value on nor allots time for their inner lives. Negative mind states proliferate, leading to unhealthy, sometimes chronic, stress, as equanimity, the sixth factor and one of the most important of these habits, remains undeveloped.

Mindfulness, the seventh factor, is the key with which students could open the other factors. However, narrow focus on achievement, overemphasis of critical thinking, and absorption with the future all work against students developing the ability to be fully open to the richness of the present moment.<sup>934</sup>

Echoing Brady’s assessment, John Miller remarks that “our education system is limited to head learning” that is driven primarily by “an economic agenda” of competition and successful participation in the global economy. The effects of such an education-for-success in its emphasis on individual achievement and test scores are, in his view, apparent

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<sup>933</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, I.ii.12.

<sup>934</sup> Richard Brady, “Realizing True Education with Mindfulness” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 6, no. 3 (2008): 87.

in “the corporate corruption that we see today.”<sup>935</sup> In agreement with Miller’s assessment of our educational system as “head learning,” Eleanor Rosch comments that “formal educational systems around the world specialize in feeding information to the outer mind, and it is generally done in such a way that students are socialized (some might say brainwashed) into abandoning all other portions of their intelligence.”<sup>936</sup> Deborah Haynes too recognizes the manner in which our current educational system has abandoned a key component of our intelligence – what I have been referring to throughout this thesis as our capacity for *noesis* – and she offers contemplative education as a means to re-introduce this “third way of knowing” as a truly transformational “epistemology based not on data, information, and the separation of subject and object, but on knowledge, wisdom, and insight about the interconnectedness of all things.”<sup>937</sup>

In agreement with our previous analysis, Rosch observes that the failure of our public schools to cultivate the contemplative capacities of students is not a result of these schools being secular; in fact, “most religious education also consists of the delivery of information, only in this case information about particular theologies.” Nor is the concern to cultivate critical-analytic capacities inappropriate in schools. Certainly “there is nothing wrong with knowledge on the outer level.” However, as Rosch so aptly points out, “It is the cutting off of access to the deeper levels that are said to nourish the outer that is at issue.”<sup>938</sup> Sadly, school boards and governments, parents and administrators, as well as teachers and students are so focused on the importance of honing our critical-analytic thinking for the purposes of future prosperity and success that they are unable to see any value in genuine contemplative practice. In such a learning environment, the Garrison Institute observes that, “Schools that solely aim to deliver measurable academic outcomes are unlikely to promote contemplation, love or forgiveness successfully.”<sup>939</sup> However, if we take the ancient and medieval insights of “wisdom literature” and philosophy seriously, by “cutting off” this “third way of knowing” in our educational institutions, we are inadvertently also cutting ourselves off from the possibility of pursuing our “highest happiness.”

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<sup>935</sup> John P. Miller, “Contemplative Practices in Teacher Education” in *Sourcebook 3*, part 2 of *Educating for Gross National Happiness in Bhutan*, draft by GPI Atlantic (available at [www.education.gov.bt](http://www.education.gov.bt)): 34.

<sup>936</sup> Eleanor Rosch, “Beginner’s Mind: Paths to the Wisdom that is Not Learned,” 154.

<sup>937</sup> Deborah Haynes, “Contemplative Practice and the Education of the whole Person,” 10.

<sup>938</sup> Eleanor Rosch, “Beginner’s Mind: Paths to the Wisdom that is Not Learned,” 154.

<sup>939</sup> Garrison Institute, *Garrison Institute Report: Contemplation and Education*, 32.

Contemplative education is “needed” not simply as a means for *students* to seek out their “highest happiness”; *teachers* too must be provided with time in which to contemplate. Indeed, I suggest that contemplative practice is the *best* way to improve teaching and instruction in the classroom. Here, I draw upon Margret Buchmann’s study of Thomas Aquinas’ analysis of the nature of teaching.<sup>940</sup> As we have already seen, Thomas demonstrates that teaching is not simply an activity of the *vita activa*; that is, it is not only active service towards and love of one’s neighbour in the sharing of truth; teaching must flow from the *vita contemplativa* as a manifestation of the contemplative life. Following Thomas’ insights, the activity of teaching itself, first and foremost, must proceed from the teacher’s own love of truth. All teachers, whether they offer instruction in English or Social Studies, Mathematics or Science, Physical Education, Art, or Music, ought to be concerned with truth, and with helping students to see the truth. But truth, like virtue, cannot exist for itself alone. In the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates describe truth metaphorically as the light of the good that illuminates being.<sup>941</sup> Put another way, as the image of the Good in the realm of intelligible things, truth is not self-sufficient, not being as fair as the Good Itself, but only its image.<sup>942</sup> Inasmuch as teachers pursue what is true and endeavour to lead their students towards what is true, this pursuit necessarily involve them in the search for the reality of which truth itself is the intelligible image. As Pieper puts it, “truth is the self-manifestation and state of evidence of real things.” It is something “secondary, following from something else.” Primary and precedent to truth are existing things, or the real. “Knowledge of truth, therefore, aims ultimately not at ‘truth’ but, strictly speaking, at gaining sight of reality.”<sup>943</sup> Teachers, then, in order to share the truth with their students, must themselves be lovers of true sights, and in loving truth, they engage in the contemplative life as lovers of the sight of what *is*. For this reason, Buchmann contends that

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<sup>940</sup> See Margret Buchmann, “Argument and Contemplation in Teaching” *Oxford Review of Education* 14, no.2 (1988); cf. Buchmann, “The Careful Vision: How Practical is Contemplation in Teaching,” in *American Journal of Education* 98, no. 1 (November 1989): 36. Also Buchmann, “Practical Arguments Are No Accounts of Teacher Thinking: But Then, What Is?” Occasional Paper No. 119. Institute for Research on Teaching, College of Education, Michigan State University (March 1988).

<sup>941</sup> Plato, *The Republic* 508b.

<sup>942</sup> Plato has Socrates discuss both truth and knowledge of the truth in this regard: “As for knowledge (*epistemen*) and truth (*aletheian*), just as in the other region it is right to hold light and sight sunlike, but to believe them to be sun is not right; so, too, here, to hold these two to be like the good (*agathon*) is right, but to believe that either of them is the good is not right. The condition which characterizes the good must receive still greater honour (*meizonos timeteon*).” See Plato, *The Republic* 508c-509a.

<sup>943</sup> Josef Pieper, “Knowing and Believing” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 161.

the improvement of teaching practices does not depend upon improving the critical-analytic argumentation skills of teachers (although this would be a fine thing too!); rather, “Teacher thinking depends on contemplation and a quality of wanting.”<sup>944</sup> Buchmann explains:

What does my argument so far suggest about the notion that philosophers and researchers can improve teacher thinking by improving the premises of practical arguments? Thought in relation to teaching as action does not account for teacher thinking, the improvement of which requires an advancement of contemplation in the first place. To be teachers, people must ... raise their sights to knowledge and other people. ... Teachers must also want to do the virtuous actions required of teaching and enjoy performing them. To move teachers’ minds from where they are to where they might better be, the concept of practical argument is insufficient, for teacher thinking depends on contemplation and a quality of wanting.<sup>945</sup>

Just as the genuine incorporation of “contemplative practices” into school curricula requires a transformation in our thinking about education – i.e., we must not simply direct our efforts to “reform” education along the sophistical route of the past 2500 years, but rather “turn around” (*periagoge*) to “pursue wisdom” -- so too must the onerous manner in which the working days of teachers are organized also change,<sup>946</sup> not to mention the way that we are treated during our “Professional Development Days.”<sup>947</sup> Put simply, in order that the

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<sup>944</sup> Margret Buchmann, “Argument and Contemplation in Teaching,” 209. Cf. similar comments by Angelo Caranfa concerning importance of “hunger” and “thirst” in “Contemplative Instruction and the Gifts of Beauty, Love, and Silence” 584.

<sup>945</sup> Margret Buchmann, “Practical Arguments Are No Accounts of Teacher Thinking: But Then, What Is?” 15-16.

<sup>946</sup> In her own teaching journals, University of Calgary Professor Jackie Seidel records: “*Elementary School Truths: Everything and everyone is rushing, rushing, rushing. So many meetings. So much curriculum to cover. So many children with so many needs. And then report cards and playground supervision and teacher workshops. How and where is there time to go to the washroom and eat some lunch? Never mind finding time to contemplate?*” See Jackie Seidel, “Some Thoughts on Teaching as Contemplative Practice” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 9 (Sept 2006): 1901.

<sup>947</sup> School, with its emphasis on “use” (*uti*) as opposed to “enjoyment” (*frui*), has long been experienced by children as a Promethean prison sentence that each day ends shortly after 3PM only to be renewed the following morning. As a teacher who loves truth as the image of what *is*, I have great sympathy for students who experience school – their *most precious* daily opportunity to practice *scholē* -- as a prison. I regularly have this exact experience of school each PD Day. In deep sympathy with my students, I cannot see how one can be a good teacher without also being a good “student” -- one who exhibits *studiositas*, or that “zeal” and desire for truth. Sadly, I have never attended a PD Day that did not mirror – in fact, I would say, “intensify” – the lack of enjoyment that students experience in being forced to sit in a room from which one cannot escape, in which certain important lines of questioning are *not* permissible, and the asking of such questions is labelled “unprofessional.” PD days are not, in my experience, at all related to the development of that “quality of wanting” to which Buchmann refers. Rather, they are largely futile exercises in distrust and accountability in which teacher-professionals are prohibited from cultivating their *studiositas*; and during which their opportunity to learn how to exercise *otium* is taken away with the result that, by and large, they respond with feelings of *odium* and resentment.

student's school day might be transformed, so too must the teacher's school day change to foster rather than stifle contemplation, or what Buchmann calls this "quality of wanting."

Finally, perhaps the greatest difficulty in demonstrating to others where contemplative education "fits" in schools arises from the challenge of trying to explain to others what is the precise nature of contemplation. Indeed, as a culture we lack any great familiarity with this "third way of knowing"; arguably, it is a kind of knowing that is beaten out of us at ever-younger ages as we press our children to "grow up" and to focus even more stringently upon the business of productivity and competition. Even admitting that such a "third way of knowing" is possible is not easy for us, since our own sciences, in their stress on dianoetic thinking, do not generally recognize the legitimacy of *noesis*;<sup>948</sup> as a matter of course, and in order to uphold our notion of "value-free" science, we dissociate our search for truth from its source in the good (truth being the image of the good), and consequently fail to grasp the true nature of contemplative science. In agreement with our own thesis, Rosch contends that "Western psychology is of little help for any of this," since it may describe "mechanisms of the body, cognition, emotion, and personality but has remained largely oblivious to anything else." We share her view that, "Even research done on meditation and spirituality tends to be formulated from the perspective of the outer mind," and not suprisingly, "if that is what is put into the research, that is what is gotten out of it."<sup>949</sup> In short, to explain what contemplative education is and how it "fits" in schools is itself a challenge since the sort of knowing (*noesis*) that it involves is itself not widely considered to be a possibility by the authority of our own modern empirical sciences. For

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<sup>948</sup> In his wonderful discussion of "peak experiences," Abraham Maslow challenges the view that science can operate without a contemplative element that relates the discovery of truth to what he calls the aim of Plato's science in "the cognition of being." Maslow writes: "If one works with great creators, great scientists, the creative scientists, *that* [namely, in noetic terms of seeing what *is*] is the way they talk. The picture of the scientist must change, and is giving way to an understanding of the creative scientist, and the creative scientist lives by peak experiences. He lives for the moments of glory when a problem solves itself, when suddenly through a microscope he sees things in a very deifferent way, the moments of revelation, of illumination, insight, understanding, ecstasy. They are vital for him" (171). Maslow writes that "Scientists are very, very shy and embarrassed about this" – ostensibly because it is the business of science to discover and apply the axioms of its own discipline dianoetically, and not to take these principles up themselves in relation to their own First Principle in the Good through *noesis*. And yet, the enjoyment that scientists experience through the sight of the truth is derived precisely from the manner in which such sights remind them of being, and its ground in the Greatest Good (*Ariston*). Maslow remarks that "They refuse to talk about it in public," but this is the real manner in which scientific investigation proceeds, and "as for the usual textbook on how you do science, it is total nonsense." See Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1971), 171-172.

<sup>949</sup> Eleanor Rosch, "Beginner's Mind: Paths to the Wisdom that is Not Learned," 154.

this reason, it is common in the advocacy literature about contemplative education to try and “sell” its incorporation into the classroom not based upon its noetic merits, but rather as means of achieving widely-held and laudable goals such as better grades, better health, enhanced attention spans, lower truancy and drop-out rates, and diminished violence in schools.

### **(iii) A Survey of Research and Advocacy Scholarship on Contemplative Education**

In a short period of time, a number of contemplative education programs have been established at various colleges and universities throughout the United States;<sup>950</sup> similarly, a broad array of academic societies, institutes, and think tanks have arisen to research and advocate for the implementation of various forms of contemplative education at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels of study.<sup>951</sup> These post-secondary institutions and think tanks have produced an extensive body of research, the majority of which focuses on only one form of contemplative practice – meditation.<sup>952</sup> Nonetheless, their voluminous body of work demonstrates the positive results that accrue from contemplative practices.<sup>953</sup> Some of the beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation include the promotion of health and quality of life,<sup>954</sup> as well as the benefits of meditation

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<sup>950</sup> Such programs exist at Amherst College, The University of San Diego, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts, as well as Naropa University and Brown University.

<sup>951</sup> See, for instance, the Garrison Institute ([www.garrisoninstitute.org](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org)), the Impact Foundation ([www.theimpactfoundation.org](http://www.theimpactfoundation.org)), the Center for the Advancement of Contemplative Education (CACE) ([www.naropa.edu/cace](http://www.naropa.edu/cace)), the Mindfulness in Education Network ([www.mindfulled.org](http://www.mindfulled.org)), the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society ([www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org)), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) (<http://casel.org>), the Mind and Life Institute ([www.mindandlife.org](http://www.mindandlife.org)), Roots of Empathy ([www.rootsofempathy.org](http://www.rootsofempathy.org)), and the Tides Center’s Project Renewal ([www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org](http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org)). Contemplative Studies research institutes have also been established in Europe; see, for instance, the Forum for Contemplative Studies in Bath and Bristol ([www.contemplativeforum.co.uk](http://www.contemplativeforum.co.uk)). For a more thorough list of such institutions, see the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s links page at [www.contemplativemind.org/programs/academic/links.html](http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/academic/links.html); cf. the Garrison Institute’s link page at ([www.garrisoninstitute.org](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org)).

<sup>952</sup> Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 34.

<sup>953</sup> See, for instance, the extensive bibliographic research page provided by the Garrison Institute at [http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=231&Itemid=1031](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=231&Itemid=1031).

<sup>954</sup> See J. Kabat-Zinn and A. Chapman-Waldrop, “Compliance with an outpatient stress reduction program: rates and predictors of program completion” *Journal of Behavioural Medicine* 11 (1988): 333-352; J. Kabat-Zinn, L. Lipworth, R. Burney, and W. Sellers, “Four-Year follow-up of a meditation-based program for the self-regulation of chronic pain: Treatment outcomes and compliance” *Clinical Journal of Pain* 2 (1987): 159-173.



in medical settings,<sup>955</sup> in mental health settings,<sup>956</sup> and in public-urban settings<sup>957</sup> in order to promote health and psychological well-being.<sup>958</sup> Indeed, one of the most compelling ways of “selling” contemplative practices to schools and society at large is as a health issue.<sup>959</sup> In addition to such medical health studies, a vast body of research exists that examines the positive effects of meditative practices on brain functions.<sup>960</sup>

The practical virtues of contemplative practice in an educational setting have received the most attention from researchers. For instance, Daniel Holland marshalls evidence to suggest that meditative practices are valuable for the purposes of fostering “experiential learning”<sup>961</sup>; similar studies by other researchers also validate the positive effects of contemplative practices on classroom learning<sup>962</sup> such that Tobin Hart writes “if we knew that particular and readily available activities would increase concentration,

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<sup>955</sup> J. Shapiro, “Poetry, Mindfulness, and Medicine” *Family Medicine* 33 (2001): 505-507; M. Speca, L. E. Carlson, E. Goodey, and M. Angen, “A randomized, wait-list controlled clinical trial: The effect of a mindfulness meditation-based stress reduction program on mood and symptoms of stress in cancer outpatients” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 62 (2000): 613-622.

<sup>956</sup> J. D. Teasdale, Z. V. Segal, J. M. G. Williams, V. A. Ridgeway, J. M. Soulsby, and M. Lau, “Prevention of relapse/recurrence in major depression by mindfulness-based cognitive therapy,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 68 (2000): 615-623.

<sup>957</sup> R. B. Roth, and T. Creaser, “Mindfulness meditation-based stress reduction: Experience with a bilingual inner-city program” *Nurse Practitioner* 22 (1997): 150-152.

<sup>958</sup> See, for instance, David Forbes, *Boyz 2 Buddhas: Counselling Urban High School Male Athletes in the Zone* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>959</sup> The Garrison Institute remarks that “contemplative techniques” are often introduced to students to promote stress management as part of the high school health curriculum. See Garrison Institute, *Garrison Institute Report: Contemplation and Education*, 20. In agreement with this manner of “selling” contemplative education, Brian Stock writes that advocacy efforts ought to begin by focussing on the issue of health: “Many Americans have little understanding of what is meant by meditation, but they all understand sickness, discomfort, and healing. If they are persuaded that meditation will contribute to their health, they may accept the idea of pursuing a contemplative activity within their daily lives.” See Stock, “The Contemplative Life and the Teaching of the Humanities,” 1762.

<sup>960</sup> R. J. Davidson *et al.*, “Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65 (2003): 564-570; A. Lutz *et al.*, “Regulation of the Neural Circuitry of Emotion by Compassion Meditation: Effects of Meditative Expertise” *PLoS ONE* 3 (2008): 1-10; S. Begley, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain* (New York: Ballantine, 2007); G. Schonher and J. A. Kelso, “Dynamic pattern generation in behavioural and neural systems” *Science* 239 (1988): 1513-1520; W. Tiller, R. McCraty, and M. Atkinson, “Cardiac coherence: A new, non-invasive measure of autonomic nervous system order” *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* 2, no. 1 (1996): 52-65.

<sup>961</sup> Daniel Holland, “Contemplative Education in Unexpected Places: Teaching Mindfulness in Arkansas and Austria.” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 9 (September 2006): 1843; cf. D. Holland, “Integrating mindfulness meditation and somatic awareness into a public educational setting.” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 44 (2004): 468-484; D. Holland, “Mindfulness meditation as a method of health promotion in educational settings: Proposal for an experiential pedagogy” *Spektrum Freizeit: Forum für Wissenschaft, Politik, and Praxis* 27, no. 1 (2005): 107-115; S. Rockefeller, *Meditation, social change, and undergraduate education*. (Williamsburg, MA: The Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society, 1996).

<sup>962</sup> See, for instance, Shauna L. Shapiro, Kirk Warren Brown, and John A. Astin, “Toward the Integration of Meditation into Higher Education: A Review of Research,” Prepared for the Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society (Oct. 2008).

learning, well-being, and social emotional growth and catalyze transformative learning, we would be cheating our students to exclude it.”<sup>963</sup> Among the benefits accruing to students from meditative practice, some academics enumerate improved concentration, empathy, perceptual acuity, a drop in anxiety and stress symptoms, as well as more effective performance in a broad range of domains from sports and academic test taking to creativity;<sup>964</sup> others claim to have gathered evidence that meditative practices significantly improve math and reading scores among students,<sup>965</sup> as well as the ability to reason in novel situations, the speed of information processing, creative thinking, and student anxiety levels.<sup>966</sup>

Much research has been done to examine how meditative practice affects student attention spans. Repetti writes about contemplative practice as a particularly good means of dealing with the problems that students face as a result of their continual exposure to the internet, networked communications, and digital stimulation. He describes the minds of young people as very often “suffering from something the opposite of idling, akin to attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.” In Repetti’s view, “rather than idling quietly, ready to learn they are scattered all over the place and have extremely short attention spans.”<sup>967</sup> Repetti, along with many others, attests to the interest- and attention-enhancing properties of meditation.<sup>968</sup> Still other studies provide evidence concerning the potential of

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<sup>963</sup> Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 30.

<sup>964</sup> See M. Murphy, S. Donovan, and E. Taylor, *The physical and psychological effects of meditation: A review of contemporary research 1991-1996*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Petaluma, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, 1997); cf. Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 31.

<sup>965</sup> L. Arguelles, R. McCraty, and R. A. Rees, “The Heart of Holistic Education” *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice* 16, no. 3 (2003): 13-21.

<sup>966</sup> K. T. So and D. W. Orme-Johnson, “Three randomized experiments on the longitudinal effects of the transcendental meditation technique on cognition” *Intelligence* 29 (2001): 419-440.

<sup>967</sup> Repetti, “The Case for a Contemplative Philosophy of Education,” 12.

<sup>968</sup> Repetti writes: “Classrooms populated by such alienated, fragmented, multiply challenged students demand an emphasis on slower, deeper, and more reflective and transparent learning designed to capture interest and attention, rekindle motivation, and develop students’ self-regulative skills. Contemplative practices are just the right choice.” See Rick Repetti, “The Case for a Contemplative Philosophy of Education,” 7. Deborah Haynes makes similar claims about the value of contemplative practice as a corrective for the ills of technology. She remarks that “teaching students techniques of awareness, concentration, and means of disciplining their attention is absolutely essential in our era of fragmentation, ever-increasing speed, multi-tasking, and continuously interrupted attention.” See Deborah Haynes, “Contemplative Practice and the Education of the whole Person,” 8. For other scholarly work on the effects of contemplative exercises on student attention and interest, see M. A. Lau *et al.* “The Toronto Mindfulness Scale: Development and Validation.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 62 (2006): 1445-1467; A. Lutz *et al.* “Attention Regulation and Monitoring in Meditation” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 12 (2008): 163-169.

meditation to reduce stress,<sup>969</sup> as well as the positive effects of meditative practice on high school students,<sup>970</sup> college students,<sup>971</sup> and on learning in general.<sup>972</sup> Finally, apart from promoting meditation on the basis of its academic benefits, some researchers have also found that meditative practice among inner-city teens has led to less rule infractions, lower rates of absenteeism, and fewer school suspensions.<sup>973</sup>

#### **(iv) The Dangers of “Selling” Contemplative Education as a “Technology of Happiness”**

With regard to our present study on the significance of pursuing wisdom in schools, discourse around contemplative education has an advantage over P4C pedagogy in that all contemplative practitioners and researchers seem to accept the definition of contemplation as “a third way of knowing” that is distinct from sense perception and critical-analytic or dianoetic reasoning. In this regard, the distance between properly conceiving of contemplative practice as the cultivation of *noesis* seems to be less dramatic than is the case in P4C programs, which generally appear content to affiliate themselves with the cultivation of dianoetic “thinking skills.” However, as is clear from the small cross-section of sample studies I have provided above in the field of contemplative studies research, work in this area, as in Philosophy for Children research, is prone to confusion about its true object; like philosophy programming, contemplative education programming may easily forget its main purpose: namely, the pursuit of wisdom.

Contemplative education researchers are strongly committed to selling their “third way” to schools and governments, to parents and administrators, to teachers and students, and they recognize that schools will be attracted by many of the promised gains offered by contemplative education reforms. As the Garrison Institute comments: “Contemplative

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<sup>969</sup> H. Benson, and M. Stark, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

<sup>970</sup> H. Benson *et al.*, “Increases in Positive Psychological Characteristics with the New Relaxation Response Curriculum in High School Students” *Journal for Research and Development in Education* 27 (1994): 226-231.

<sup>971</sup> G. Deckro *et al.*, “The Evaluation of a Mind/Body Intervention to Reduce Psychological Distress and Perceived Stress in College Students” *Journal of American College Health* 50 (2002): 281-287.

<sup>972</sup> J. Bransford, “Report of the National Research Council’s Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning,” in J. Bransford, A. Brown, and R. Cocking (eds.), *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 1999).

<sup>973</sup> V. Barnes, L. B. Bauza, and F. A. Treiber, “Impact of stress reduction on negative school behaviour in adolescents” [Electronic version] *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes* 1, no.10 (2003); cf. Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 33.

programs share a common set of outcomes consistent with those of mainstream education. The main short-term or immediate outcomes include enhancing students' learning and academic performance, improving the school's social climate as well as promoting emotional balance and pro-social behaviours."<sup>974</sup> However, despite diligence and careful research about how contemplative education techniques might be made to serve these broadly accepted societal goals, "most schools do not currently incorporate contemplative programs," which remain largely "outside the bounds of education." Advocates judge their failure in this regard to be the result of teachers and schools "having too much to do and too few resources." They also cite "increased pressure to improve academic performance and the need to create safe and non-disruptive schools" as significant factors.<sup>975</sup> I suspect that the tremendous efforts of these researchers will sooner or later bear their desired fruit once schools begin to recognize how their fixations with technology, assessment, and testing have harmed education. However, I think that such advocacy research runs an even greater risk by becoming a victim of its own successes. In brief, I think that the greatest danger to contemplative educational practice is that it will continue to be "sold" as a "technology of happiness" – that is, for its utility as a tool to bring about all sorts of fringe benefits peripheral to the genuine noetic pursuit of Wisdom.

This language of contemplative practice as a form of "technology" infects even the writings of the most excellent authors in the field, such as Tobin Hart, who refers to contemplative exercise as "an inner technology of knowing and thereby a technology of learning and pedagogy without any imposition of religious doctrine whatsoever."<sup>976</sup> The danger with such formulations is that they misconstrue the nature of *theoria* by turning it into a "use" object for the purposes of acquiring a "thing" that is to be enjoyed. According to such language, "happiness" is like a skill or a state of being that might be acquired through the consistent use of contemplative techniques, just as our abilities to improve in reading, solving math puzzles, performing physical tasks, or writing tests might be improved with the adoption or "use" of various techniques. However, as we have already seen, Aristotle points out that happiness is not an object or a thing; it is not a good that can

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<sup>974</sup> Garrison Institute, *Garrison Institute Report: Contemplation and Education*, 4.

<sup>975</sup> Garrison Institute, *Garrison Institute Report: Contemplation and Education*, 9.

<sup>976</sup> See Hart, "Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom," 30; cf. Bai, Scott, and Donald, "Contemplative Pedagogy and Revitalization of Teacher Education," 327.

be acquired like other goods; happiness, unlike these other goods, is always chosen for its own sake and never as a means to something else;<sup>977</sup> nor is it a state of being, like a good disposition (*hexis*), since then a man might be accorded happy while asleep or in a coma;<sup>978</sup> rather, it must be an activity (*energia*) that is done not for any other end (i.e, it is not “used” for anything else), but simply enjoyed and for its own sake. As Raimundo Panikkar writes:

Contemplative *studies* will ... challenge our idea of what it means to ‘study,’ or rather will recover its original meaning. You cannot teach contemplation or even ‘study’ it as a subject matter. *Studium* itself may become dedication to contemplation – that thirst for understanding what it is all about for no other motive than to know it – i.e., to practice and become ‘it.’ *Study*, then is contemplation itself, an end in itself and not a means to master a certain discipline or to acquire some information on what so-called contemplatives have been talking about.<sup>979</sup>

Quite literally, then, contemplative activity is not a tool for happiness; it *is* happiness, for it is the highest activity of the best part of the soul in relation to its most sublime object in the Supreme Good (*Ariston*). Here, both Eastern and Western contemplative traditions agree. For instance, Zen master Dogen’s most basic teaching in the Soto school is that *satori*, or enlightenment, is *not* the goal of training; in essence there is no difference between practice and enlightenment. Because all human beings are already endowed with the Buddha-nature (*tathagatagarbha*), there is no “use” function that brings this nature about; hence there is no attainment. As Dogen advises in his *Points to Watch in Buddhist Training* (*Gakudo Yojinshu*), “[D]o not practice Buddhism for your own benefit, for fame and profit, or for rewards and miraculous powers. Simply practice Buddhism for the sake of Buddhism; this is the true Way.”<sup>980</sup> Contemplative practice is, as it is, enlightenment, and vice-versa.

#### **(v) The Danger of Dissociating Contemplative Practice from its Religious Roots**

A great temptation in advocacy scholarship is the urge to diminish aspects of contemplative exercise that might be liable to stir negative controversy against the introduction of contemplative practices in schools, or that might offend a mass audience. For instance, Eleanor Rosch warns about accepting “labels” that might “obstruct” the

<sup>977</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.vii.5.

<sup>978</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.viii.9.

<sup>979</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, “The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity” *Cross Currents* (Fall 1981): 271.

<sup>980</sup> See translations of Dogen’s writings in Yokoi, *Zen Master Dogen*, 51.

adoption of contemplative educational practices in schools. Advocacy for such programming must not, in her view, proceed in any manner that might be construed as “mysticism,” since such a route will most certainly lead to contemplative education being dismissed as “not relevant to normal people or the the everyday world.” Moreover, while contemplation is broadly understood in the literature as a “third way of knowing” that differs significantly from the “objective” knowing stressed in scientific discourse, Rosch contends that any claims about contemplative education being “unscientific” must also be eschewed; indeed, as we have seen above, much of the advocacy research on the benefits of contemplative education is presented according to rigorous scientific research standards. Similarly, Rosch contends that contemplative education must not be equated with “personal transformation,” since this terminology has come to be associated with “personal therapy” rather than “something related to truth.”<sup>981</sup>

In keeping with this desire to make contemplative practices palatable in mainstream education, a broad swath of some of the most esteemed scholars associated with the contemplative education movement have weighed in upon the question of whether or not contemplative pedagogy is “a form of teaching religion and religious practice in the classroom.” Various among these reseachers reply that “religious commitments” must either be “bracketed or incorporated in innovative ways,” that contemplative pedagogy requires “nothing by way of belief or anything resembling a faith commitment,” that it “has nothing to do with religion or religious practice” but only concerns “attentiveness and awareness,” and that contemplative practices are “first and foremost psychological techniques for training the attention.”<sup>982</sup> In his own advocacy for “contemplative reading” practices, Charles Suhor too dissociates contemplation from the relational exploration of religious realities, remarking that the term “‘contemplative’ is not a word necessarily linked to religion.”<sup>983</sup> However, not all writers on contemplative education are so eager to “bracket-out” religious matters from contemplation. For instance, Hill, Herndon, and Karpinska warn that, “from an educational perspective, it seems important not to deny the

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<sup>981</sup> Rosch, “Beginner’s Mind: Paths to the Wisdom that is Not Learned,” 138.

<sup>982</sup> See Tom Coburn, Fran Grace, Anne Carolyn Klein, Louis Komjathy, Harold Roth, and Judith Simmer-Brown. “Contemplative Pedagogy: Frequently Asked Questions” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14, iss. 2 (April 2011): 169-170.

<sup>983</sup> Charles Suhor, “Contemplative Reading – The Experience, the Idea, the Applications” *The English Journal* 91, no. 4 in *The Truth about Non-fiction* (March 2002): 28.

historical origins of these practices”; they point out that “In today’s world, where religion is often a source of human conflict, educators have an opportunity to cultivate respect for the contemplative quest at the heart of diverse spiritual traditions.”<sup>984</sup> Similarly, Maria Lichtmann points out that, as a “third way of knowing” by loving or seeking union with its object, contemplation necessarily has a religious dimension: “Because it embodies a way of love rather than of possession, of being rather than having, a way of union rather than domination or fusion, contemplation comprises a deeply religious way of being in the world.”<sup>985</sup> Indeed, the rush to divest contemplative practice of its “historical” roots – or rather, its *trans*-historical nature – in the experience of religious reality is problematic inasmuch as it betrays an unwillingness to acknowledge that aspect of reality to which all “religion” – a word derived from the Latin verb *religo*, meaning “to bind together” – points; namely, the activity of celebrating “that which binds all things together.”

As we have already seen, Pieper points out that genuine *scholē* and its concomitant activity of contemplation or *theoria* is simply not possible without having its foundation in the feast or celebration. That is to say, true leisure (and consequently, true contemplative activity) cannot exist separate from its “cultic essence”; *scholē* only abides in an atmosphere of fundamental thankfulness or gratitude that affirms the goodness of things as they are. Pieper calls this attitude of praise in which “we find the world and our own selves agreeable” the “precondition” of leisure, since “to celebrate means to proclaim ... our approval of the world as such.”<sup>986</sup> This is not to say that the contemplative attitude only exists where the human will finds itself in devout or rapt direct relation to the transcendent; contemplative experience is much more commonplace than the *visio beatitudo*, and it “occurs far more frequently than one would be led to believe by the prevailing image of modern man”<sup>987</sup>:

The time has come to speak of the contemplative mode of seeing the things of the Creation. I am referring to things which are perceptible to the senses, and to the kind of seeing we do with our eyes. It would be impossible to exaggerate the concreteness of this vision. If a person has been terribly thirsty for a long time and then finally drinks, feels the refreshment deep down inside and says, “What a glorious thing fresh,

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<sup>984</sup> Clifford Hill, Akbar Ali Herndon, and Zuki Karpinska, “Contemplative Practises: Educating for Peace and Tolerance” *Teacher’s College Record* 108, no. 9 (Sept. 2006): 1916.

<sup>985</sup> Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 19.

<sup>986</sup> Josef Pieper, “Leisure and its Threefold Opposition” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 141-142.

<sup>987</sup> Josef Pieper, “Earthly Contemplation” in *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*, 145.

cold water is!” – then whether he knows it or not, he may have taken one step toward that beholding of the beloved wherein contemplation consists.<sup>988</sup>

Contemplation is a common characteristic given to all human existence, and the academic panelists cited above who dismiss the requirement of espousing a “faith” or “belief” in any religious creed are correct inasmuch as *theoria* is in principle available to anyone at any time regardless of dogmatic affiliations. Indeed, as we have already pointed out using Weber’s work on Puritanism, religiosity is no guarantee of contemplative awareness or the cultivation of a contemplative attitude. However, it is also true that these authors too easily gloss over the essential nature of contemplative education as “waking up to the sacredness of everyday learning,”<sup>989</sup> for it is indeed this element of the sacred that lies at the heart of all genuine religious awareness. It is indeed this “sacred” that “binds together” all that *is*.

We have already discussed at length how Plato presents the contemplation of mundane things in their anamnestic relation to the transcendent, and therefore how contemplative practice necessarily involves the exploration of religious reality.<sup>990</sup> Following Pieper’s everyday examples, whether we praise water, a rose, a tree, or an apple in this way, we are, to some degree, uttering “an affirmation which transcends the immediate object of our praise and the literal meaning of our words – an ascent touching the foundation of the world.” Pieper contends that, as a rule, we do not say such things, at least when we are in full possession of our faculties. However, “in the midst of our workaday cares,” we may nonetheless “raise our heads and unexpectedly gaze into a face turned towards us, and in that instant we see: everything which is, is good, worthy of love, and loved by God.” Moments such as these certainly have a cultic resonance, for they are experienced as “proofs of the divine foundation and warranty of all Being,” and they “can be imparted to us when our gaze is directed at the most insignificant things, provided only that this gaze is kindled by love.”<sup>991</sup>

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<sup>988</sup> Pieper, “Earthly Contemplation,” 145-146.

<sup>989</sup> Richard C. Brown, “The Teacher as Contemplative Observer” *Educational Leadership* (Dec 1998-Jan 1999): 70.

<sup>990</sup> Briefly, Plato shows us in his *Phaedrus* how our everyday sights of beauty remind us of that Beauty Itself, and that our experience of the lesser beauties enkindles our search for the higher. This insight is re-stated in his *Symposium*, where the image of a ladder of love is presented to the reader, upon which we ascend, first from our experience of love for a single bodily beauty to all bodily beauty, and next from one beautiful soul to the appreciation of all psychic beauty; and then from beautiful pursuits to beautiful studies, and from beautiful studies to Beauty Itself.

<sup>991</sup> Pieper, “Earthly Contemplation,” 146.



In short, genuine contemplative activity – readily available to all human beings as their noetic “inheritance” – does indeed imply a relation to religious reality, or to what binds us all together. Put another way, it is simply not possible to engage in contemplative activity without in some way finding oneself in relation to what is lovable; we may do so as philosophers who anamnatically “take up” (*anairein*) the beauty of whatever it is that is seen towards its source in the Beautiful Itself; or we may, as contemplatives, seek to divest ourselves of all psychomental illusions and yearn for a genuine seeing (*darsana*) of what truly *is*. In either case, what is called for is *not* that we divest our loving search for wisdom of its Final End (*Telos*), the discussion of which relies -- for better or worse -- upon religious language. Indeed, it is wholly unclear how genuine contemplative practice could ever occur simply as a set of “psychological techniques for training the attention.” Rather, contemplative experience, rooted as it must be in celebration and awareness of the sacred, necessarily involves the exploration of religious reality as it is experienced in ordinary life. Moreover, these subtle experiences of religious reality must not be diminished as some academics in the field of contemplative studies are wont to do in order to downplay the controversiality of contemplative practice in the eyes of the many. Indeed, as Pieper writes, “Not only do these inconspicuous forms of contemplation deserve more attention, more thought; they also deserve to be encouraged.”<sup>992</sup>

#### **(vi) Contemplative Activity Presupposes an “Epistemic Commitment”**

To restate: the central concern throughout this thesis has not been with the fringe or peripheral “benefits” that might be gleaned from contemplative educational practices or philosophizing with children. Rather, this paper seeks to isolate the significance of the pursuit of wisdom in education, and how this pursuit might actively be encouraged. Advocacy scholarship that attempts to “sell” contemplative education as a means to better health, better grades, greater social harmony, or greater worldly success diverts contemplative activity from its true object in Wisdom. We must therefore beware of any formulation of contemplative activity that denudes *theoria* of its ability to approach its Beloved, or that suggests that the knowing (i.e., the *seeing*) of such things is simply not possible or irrelevant. The dismissal of the desire to know religious reality as discussed

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<sup>992</sup> Pieper, “Earthly Contemplation,” 145.

above certainly contributes to this emasculating of the theoretic activity, rendering the love of its sublime end impotent, and thereby relegating all contemplative activity to the realm of mere psychomental exercise. Similarly, we must also beware of contentions like Robert Altobello's that "the use of contemplative and meditation practices ... in no way presupposes any commitment to a particular epistemological foundation."<sup>993</sup> Such formulations suggest that contemplative activity may be properly understood strictly in terms of its "use" function in relation to the acquisition of desired effects and not according to its genuine function of knowing what *is*. Arthur Zajonc warns precisely against this "cutting off" of contemplative practice from its true object in seeking *to see* (and thereby *to know*) reality as such. Writing about the state of "contemplative studies" in educational institutions, Zajonc comments:

This is a key moment. If we intend to connect contemplation to knowing, to *veritas*, then we must articulate an understanding of contemptive practice that moves from the psychological and health benefits of meditation (which are great) to its cognitive dimensions.<sup>994</sup>

For Zajonc, contemplative activity can only properly be understood as a way of knowing through loving; in his view, it is a sort of knowing that necessarily implies "an epistemology of love." Against the other academics previously cited, Zajonc here points out that, like it or not, contemplation, when understood as "a third way of knowing," does indeed imply a kind of faith or epistemological commitment, inasmuch as faith is the way that we know what we cannot see with our eyes, what is not knowable through the senses or by discursive reasoning; faith – as "the assurance of things hoped for" and "the conviction of things not yet seen"<sup>995</sup> -- is in this regard foundational to our pursuit of Wisdom, since Wisdom is something we do not possess yet nonetheless hope for. Indeed, it is precisely our assent to this epistemic and erotic commitment to know by loving that drives us to seek beyond all the lesser goods of health, good grades, worldly acclaim, and societal harmony for the Supreme Good (*Ariston*).

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<sup>993</sup> Altobello, "Concentration and Contemplation" 366.

<sup>994</sup> Zajonc, "Love and Knowledge: Recovering the Heart of Learning Through Contemplation" 1753.

<sup>995</sup> Hebrews 11:1.

### **(vii) The Importance of Maintaining and Heightening the Absurdity of Contemplative Practice**

Such an epistemic and erotic commitment to knowing what must never be used or treated as a means, but known only as an end in itself is essential to all genuine contemplative activity. For example, Pieper warns that, although it is important for our health to have leisure, it is nonetheless impossible to “achieve leisure” in order to stay or to become healthy: “Some things can be approached only if they are seen as meaningful in and by themselves. They cannot be accomplished ‘in order to’ effect something else.” Indeed, if leisure is not conceived of as meaningful in and by itself, “then it is plainly impossible to achieve.”<sup>996</sup> However, Pieper’s contention here – which is essentially the contention of my own thesis in education as well -- makes “achieving leisure” or the practice of contemplation in schools even more challenging than is already the case in what the Garrison Institute has documented as the reluctance of schools to adopt contemplative practices despite their clear fringe benefits. Put simply: if we are not willing to “sell” contemplative practice on the basis of its attractiveness for lesser goods than Wisdom, contemplative practice (and this includes philosophy too!) is necessarily rendered quite absurd in the eyes of the many. Writing specifically about higher education – but in a way that *also* applies to the integration of contemplative practices in primary and secondary schools -- Daniel Holland observes:

It is worth noting that efforts to integrate mindfulness meditation into the curriculum of a traditional public university is quite absurd. Asking students to practice reflection and nondoing in silence poses a paradox for most contemporary educational settings, because typical approaches to thought are suspended so that learning can be more fully embraced. But it is this very absurdity that we should be after. We must embrace the absurdity, too. Without such absurdity, we will grow trapped in academic environments that have little meaning, because they will emphasize the acquisition of ideas and facts as separate from our lives as we experience them.<sup>997</sup>

The importance of recognizing and embracing the absurdity of contemplative practice is also rendered clearly by Rosch, who points out that, unlike in ordinary educational practice where the aim and ambition of students and their parents is that they pass, that they succeed, and perhaps even excel, in contemplative practice the aim is rather more like

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<sup>996</sup> Pieper, “Leisure and its Threefold Opposition,” 141.

<sup>997</sup> Holland, “Contemplative Education in Unexpected Places,” 1858.

coming into awareness of a “failure” of the self. As Rosch puts it, “Basically the self has to fail at the path and thereby surrender – not our ordinary idea of teaching and learning.”<sup>998</sup>

The absurdity of contemplative practice in the eyes of the many is that it looks for a good (namely, the *Summum Bonum*, or *Ariston*) that has no equivalent in the world of finite, conditioned things. It therefore avoids satiation or satisfaction in the attainment of any of the worldly goals reckoned as laudable and great in the eyes of the many. But for this reason, it appears to achieve nothing in the eyes of the ambitious, never resolving the tension it feels in its love for its End (*telos*); rather than training its practitioners for accomplishment – and with accomplishment, rendering them relaxation from the experience of tension in relation to its object -- contemplative study *prolongs* and *heightens* psychic tension towards what is experienced as the ultimate ground or source of its love – namely, wisdom. As Panikkar remarks:

The concept of ‘study’ implies something further when applied to contemplation. Contemplative *studium* suggests that the contemplative act is not yet completed and so not yet perfect. It indicates that the act, contemplative in itself, is still in the making. *Studium* implies the effort or rather the tension of the soul which, having in some way reached the goal, is still not fully there and so is stretched, as it were, between our common condition and its (relative) fulness. *Studium* is the way.<sup>999</sup>

Given Panikkar’s enunciation of the distinctive psychic “tension” that all genuine contemplative activity necessarily cultivates and how, as Holland points out, the desire to sustain this tension renders contemplative activity absurd in the eyes of the many, it may indeed be the case that one of the best ways to tell whether or not true contemplative activity has taken effect in any school is the degree to which such studies remain unpopular or at the very least subject to ridicule. Put another way, it may be important, when we look at how contemplative education practices are integrated into schools, to be suspicious of the manner in which they have been implemented wherever they are met with great fanfare and enjoy claims of mass success.

Perhaps the best modern example of the distortion and decay of a contemplative exercise is the massive popularity of yoga. Most of the yoga practiced worldwide today would be unrecognizable to earlier yogis like Patanjali. When he uses the word *yoga*, he

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<sup>998</sup> Rosch, “Beginner’s Mind: Paths to the Wisdom that is Not Learned,” 145.

<sup>999</sup> Panikkar, “The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity,” 271.

means “yoking.”<sup>1000</sup> The practice of yoga is meant to rein in the tendency of consciousness to gravitate toward external things, to identify with them and try to locate happiness in them. This older, contemplative yoga has come to be known as *raja-yoga*; it is the “royal” or “exalted” path, and is thereby distinguished from *hatha* yoga, which did not develop until the ninth or tenth century,<sup>1001</sup> and which is the predominant form of yoga practiced today. Hatha yoga was originally developed to temper the body-mind and focus its energies for meditation;<sup>1002</sup> it was conceived of as an exercise meant to condition the practitioner to be better able to engage in a way of life that had at its centre – like *raja-yoga* -- the pursuit of wisdom. Now, however, hatha yoga is not generally understood to be a “way of life” that, as the practice of dying, simultaneously immortalizes; rather than as a way of life, its surging success is premised upon its transformation into a mass-marketed “lifestyle” accessorized with a line of fashionable clothing and sports gear. Divested of Patanjali’s original recognition that the causes of suffering arise from ignorance, or not seeing things as they are (*avidya*), the desires cultivated by hatha yoga practice in its current form may very well be antithetical to true yoga practice, fuelling the wanting self and its dissatisfactions. In his commentary on Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra*, Chip Hartranft writes insightfully:

In fact, hatha yoga practice may initially be driven to some extent by narcissism. After all, hatha yoga can appeal to us because of the powerful way it addresses some of the self’s most cherished preoccupations – health, attractiveness, sexual energy, and longevity. When attachment to these properties lurks subliminally, seeding us with the urge to transcend phenomena like pain and fatigue simply in order to push the body beyond its barriers for its own sake, the potent hatha practice can be self-defeating and injurious.<sup>1003</sup>

Aligned with Hartranft’s warnings about yogic practice when it becomes divorced from Patanjali’s insights, Simone Weil writes similarly that the true purpose of education is to cultivate attention; but attention is not to be cultivated simply in order to secure the objects of our vain desires; rather, the significance of cultivating attention lies in its value as a necessary precursor for prayer, or attending with the mind to its highest object in the *Summum Bonum*. In the same way as the popularization of yoga by Lululemon and other

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<sup>1000</sup> Its root, *yuj*, is also the root of our modern word, “yoke.”

<sup>1001</sup> Patanjali, *The Yoga-Sutra*, 32.

<sup>1002</sup> Patanjali, *The Yoga-Sutra*, x.

<sup>1003</sup> Patanjali, *The Yoga-Sutra*, 78.

marketing giants may be premised upon the loss of yoga's true spirit as "yoking" in pursuit of wisdom (*prajna*), so too must we be careful, when reviewing the reasons put forth by advocacy groups and contemplative education researchers, not to lose sight of the true goal of all genuine contemplative practice, which must only be to pursue wisdom.

### 3. Examples of Contemplative Education in Schools

When I think back to my own youthful experiences of school, I can only recall one example of what might pass muster today as "contemplative education." I attended public school at a time when it was still legal for the Lord's Prayer to be recited in Ontario classrooms. Not myself being religious and never having been raised with religion, I nonetheless found the morning routine and solemnity of recitation to my liking, but I did not experience it as a particularly contemplative activity. One day, however, I remember that we had a substitute teacher, Mrs. Persall, who asked us, instead of reciting in our routine monotone, to consider the meaning of each word we enunciated, and to say the prayer as though we were genuinely speaking it to Someone. This exercise did indeed perk my interest in the prayer, for it made me wonder Who or What it was that I was addressing, and what exactly a person is doing when he prays. In posing this challenge to think, to wonder, and to "take up" a routine exercise in relation to its Principle (*Arche*), this experiment – conducted maybe thirty years ago and lasting no more than thirty seconds -- still remains with me as a significant memory that, in many ways, bears relation to life-long questions that I have carried with me, as well as to the deeper sorts of non-school experiences that I had as a child.

Of course, experiments of this sort are no longer possible in Ontario public schools – or anywhere else in Canadian public schools, for that matter – since the 1988 appeal court decision in *Zylberberg v. Sudbury* (Board of Education) which made all such exercises a violation of the religious freedoms of dissentient students, despite their long-standing ability to "opt-out."<sup>1004</sup> However, this ban does not mean that it is impossible in a public

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<sup>1004</sup> The appeal court decision in *Zylberberg* has important policy ramifications for instruction about religion in Canadian public schools. Relying upon American precedents, the court held that any "opt-out" policy with regard to religious exercises would violate the religious freedom of dissenting students. The traditional compromise of student exemptions is, in *Zylberberg*, forever lost as a policy option. The ruling in *Zylberberg* has since created a situation in which opening exercises in our public schools must now be absolutely devoid

school setting to cultivate contemplative moments during the day through one's own skilful and subversive teaching. It is still possible, for instance, to engage students in recollecting their own fondest experiences of love or being loved, of union with others or with nature; students still occasionally may be drawn to speak or to write about the gratitude or delight they have experienced in beautiful and good things, or perhaps to recount their experiences of being moved by fear or *tremendum*; they may still be encouraged to ponder and to wonder about the meaning of their own suffering or the suffering of those they love. Students might, with some coaxing, relate an account of having been awestruck by something, or tell about a time when they have felt peace and serenity in the quiet of things. These are, of course, exceedingly private matters to share with others – especially with a teacher! -- and often older students are reticent to do so, whether in a class discussion, or in their own writing samples; sadly, in my experience it seems even more common when the subject is broached that students complain *they have never even had any such experiences*. The truth of this teenage complaint, however, is very doubtful; it is far more likely that they have simply never been asked such questions before, and that without any encouragement from others they have forgotten all the wonderful everyday experiences and questions that they once had when they were younger. No child is a stone, but through social conditioning and habit, along with the war of attrition waged by time, their awareness of the beauty of the world and the consequent feelings of thankfulness that arise from this experience has simply atrophied or gone dormant.

With many students, therefore, the first challenge is simply to open them up to such things, and to invite them to take “experimentation” in the cultivation of such experiences seriously. Once students are opened in this manner, it requires only a small, subversive step – although in Alberta with its Bill 44 legislation requiring waivers and advanced notice to parents whenever such discussions are to take place, this step is regrettably experienced as a much larger and more dangerous one! -- to have them engage in *noesis* or noetic inquiry.

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of any religious content whatsoever. See *Zylberberg v. Sudbury* (Board of Education) [1986], 29 D.L.R. (4<sup>th</sup>) 577 (Ont. Div. Ct.); Reversed [1988] 52 D.L.R. (4<sup>th</sup>) 709 (Ont. C.A.); 65 O.R. (2d) 641 (C.A.).

### (i) Examples of Contemplative Practice from the Field

In her own examination of Montessori and Waldorf schooling, Patricia Jennings emphasizes the need to provide “opportunities for naturally occurring contemplation” as well as “infusing the curriculum with a contemplative orientation.”<sup>1005</sup> The literature on contemplative education is replete with excellent examples and ideas for teachers to test out and experiment with contemplative practices in their public school classrooms. Most common among these are discussions of the two broad categories of meditative practice: namely, *vipassana* and *samatha* meditation; however, variations on these two forms of meditation are frequently mentioned, including meditation on the breath, lovingkindness meditation, mantra recitation, mindful movement (including walking or even running meditation), visualization, and contemplation on poetry or sacred texts.<sup>1006</sup> Besides the books and studies available from modern-day practitioners, academic researchers, and educators in the field of contemplative studies, there is a vast ancient literature that offers simple explanations of how to engage in meditative practices, as well as tips to assist one in approaching meditation properly.<sup>1007</sup>

Besides these forms of meditative exercise, numerous other methods of cultivating mindfulness have been introduced into classroom routines. These may include simple things like Hart’s suggestion to lead students in “not-doing” exercises by turning out the lights in the classroom and practicing following one’s breath,<sup>1008</sup> or Brady’s use of a *ringong*, a small Japanese bell, in his math classes in order to center and focus student attention.<sup>1009</sup> Richard Brown writes similarly about inviting his students to listen to the

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<sup>1005</sup> Jennings, “Contemplative education and youth development,” 103. Careful and considered study of contemplative practices in Waldorf and Montessori schools would be a fruitful area of research; however, I have not chosen to deal explicitly with Waldorf or Montessori school pedagogy since these are not public school institutions.

<sup>1006</sup> John P. Miller, “Contemplative Practices in Teacher Education,” 36.

<sup>1007</sup> For instance, in Chapter One of his *Yoga-Sutra*, Patanjali offers his readers a list of the various distractions and warning signs of distractions that invariably arise during meditation, as well as seven ways to neutralize these distractions, such as radiating friendliness, compassion, delight, and equanimity towards all things, pausing after breath flows in or out, steadily observing as new sensations arise or when thoughts are luminous and free of sorrow, focusing on things that do not inspire attachment, reflecting on insights culled from sleep, dreaming, meditative absorption on any object, or full absorption in any object. See Patanjali, *The Yoga-Sutra*, I.30-40.

<sup>1008</sup> Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 35.

<sup>1009</sup> Brady, “Learning to Stop, Stopping to Learn,” 375. Richard Brown recounts a similar use of the gong with young children at snack time, during which they “listen in stillness” as “the sound crescendos and dissolves.” See Brown, “The Teacher as Contemplative Observer,” 71.



sound of leaves rustling in the wind as a focal point for meditative practices, such that “When we become aware that our attention has strayed, we notice where our attention has wandered, and we gently come back to the sound.”<sup>1010</sup> Other educators report using the common Buddhist practice of cultivating attention while experiencing the slow and mindful eating of a raisin, which might easily (and cheaply!) be distributed to each student in a classroom.<sup>1011</sup> In his book, *A Buddhist in the Classroom*, Sid Brown includes a valuable appendix of “nifty assignments” he has used with his own students to help them develop mindfulness that might serve to undercut their pretensions to knowing, as well as counteract the deadening effects on our ability to enter into “I-Thou” relations with the world that result from the commodification of the world in consumeristic culture.<sup>1012</sup> Other examples of mindfulness experimentation in the classroom include “deep listening,”<sup>1013</sup> “body focusing,”<sup>1014</sup> the exploration of “concentrated language,”<sup>1015</sup> and “free writing.”<sup>1016</sup>

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<sup>1010</sup> Brown, “The Teacher as Contemplative Observer,” 71.

<sup>1011</sup> I first encountered this mindful eating practice at university through one of my professors in Asian Religions, Dr. Robert Sharf; however, the practice is also discussed by Brady in “Realizing True Education with Mindfulness,” 87-97. Also see Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, 63.

<sup>1012</sup> See Appendix I in Sid Brown, *A Buddhist in the Classroom* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 117-130. One of the most interesting of these assignments is a “Wal-Mart Meditation Fieldwork” exercise in which the students enter a spiritually-arid space like Wal-Mart and transform the experience through experimentation with walking meditation.

<sup>1013</sup> Mary Rose O’Reilly explains this activity as follows: “Attention: deep listening. People are dying in spirit for lack of it. In academic culture most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention only long enough to develop a counterargument; we critique the student’s or the colleague’s ideas; we mentally grade and pigeonhole each other. In society at large, people often listen with an agenda, to sell or petition or seduce. Seldom is there a deep, openhearted, unjudging reception of the other. And so we all talk louder and more stridently and with a terrible desperation. By contrast, if someone truly listens to me, my spirit begins to expand.” See Mary Rose O’Reilly, *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice* (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1998), 19. In O’Reilly’s book, “deep listening” means sitting quietly and not interrupting or judging what your interlocutor is saying, but rather trying to cultivate openness to the other person in a genuine Thou relation. Tobin Hart writes about “deep listening” practices in the classroom. These may they include listening deeply to a poem or a story and paying attention to the various ways in which this story affects you as a listener; or, like O’Reilly, it may involve students (and teachers) listening to each other, or “tuning into one another.” See Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 36-37.

<sup>1014</sup> Tobin Hart explains “body focusing” by pointing out that “Whereas knowing is most often associated with the head, both the ancients and contemporary neuroscience supports the idea of a bodywide mind,” and that “shifting awareness to the body may help to open to a state past the analytic.” In particular, he recommends focusing attention on coming into awareness of one’s own heart beating in one’s chest and combining this with a lovingkindness meditation that might then be radiated out towards others. See Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 40.

<sup>1015</sup> English teachers very often enjoin students to this practice already when they ask them to write haiku poetry, which attempts to encapsulate the sacredness of an instant or an experience of the natural world in as few syllables as possible. For more details, see Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 41.

<sup>1016</sup> Free writing involves the uninterrupted flow of thoughts to paper without concern for grammar, syntax, analytic precision, and so forth. It is most akin to keeping an ordinary diary or journal writing. Richard Brady

Robert Altobello makes the valuable observation that contemplative practices need not be segmented off or isolated from regular classroom practices as an add-on feature, but may rather be incorporated into regular analytic study, critical reading, and writing. For instance, he incorporates the yogic practice of “yoking” into regular classroom studies by re-interpreting the root meaning of yoga in *yuj* rather like “coralling” a horse. According to this interpretation, the point of contemplative practice is not to immobilize the mind, but like a horse, to tame and control it within a corral in which it is “free to roam.” Altobello demonstrates how, through loosening the traditional meanings of terms for concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*), and oneness or stasis (*samadhi*), students can develop attention and meditative focus that culminates in a merging of the one studying with what is studied. In his example, students engage in the exercise of focusing their attention on the topic of “civil disobedience” as it has been examined by various authors examined in class. By continually redirecting their minds towards this object of study, students slowly learn at first to concentrate or “fix the attention on a single point” (namely, the concept of “civil disobedience”), until finally all interruptive and extraneous thoughts, as well as all self-awareness of their own activity that might cause them to separate themselves from their object of study drops away, and their attention is fully absorbed in its object of contemplation.<sup>1017</sup> In this way, Altobello’s incorporation of contemplative practices into ordinary classroom learning teaches that “I-Thou” experience is not merely available between students and other sentient beings, or between students and the natural world – which seems very often to be the case in the other experiments mentioned above; rather, Altobello’s insights point out that an “I-Thou” relation may also be established between students and their own academic studies, and that in fact “a sense of intellectual intimacy

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offers his own instructions to students as follows: “[F]or the last two years my students have done five minutes of free writing every Friday. My instructions are, ‘Spend the next five minutes writing down whatever comes into your awareness. Do not stop writing. Should you find nothing in your mind, write “My mind is blank” over and over until something shows up.’ I never read this writing. It is only for the students. Many take to it from the start. Others report being initially put off by the randomness of their minds but over time find their thinking becoming more coherent. The exercise of writing takes on real value. On the rare occasions I forget it is writing day, the students are quick to remind me.” See Brady “Realizing True Education with Mindfulness,” 87-97. Also see Hart’s explanation of free writing in “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” 42-43.

<sup>1017</sup> See Altobello, “Concentration and Contemplation,” 354-371.

with the content they are studying”<sup>1018</sup> is essential for all true study, when conceived as *studium*.

Keith Kroll remarks that “Almost any classroom activity may be transformed into a contemplative one” simply by “slowing the activity long enough to ‘behold’ – to facilitate deep attention to and intimate familiarity with the object of study.” Part of structuring such a “wisdom environment” involves creating “downtime that is unstructured, unplanned, and open to discovery,” as well as placing fewer subjects before students, and allowing them to go deeper into each one.<sup>1019</sup> Hill, Herndon, and Karpinska similarly observe that, “Given children’s hectic schedules and the ensuing inner turmoil, children are provided little opportunity to experience silence.” The authors therefore argue that providing regular time each day for children to be still allows them the opportunity to “recreate themselves”; to this end, they recommend the use of “brief periods of silence and solitude in school.”<sup>1020</sup> Quaker schools have explicitly spiritualized and extended such moment of silence as an integral part of their own daily worship.<sup>1021</sup> I would further stress that these exercises in slowing down and in providing “downtime” are vital not only for students, but perhaps most especially for teachers, who very often are given no “downtime” – i.e., “prep time” -- at all in our current educational environment. I cannot stress enough how injurious this lack of prep time-downtime is to the task of cultivating a wisdom environment in schools. Indeed, it is not likely that students will ever *en masse* be enabled to encounter and to enjoy contemplative practice if teachers themselves are constantly beaten down and driven to extremity by the busyness of their workday.

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<sup>1018</sup> Altobello, “Concentration and Contemplation” 365.

<sup>1019</sup> Keith Kroll, “Contemplative Practice in the Classroom” *New Directions for Community Colleges*. No. 151 (Fall 2010) 111-113; 111.

<sup>1020</sup> Hill, Herndon, and Karpinska. “Contemplative Practises: Educating for Peace and Tolerance” 1932; here, the authors cite R. Kessler, *The soul of education: Helping students find connection, compassion, and character at school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.

<sup>1021</sup> Richard Brady comments on his own experiences teaching at Sidwell Friends, a Quaker school in Washington, D. C.: “Quakers describe their attitude in worship as expectant waiting. Through activities such as prayer and silent recitation of Bible passages that center and quiet the conditioned, discursive thinking the mind habitually engages in, Quakers seek to create conditions in which the still, small voice of the spirit can be heard.” See Richard Brady, “Learning to Stop, Stopping to Learn: Discovering the Contemplative Dimension in Education.” *Journal of Transformative Education*. Vol. 5 No. 4, October 2007. 372-394; 373.

## (ii) Personal Forays into Contemplative Practice in the Classroom

I have tried to encourage contemplative practices within my classroom throughout my time as a public school teacher. Besides starting Philosophy programs in a number of high schools and encouraging philosophic inquiry in my other classes, I have also introduced students to various forms of contemplative and meditative experimentation. For instance, I have found that teaching high school courses in Personal Psychology lends itself to providing students with an opportunity to experiment in the “alternative psychologies” offered in Yogic (*samatha*) and Buddhist (*vipassana*) meditation. In English classes, during our study of Thoreau’s *Walden*, I have also engaged grade eleven students in free writing or keeping an “open air journal” in which they were asked to record their experiences of and reflections on various contemplative experiments.<sup>1022</sup> In keeping with the spirit of Thoreau’s book, these include mindful walking in nature, mindful listening and spectating in nature, as well as a modern-day adaptation of Thoreau’s own “experiments in economy” wherein students are asked to give up certain among their habits or possessions, and to observe how their abstinence from these things over a period of time affects their inner states and their behaviours.

Occasionally, students are put off by the foreignness of explicitly meditative exercises, and a few in my experience either resist or adamantly refuse any invitations to experiment with meditation on “religious” grounds. This hurdle, however, can be overcome through what the Buddhists refer to as “skill-in-means” (*upaya*). Although most of the advocacy literature in contemplative education focuses upon meditation and meditative practices, there are certainly other ways than overtly meditative exercises to introduce the contemplative attitude into the classroom, and I have found that these same students are amenable to less explicitly meditative, but nonetheless contemplative activities. The academic study of texts like *Walden* is particularly valuable as an example for students of what contemplative activity looks like, for it helps them to enter into contemplative exercises without feeling they have violated their family’s religious commitments by participating in more explicitly meditative – and therefore, from certain religious points of view, strictly prohibited -- experiments. As mentioned above, very often students – even in rural areas! -- complain that they have never felt any deep spiritual connection with the

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<sup>1022</sup> See my teaching website for details: <http://www.mrsteelsclass.com/eng20-1/walden/waldenhome.htm>.

natural world around them. The first challenge in such cases is simply to open them up to these things, and to invite them to take “experimentation” in the cultivation of such experiences seriously. Quite often, the best way to begin is by having students look at the world around them with different eyes and begin to note how much of it they take for granted on a daily basis.

In my experience, Thoreau’s *Walden* provides students with an excellent example of how to begin to look at the world with fresh and wondering eyes. In conjunction with the study of this text, a simple activity I have tried is the contemplation of river rocks.<sup>1023</sup>

Rocks are excellent examples for students of the small, the insignificant, the ordinarily overlooked, and the taken-for-granted. In this regard, I suspect that many students who complain that they have *never* felt any connection with the natural world do indeed experience a deep spiritual affinity with rocks without even realizing it. During this activity, I pass around a pail full of such rocks; I ask my students to take one for their very own; next, they are required to study the rock. What do they think of it? How might they describe it? What are its features? How do they come to *know* the rock they have chosen? And why did they choose that particular rock over all the others?

Very often students are bored of their rock quite quickly after the initial weirdness of being handed one by a teacher wears off. However, their interest in the rock is once again easily perked when they are led to ponder how it is that all the characteristics they have enumerated as their way of *knowing* the rock (such as its colour, texture, weight, shape, size, and temperature) somehow describe the rock, but how, at the same time, these descriptors are not themselves the rock; what-is-the-rock evades capture by any and all of these qualities. Indeed, even if we were to reduce the rock to its molecular structure or if we counted the number of atoms and all the forces that composed it we would not have what-is-the-rock. When asked to think of the rock, therefore, stripped of all its qualities and divested of all such descriptive devices, when asked to peel away and let drop each characteristic of the rock as not being the rock-itself, when asked to locate the IS-ness of the rock – that is, its state of being, or its “mineral soul” as Aristotle calls it – *now* we have a genuine mystery to behold as a class! *Now* we have laughter and amazement; we have

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<sup>1023</sup> As a sidenote, be careful you don’t get caught taking rocks from the river by fellow citizens or By-Law officers. I have found that it is apparently quite illegal and expensive!

looks of bewilderment, and genuine excitement in the air! *Now*, when students hold their rock in their hands at their desk and sit quietly in the darkened classroom contemplating their rock, and re-directing their thoughts back to the rock's bare existence – its IS-ness as opposed to their thoughts about it, or its qualities, or their math problems, or Thoreau's *Walden*, or what they will have for supper – we have a genuine instance of the *vita contemplativa* on our hands!

I have remarked above how Altobello's incorporation of yogic practice into ordinary classroom study can transform it into genuine *studium* wherein an "I-Thou" intimacy might be established between the student and his or her subject. In my own classroom experiments with contemplative practices and contemplative texts, I have taken Altobello's insights even further; for I have found that by exploring the *structure* of consciousness through contemplative practice with students and by familiarizing them with this structure *experientially*, students are often suddenly enabled to read and to understand texts with a depth that would otherwise remain inaccessible to them, even despite all the diligence and best efforts of English teachers in other classrooms to hone their critical-analytic thinking and writing skills.

Laying the groundwork for this sort of study requires some personal familiarity with philosophy and contemplative practice on the part of the teacher; additionally, it is best if the teacher can spend some extended, quality time with the same students, preferably over a number of years. Nonetheless, a certain amount may be accomplished in a single term if a longer period of time is not available. In my Philosophy classes, for instance, I have, at intervals of a year, led my students in the reading and discussion of Plato's two dialogues on love, *The Phaedrus* and *The Symposium*. All term long, students grow more familiar with what it *feels* like to philosophize – that is, to engage in the "taking up" (*anairesis*) of perplexing questions, as well as to reach down or to descend (*katabasis*) into themselves and into the depths of things. Exposure to Plato's *Symposium* is particularly good for demonstrating to them how the philosopher makes both these movements simultaneously – that is, how Heraclitus' dictum "The way up and the way down are one and the same" can be true. Following Diotima's "ladder of love" imagery in the dialogue, they easily come to see that Socrates engages in an erotic *ascent* through the banquet speeches; but at the same time, as they read the speeches and learn – much to their surprise and horror! -- about the

various characters and their pederastic loves, they also easily understand that, while we are ascending through the speeches, we (along with Socrates) simultaneously must undergo a dramatic *descent* into the Hades of the disordered souls of his fellow drinking companions.<sup>1024</sup>

When I lead students in such philosophic-contemplative exercises, I do not allow these exercises to exist “in a bubble” – that is, such exercises cannot be left unrelated to other activities in their daily lives with which they have greater familiarity. For instance, students learn to associate their “going up” and “going down” as budding “philosophers” (*philosophoi*) with other experiences they have had as “lovers of beauty” (*philokaloi*) that are quite common to teenagers, such as listening to music, writing poetry, or doing art. Listening to music in class together, we allow its beauty – very often experienced as frenzy, for they either *love* or *hate* whatever is played -- to transport us, and we observe the feeling of *direction* (i.e., “Am I being led up or down?) that each note of each song instills in us; this contemplative practice of music appreciation in class, when coupled with experimentation in both *vipassana* and *samatha* meditation, renders the structure of students’ mostly-unexplored and ordinary, daily inner movements experientially *visible* (i.e., they *see*, or engage the *intellectus* in *theoria*) to them. Sometimes with little difficulty a teacher can bring students experientially to understand something of the strange mystery that true philosophy, as a simultaneous ascent-descent movement, is both “immortalization” (*to athanatizein*) as well as the practice of death (*melete thanatou*),<sup>1025</sup> just as *samatha* meditation, being a kind of *ascent* in which all psychomental phenomena are dropped in order to bring focus upon the One, is the mirror image of the practice of *descent* through *vipassana* meditation, in which all self-concern is allowed to pass away such that the self learns to “die” to itself. Through their experiences of meditation and philosophizing, students may be led to inquire to what extent their own enjoyment of everyday pleasures in the things they find beautiful is likewise “immortalizing,” or to what extent it might be related to the practice of dying.

These same contemplative insights derived from seeing the structure of one’s own consciousness as an experience of the “in-between” (*metaxy*) – i.e., as a being stretched in a

<sup>1024</sup> For details, consult Steel, “*Katabasis* in Plato’s *Symposium*,” 59-83.

<sup>1025</sup> In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates says to Simmias, “The true philosophers practise dying” (*hoi orthos philosophountes apothneskein metelosi*, 67e).

tension between immortality and death -- can readily be brought to bear not simply upon students' private enjoyment of music, art, or their own daily activities, but also upon their school studies which may, in turn, be transformed from exercises in work to true *studium*. For instance, I have used this sort of experiential learning to help students understand and appreciate native history and world mythology in a different way. When I have in the past read the autobiographical children's story of the Inuit-Canadian artist Simon Tookome entitled *The Shaman's Nephew* to my own children at the youngest ages, they have taken Tookome's claim to have actually seen shamans flying in the sky at face value; that is, they have simply believed it unquestioningly. However, I have found that when the same story is read to students at the high school level (or to my own children as they grow older), these older youths take pride in being far less "naive"; they tend to dismiss Tookome's accounts of "historical events" as superstitious and fanciful -- most certainly *not* true accounts of *real* experiences of *real* things. However, I have sometimes found with my own students that, once they have been exposed to contemplative exercises like philosophizing or insight meditation, it requires only a little effort to point out how shamanic "techniques of ecstasy" share a similar spiritual structure to things that they themselves have experienced.<sup>1026</sup> Students prepared to encounter native history in this way are less dismissive of Tookome's autobiographical account as a lie, as a childish fantasy, or a delusion when it is re-read to them; they are able through empathy and spiritual affinity to express greater cultural appreciation for the spiritual truth articulated by Tookome that shamans do indeed fly, or that they do indeed travel to the bottom of the sea to comb the sea goddess' hair.<sup>1027</sup> In short, through gaining an awareness of the structure of their own consciousness through contemplative study, students sometimes become willing to accept Tookome's real-life

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<sup>1026</sup> Indeed, as we already have seen, historically philosophy has its roots in shamanism, and there is much evidence that the earliest philosophers such as Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Empedocles were, in fact, first and foremost shamans. That shamanism can be, and perhaps ought to be, related to our understanding of teaching, see for instance, Clifford Mayes, "The teacher as shaman." *J. Curriculum Studies* 37, no. 3 (2005): 329-348; also see Corelyn F. Senn, "Journeying as Religious Education: The Shaman, The Hero, The Pilgrim, and the Labyrinth Walker" *Religious Education* 97, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 124-140. Sharada Bhanu has written an excellent analysis of Russell Hoban's classic children's book, *The Mouse and His Child*, demonstrating quite clearly how the structure of this story models classic shamanic experiences, and so would be a wonderful way to introduce students to the structure of consciousness. See Sharada Bhanu, "The Shaman and the ISness of TO BE" *Children's Literature in Education* 39 (2008): 21-30.

<sup>1027</sup> See, for instance, Eliade, *Shamanism*, 292-296.



account of seeing shamans flying as a genuine articulation of an historically-situated spiritual fact.

I have used this same method of incorporating contemplative exercise in order to awaken students to the structure of their own experiences as beings “in between” (*metaxy*) immortalizing and dying on a number of occasions and with great delight on the part of some of them. Most often, for instance, when we encounter world mythologies in a classroom, we study them as archaic stories told by people who do not really know about the world as well as we do today – who are naive and very often superstitious. Often we simply read mythology with students as an exercise in comprehension, or as a means of exposing them to different cultures, to their “beliefs” or “value systems” which students ought to learn to “appreciate.” Very often mythology is taught as bad science – as the way that ancient people explained where lightning comes from, for instance – or as a means to teach the moral “values” of an ancient civilization. It always comes, then, with great astonishment to my grade nine students as we read *The Epic of Gilgamesh* when I tell them that the myth is actually *true*, that it expresses the real spiritual journeying of Gilgamesh and Enkidu as an historical fact that is verifiable through reproduction in our own inner spiritual experiences of the world.<sup>1028</sup> Initially flabbergasted, once students are made aware of the metaxic structure of their own inner lives, they are later able to grasp precisely how it is that the *Gilgamesh* epic *does*, in fact, render unto them the sight of deep spiritual truths and fundamental insights. Through developing contemplative awareness of the structure of consciousness as a *metaxy* – i.e., as an *axis mundi* along which we, like Gilgamesh, must ascend and descend -- students no longer need approach the myth with the critical-analytic eye that is everywhere *enforced* and *beaten* and *tested* into them. No longer need they approach reading with that eye that gazes upon myth as an object dissociated from their own inner experiences; no longer need myths be encountered as fragmented, unrelated museum pieces, as expressions of the “values” or “belief systems” of backward and inferior civilizations that bear no significance to their own lives; rather, with careful tutelage and exposure to these stories through contemplative practice, students can be led to rediscover

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<sup>1028</sup> My favourite translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to use with students is the verse rendition by Danny P. Jackson available from Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers. It includes excellent illustrations, a number of reproductions of ancient artifacts, as well as a good introduction. Stephen Mitchell’s new English version is not as good, but he includes an excellent introductory essay on the *Epic* that is valuable for teachers wishing to study this text with students.

the deepest and most fundamental insights of ancient peoples – insights that have, by and large, been lost and forgotten in our modern times.

Finally, in my experience with contemplative practices in the classroom, I have found that the greatest excitement can be generated among students not simply when their discourse becomes philosophic or -- as when they become genuine “lovers of myth” (*philomythoi*) -- full of wonder. The physical arrangement of the classroom environment itself can play a significant role in transforming ordinary, laborious school study into *studium*. In the Alberta Program of Studies for English, visual materials are, along with written materials, accorded status as “texts” that *must* be studied with students. I have for many years been attracted to the study of native rock art,<sup>1029</sup> and prehistoric cave paintings in particular because of their deep mystery, the wonder and reverence they always inspire in me. I have therefore endeavoured to share my appreciation of these “texts” with my students as an exercise in their own contemplative study. As part of my pedagogical experiments with contemplation, I have in the past tarped my entire classroom – both its ceiling and walls, and then papered over this rough, tarped surface in order to transform the space into a simulated cave ripe for the reproduction of cave paintings and cliff carvings by my students. I have used a simulated fire<sup>1030</sup> to light the otherwise pitch darkness, and I have supplied students with small battery-operated candles by the light of which they might sketch and journal their experiences with this experiment. Having filled the cave with sounds of heart beats, Indian tabla and sitar music, native drumming and singing, Inuit throat songs, as well as both Gregorian and Tibetan chanting, I have asked students to engage in various contemplative activities in order to recreate within themselves – as they attempt to reproduce the various visual “texts” of the glyphs and paintings we have studied -- what it must have been like for their prehistoric ancestors and their Aboriginal counterparts to have carved and drawn and painted from a contemplative frame of mind.<sup>1031</sup> I have generally found students receptive to such activities as contemplation of the fire’s constant flux in the darkness (*vipassana* meditation), or the task of trying to listen for the

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<sup>1029</sup> In particular, I have been interested in examining the Peterborough petroglyphs, as well as the cliff carvings at Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park along the Milk River here in Alberta.

<sup>1030</sup> “Fake fires” may be custom built, or else purchased online relatively inexpensively. Mine consisted of real logs and a silk “flame” lit and animated from below by fire-coloured LED bulbs and a fan. I used an audio recording of crackling-fire noises to complete the illusion.

<sup>1031</sup> For the full lesson plan with instructions and an extensive explanation of student activities, see my teaching website at <http://www.mrsteelsclass.com/cavepaintings/cavepaintingshome.htm>.

silence of the cave beneath all the noises of drumming, singing, students working, and fire crackling (*samatha* meditation), as well as the exercise of trying to develop empathy and understanding for the “head” and “heart-space” from which these ancient and prehistoric etchings, drawings, and paintings were formed.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION – A PROPOSAL FOR METAXIC EDUCATION, OR AN EDUCATION OF THE IN-BETWEEN

### 1. The Cultivation of “Human Wisdom” (*Anthropine Sophia*)

In my experiences as a high school teacher, I have found that the most wonderful and meaningful part of education is unfortunately not the focus of what we do as teachers. As a typical English teacher, I mostly focus on helping my students to learn how to write and to read and to think critically about their studies. I work very hard, as do most teachers, to help my students “do well” (*eu prattein*) in school. As teachers, we concentrate mostly on using assessment in the form of marks to goad students towards pre-conceived “learning objectives” and government-mandated “outcomes”; when we assess students, we are told by the architects and overseers of the curriculum that the *only* thing that we are allowed to consider is how much each student “knows” – i.e., what level of mastery of the course materials each pupil is able to display. We therefore emphasize the demonstration of correct answers rather than thinking about the extent to which we do not know, or about how the “correct answers” might be problematic, or encouraging students to investigate and to question in order to realize the extent to which they (and we too as teachers) are ignorant about things. In short, in school we focus on demonstrating our measurable knowledge of things, our proficiencies with manipulating, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating things – we command our students to demonstrate “masterful” knowledge of the disciplines in which they are immersed; we demand that they find the correct answers; but our institutional efforts do not take us very far at all in the direction of knowing ourselves, for knowing ourselves not only entails knowing what we know, but also knowing the extent of our own ignorance.

In ancient times, when sojourners after the deepest knowing approached the “bellybutton” (*omphalos*) of the world – that is, its very centre and life source -- the Pythian Apollo commanded them at the doorpost and gateway to “know thyself!” (*gnothi seauton*). When Socrates was made aware by one such sojourner, his friend Chaerephon, of the oracle at Delphi’s pronouncement that “no one was wiser” than he,<sup>1032</sup> Socrates was perplexed; he knew that he was not wise, “either much or little.” Indeed, he knew – as did Pythagoras

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<sup>1032</sup> To Chaerephon’s inquiry whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates, “The Pythia replied that there was no one wiser” (*aneilen oun he Pythia medena sophoteron einai*). See Plato, *Apology* 21a.

before him – that “only the god is wise”; but then he did not suppose that the god would lie either. And so in order to try to understand the god’s “riddle,” Socrates began his famous (or rather, infamous) dialogic explorations; he questioned those in his city about what they knew and what they claimed to know, hoping to find somebody who was wiser than he and thereby to refute the divination. However, through his questioning, Socrates found that all those with whom he spoke supposed themselves to be wise (in the sense of knowing the highest and the most important things) but were, in fact, not wise at all; rather, they only believed themselves to be so. They did not truly know themselves, being unaware of the extent of their own ignorance. Having exposed their ineptitude in a rather public way, Socrates became hated by many powerful men in Athens; they felt humiliated and insulted by his questions, and they supposed that he was not only insulting them, but also teaching the youth to be disrespectful towards them as well; titillated by the contest of words in such displays and eager to play these games themselves, the youth in earshot of Socrates no longer simply bowed to the presumed authority and wisdom of their elders, but rather became questioners themselves. Unlike Socrates, however, they did so not necessarily for the purposes of seeking out the truth, but rather for the joy of contest (*agon*): for the love of tearing down and destroying the customs and traditions that were held sacrosanct by their community. And certainly students even to this day still enjoy teaching their teachers and authority figures to “suck eggs”!

In his defence speech, Socrates claims that he never was anyone’s teacher.<sup>1033</sup> The purview of teachers, in this regard, seems to be to pass on knowledge to their pupils, to instruct them in the acquisition of a particular sort of knowing – in the principles and practices of mathematics, physics, wood-working, and literary composition, for example. However, Socrates disavows ever having instructed anyone in anything. Rather, he claims to have done nothing else but ask the people he met during his lifetime what they knew or claimed to know; he found in doing so that the “wisdom” for which he became distinguished by the Delphic oracle was a rather low, “human sort of wisdom” (*anthropine sophia*)<sup>1034</sup> that entailed not claiming to know what one does not in fact know.<sup>1035</sup> The

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<sup>1033</sup> Plato, *Apology* 33a.

<sup>1034</sup> Plato, *Apology* 20d.

<sup>1035</sup> Speaking about his questioning of others either professing or espoused as being in the possession of wisdom, Socrates says to his audience: “I am wiser than this human being. For probably neither of us knows

activity for which he was being prosecuted was, in this sense, not really teaching anyone anything; rather, as a testament to his friendship (*philia*) for his fellows and their children, Socrates sought to awaken the people of Athens – and, of course, people down through the ages – to the importance of coming to know themselves,<sup>1036</sup> not to care for “bodies or money” so much as for “how your soul will be the best possible.”<sup>1037</sup> In this regard, philosophy is the quintessential art of caring for souls.

How is it then that modern mass public education cannot likewise be harnessed towards this precious end? What would education look like if it followed Socrates’ example? Rather than teaching students and testing them and assessing them and goading them to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge in the various disciplines, what would the pursuit of “human wisdom” look like? Is it beyond the purview of teachers *not to teach* and to inculcate, but rather to ask questions, like Socrates, that lead students (and ourselves!) into an awareness of our own ignorance, and to this extent, into a “human sort of wisdom” (*anthropine sophia*)? Imagine the strangeness of not being graded on what you claim to know, but focusing rather on coming to know the extent of your own ignorance! How would students react to not having to worry about finding the “right answers” to achieve pre-ordained curriculum “outcomes”? What if significant portions of what we did in school – whether as teachers or as students -- were cut loose entirely from the grading system – for again, we are told that grades ought only to measure what a student *knows*<sup>1038</sup> -- and

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anything noble and good, but he supposes he knows something when he does not know, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do. I am likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know.” See Plato, *Apology* 21d.

<sup>1036</sup> Socrates invokes the image of the gadfly in his defence speech to make this point: “I awaken and persuade and reproach each one of you, and I do not stop settling down everywhere upon you the whole day” (30e-31a).

<sup>1037</sup> Plato, *Apology* 30b.

<sup>1038</sup> Relying on Thomas Aquinas’ insights as well as those of other contemplatives, I have previously discussed how our fixation with measurement and assessment cannot readily be reconciled to contemplative activity. Holland makes a similar remark when he writes: “There is really no such thing as a good meditator or a bad meditator – there is just a meditator.” See Holland, “Contemplative Education in Unexpected Places,” 1851. Indeed, the emphasis on “beginner’s mind” – i.e., that everyone who participates in meditative or contemplative exercises is the same, and starts from the same spiritual place – is throughout all contemplative literature and contemplative practice. Nonetheless, part of the charade of teaching requires that we measure student “knowledge.” In my own teaching, I have therefore relied primarily upon two modes of “marking” student activities in this regard. I have always used self-assessment by the student on the one hand, as well as recognition by me (the teacher) on the other hand that the student has made a valiant attempt at the experiment: that he or she has participated in its spirit and completed it. This mode of assessment (i.e., using “effort” marks, participation marks, and “completion” marks) has been strictly forbidden and condemned in my own school division as “bad pedagogy,” but it is the only form of assessment that seems to come close to recognizing the peculiar nature of contemplative practice. I have since learned that other teachers and

students were instead encouraged to explore the extent of their own ignorance, such that the more they came to realize what they didn't know, the more praise they would garner from us as parents and teachers? Indeed, what if a terrible grade in a course was *not* spurned or decried by parents maddened for the success of their children as a failure of the child, a failure of the teacher, and a failure of the educational system, but rather as a great boon and an indication that the student had, in fact, undergone some deep learning about the most important things? To recognize what we know and what we do not know is to know ourselves, inasmuch as it is to know the limits of our own knowledge. It is to recognize, as Plato has often written, that human beings live in the “in-between” (*metaxy*): that is, we inhabit a region between ignorance (*agnoia*) and knowledge (*episteme*). We are neither completely ignorant, nor are we completely knowledgeable. It is to recognize our limitations and our mortal nature; however, in recognizing the mortal, we also intimate what is immortal as its boundary; we come to know our participation in the immortal by default. This too is the value of philosophy, or pursuing wisdom.

## 2. The *Metaxy* and Pursuing Wisdom in Schools

Plato develops a number of symbols for investigating the full range of our experiences as human beings. Among these, the notion of “participation” (*methexis*) is key. That is, human beings come to know through participating in the “good order” (*kosmos*) of things as a part of that good order themselves. We derive our participatory knowledge of what *is* through *eros* or love, and human beings partake in the full range of being; that is, we share in becoming and change (*genesis*), as well as in the various manners of being (*ousia*). For instance, inasmuch as we exist, we participate by the activity of our simple existence in mineral soul (*psyche*); being subject to both growth and decay, we participate in vegetative or nutritive soul; when we experience appetites, drives, or desires, we partake in the realm of animal soul; and finally, inasmuch as we engage in thought (*dianoia*), intellection (*noesis*), or matters of reason (*logos*), we participate in rational soul. Our experiences are not simply of sensible being in the world of becoming, changing, or

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professors who incorporate contemplative practices into their pedagogy likewise use these same modes of assessment. See, for instance, Coburn, Grace, Klein, Komjathy, Roth, and Simmer-Brown. “Contemplative Pedagogy: Frequently Asked Questions” 168; cf. Holland, “Contemplative Education in Unexpected Places” 1850.

corruptible things; we can also imagine or think about incorruptible or unchanging things in the realm of the intelligible.

A second symbol arises from the fact that human existence, as Plato understands it, is daimonic; that is, we exist as beings who are in-between (*metaxy*) death (*thanatos*) and deathlessness (*athanatos*), ignorance (*agnoia*) and knowledge (*episteme*), the mortal unlimited (*apeiron*)<sup>1039</sup> and the immortal beyond (*epekeina*). Existence is lived and experienced as a tension (*tasis*) between these two poles; moreover, it is clear that, for Plato, neither pole in this tension (the ground pole on the one hand, and the human pole on the other) can be known independently of or apart from this tension hypostatically. Rather, the experience of the tension and awareness of the poles belong together. Our erotic desire to know can take us noetically to the very extremes in this tension, but the tension itself can never be resolved. We can ascend and descend noetically as daimonic beings erotically motivated to know the Ground of Being.

Tied to the symbols of *methexis* and the *metaxy*, the symbol of recollection or *anamnesis* is developed by Plato in order to make plain the manner in which our natural inclination towards inquiry (*zetesis*) indicates the participatory nature of our being in both time and Eternity. It is a means of connoting the existential tension (*tasis*) of the ignorance that is in search – the Platonic *zetesis* – of something and, "in order to be in search of the something, [we] must be moved already by some sort of knowledge of that something into searching for it."<sup>1040</sup> We have already seen similar discussions of this phenomenon in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where it is pointed out that the desire of all men to know originates in a pull (*kinesis*) toward searching for something beyond ourselves; the experience of unrest in ignorance is therefore simultaneously an experience of transcendence and grace.

To sum up, for Plato, seeking to know metaphysical reality is part of our character as beings who experience the desire to know in the daimonic tension of our existence. The mind, like the heart, desires, and it is this erotic desire to know throughout the entire soul

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<sup>1039</sup> As a term invented by Anaximander, the *Apeiron* signifies "the inexhaustibly creative ground (*arche*) that released 'things' into being and received them back when they perished"; Plato, in cognizing the One (*to hen*) as the Divine Ground Pole opposite to the *Apeiron*, used this term to signify "the function of an infinite and formless *materia prima* in which the One can diversify itself into Many of the 'things' with their form and number." See Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 4 in *Order and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 185.

<sup>1040</sup> Eric Voegelin, "Structures of Consciousness" in vol. 33 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. William Petropoulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 362.



that indicates our awareness of the Lovable that is the ground or source for all being; it is this Good Beyond Being<sup>1041</sup> that draws us beyond the realms of the sensible and the intelligible. The height of metaphysical ascent, for Plato – namely, that vision of the transcendent depicted in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (247a-248a) – is ultimately achieved through love, desire, or *eros*, which is itself a response to the grace of the Lovable source.

Eric Voegelin has written extensively on the significance of the symbol of the *metaxy* in Plato’s corpus – particularly as this symbol is developed in the *Symposium* and the *Philebus*. In Voegelin’s analysis of Plato’s symbol, human beings experience themselves as tending beyond their human imperfection toward the perfection of the divine ground that moves them:

The spiritual man, the *daimonios aner*, as he is moved in his quest of the ground, moves somewhere between knowledge and ignorance (*metaxy sophias kai amathias*). “The whole realm of the spiritual (*daimonion*) is halfway indeed between (*metaxy*) god and man” (*Symp.* 202a). Thus, the in-between – the *metaxy* – is not an empty space between the poles of the tension but the “realm of the spiritual”; it is the reality of “man’s converse with the gods” (202-203), the mutual participation (*methexis*, *metalepsis*) of human in divine, and divine in human, reality. The *metaxy* symbolizes the experience of the noetic quest as a transition of the psyche from mortality to immortality.<sup>1042</sup>

In his *Phaedo*, Plato has Socrates describe the “correct” (*orthos*) study of philosophy as “nothing other than the practice of dying and being dead” (*ouden allo autoi epitedeuousin e apothneiskein te kai tethnanai*);<sup>1043</sup> as we have already seen, Aristotle too speaks of philosophizing as the practice of “immortalizing” (*athanatizein*).<sup>1044</sup> In this way, the noetic movement of the *psyche* within the *metaxy* is characterized as a motion away from our mortal and finite nature, and as a reaching out towards the immortal and unlimited poles of existence:

Man exists in the tension between mortality and immortality, between the apeirontic depth and the noetic height. The *apeiron* and the *nous* reach into his psyche and he participates in them, but he is not identical with, or in control of, either the one or the other. This area of metaleptic reality is the proper domain of human thought – its inquiries, learning, and teaching (*skopein*, *manthanein*, *didaskein*). To move within the *metaxy*, exploring it in all directions and orienting himself in the perspective granted to man by his position in reality, is the proper task of the philosopher. To

<sup>1041</sup> See Plato, *Republic* 509b.

<sup>1042</sup> Eric Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience” in *Anamnesis*, 103.

<sup>1043</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 64a.

<sup>1044</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.vii.8.

denote this movement of thought or discussion (*logos*) within the *metaxy*, Plato uses the term “dialectics.”<sup>1045</sup>

Plato, Voegelin points out, depicts human beings as daimonic in nature. We participate in the full amplitude of cosmic being, and our nature is drawn erotically towards the exploration of both the heights and the depths of things – that is, we aspire beyond our own mortal and limited nature towards the poles of our existence in the One and the Unlimited.

What does this image of the *metaxy* have to do with the pursuit of wisdom in schools? Voegelin rightly points out that philosophy, as the genuine “love of wisdom,” is *not* a body of “ideas” or “opinions” about the divine ground “dispensed by a person who calls himself a philosopher”; following Aristotle, he writes that the love of wisdom is “a man’s responsive pursuit of his questioning unrest to the divine source that has aroused it.”<sup>1046</sup> The pursuit of wisdom – whether articulated in terms of *anairesis* or *katabasis* within the *metaxy*, whether conceived of as immortalizing or as dying, whether embodied in *samatha* or *vipassana* meditation -- is therefore necessarily tied to our becoming conscious of our own status as beings of the in-between (*metaxy*) who are drawn in tension (*tasis*) towards the poles of our existence. Indeed, Voegelin describes consciousness as “the experience of participation,” or the “participation of man in his ground of being.”<sup>1047</sup> Put another way, without actively cultivating and heightening our awareness of this tension towards the ground, we are likely – despite all the sophisticated educational efforts of modern-day reformers -- to remain in a state of spiritual slumber (*katheudontes diateloite an*). In our sloth or dullness (*notheia*), we shall resemble the ancient Athenians who, when the gadfly Socrates sought by his stings to “awaken” them like a great but sluggish (*nothes*) horse, chose to swat and to kill him in order to fall back into their slumbering state rather than to live in the discomfort of this experiential tension (*tasis*).<sup>1048</sup> Our sophisticated education numbs us to this tension; however, it is precisely this tension that must be

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<sup>1045</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 107. In this same essay, Voegelin elaborates further on these two poles as they are discussed in the *Philebus*. The One (*hen*) is “the divine ground (*aitia*) that is present as the formative force in all things, to be identified with wisdom and mind (*sophia kai nous*) (30bc).” The Unlimited “is Anaximander’s *apeiron*, the cosmic ground (*arche*) from which things are brought forth into being (*genesis*) and into which they perish again (*phthora*), ‘for they pay one another penalty for their injustice (*adikia*) according to the ordinance of Time’ (B 1).” (105).

<sup>1046</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 96.

<sup>1047</sup> Voegelin, “Linguistic Indices and Type-Concepts,” 175.

<sup>1048</sup> For Socrates’ use of the horse and gadfly images to express the philosopher’s relationship to the city, see Plato, *Apology* 30e-31a.

suffered wherever and whenever wisdom is pursued. As Voegelin writes: “Without the *kinesis* of being attracted by the ground, there would be no desire for it; without the desire, no questioning in confusion; without questioning in confusion, no awareness of ignorance.”<sup>1049</sup>

A genuine education for wisdom, then, must draw both students and teachers into awareness of this existential *taxis*; indeed, such an education will heighten our feeling for this tension to the greatest extent possible. Of course, the experience of this tension is not necessarily pleasant; consequently, we must beware of the various calls among P4C advocates to make philosophizing “safe” and “secure” for children (as well as for teachers!).<sup>1050</sup> Certainly, the act of pursuing wisdom in schools ought to be protected and given a sanctuary of sorts within which it might reside and prosper in safety from the sophisticated claims of what commonly passes for education; but within the boundaries of that sanctuary – whether it be the modern classroom, the medieval monk’s cell, or the ancient academic garden -- philosophy itself is never rightly characterized as a safe activity. Rather, Karin Murris writes that in philosophy, “Emotional disturbance cannot be avoided.” In her view, the disturbance wrought by philosophizing “can be a sign that ‘demanding thinking’ is taking place,”<sup>1051</sup> and she points out that bringing about philosophy’s “disequilibrium” is an important factor in establishing the sorts of “tensions” that can create “rich opportunities” in the classroom.<sup>1052</sup>

Voegelin writes about Aristotle’s articulation of “questioning unrest” as “the initial phase of the noetic experience.” It is the baseline experience from which the pursuit of wisdom might arise, and without which wisdom’s pursuit is quite impossible. However, the experience of this questioning unrest itself is no guarantee that noetic movement – whether conceived of as *anairesis* or *katabasis* -- will occur. Rather, this unrest “can either follow

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<sup>1049</sup> Eric Voegelin, “The Consciousness of the Ground,” in *Anamnesis*, 149.

<sup>1050</sup> See, for instance, Reeve, Messina, and Scardamalia, who contend that for philosophy to prosper among children, “the culture must be one of psychological safety, so that people feel safe in taking risks – revealing ignorance, voicing half-baked notions, giving and receiving criticism.” See Reeve, Messina, and Scardamalia, “Wisdom in Elementary School,” 81. Certainly the authors are correct inasmuch as children’s philosophic acts must be secured and protected from the meddlesomeness of grades and accountability structures, the demands for correct answers, and the rest of regular schooling. But inasmuch as philosophy cannot, as an activity, occur without being the art of dying, it is most certainly not safe – even for children.

<sup>1051</sup> Murris, “Autonomous and Authentic Thinking Through Philosophy with Picturebooks,” 116.

<sup>1052</sup> Karin Murris, “Philosophy with Children, the Stingray and the Educative Value of Disequilibrium,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42, no. 3/4 (2008): 681.

the attraction of the ground and unfold into noetic consciousness, or it can be diverted from the ground and follow other attractions.”<sup>1053</sup> Put another way, the experience of suffering this *tasis* may, on the one hand, give rise to the desire for liberation (*moksa*) from suffering through seeking out knowledge of the divine ground. Eliade remarks on the instructive nature of suffering (*dukkha*) in this regard when he writes that “the more man suffers (that is, the greater is his solidarity with the cosmos), the more the desire for emancipation increases in him, the more intensely he thirsts for salvation.”<sup>1054</sup> However, on the other hand, the experience of suffering this tension may just as easily derail when the suffering subject seeks to lash out at what is seen to be the cause of his or her suffering.

Students – and in my experience, most often the “good” students who demand high marks and who score well on government-mandated tests -- exposed to *tasis* very often respond with great anxiety; for this reason, teachers who philosophize with their charges sometimes incur significant wrath, being met with hostility from parents as well as pupils. This situation cannot be new; in fact, it is fair to surmise that the experience of being led into an awareness of this existential tension was among the motives for Socrates’ murder at the hands of his fellow citizens.<sup>1055</sup> Moreover, without having constructed a sanctuary or playing field of sorts within the modern school day to protect the activity of pursuing wisdom from meddlesome external forces, it seems likely that the derailment of *noesis* will most often be the rule and *noesis* the exceptional response. As I have argued throughout this thesis, outside of its playing field – i.e., a place of genuine schooling or *scholē* – the pursuit of wisdom will always look ridiculous; it will always be met with scorn and opposition. Indeed, given the manner in which students today are pressured to succeed in school, being conditioned to provide the “correct” answer to every question, they most often encounter the uncertainty of not-knowing and existential tension in school *not* as a joyful impetus towards liberation, but rather with the greatest anxiety.

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<sup>1053</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 100.

<sup>1054</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 11.

<sup>1055</sup> Socrates’ murder at the hands of his fellows shares some resemblance in this regard with the story of St. Benedict of Nursia. Maria Lichtmann writes that a number of monks found Benedict settled in a cave among the hills at Subiaco in Italy, and they begged him to become their teacher “in the ways of God.” Although he warned them that his way would “seriously disturb their lifestyle, the very monks who persuaded him to leave his solitary cave found his spiritual guidance so intolerable that they conspired to poison him.” See Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life*, 20.

Voegelin has remarked how, in classical Greek experience, there is no term with a meaning equivalent to our modern sense of “anxiety” as being scared or frightened by a question to which no answer can be found.<sup>1056</sup> Rather than being experienced as fear, the classic (especially Aristotelian) unrest is “distinctly joyful” because “the questioning has direction.”<sup>1057</sup> That is to say: such unrest was understood implicitly to be the sign of a burgeoning awareness of the divine ground pole; it was what Voegelin calls “the joy of luminous participation”<sup>1058</sup> in this pole as experienced in the soul of the seeker. By contrast, our anxious, modern-day, and fearful responses to not-knowing arise as a kind of ignorance (*agnoia*) about the self and what concerns it.<sup>1059</sup> Eliade similarly remarks that the prominence of anxiety for modern-day (and particularly Western) people is due to “our discovery of our temporality and historicity” – perhaps our awareness of the apeirontic depth into which we all must once again ineluctably be submerged -- on the one hand in the absence of any concordant awareness on the other hand of the eternality of the One – that opposite pole in which we too participate.<sup>1060</sup>

Throughout this thesis, I have been at pains to emphasize that the solution to this situation of modern anxiety – and student anxiety in particular -- is *not* to be found in developing greater adeptitude with our critical-analytic reasoning capacities, nor in the cultivation of imagination or creativity. Rather, we must take pains to awaken ourselves to full consciousness of our existence as being in-between (*metaxy*). To know this “in-between” requires not simply knowledge of the apeirontic depth – that inescapable dissolution of the mortal, bounded self into the unbounded *materia prima*; indeed, only knowing this, we remain unaware of the Apeiron *as a pole*, for knowing something as a “pole” implies knowing it in relation to its opposing pole; neither are we truly aware of ourselves as beings of the *metaxy*, or of our soul as “a place of tensions”<sup>1061</sup> -- for again, the fact of tension or being pulled *between* makes no sense without an awareness of amplitude *between* two poles. Student anxiety in the experience of their own temporality and

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<sup>1056</sup> Voegelin writes that Cicero’s *anxietas* in the *Tusculan Disputations* is “too uncertain in its meaning to be unreservedly identified with modern “anxiety”; he points out that our modern notion of anxiety as “being scared by not-knowing” was first introduced by the Stoics. See Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 101.

<sup>1057</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 101.

<sup>1058</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 112.

<sup>1059</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 99. Here, Voegelin cites the Stoic Chrysippus.

<sup>1060</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, xix.

<sup>1061</sup> Eric Voegelin, “Eternal Being in Time” in *Anamnesis*, 125.

dissolution -- being a form of ignorance (*agnoia*) that arises from lack of consciousness of the ground pole -- can only be combatted and ameliorated through persistent efforts to awaken them to this pole; in Voegelinian terms, in schools, we must enculture an “existential *philia*”<sup>1062</sup> or friendship with Wisdom that would inform the exercise of our reason through opening us toward the ground. Such an “existential friendship” or *philia* for this pole would thereby dispel students’ fears, restoring for each of them the classical noetic experience of “joy in luminous participation.”

To return to Plato’s enucleation of education, *paideia* is best described as a kind of recollection (*anamnesis*) of one’s participation in the full breadth of what is. Given that human existence is so rich and that it spans the entire amplitude of being, what then ought modern educators do to cultivate our broadest awareness of ourselves (our self-knowledge) as beings who participate in this full spectrum? Certainly the study of mathematics, sciences, history, and literature is not enough to cultivate such a vision; nor, as I have repeatedly explained, is demonstrating mastery of analytic, synthetic, and evaluative capacities in these fields of study sufficient. Voegelin writes in the passages cited above that it is the proper task of the philosopher to explore the *metaxy* and to move in all directions along its full amplitude. But is it the sole prerogative of the philosopher to explore the full range of his or her own being, or are not *all* human beings called upon by the Delphic oracle to know themselves? Are not all of us to various degrees called towards such recollective seeing? Moreover, if self-knowledge and its companion activity of immortalization are essential components to the pursuit of the good human life, and if the possibility for a good human life ought to be available to all human beings, what then ought education look like? Shouldn’t education, as much as is possible, bring about within those being educated the fullest awareness of the amplitude of their being? Much of what we do in school deadens our awareness of this tension and the metaxic nature of our existence. Ought school not do the exact opposite? Ought it not draw attention to our experience of the tension (*taxis*) through which we become aware of the two poles of our existence and teach us, as best as possible, how to live within that tension instead of seeking release from it through supposing that either one of the poles in the tension might either be denied or fully attained? Plato’s symbol of the *metaxy* and his philosophic exposition of our daimonic

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<sup>1062</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 98.

nature suggests that a true education is one that might perfect us by making available the possibility of our highest happiness. Indeed, a true education is necessarily philosophic in the sense that it must empower us to engage in a full investigation of the psychic amplitude that we all experience through existential tension as beings in-between the poles of existence.

### 3. The Importance of the “True Up” in Education (*To Alethos Ano, Republic 584d*)

Voegelin’s analysis of the Platonic symbol of the *metaxy* has recently met with criticism. James Rhodes has written, for instance, that Voegelin gives the *metaxy* “a centrality that it does not have in Plato,” that Voegelin tends to “select Platonic lines that appeal to him,” and that he “merely quoted the same few lines of the *Symposium* repeatedly, neglecting to defend the accuracy of his first interpretation of them and filling up his newly minted noun ‘*metaxy*’ with ever more meanings as he developed his own exceedingly rich philosophy of consciousness.” Indeed, Rhodes goes so far as to say that, apart from Diotima’s use of the word in the *Symposium*, “Nothing more is said about a significant ‘*metaxy*’ in the dialogue or anywhere else in Plato.” Moreover, Rhodes argues that Diotima’s preposition “*metaxy*” and Voegelin’s noun “*metaxy*” “envisage different things.” Specifically, Voegelin is accused of missing “the fact” that Eros “lives more fundamentally between being and nothingness,” and therefore that for Plato, “the word ‘*metaxy*’ is a symbol of the philosopher’s experiences of human converse with divine reality and of man’s potentially fatal attraction toward nothingness.” Voegelin, by contrast, is said to envision the *metaxy* as “a symbol of human converse with divine reality that loses the second meaning of attraction toward the void.” In other words, Voegelin’s “failure,” as Rhodes sees it, is in misconstruing the pull or tension as uni-directional rather than as “one double pull in opposite directions, one of them evil.”<sup>1063</sup>

However, I suggest that a careful reading of both Plato’s and Voegelin’s elucidation of the *metaxy* suggests that Rhodes’ criticisms are quite unfair and inaccurate. First, the claim that Voegelin misconstrues existential *taxis* as uni-directional is not confirmed by my reading of Voegelin’s texts. Indeed, Voegelin frequently makes mention of the “double

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<sup>1063</sup> See James Rhodes, “What is the Metaxy?” [Electronic paper] The Voegelin Institute (2003) <http://www.lsu.edu/artsci/groups/voegelin/society/2003%20Papers/Rhodes.shtml>. (accessed June 3, 2011).

pull” as Rhodes calls it. As we have already seen, Voegelin remarks that our unrest can “either follow the *attraction* of the ground and unfold into noetic consciousness, or it can be diverted from the ground and follow *other attractions*.”<sup>1064</sup> Here, we already see evidence of a “double pull.” Later in this same essay, Voegelin remarks upon the “double pull,” writing: “In the classic experience of noetic existence man is free either to engage in the action of “immortalizing” by following the pull of the divine *nous*, or to choose death by following the *counterpull* of the passions.”<sup>1065</sup> Elaborating on this “counterpull” to the tug of the divine *nous*, Voegelin remarks that: “Behind the passions there is at work the lust of existence from the depth (i.e., the injustice on which the law of the cosmos has set the penalty of death in Time).” He then links this classic expression of the “counterpull” in Greek philosophy with its expression in Christian psychology, where “this apeirontic lust of existence has become the *superbia vitae*, or *libido dominandi*, which serves the theologians as the definition of original sin.” Next, he explicitly links both these articulations of what Rhodes calls the “double pull” to “the participation of the psyche in the *metaxy* whose poles are *apeiron* and *nous*.”<sup>1066</sup> Quite clearly, then, Rhodes’ accusations concerning Voegelin’s “failure” to adequately express the Platonic sense of *taxis* experienced within the *metaxy* as a “double pull” are unfair and inaccurate.

Second, I suggest that Rhodes’ claim that Voegelin has hyper-accentuated the significance of Plato’s symbol of the *metaxy* -- that “Nothing more is said about a significant ‘*metaxy*’ in the dialogue or anywhere else in Plato” -- is unfair and unsubstantiated. Certainly, Voegelin focuses upon the appearance of this symbol in *The Symposium* and *The Philebus*, but I doubt very much that this was due to his ignorance of its existence elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, nor do I believe that Voegelin was simply playing fast and loose with textual evidence. Rather, I think Voegelin simply wanted, like anyone pursuing wisdom, to see most clearly what *is*, and he found the passages in Plato’s *Symposium* where the *metaxy* is specifically discussed most amenable to that purpose. Of course, it should come as no surprise to us as readers if the symbol or its equivalents are to be found elsewhere in Plato’s corpus, since he, like Voegelin, sought to know what is, and though the symbols used might vary in detail and inflection, the reality they explore

<sup>1064</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 100 (italics added).

<sup>1065</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 105 (italics added).

<sup>1066</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 106.



remains what it is. Elsewhere, I have argued that the symbol of the *metaxy* is not simply spoken of by Diotima in a few scant lines in the *Symposium*; rather, it permeates the entire *Symposium*, both in the image of a dialectical ascent in the speeches, as well as in the form of a dramatic descent.<sup>1067</sup> In what follows, I offer my own further interpretation of two of Plato's dialogues, partly as an homage to Voegelin's original insights into Plato's writings, but also as an extension of what Voegelin has taught me about the pursuit of wisdom, and in particular, what significance wisdom's pursuit might have with regard to education in schools.

The significance of Plato's *metaxy* as a symbol to assist us in understanding the pursuit of wisdom in the field of education can be explored more fully if we turn to a passage not discussed by Voegelin that appears in Book IX of the *Republic*.<sup>1068</sup> At this point in Plato's dialogue, Socrates and Glaukon have come to an impasse over the question of whether or not human beings with a variety of dispositions towards the truth,<sup>1069</sup> or only philosophers, are able to experience the entire gamut of things that constitute our experience of tension within the *metaxy*. Glaukon agrees that the money-maker, for instance, will assert that the sweetest life could only be that of gaining wealth, and that a life either of honours or of learning would be worth very little by comparison, whereas the lover of honour will judge the acquisition of money to be a low and vulgar thing and the life of learning to be "smoke and nonsense" compared with gaining esteem in the eyes of others. Glaukon also assents to the judgement that the lover of wisdom, in contrast to the other two types of human beings, would hold both money-making and honours "far behind in pleasure." Each person, in short, would judge as best the life that most suited his own personal tastes and accorded best with what he considered to be most the pleasurable things given his own experiences.<sup>1070</sup>

When Socrates asks Glaukon "how would we know which of them speaks most truly?" Glaukon responds with, "I certainly can't say."<sup>1071</sup> In my experience, this exchange between Socrates and Plato's brother is accurate to what students in modern-day classrooms say when asked about what sort of life is best. Students really do suppose that

<sup>1067</sup> Steel, "Katabasis in Plato's *Symposium*," 59-83.

<sup>1068</sup> Further discussion of the *metaxy* can be found in Book V of Plato's *Republic* at 477a and 478d.

<sup>1069</sup> The three dispositions explored here are "wisdom-loving," "victory-loving," and "gain-loving" (581a).

<sup>1070</sup> Plato, *Republic* 581ce.

<sup>1071</sup> Plato, *Republic* 582a.

whatever pursuits bring them the most pleasure in their current experience of things are the true indicators of the best sort of life, and that the value of education is to enable each of them to pursue the goals that they establish for themselves based on their experiences of pleasure in the goods they have chosen as best. To speak with students and to question them about whether or not their evaluations of the pleasures and pains they have experienced are adequate, and whether the goals they have set in conjunction with these experiences are well-advised is to cross a line that sometimes affronts and offends. Nonetheless, Socrates suggests that anyone is capable of seeing past his or her own natural dispositions towards certain goods more broadly. He asks Glaukon:

Now, consider. Of the three men, which is most experienced in all the pleasures of which we were speaking? Does the lover of gain, because he learns the truth itself as it is (*auten ten aletheian hoion estin*), seem to you to be more experienced in the pleasure that comes from knowing than the lover of wisdom is in the pleasure that comes from gaining?<sup>1072</sup>

Essentially, Socrates would have Glaukon consider here if the salesman or money-maker couldn't appreciate a vision of the truth just as well as the philosopher could if he was exposed to it; the suggestion is that the philosopher and the money-maker are really no different from one another apart from their basic dispositions – that all of us are able by nature to have a vision of the Good Itself, and to learn “the truth itself as it is” (*auten ten aletheian hoion estin*). Glaukon, however, balks at Socrates' gentle suggestion, saying, “the kind of pleasure connected with the vision of what *is* (*tes de tou ontos theas*) cannot be tasted by anyone except the lover of wisdom.”<sup>1073</sup> Glaukon exposes his elitism throughout the dialogue, and here is just one more example of his supposition that he is among the few and the wise and the philosophic; here, we encounter the claim often made about philosophic inquiry that it is the sole prerogative of a few intelligent elite – certainly not amenable to the mass public education of children and youths! Glaukon may be many things: he is a geometrician, an honour-loving young man, a pederast, and a lover of both cock-fighting and animal husbandry; but he is no philosopher. He fails again and again throughout the dialogue to follow Socrates all the way along the long, upward path<sup>1074</sup> of their discussions towards a vision of the Good (*Agathon*). From Glaukon's assumptions in

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<sup>1072</sup> Plato, *Republic* 582ab.

<sup>1073</sup> Plato, *Republic* 582c.

<sup>1074</sup> For examples of the image of the longer, upward way, see Plato, *Republic* 435d, 504a, and 504d.

this passage about the exclusivity of philosophizing, the suggestion arises that only lovers of wisdom can be prudent since they alone are open to a vision of the Good.<sup>1075</sup> But what if, just as a common money-maker or salesman can take pleasure in “learning the truth itself as it is,” so too can such a one be prudent? What if the pleasures of philosophy are not an elite affair as Glaukon suggests, but open to anyone and everyone?

When Socrates next tests Glaukon to inquire if “arguments are especially the instrument of the philosopher,” the young man responds without hesitation, “Of course.”<sup>1076</sup> But isn’t it the case that *anyone* can engage in dialectic? Doesn’t Socrates talk to anyone and everyone he meets, in fact? Certainly not everyone in Athens is a “philosopher” by disposition. But just as certainly everyone Socrates talks to has a mind, and although Glaukon is not a philosopher, he is still able to use argument and to engage in dialectic along with Socrates. Indeed, the very drama of the dialogue itself, and not only Socrates’ gentle suggestions to the contrary, indicates that Glaukon’s distinctions between the philosopher and everyone else are too stark. Glaukon treats philosophy and wisdom as though they were sorts of technical knowledge or skills in which one could become an “expert,” just like a carpenter knows best how to do carpentry work. But if philosophy were a particular art (*techne*) and if wisdom were a kind of specialized knowledge (*episteme*), this would mean that no one except the philosopher could have wisdom, and moreover, that the philosopher would know nothing else besides; but if this were the case about wisdom and philosophy -- if all knowing (wisdom included) were compartmentalized and specialized in this way -- then the lover of wisdom would be ridiculously out of touch with all things. But thankfully, even carpenters know things besides carpentry! Something is clearly quite amiss about Glaukon’s understanding of wisdom and philosophy. Glaukon has not been able to follow Socrates in their discussion.

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<sup>1075</sup> Plato, *Republic* 582d.

<sup>1076</sup> Plato, *Republic* 582d.

At 583b, Socrates repeats his earlier characterization of their discussion as a kind of wrestling match. Unhappy with the results of their dialogue, Socrates takes a “third hold”

upon the argument for his friend’s sake.<sup>1077</sup> In particular, he attempts to remedy Glaukon’s own blindness to the full spectrum of the *metaxy* that might be explored if, like the simple money-maker in Socrates’ example at 582a, he too might “learn to see the truth itself as it is.” Glaukon’s problem, however, is that he supposes he has already seen everything that can be seen, and that he already knows the highest things that can be known. Socrates therefore attempts to dispel Glaukon’s suppositions about his own knowing by appealing to his basic experiences of pleasure and pain. He begins by asking Glaukon whether or not

pain (*lypen*) and pleasure (*hedone*) are opposites, and if there is not also a middle term between (*metaxy*) them we refer to as “repose” or quietude (*hesuchian*) of soul that is neither affected by joy nor pain. To this ordering, Glaukon agrees (see Figure 1).

Next, Socrates introduces the complexities of psychological dispositions and perspective through the mention of how sick men experience pleasure differently than healthy men, saying: “After all, nothing is more pleasant than being healthy, but before

they [the sick men] were sick it had escaped them that it is most pleasant.” Glaukon agrees with Socrates that for those undergoing some intense suffering “nothing is more pleasant than the cessation of suffering.”<sup>1078</sup> In short, the simple cessation of pain can be mistaken for pleasure since human beings, “while they are in pain, extol as most pleasant not enjoyment but rather the absence of pain and repose from it.”<sup>1079</sup> Through appealing to Glaukon’s own experiences of pain and pleasure, Socrates has demonstrated that, to those in pain, repose is experienced as pleasure, whereas for one who experiences pleasure, to lose that pleasure in a state of repose is experienced as painful. As

depicted in Figure 2, repose or quietude of soul will “at times be both, pain and pleasure.”<sup>1080</sup> But through these examples, it becomes clear to Glaukon that the absence of

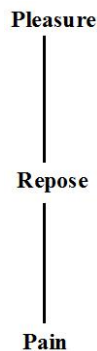


Figure 1

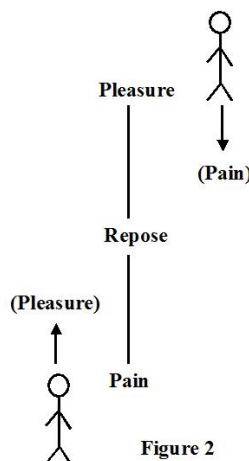


Figure 2

<sup>1077</sup> The first and second wrestling holds are discussed at 543c and 544b respectively.

<sup>1078</sup> Plato, *Republic* 583cd.

<sup>1079</sup> Plato, *Republic* 583d.

<sup>1080</sup> Plato, *Republic* 583e.

suffering is not the same thing as enjoyment, nor is the absence of enjoyment rightly understood as grievous. Rather, only when it is next to the painful does repose look pleasant, “and next to the pleasant, painful,” such that “in these appearances (*phantasmaton*) there is nothing sound, so far as truth of pleasure goes, only a certain wizardry (*goeteia*).”<sup>1081</sup>

Having explored the nature of pleasures and pains, and the manner in which our experiences of them can trick us into supposing that we have undergone something that we have not, Socrates next takes his explanation of such experiences and applies it to our suppositions about what we know and do not know. Replacing the experiences of pleasure, repose, and pain with the categories of “up” (*to ano*), “middle” (*to meson*), and “down” (*to kato*), Socrates has the following exchange with Glaukon:

“Do you suppose that a man brought from the downward region to the middle would suppose anything else than that he was being brought up? [See Figure 3] And

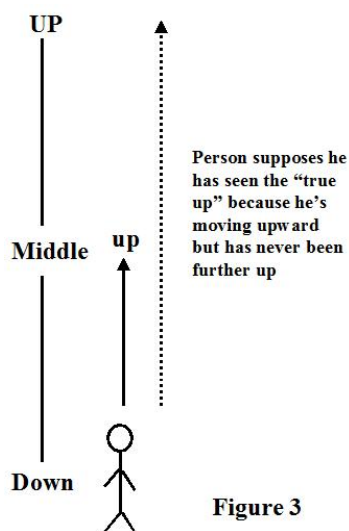


Figure 3

standing in the middle and looking away to the place from which he was brought, would he believe he was elsewhere than in the upper region since he hasn't seen the true up [*to alethos ano*]?"

"No, by Zeus," he [Glaukon] said. "I don't suppose such a man would suppose otherwise."

"And if he were brought back," I [Socrates] said, "would he suppose he was being brought down and suppose truly?"

"Of course."<sup>1082</sup>

"And would he undergo all this due to being inexperienced in what is truly above, in the middle, and below?"

"Plainly."

"Then would you be surprised if those who are inexperienced in truth, as they have unhealthy opinions

about many other things, so too they are disposed toward pleasure and pain and what's between [*metaxy*] them in such a way that, when they are brought to the painful, they suppose truly and are really in pain, but, when brought from the painful to the in-between [*metaxy*], they seriously suppose they are nearing fulfillment and pleasure; and, as though out of lack of experience of white they looked from grey to black, out of lack of experience of pleasure they look from pain to the painless and are deceived?"<sup>1083</sup>

<sup>1081</sup> Plato, *Republic* 584a.

<sup>1082</sup> Glaukon understands here that the man is brought downward, but he does not recognize that the man supposes he has descended further than he really has come down. This error, in fact, aptly describes Glaukon's own condition of ignorance.

<sup>1083</sup> Plato, *Republic* 584d-585a.

Coordinate with the error of supposing that you have seen and experienced the "true up" or apex of things in *moving upward* when you have not, but have only moved partway, is the error of supposing that you have *moved downward* from a vision of the "true up" (as in Figure 4); for here too the inquirer overestimates how far he or she has come. In this way, lack of experience in the "true up" (*to alethos ano*) leads us to misjudge both the middle (*to meson*) and the below (*to kato*) as well. No part of our experiences of goods, or of our judgements concerning what is good, remains free from distortion as long as we remain

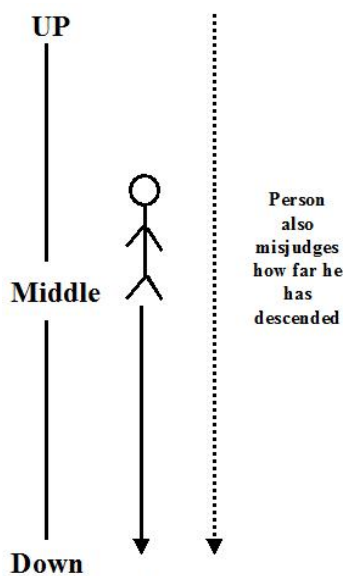


Figure 4

unaware of this "true up" – such as if we imagine that we have already reached it, or if we suppose that there is no such "up" in the first place. Pursuit of this "true up" is the pursuit of philosophy; cultivating an awareness of the tension of our existence in the *metaxy* and navigating its full amplitude is the peculiar and special preserve of philosophy.

As we have already seen, Voegelin writes that movement "within the *metaxy*, exploring it in all directions and orienting himself in the perspective granted to man by his position in reality, is the proper task of the philosopher." We can now draw Voegelin's Platonic insight into the orbit of our own educational concerns. I suggest that it is the job of philosophy in schools to assist us and to lead both us and our

students to practice exploring the full range of this *metaxy* – that through engaging in philosophizing we might learn to move through its full amplitude; we as teachers and students ought not to suppose that we have come to know the "true up" when we have not; philosophy is important in order to cultivate in both students and teachers a keen awareness of the tension (*tasis*) of existence that we experience as daimonic beings inhabiting the in-between (*metaxy*).

#### 4. Metaxic Education and the Pursuit of Wisdom with Children in Plato's *Lysis*

James Schall writes that the purpose of the liberal arts is “to teach us how to be open to the various levels of being.”<sup>1084</sup> In his *Lysis*, Plato provides us with an excellent example of what the education of young people might look like if it were truly concerned with bringing about their broadest awareness of the full amplitude of being – i.e., the *metaxy* -- and if it were truly concerned with training students to navigate this “in-between.” The dialogue takes place nearby the spring of Panops<sup>1085</sup> at a newly-constructed wrestling school (*palaistra*) run by the sophist Mikkos. During the celebration of the Hermaia,<sup>1086</sup> both youths (*neanioi*) and boys (*paides*) have congregated within to compete for athletic honours. Youths or *neanioi* are high school age students, whereas *paides* are younger boys from the age of seven upward. Upon his arrival, Socrates meets one of the youths, Hippothales, who confesses his love for a young boy by the name of Lysis;<sup>1087</sup> Hippothales requests that Socrates approach Lysis, who is said to be distinguished by his “love of listening” to discourses<sup>1088</sup> in order to see if Socrates might win Lysis’ affections for him. In fact, Hippothales relates that the wrestling contests in Mikkos’ new school take a back-seat to such discussions, which are experienced by those in attendance as a kind of game, and as a form of play in which victories might be had and celebrated.<sup>1089</sup>

Socrates enters the *palaistra* to find the boys engaged in play (*paidia*) at games of odd-and-even and knucklebones. Here we see that the dramatic setting for philosophic inquiry – particularly among children -- is a play atmosphere. Socrates obliges Hippothales by striking up a conversation among the *neanioi*, devising to sit apart from the noise of the games among the *paides* on the opposite and “quiet” (*hesuchia*) side of the *palaistra*. Philosophic play is therefore distinguished in the dialogue’s dramatic form from Aristotle’s conceptual criticisms of *diagoge* by its absence of “noise” – that is, by its quality of “quietude” or stillness, variously translated as being related to leisure (*schole*), or even as a

<sup>1084</sup> James Schall, “*Artes Liberales* – The Liberal Arts” in *The Life of the Mind*, 37.

<sup>1085</sup> An epithet of Hermes the “All-Seeing.”

<sup>1086</sup> A children’s festival in honour of Hermes. See 206d.

<sup>1087</sup> The young age of Lysis is noted by Socrates at 204de (*esti de, en d’ego, ho Lysis neos tis, hos eoike*); we learn that due to his age, Lysis still goes by the title of his father as the “son of Democrates,” which accounts for why Socrates does not recognize Lysis’ name when he hears it.

<sup>1088</sup> Hippothales says: “*philekoos gar ... diapherontos esti*” See 206cd.

<sup>1089</sup> Here, we see Hermes’ various associations intermingling: he is the divine child in a dialogue with children; he is the god most closely associated with athletics and wrestling in particular, in a dialogue on the date of a festival in his honour; but he is also the god of orators, persuasive speech, and sophistry.

kind of solitude that attends to what is holy. Moreover, Socrates' strategic positioning of their conversation is such that young Lysis is made "ever to turn around" (*peristrephomenos ... thama*) in order to observe them; philosophy is, in this manner, likened to *periagoge*, or the "turning around" of the soul that is famously said to constitute the nature of education in Plato's *Republic*. Lysis is clearly eager to join in their conversation, but he is reluctant to do so until his young friend of the same age, Menexenos, comes forward to take a seat alongside Socrates and Ktesippus.<sup>1090</sup> Here we see that the boy's reluctance to philosophize is overcome through not only the attractions of philosophy as a kind of play (*paidia*), but also by its character as a venue for the enticements and pleasures of friendship (*philia*). Indeed, *philia* is the subject of philosophic discourse in the *Lysis*, and it is the experience of *philia* that provides the entry point for Lysis' engagement with Socrates. The pursuit of wisdom with children in Plato's *Lysis* clearly involves both play and friendship as foundational experiences; each forms the "atmosphere" for the ensuing investigations. I suggest that the components of friendship and play remain integral for the pursuit of wisdom in a modern educational setting as well.

Socrates' dialogue with the boys makes clear the foundation of his own affection for discussing with young people, and perhaps it speaks to what so many teachers also find enticing about teaching: namely, the vicarious participation of teachers in the atmosphere of friendship among their students, or the seeing (*theoria*) of friendships that so naturally arise between young people, but that seem so hard to come by for us as we grow older. Socrates confesses his deep appreciation of *philia* to the two young boys:

There is a certain possession that I have desired from my childhood, as every one does in his own way. One person wants to get possession of horses, another dogs, another money, and another distinctions: of these I reckon little, but for the possession of friends I have quite a passionate longing, and would rather obtain a good friend [*philon agathon*] than the best quail or rooster in the world.<sup>1091</sup>

Socrates speaks early in the dialogue of his "one gift from the god" – namely, his ability to recognize quickly a lover and a beloved<sup>1092</sup>; he has an eye for spotting friendships where

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<sup>1090</sup> Ktesippus is a kinsman to Menexenos; he is used as bait first to draw his younger sibling, and later by extension, Lysis as his friend, towards Socrates.

<sup>1091</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 211e.

<sup>1092</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 204c.



they exist. Speaking to the boys, Socrates voices his amazement at the wondrous friendship that exists between them:

I am quite beside myself [*eudaimonizo*], and I congratulate you on being able, at such an early age, to gain this possession so quickly and easily; since you, Menexenos, have so quickly and surely acquired his [*Lysis*'] friendship, and he likewise yours: whereas I am so far from acquiring such a thing, that I do not even know in what way one person becomes a friend of another, and am constrained to ask you about this very point, in view of your experience.<sup>1093</sup>

Here we have an excellent dramatic example of a starting point for teachers to engage in philosophic wonder ourselves, wherein our students become a source for our own wondering; perhaps, like Socrates, by articulating our own wonder at them, we might draw them as well as ourselves into philosophic inquiry by means of reflecting on their experiences. Indeed, school affords an opportunity and an atmosphere like no other public institution in which deep experiences of *philia* may become a point of philosophic inquiry. In such an atmosphere, teachers learn alongside their students and from their students.

Students live and breathe friendship every day in school, but they rarely give much extended thought or consideration to what precisely is friendship, or what the reality of friendship means. But what could be a more fruitful inquiry for young people who love their friends? And what is philosophy (*philia-sophia*) if not a sort of friendship (*philia*)? Might not the experience of friendship be the best doorway to cultivating a “love of wisdom” if only one’s own experiences of *philia* could somehow be related to that friendship that philosophers cultivate towards the greatest good (*Ariston*) -- what Voegelin has described as their “existential *philia*”? In my own teaching, I have very often led students in investigations of friendship with this noblest of intents.<sup>1094</sup> In Plato’s *Lysis*, Socrates encourages the two boys to consider their own compact experiences of friendship; through dialectical engagement, he assists them in differentiating the richness of these experiences from one another.<sup>1095</sup> For instance, he encourages them to examine their

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<sup>1093</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 212a.

<sup>1094</sup> For details on one such writing assignment, see my website at <http://www.mrsteelsclass.com/eng20-1/eng20-1research/eng20-1researchhome.htm> (accessed June 7, 2011).

<sup>1095</sup> I have borrowed the terms “compactness” and “differentiation” from Eric Voegelin. He uses them when examining the history of symbolization of human experience, viewing it as a movement from the compactness of the mythical vision of the whole towards the differentiated symbols of philosophy that unpack the mythological – essentially making plain for us the breadth or amplitude of the *metaxy* that we might know ourselves more fully in relation to the full panoply of being.

compact experiences of love from their parents,<sup>1096</sup> of mutuality in friendship,<sup>1097</sup> as well as of non-mutuality,<sup>1098</sup> of friendships that arise naturally versus those that develop through being cultivated,<sup>1099</sup> as well as those friendships that are proclaimed as good but are not<sup>1100</sup>; together, they explore friendships between like<sup>1101</sup> and unlike,<sup>1102</sup> friendships of utility<sup>1103</sup> as well as those without utility as their basis; additionally, they examine friendship as an ordering of the soul, or the notion of a friendship with oneself.<sup>1104</sup>

Alongside the boys, Socrates admits that he, like them, has “become quite dizzy with the puzzle of their argument.”<sup>1105</sup> Discussions about the nature of friendship have led them into perplexity (*aporia*); they cannot seem to get a handle on what friendship is even though they have each experienced it in some deep, fundamental way. Socrates directs the boys’ attention back to their experience by reference to a proverb that “the beautiful is friendly” (*to kalon philon einai*); that is, the *kalon* “resembles something soft and smooth and sleek that easily slides and glides right into us by virtue of those qualities.”<sup>1106</sup> And the good (*agathon*) is

Figure 5

this *kalon*. Here, Socrates inserts into their discussions, and as a means to redirect them in their perplexity, an experiential reference to the sublime. As a “diviner,”<sup>1107</sup> Socrates next speaks to the boys about their compact experiences of friendship and beauty and goodness in a manner that might differentiate these experiences and hence build up their cognizance of the metaxic nature of their existence. The task of philosophy in differentiating their experiences of friendship is, in this way, related to a kind of divine inspiration. In a manner similar to the passage already discussed from the *Republic*, Socrates distinguishes the good

<sup>1096</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 207d-209c.

<sup>1097</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 212bc.

<sup>1098</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 212de.

<sup>1099</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 212e-213a.

<sup>1100</sup> As in other dialogues and in Plato’s Letters, there is in the *Lysis* a criticism of the institution of pederasty. The pederastic pedagogical relationship between the adult lover (*erastes*) and the youthful beloved (*eromenos*) is here duplicated in the desires of a youth (Hippothales) for a young boy (Lysis). Lysis is only too familiar with the experience that some people who would be his friend are, in fact, predatorial. His own love and friendship for Menexenos is genuine, but both he and Menexenos experience the advances of Hippothales as discomforting, unwanted, and not akin to friendship at all (see 222ab).

<sup>1101</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 214a.

<sup>1102</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 215c-216a.

<sup>1103</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 214e.

<sup>1104</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 214cd.

<sup>1105</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 216c: “*autos eiliggio hupo tes tou logou aporias*.”

<sup>1106</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 216c.

<sup>1107</sup> Socrates says “*lego ... apomanteuomenos*,” or “I will speak as a prophet.” See also his use of *manteuomoi* shortly after at 216d.

from the bad, and each of these poles from the in-between of that which is neither good nor bad in a kind of spectrum (see figure 5). Having demonstrated the difficulties with the views that the good is friendly to the good, the bad to the bad, and the good to the bad,<sup>1108</sup> “one view then remains”: namely, “If anything is friendly to anything, that which is neither good nor bad is friendly to either the good or what is of the same quality as itself.”<sup>1109</sup>

Socrates brings up the body as an illustrative example of something that is neither good nor bad, but becomes a “friend” to medicine when compelled by the presence of disease. In such a case, “what is neither bad nor good becomes a friend of the good because of the presence of evil.”<sup>1110</sup> Inasmuch as the body can be helped by medicine to become good, it is not wholly bad; nor would something wholly bad be a friend to the good. Rather, when what is neither bad nor good “is not bad as yet, though bad is present, this presence (*parousia*) makes it desire good.” Socrates’ example provides a metaphor for the notion that friendship exists “in-between” the two poles of good and bad as a kind of desire for the good, and that at either pole, friendship would disappear; the image helps the boys see that philosophy too, as a kind of friendship with wisdom, exists in this in-between, such that “those who are already wise no longer love wisdom (*philosophein*), whether they be gods or men; nor again can those be lovers of wisdom who are in such ignorance as to be bad: for we know that a bad and stupid man is no lover of wisdom.” According to this image, it follows that “those who are as yet neither good nor bad are lovers of wisdom, while all who are bad, and all the good, are not.”<sup>1111</sup> This passage from Plato’s *Lysis* has significant import in our own investigations of the role of wisdom’s pursuit in public education, for any Aristotelian qualms about Lysis or Menexenos not being fit for philosophy based on their young age are cast aside. Although elsewhere in the dialogue, Lysis’ naivety and his lack of life experience certainly contribute to his not being aware about the practical affairs of politics and economics,<sup>1112</sup> he is nonetheless able -- as are all human beings given their “in-

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<sup>1108</sup> Earlier discussions suggested that the good would not be friend to the good because it would lack no good, and friendship arises from desire or lack of what is good; the bad would not befriend the bad, because friendship is a desire for the good; nor would the good be friend to the bad for similar reasons.

<sup>1109</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 216e.

<sup>1110</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 217b.

<sup>1111</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 218ab.

<sup>1112</sup> Aristotle’s warnings about teaching young people in matters of Political Science, practical wisdom, or *phronesis* are dramatically confirmed in Plato’s dialogue. Lysis’ naivety concerning practical affairs is illustrated in their discussions concerning his understanding of the dignity and respect that good, intelligent, or wise people ought to be afforded by others at 209c ff. In his inexperience, Lysis takes it to be the case that

between” nature -- to philosophize; indeed, philosophizing begins in wonder: in metaxic awareness of our own deficiencies in the good and in our desire for the good. And young children are especially good at wondering.

Having brought the boys this far as a Hermes-like soul-guide (*psychopomp*) – that is, having helped them to recognize that they are philosophic creatures of the “in-between” -- and in the spirit of competition for victories during the Hermaia, Socrates remarks about being “especially filled with joy” (*pany echairon*, 218c); Hermes, the wrestling god of athletic youth, of debate and sophistry,<sup>1113</sup> the thieving god of the unexpected “windfall” (*hermaion*),<sup>1114</sup> of roads and the “middle domain,”<sup>1115</sup> of deceptive dreams<sup>1116</sup> and “lord of animals,”<sup>1117</sup> has clearly made his appearance in the *Lysis*; indeed, Socrates supposes that he has tracked down and seized the animal he was hunting in their discussion<sup>1118</sup> -- a kind of unexpected find or “windfall” (*hermaion*). However, no sooner does Socrates experience delight in the god’s gift than he becomes filled with suspicion (*hypopsia*) of it as the gift of a thieving and deceptive god, fearing that “our new-gotten riches are all a dream” (*kindyneuomen onar peploutekenai*, 218c). The glory that the boys experience in having won such a wrestling victory in disputation during the Hermaia is but short-lived once they investigate their “windfall” more carefully. Returning to their illustrative example, Socrates points out that the good of medicine that is sought out by that which is neither good nor bad

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the best men with the greatest wisdom or intelligence ought naturally to be favoured in all things; but he has no experience of the grown-up world of the fickle passions (*pathemata*), and he does not realize that the men’s vanity and lust for power often prevents them from recognizing the value in deferring to the decisions of the best men. Lysis’ naivety is evinced most plainly in his belief that his father will defer to him as soon as the young boy grows more knowledgeable than him in household management (*oikonomos*); Lysis further supposes that not only the people of Athens, but also the “Great King” of Persia himself would naturally hand over his affairs to one such as himself if only he became sufficiently wise or intelligent (*hikanos phroneis*, 209d). Socrates’ persecution and death is yet another excellent (unspoken) counter-example to Lysis’ belief that men will defer to the best.

<sup>1113</sup> Karl Kerényi, *Hermes: Guide of Souls*, trans. Murray Stein (Putnam: Spring Publications, 1976), 59.

<sup>1114</sup> Kerényi, *Hermes*, 43.

<sup>1115</sup> Kerényi, *Hermes*, 33.

<sup>1116</sup> Kerényi, *Hermes*, 40. Also see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Stuttgart: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1985), 156-159.

<sup>1117</sup> See “Hermes,” in Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 690-691.

<sup>1118</sup> The image of Socrates as hunter (also found in the *Republic*) appears, on first glance, to be associated with the representation of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*; however, on further inspection, and with the assistance of Kerényi’s book on Hermes, I have come to suspect that Plato actually took his description of Eros in the *Symposium* from the traditional poetic accounts of Hermes. See particularly the section of Kerényi’s book *Hermes* entitled “Hermes and Eros,” 74-79. I think that a study of the relationship between Socrates, Hermes, and Eros would be very exciting.

(the body) on account of the bad (namely, disease) is desired as a friend for the sake of health, not for the sake of medicine itself:

“Then is health a friend also?”

“Certainly.”

“And if it is a friend, it is so for the sake of something.”

“Yes.”

“And that something is a friend, if it is to conform to our previous agreement.”

“Quite so.”

“Then will that something be, on its part also, a friend for the sake of a friend?”

“Yes.”

“Now are we not bound to weary ourselves with going on in this way, unless we can arrive at some first principle [*tina archen*] which will not keep leading us on from one friend to another, but will reach the one original friend [*proton philon*], for whose sake all the other things can be said to be friends?”

“We must.”

“So you see what I am afraid of – that all the other things, which we cited as friends for the sake of that one thing, may be deceiving us like so many phantoms [*eidola*] of it, while that original thing [*to proton*] may be the veritable friend [*alethos philon*].”<sup>1119</sup>

Socrates takes the boys’ compact experiences of bodily sickness and health, as well as their spiritual experiences of deep friendship for one another, and uses them like a springboard to consider the manner in which such experiences might broaden their awareness of the *metaxy* of their existence and their participation (*methexis*) in the transcendent good (*agathon*). Indeed, Socrates asks them at this point if “the good is a friend” (*to agathon esti philon*, 220b). Are the boys – and are our own students in the modern-day classroom – able to see (*theorein*) the manner in which their own everyday friendships are but means of participation in or intimations of that one true friendship with that one “true above” that is explored and sought out most keenly by philosophy? By encouraging the boys to philosophize, Socrates bids them to unpack their compact everyday experiences -- to differentiate them in light of the problem of the infinite regress that arises if one does not recognize the existence of the “first principle” -- the “true” (*alethos*) or “first” (*proton*) friend for the sake of which all other friendships exist, and because of which all other goods are rendered good. In reality, their own experiences of friendship for one another are but images that participate in a more sublime friendship – that “existential *philia*” of which Voegelin speaks; their use of the word “friend” is but an imperfect usage, when in truth

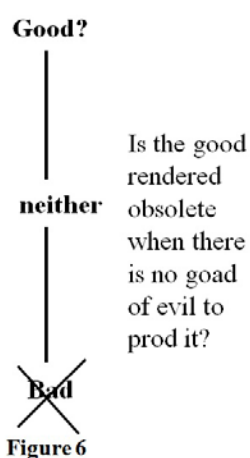
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<sup>1119</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 219cd.

“‘friend’ appears to be simply and solely the thing in which all these so-called friendships terminate”; through philosophical inquiry, the boys become cognizant of the fact that “the real friend is a friend for the sake of nothing else that is a friend.”<sup>1120</sup> The real, lived experience of friendship between the boys becomes the basis for awakening their awareness of the “first friend” and the “true up” previously discussed in Plato’s *Republic*. Philosophy in a modern-day classroom setting has, as its proper directive, a similar awakening purpose; if philosophy is pursued in our classrooms, its result ought to be a keener awareness, consciousness, or seeing (*theoria*) among both teachers and students of the full metaxic structure of being in which we participate.

Socrates further encourages the boys to examine and unpack their own compact experiences of love and friendship by bidding them to consider the manner in which the good of friendship as they have come to know it is not predicated simply on the alleviation of badness, but rather on the desire for goodness itself. Put another way, it is not simply because of the presence of badness that the good is loved; rather, the good is loved for its own sake. Recalling the relation between the good, the neither-bad-nor-good, and the bad, Socrates inquires:

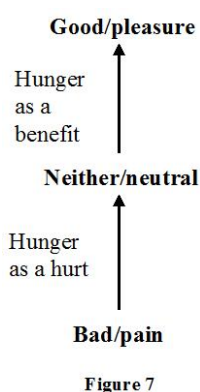
If but two of these [the good and the neither-bad-nor-good] remained after evil had been cleared away, so that it had no contact with anything ... would the result be that good would be of no use to us, but would have become quite a useless thing? For if there were nothing left to harm us, we should feel no want of any assistance ... Is not this the nature of the good – to be loved because of the bad by us who are midway [*metaxy*] between the bad and the good, whereas separately and for its own sake it is of no use?<sup>1121</sup>



Socrates tests the understanding of his young interlocutors here: Is the good rendered obsolete, unimportant, or of no concern when there is nothing left to harm us (See figure 6)? Do the boys simply seek out each other’s friendship in order to escape evils -- to alleviate their own grief, boredom, or suffering? Or does their experience of friendship enable them to intimate a higher sort of

<sup>1120</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 220b.

<sup>1121</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 220cd.



good that transcends the mere experience of overcoming pains?<sup>1122</sup> This question is of particular interest in modern-day schools, where it is often the case that friendships arise in order to manage the boredom and tedium of the school day – to make the spiritual emptiness and drudgery of school work bearable. On the one hand, certain student friendships could simply be a means of lightening the pains, discomforts, and “evils” of school; but on the other hand, it is perhaps the case that other friendships among students might embody that spirit of *scholē* previously

investigated: namely, that activity that is sought out for its own sake as the greatest good (*ariston*), and on account of which all other goods are rendered good.

Posing this question about *philia* in another way, Socrates likens the experience of desire, love, or friendship to a kind of hunger. He asks the boys:

Tell me, by Zeus ... if evil is abolished, will it be impossible any longer to feel hunger or thirst or other such conditions? Or will hunger exist, so long as men and animals exist, but without being hurtful? Thirst, too, and all other desires – will these exist without being bad, because the bad will have been abolished? Or is this a ridiculous question – as to what will exist or not exist in such a case? For who can tell? Yet this, at all events, we do know – that, as things are now, it is possible for a man to feel hunger as a hurt, and also to be benefited by it.<sup>1123</sup>

Their previous discussion of the *metaxy* as it is experienced through friendship has been incomplete, for it has not properly delineated or differentiated the boys’ awareness of the alleviation of pains on the one hand from the positive awareness of pleasure in the good on the other hand. Put another way, their discussion of *philia* has not distinguished the top portion of Figure 7 from the bottom portion. Here, Socrates takes their discussion of friendship upwards to the “true above” in a fashion similar to his discussion with Glaukon in the *Republic*. Through philosophic inquiry, the boys come to see that their vision (*theoria*) of *philia* thus far has been partial, and that their previous discussions had only isolated the lower region of friendship while leaving its upper elements unaccounted for. Socrates summarizes this experience succinctly for us:

<sup>1122</sup> Recall our earlier discussion of Plato’s *Republic* where we pointed out that lack of familiarity with “the true up” commonly results in misunderstanding our experiences; namely, we wrongly identify overcoming pains and entering a state of repose with movement from a state of repose into a positive state of pleasure.

<sup>1123</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 220e-221a.

“We supposed, just then, that it was because of evil that what was neither good nor bad loved the good.”

“True.”

“But now, it seems, we make out a different cause of loving and being loved.”

“It seems so.”

“Can it really be then, as we were saying just now, that desire is the cause of friendship, and the desiring thing is a friend to that which it desires, and is so at any time of desiring; while our earlier statement about friends was all mere drivel, like a poem strung out for mere length?”

“It looks like it.”<sup>1124</sup>

The value of philosophizing with children and youths is demonstrated well in this Platonic dialogue. Philosophy bids students to consider their compact experiences deeply, to know themselves, and to differentiate their experiences more fully. Philosophic investigations stretch student awareness, both deepening and heightening it. By cultivating a refined sense for the tension (*tasis*) of their existence as beings stretched between the two poles of the *metaxy*, students and teachers who pursue wisdom might develop a sense for the “true up” that is wisdom; by doing so, they might also understand what is in the middle (*to meson*) and the below (*to kato*) more accurately.

## 5. On the Consolation of Galleons Lap

Throughout this study of the significance of the pursuit of wisdom in schools, I have been at pains to show that a kind of “wisdom atmosphere” is required – one that I have referred to as making possible the opportunity to practice and to experience *scholē* or leisure in schools. I have suggested that such an atmosphere is in some way associated with cultivating the activities of play (*paidia*) and friendship (*philia*), and that much of what we do in schools thwarts such developments. If we are to re-invigorate *scholē* and to promote *theoria* in the modern classroom, where ought our reforms to start? The root passionate experience of philosophy, as the pursuit of wisdom, is *philia*, or friendship. The centrality of friendship to the rest of the virtues, to the pursuit of happiness, and to seeking wisdom as our highest end is not lost on Aristotle, who makes *philia* the subject of a good part of his own *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Thomas Aquinas as well, friendship is a necessary component to all teaching, whether in its active aspect as service to the neighbour (i.e. one's

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<sup>1124</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 221d.



students), or in its contemplative aspect as friendship with the truth itself.<sup>1125</sup> Indeed, the motto of the Dominican order to which Thomas belonged is that to teach is *tradere contemplativa*, or “to share the fruits of contemplation” with others as an act of friendship or neighbour-love. And certainly any teacher could confirm Thomas' statements about the significance of friendship in teaching by looking to its power in our schools: students bind heart and soul with nothing in school more powerfully than their own friendships. The task of a truly philosophic education, it seems to me, is to “take up” these experiences of friendship among our students towards their ultimate source in order to establish within each student (as within ourselves) a consciousness of that “true friendship” or “existential *philia*” of which Voegelin has written extensively.

The potency of *philia* in fostering the *scholē* proper to the perfection of teaching in both its aspects, as well as in student learning, is only matched by the power of *paidia*. Indeed, the close bond between *philia* and *paidia* may be that *paidia* is the form through which true friendship expresses itself. Perhaps for this reason St. Teresa has described “recollective prayer”<sup>1126</sup> as implying not only recognition of the unseriousness of all human things, but also that prayer itself is a higher and “serious” (in the Aristotelian sense of *spoudaios*) sort of play in which “It is as if the soul were rising from play, for it sees that worldly things are nothing but toys; so in due course it rises above them.”<sup>1127</sup> Whether as teachers we are friends to wisdom (the contemplative aspect of teaching, according to Thomas), or friendly towards our students by encouraging them to pursue wisdom (the

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<sup>1125</sup> Margret Buchmann argues for the great importance of friendship in education in her own discussion of this passage from Thomas' *Summa*, and in conjunction with Aristotle's views on *philia*. She writes: “The subject matter of teaching, or its *first* object, is ... the consideration and love of truth in all its forms, with the teacher taking delight in that consideration and love. Compared to external acts of teaching, even practical arguments, this object and associated activities have logical, though not necessarily temporal, priority. In teaching, the contemplative precedes the active life because of its nature, and the nature of teaching. ... Still teaching aims at those others and is conveyed through external acts, for instance, speech; and those to whom contemplated truth is communicated are therefore its *second* object.” That teaching is not simply friendship towards the truth, but also involves friendship towards one's students is argued forcefully by Buchmann: “That one's attention is urged on, towards the second object of teaching, also follows from the relation that there is, in human life, between what one most delights in and the wish to be sharing it with other people, particularly one's friends.” Here, Buchmann follows Aristotle in the contention that “whatever existence means for each class of men, whatever it is for whose sake they value life, in that they wish to occupy themselves with their friends.” To the extent, then, that teaching belongs to the active life, it requires exertions in the spirit of fellowship and kindness. See Margret Buchmann, “Argument and Contemplation in Teaching” *Oxford Review of Education* 14, no.2 (1988): 204.

<sup>1126</sup> By “recollective prayer” she means that sort of meditative practice in which the practitioner withdraws his or her attention from all lesser goods inward, “re-collecting” and focusing instead upon loving God alone.

<sup>1127</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, XXVIII 176.

active aspect), our friendliness towards the truth on the one hand and our neighbour (i.e., the student) on the other will always in some measure take the form of *paidia*.

As we have seen in our earlier defence of *paidia* against Aristotle's accusations, play relates us to our highest nature. We discussed Plato's depiction of human beings as divine play-things; if we are not to be simply dead sacks of meat hanging from a cord, we must respond to the playful tugs of the god upon our strings; we must dance divinely for the pleasure of the god. Through this image, Plato teaches us that *paidia* is, in some sense, the manner of our highest fulfillment as human beings in relation to the immortal source of all the good things in which we might rejoice;<sup>1128</sup> moreover, in conjunction with Plato's philosophic image, we have discussed Huizinga's defence of play as a form of activity that, in principle, is not dissimilar to wisdom's pursuit. The rejoicing that is proper to our experience of freedom from work in *scholē* as opposed to the despair of *akedia* might be verified by any teacher who sees the degree to which the students in his school adore one another as friends and rejoice in one another through play, and that this sort of play is what they truly seem to desire above all else as the source of their genuine happiness. If we therefore take Thomas' comments about friendship and unite them (as we are wont to do, given experiences readily available to any school teacher) with Huizinga's insights concerning play, we begin to see the sort of atmosphere that might cultivate and foster *scholē* among both our students and our teachers. Such an atmosphere would be one of friendship (*philia*) and play (*paidia*). Such a school would be truly "scholastic": it would provide both students and teachers with a venue for practicing their *scholē* and for diminishing their *akedia*. Moreover, it would bring teaching to its perfection as both an active and a contemplative activity; on the one hand, through familiarity with such an atmosphere, teachers would not be kept interminably busy for the sake of busyness and out of distrust of them as professionals by their administrative and governmental superiors; in *scholē*, they would be given opportunity to cultivate a friendship for the truth and for the

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<sup>1128</sup> In Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger distinguishes human things as "unserious" and only divine things as worthy of "seriousness," with the concomitant suggestion that human life at its height is, when properly understood, a form of play: "I assert that what is serious should be treated seriously, and what is not serious should not, and that by nature god is worthy of a complete, blessed seriousness, but that what is human, as we said earlier, has been devised as a certain plaything of god, and that this is really the best thing about it. Every man and woman should spend life in this way, playing the noblest (*kallistas*) possible games, and thinking about them in a way that is the opposite of the way they're now though about." (803c) See Plato, *The Laws*, trans. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

ground of truth in the good (*agathon*) for its own sake, and thereby begin to pursue Wisdom. On the other hand, teachers could encourage *scholē* by their own example among their students, and particularly by fostering the element of play in their pedagogy; for *paidia*, as Huizinga notes, moves not only "below the level of the serious," but also above it – "in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred."

In his own discussions of spiritual searching and meditative practice, Thomas Merton has explored the question of what might constitute a genuine "wisdom atmosphere." In his view, such an environment can only be one of tranquility and peace and balance. "The mind should be able to give itself to simple and peaceful reflection." In such an atmosphere, the critical-analytic rigors we demand of students in order that they might excel and shine in our assessments of their learning are unnecessary. Indeed, "Intellectual brilliance is never required." Perhaps it is for this reason that in my own classroom experiments with contemplative exercises I have found that some of the most gifted participants were those we have labelled as "learning disabled," or as possessed by "cognitive deficits," whereas equally as often I have found that academically-driven students encounter such exercises with great difficulty and even consternation. Moreover, in Merton's view, the wisdom environment does not imply continual (or even frequent) experiences of revelry and delight in what is learned or seen. In his experience, the will "does not have to feel itself enkindled with raptures of ardent love." Very often, the opposite may be the case: "A good meditation may well be quite 'dry' and 'cold' and 'dark.' It may even be considerably disturbed by involuntary distractions." Indeed, the "aridity" of a wisdom environment is itself instructional, since it "fills the soul with humility, peace, courage, and the determination to persevere in negotiating the obstacles to our spiritual progress."<sup>1129</sup>

Nor does Merton suggest that safety and security are necessarily essential components of a "wisdom environment." Indeed, inasmuch as such qualities might enable students and teachers to continue in "habitual self-complacency," safety and security only serve to foster "spiritual stagnation." Merton rightly observes:

The complacent no longer feel in themselves any real indigence, any urgent need for God. Their meditations are comfortable, reassuring and inconclusive. Their mental prayer quickly degenerates into day-dreaming, distractions or plain undisguised sleep.

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<sup>1129</sup> Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 67.

For this reason trials and temptations can prove to be a real blessing in the life of prayer, simply because they force us to pray. It is when we begin to find out our need for God that we first learn how to make a real meditation.<sup>1130</sup>

In this passage, Merton's stress on the significance of discomfort is not dissimilar to Eliade's statements above concerning the value of suffering as an impetus towards liberation (*moksa*), or Voegelin's remarks concerning the importance of cultivating our consciousness of "existential *taxis*." But perhaps most pertinent for our current study and its questions concerning the possibility of establishing a "wisdom atmosphere" within a school environment is Merton's short reflection concerning "The Proper Atmosphere of Prayer":

One who has reached a certain proficiency in the interior life can normally practice some form of mental prayer anywhere and under almost any conditions. But beginners and proficients alike need to devote some part of the day to formal meditation. This means choosing a time and place propitious for mental prayer, and the exclusion of all possible obstacles to meditation. It should not be necessary to remark that we can best meditate in silence and retirement – in a chapel, in a garden, a room, a cloister, a forest, a monastic cell.<sup>1131</sup>

Granted, any teacher immediately recognizes how dissimilar – if not *antithetical* – Merton's discussion of the "proper atmosphere" is to our own experiences of teaching in public schools and universities. Lichtmann remarks: "*Contemplative* is probably the last adjective we would apply to the flurry of committee assignments, politicking in and out of departments, tenure pressures on both sides of that great divide, and so much else that occupies and preoccupies us as teachers."<sup>1132</sup> And certainly the lack of a contemplative atmosphere is not only a problem for teachers, but also for students. James Schall observes: "There is no leisure for boys and girls who are expected to gorge themselves on three thousand years of texts and then regurgitate them come examination day."<sup>1133</sup> In fact, the primacy of modern educational structures which focus upon school as work rather than as the cultivation of leisure has led scholars such as Schall to remark that "education in the higher things today is largely a matter of private enterprise."<sup>1134</sup> Sadly, Schall may be

<sup>1130</sup> Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 81-82.

<sup>1131</sup> Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 82.

<sup>1132</sup> Lichtmann, *The Teacher's Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life*, 16.

<sup>1133</sup> James Schall, "Truth and the College of Your Choice" in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 37.

<sup>1134</sup> Schall, "Truth and the College of Your Choice," 38.

mostly correct in this assertion.<sup>1135</sup> As Voegelin writes, “there is no philosophy without philosophers.”<sup>1136</sup> That is, there is no love of wisdom without those who love it. And just as an education aimed at the pursuit of wisdom may be a matter of “private enterprise”<sup>1137</sup> on the part of students, so too may it very likely be the case that any teacher wishing to *tradere contemplativa* must do so as an act of “free enterprise,” not only receiving no sanction from the state to do so, but also acting at great personal risk, and continually exposed to both social and professional ridicule.

Nonetheless, in order to pursue our true happiness (*eudaimonia*), we *must* engage in the pursuit of wisdom. All the greatest thinkers and contemplatives in history that we have studied in this thesis point to this inescapable fact. As a final reflection, and perhaps as a consolation to those few who would be so moved to take up philosophy’s gauntlet as teachers and as students, I wish to end this thesis with the observation that, as those concerned with the pursuit of wisdom, we have no greater ally and friendship in spirit than children. Nowhere else is the articulation of wisdom’s pursuit, of *scholē*, and of the “wisdom environment” better expressed than in the last chapter of A. A. Milne’s *House at Pooh Corner*.

Chapter Ten, subtitled as that section of the book “In Which Christopher Robin and Pooh Come to An Enchanted Place, and We Leave Them There,” renders an account to the reader of Christopher Robin’s last day of freedom from school; this chapter – full of understated *hesuchia* or holy silence -- marks his sad passage towards school-age, his subsequent exile from the Hundred Acre Wood, and the loss of his daily enjoyments in the pleasures of conversation and friendship with Pooh.<sup>1138</sup> The Hundred Acre Wood, itself a vast place of danger and adventure – for indeed, there must be *risk* in play and adventure -- where Tiggers might be “unbounced,” Rabbits lost, the houses of Owls blown down, and

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<sup>1135</sup> I am only willing to say “*mostly* correct” since most of us are aware of at least one teacher we have had who genuinely taught us by leading us to consider higher things. Indeed, Professor Schall himself stands as a testament to the overstatement of his own claim in this regard.

<sup>1136</sup> Voegelin, “Eternal Being in Time,” 117.

<sup>1137</sup> Indeed, Music Professor Logan Skelton comments that “Not everything that’s worth doing belongs in a classroom.” See the discussion of skepticism towards contemplative education in John Gravois, “Meditate on It” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, iss. 9 (Washington: Oct 21, 2005): A10.

<sup>1138</sup> Here, I am reminded of Schall’s observation that conversation is essential to the pursuit of wisdom and the activity of leisure-izing. Schall writes that, “Conversation requires a kind of academic and moral leisure that is practically nonexistent in any university of my acquaintance.” See James Schall, “Truth and the College of Your Choice” in *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs*, 37.

where donkeys might be floated downstream after a gruelling rain, is found *not* to provide enough “Space” for Christopher Robin’s farewell gathering. As Eeyore complains: “Everybody crowds round so in the Forest. There’s no Space. I never saw a more Spreading lot of animals in my life, and all in the wrong places. Can’t you *see* that Christopher Robin wants to be alone? I’m going.”<sup>1139</sup> At the end of things, and in these final, sombre concerns even one hundred acres is insufficient space for the sort of “Space” required by Christopher Robin. The need for such Space is “*seen*” by Eeyore and the others, who leave Christopher Robin in quiet solitude – all, that is, save Pooh; he is asked to stay. Together, Christopher Robin and Pooh walk off “quickly” to “Nowhere” in order to do what Christopher Robin likes doing best: namely, “Nothing.”

The friends walk on, doing “a nothing sort of thing” by “listening to all the things you can’t hear, and not bothering” until they arrive in “an enchanted place on the very top of the Forest called Galleons Lap.”<sup>1140</sup> Milne describes this sacred spot as a place beyond all counting or measure, and as always escaping the grasp of the analytic, calculative mind; it is a place of gazing upon the whole, just as one might, from a great height, look down upon the whole of a valley to see everything in a single look. Galleons Lap – having the name of both a great ship for adventuring and warfare, as well as the nature of a “lap” in which a child might sit, feeling engulfed in the union with a broader love -- is described by Milne as

sixty-something trees in a circle; and Christopher Robin knew that it was enchanted because nobody had ever been able to count whether it was sixty-three or sixty-four, not even when he tied a piece of string round each tree after he had counted it. Being enchanted, its floor was not like the floor of the Forest, gorse and bracken and heather, but close-set grass, quiet and smooth and green. It was the only place in the Forest where you could sit down carelessly, without getting up again almost at once and looking for somewhere else. Sitting there they could see the whole world spread out until it reached the sky, and whatever there was all the world over was with them in Galleons Lap.<sup>1141</sup>

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<sup>1139</sup> Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, 169.

<sup>1140</sup> Every time I read this passage it reminds me of similar passages in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* where Bilbo Baggins is overcome with the beauty of things having ascended to the top of the trees in Mirkwood to gaze upon the blue sky and open atmosphere filled with butterflies (in Greek, literally souls) flying around the vault of heaven. But most especially, this passage reminds me of Socrates’ tale in Plato’s *Phaedrus* of the charioteer who with great difficulty raises his head above the cosmic order to gaze upon the Mysteries.

<sup>1141</sup> Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, 173.

Such a “Space” of stillness is one of *seeing* All; it is a place where one might feel a deep union with Everything, much like in Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence” where one might “see a world in a grain of sand, / And a heaven in a wild flower, / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, / And eternity in an hour.”

Within this “Space,” Christopher Robin begins to tell Pooh of the marvels and knowing that are taught in schools, of “people called Kings and Queens and something called Factors, and a place called Europe, and an island in the middle of the sea where no ships came, and how you make a Suction Pump (if you want to), and when Knights were Knighted, and what comes from Brazil”; this long list of “things” fills Pooh with wonder at the prospect of having “Real Brain.”<sup>1142</sup> But at the end of his inventory of this new knowledge of the world of “things,” Christopher Robin “was silent, and he sat there looking out over the world, and wishing it wouldn’t stop.” And Pooh -- filled with a naivete about what was going to happen to his best friend -- speaks to the boy about how “Grand” such “things” must be; Christopher Robin, knowing that such “things” – though they be grand – are certainly not as “Grand” as his very best friend, in turn shows his good judgment by knighting Pooh, as “Sir Pooh de Bear, most faithful of all my Knights.”<sup>1143</sup>

Grateful for having been recognized as being especially “Grand,” Pooh next begins to wonder how, when Christopher Robin returns from school, he will ever be able to communicate with him, being himself “a Bear of Very Little Brain.” He thinks sadly to himself: “Perhaps ... Christopher Robin won’t tell me any more.” That is, Pooh suspects in his naive way that school will make Christopher Robin no longer able to commune-icate with him, and that both shall lose touch with one another on account of Brain. Christopher Robin too is saddened by his sense of this impending exile from the Lap and from his friendship with Pooh. Milne records that suddenly Christopher Robin, “who was still looking at the world, with his chin in his hands,” calls out, “Pooh!” He recognizes that he will no longer be allowed to “do Nothing any more,” and he asks Pooh to promise never to forget about him, even if he can’t ever come back – a promise to which Pooh consents. Never taking his eyes off the world the entire time, Christopher Robin puts out his hand to feel for Pooh’s paw. Even though the boy knows that he shall have to leave the Forest and

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<sup>1142</sup> Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, 173-174.

<sup>1143</sup> Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, 176-177.

its Lap, he refuses to leave off from gazing. The book ends with the duo going off together: “But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.”<sup>1144</sup>

In closing, despite the call of this paper that a space and a time be set aside in schools for the practice of *scholē*, it is more than likely that such a “Space” for “doing Nothing” – that is, for genuine leisure in which one gazes out at the whole of what *is* in contemplation – may not find a home in schools, and it may *never* find a home there. This likelihood is indeed a reason for sadness, just as Milne depicts it. However, like Christopher Robin in our awareness of how schooling seems always to bring about such a lack of “Space,” we must not allow our sadness to overcome us; rather, like him, we must *never* allow our gaze to be broken from what *is*; we must continue in our desire to see (*theorein*) at the greatest heights, and we must continue at the same time to “feel” for that “existential *philia*,” that “paw” which draws us up towards that “True Above” – that “Nowhere” like Galleon’s Lap at the top of the *cosmos*-Forest of which perhaps Augustine wrote in his *City of God*, or about which Plato wrote in his *Republic* when he had Socrates speak of that city that “itself exists no place on earth” (*ges ge oudamou ... auten einai*), but “perhaps in heaven a pattern is laid up for the man who wants to see and found” such a place “within himself on the basis of what he sees.” Indeed, such a foundation seems possible for the young boy in Milne’s story who, even as he leaves his childhood behind, nonetheless “will always be playing” in that sacred and high place. Governments, administrators, parents, teachers and students may thwart our efforts ever to establish such a place of holy leisure as a component of our institutional public education system; but ultimately, says Socrates, “It doesn’t make any difference whether it is or will be somewhere,” for such a man, having founded such a place within himself with its pattern (*paradeignma*) “laid up in heaven” would mind the things of this place alone, and of no other.<sup>1145</sup>

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<sup>1144</sup> Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, 180.

<sup>1145</sup> Plato, *Republic* 592b.



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