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Issue 2 | 2024

CLASSIS

Sine Doctrina Vita est Quasi Mortis Imago

FEATURING

**"The Riot of Fashionable Virtues and a Thing Called Truth:
A Classical Christian Response to Critical Race Theory"**

By Devin O'Donnell

Volume XXXI | Winter
Issue 2 | 2024

CLASSIS

A JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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Association of Classical Christian Schools
317 West 6th, Suite 211, Moscow, ID 83843

Phone: (208) 882-6101

Editorial: dodonnell@accsedu.org

Advertisement: rortego@accsedu.org or aodonnell@accsedu.org

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Critical Theory and Christian Affirmations: A Dashboard Summary

Dr. Christopher Schlect

Friends, Colleagues, and Fellow Classical Christian Educators,

Welcome to the Winter issue of *Classis*. The classical Christian renaissance began as one of the first responses to the accelerated cultural decline of the 1980s, an early effect of the “culture wars.” But this is not necessarily without precedent. Our word for “school” (*scholé*) is derived from the Greek word “leisure,” which the ancients and medievals both believed was the animating principle that created a “culture.” In many ways, education has always been about culture. That’s what the word *paideia* means, after all. Education, G. K. Chesterton says, is not a subject and does not deal in subjects. It is the transfer of a way of life. In this sense, he argues, “education” is only a loose phrase for the handing down of whatever truth we happen to have in ourselves. That’s what a culture is. It is a living thing. It preserves its life through time by giving that life to the next generation.

For those of us living in the year of our Lord 2024, however, this means we might look a bit strange. Perhaps the author of *The Great Tradition* (ISI Books), Dr. Richard M. Gamble, has put it best, that our bold aim is to “make students unfit for the modern world.” Such an idea might invoke images of Francis Schaeffer wearing his knickers in the 1970s while bellbottoms were the fashion. But why did he do this? It was not because of his “artistic temperament” or for some vague attempt to be *avant-garde* but simply because he was in love with an older world. Schaeffer was, in the best sense, a “throwback” to an older time when our culture was still human. If our education is superficially classical but functionally modern, then we have some reckoning to do.

This brings us to our theme: how does classical Christian *paideia* make our students unfit for the modern world? What truth or virtue are we handing down to our children in this age when the virtues have run riot and when our understanding of justice, for instance, has become dislodged from its traditional place in Christian metaphysics? This is a question I seek to answer in the feature of this issue, along with my hope to impart a proper Christian response to Critical Theory, which now dominates the majority of Western universities and has made its way into primary and secondary educational programs.

“Nature is what is there on its own,” wrote Romano Guardini, “culture is what humans make of it.” If our students are expected to hand on the same *paideia* they received, then what does that look like? This involves how we understand the authority of nature or our regard for the Natural Law. For instance, it may be well enough that classical Christian education results in the transmission of obsequious sentiments to students. But if, for instance, sentiments only exist at the rational level of Christian worldview, without any regard for the premises of the modern world in which they live — how we engage with technology, how we are to understand AI compared to previous technological paradigm shifts, how we are to live in this age of the unnatural — then our teachers and our students will not have much substance to hand down to the coming generations. Josh Pauling might put it this way, how are we to teach and learn in the age of the machine? His piece, “Avoiding the Tyranny of Technique in the Classroom,” warns us about the danger of embracing the inhuman disposition so intrinsic to the modern world. He looks to the philosopher Jacques Ellul to give us a basic philosophy of technology.

Similarly, Nicholas DiDonato explores an additional problematic feature of the modern world: the absence of *telos*, or purpose. In his article, he raises a serious question for us to consider: Is Intelligent Design (ID) in harmony with a classical Christian account of the world,

or is it just another modern and mechanistic relation of things? Any classical Christian school that teaches biology, or any other science, should know how to answer this. In what may be one of the most insightful critiques, DiDonato notes how ID might mistakenly swap the conclusion for the premise.

Kyle R. Hughes also reminds us of yet another feature that was once germane to classical Christian education but is often lacking in modern schools today: the differences between boys and girls. In “Educating Boys and Girls in a Convulsed Age,” Hughes reminds us that educating boys and girls separately was a fairly consistent practice in history and that the ludicrous cultural moment in which we find ourselves is perhaps in some small measure due to the loss of this basic tradition. This fact, of course, presents us with a needed opportunity to reestablish practices that honor our God-given sexual differences.

Lastly, I want to highlight the new contributions in our remaining sections. For “Commonplace”, we are pleased to feature the work from two different students, one on the importance of a traditional view of Creation and the other on the traditional view of language. And for our “Old Voices” section, we are pleased to announce the first printing of a translation from Alcuin of York. The dialogue *Disputatio Pippini* is not only a practical guide to teaching the liberal art of grammar; it is also one of the most beautiful examples of how to teach anything. We are honored with the translation efforts of several of Dr. Christopher Schlect’s students from New Saint Andrews College. What they have given us in English will stand as a model for how we as teachers can convey (and conceal) serious content in beautiful forms.

Non Nobis

Devin O’Donnell, Editor-in-Chief

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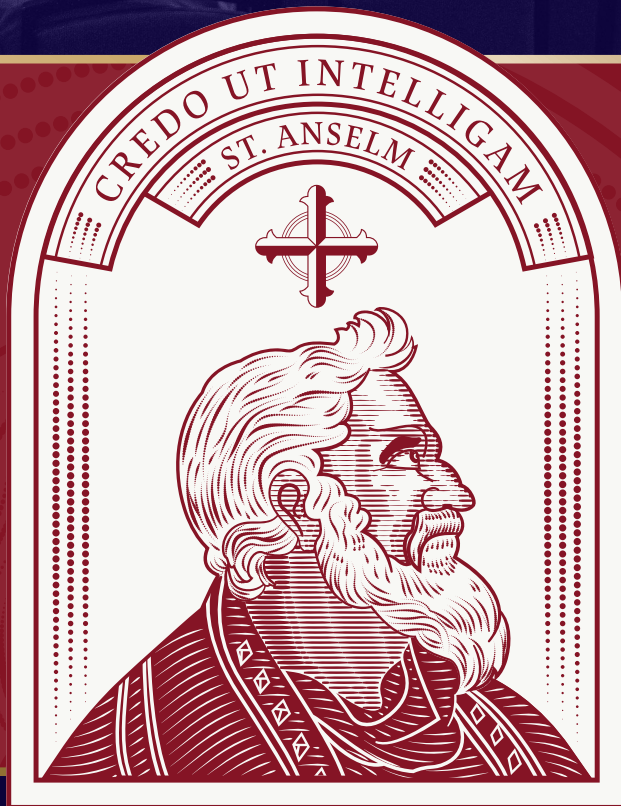
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“On Education”, 1982

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ARTICLES



“In a time when our culture has increasingly lost its vision of what it means to be men and women, the classical Christian education movement must aim at acknowledging, nurturing, and cultivating these two natures in a way that can help our children appreciate and embody these complementary roles in a true, good, and beautiful way.”

Educating Boys and Girls in a Convulsed Age

Kyle R. Hughes, *The Stonehaven School*



From the institutional heights of academia, big business, media, and government, the new gospel of expressive individualism rings out across the land. “Affirm and celebrate each individual’s self-created identity! Let go of intolerant “binaries” that assume anything about a specific gender. Be your true self!”¹

The classical Christian education movement, operating within a “Negative World” context characterized by increasing hostility to traditional Christian beliefs, has thus far thankfully taken a clear stand against America’s new public religion.² There is, however, a vulnerability for the movement at precisely this juncture: while the culture is intentional and relentless in its attempts to catechize our children in the latest, most fashionable dogmas of sexual orientation and gender ideology, the attempts of many classical Christian schools to catechize their students on topics related to gender and sexuality are too often *occasional* and *haphazard*.

What would it look like, then, for our movement to provide our students with a compelling vision of biblical manhood and womanhood so that they, even in their youth, can begin growing into the men and women that God created them to be? And how might this impact the way we deliver our core business of teaching

and learning? Before considering practical strategies for counter-catechizing our children away from the deformative messages of our present convulsed age, we need to remind ourselves of what the Scriptures tell us about God’s design for men and women.

Theological Reset

In Genesis 1:27 we read that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (cf. Matt 19:4). The purpose of this gender binary is no doubt linked to the general vocation that God gives to human beings: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). As the Bible goes on to make clear, the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply finds its proper place within the context of holy matrimony, in which one man and one woman become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).³

God’s design in creating a gender binary is not merely associated with sexual reproduction; Genesis 2 informs us that God saw that it was “not good that the man should be alone,” and therefore God made the woman to be “a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18). The complementary nature of men and women even serves a



1. For background, see, e.g., Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 339-78.

2. See further Kyle R. Hughes, “Christian Education in the Negative World,” *Classis* 30.3 (2023): 9-11.

3. On the importance of the “creation ordinance” for our modern context, see further Rosaria Butterfield, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 7-10. For a more scholarly account with prophetic warnings for today, see Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston, MA: Pauline, 2006).

sacramental purpose. Most famously, the Apostle Paul states that “the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church” (Eph. 5:23), interpreting Gen. 2:24 as a mystery that also “refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32). In these passages, God makes it clear that He has created men and women with distinct and complementary natures and roles. Despite their many similarities, men and women are created with differences that relate to their unique callings to serve the Lord and image important spiritual truths.

Indeed, as we look across the whole sweep of the Scriptures, we find that even as all Christians are called to exhibit traits such as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), there are nevertheless certain roles, responsibilities, and virtues that are associated with either men or women.⁴ For instance, throughout Scripture we see that men are called to be progenitors who initiate life as leaders and heads of families (cf. Gen. 1:28; Gen. 2:18-25; Ps 127:4-6; Prov. 18:22; Eph. 5:22-33), providers who toil on behalf of life (cf. Gen. 1:29-30; Gen. 2:15; Gen. 3:17-19), and protectors who defend life sacrificially (cf. Eph. 5:25). We find that God desires men who are characterized by love, responsibility, integrity, honor, courage, humility, and perseverance.

Despite their many similarities, men and women are created with differences that relate to their unique callings to serve the Lord and image important spiritual truths.

On the other hand, throughout Scripture we see that women are called to be perfect counterparts to men (cf. Gen. 2:18-21; 1 Cor. 11:7-9; Eph. 5:22-33), bringing new life into the world (cf. Gen. 3:16) and filling it with goodness, truth, and beauty (cf. Prov. 31:10-31; 1 Tim 5:10). God intends that women would become icons of holiness (cf. Eph. 5:26; 1 Tim 2:15), hospitable (Prov. 31:20; 1 Tim 5:10), industrious (cf. Prov. 31:13-14), modest (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9-10), meek (cf. Eph. 5:24; 1 Tim. 2:11), respectful (Ephesians 5:22), and faithful (cf. Song 8:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:15). As community builders who forge bonds of love and inclusion, women play an integral role in the advancement of God’s kingdom (cf. Ruth 1:15-17).

The testimony of Scripture is clear in affirming the distinct vocations of men and women. How, then, does the existence of this gender binary translate into the realm of classical Christian education?

Pedagogical Reset

In a time when our culture has increasingly lost its vision of what it means to be men and women, the classical Christian education movement must aim at acknowledging, nurturing, and cultivating these two natures in a way that can help our children appreciate and embody these complementary roles in a true, good, and beautiful way. As Christians have historically seen virtue formation as an integral part of true *paideia*,⁵ our schools have a mandate to partner with parents and churches in raising boys and girls who will fulfill their vocation as men and women in the contexts of the family, the church, and the world.

To fulfill this mandate, however, we must acknowledge one potentially uncomfortable truth: *if God has indeed created men and women with distinct*

4. For this section, my gratitude to Brett Edwards, Karisa Hughes, and the Rev. Tony Melton.

5. See further Kyle R. Hughes, “An Early Christian Approach to Virtue Formation,” *Classis* 30.2 (2023): 13-15.



and complementary natures and roles, the education our schools provide should reflect this fact. To put it another way: I am blessed with both a daughter and two sons, and in light of everything I have posited above, I desire that my daughter's educational experience looks different from that of my sons—not that she would have an inferior education, of course, but rather one that uniquely forms her to live out the vocation of womanhood in whatever context God ultimately places her. And the same for my two boys concerning the vocation of manhood. To suggest otherwise is to affirm the essential interchangeability of men and women, adopting a one-size-fits-all approach that is essentially gnostic insofar as it denies the significance of our physical existence as male and female. It seeks to cultivate a sexless mind rather than train embodied persons.

Traditionally, one solution to this problem has been to educate boys and girls separately. C.S. Lewis identified the core of classical education as “men transmitting manhood to men,”⁶ and based on some of his passing remarks on the subject, it seems clear Lewis was not wholly accepting of the new “co-educational” model.⁷ For better or worse, however, the vast majority of classical Christian schools are – and no doubt will continue to be – tasked with the work of educating both boys and girls.

This does not mean, however, that we need to throw up our hands and accept that boys and girls will have the exact same educational experience at our schools. As faithful Christians, we must forge ahead, remembering that we are up against a culture that is *relentless* and *intentional* in its effort to shape our children in its image. How, then, can we be more intentional in providing distinctive formation in faith and virtue for the boys and girls that God has entrusted into our care? How can our schools create liturgies, habits, and rituals that

allow “men to transmit manhood to men” and “women to transmit womanhood to women”?

First, at a foundational level, we can be more clear, explicit, and consistent in how we teach our students (and, perhaps by extension, their ill-catechized parents as well) about God's created design for men and women. Traditional catechisms, having been produced in other times that could not have imagined our present convulsed age, by and large fail to address issues of gender and sexuality. Students should be able,

To suggest otherwise is to affirm the essential interchangeability of men and women, adopting a one-size fits-all approach that is essentially gnostic insofar as it denies the significance of our physical existence as male and female.

from memory, to define marriage as “the exclusive, lifelong, covenantal love between one man and one woman, and a reflection of the faithful love that unites God and his people,” and to recognize that God ordained marriage “for the procreation of children to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; for a remedy against sin and to avoid sexual immorality; for mutual friendship, help, and comfort, both in prosperity and adversity; and for the benefit of family, church, and society.”⁸ Being able to confidently and persuasively articulate the biblical, theological, and historical reasons for these

6. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperOne, 2000), 23.

7. “This is not going to be a school story,” writes Lewis in *The Silver Chair*; “so I shall say as little as possible about Jill’s school, which is not a pleasant subject.” Immediately after this statement, the narrator notes, “It was ‘Co-educational’, a school for both boys and girls, what used to be called a ‘mixed’ school; some said it was not nearly so mixed as the minds of the people who ran it.” C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: Harper Trophy, 2000), 3. Thanks to Devin O’Donnell for the reference.



statements will allow students to go forth from their schools into the world “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15).

Second, we can divide boys and girls into separate groups for areas of the curriculum where mixed-gender classes are most problematic. For example, in the middle of our last school year, we observed that our older grammar students were struggling in co-curricular classes; girls were not participating in P.E. and boys were not engaging in choir. A mid-year adjustment that had all 5th and 6th grade boys do P.E. and then music together as one group, while all 5th and 6th grade girls had music and then P.E. together as one group paid immediate dividends. Low-hanging fruit in these and other areas, such as Bible classes, provide an easy place to start as our school explores the further possibility of separating boys and girls in all of their core classes during the logic years.

Third, we can go further to create different experiences for boys and girls within our schools. Our school has started a new “Lords and Ladies” initiative for older grammar students, which we hope to eventually expand to include earlier grades as we (Lord willing) acquire more space. This program seeks to carve out space for boys to be together with other boys and with male mentors, and for girls to be together with other girls and with female mentors; additionally, the

program aims at creating opportunities for students to engage in forms of learning that take them outside of a traditional classroom setting to pursue virtue as they acquire new skills and talents.

To wit, this weekly 60-minute block seeks to challenge young men to learn and acquire masculine virtues through a variety of fun activities that form physical strength, mental toughness, and spiritual fortitude. The boys’ program cycles every quarter through areas such as archery, woodworking, traditional country dance, and farming. We challenge young women to learn and acquire the feminine virtues through fun activities that form habits of attention, perseverance, and creativity. Each quarter, our girls cycle through areas such as fiber arts, paper arts, traditional country dance, and handicrafts. Additionally, about two weeks each quarter are set aside for special gender-specific training in areas such as etiquette, manners, and relationships.⁹

We will not roll back the tide of progressive ideology regarding marriage, gender, and sexuality overnight; we will not reverse our failures in producing “men without chests”¹⁰ through a single initiative or two in our schools. However, the seeds that we plant in our classical Christian schools, in concert with faithful catechesis in churches and homes, will no doubt spring up and provide goodness, truth, and beauty to future generations.

Kyle R. Hughes (Ph.D., Radboud University Nijmegen) is Lower School Principal at The Stonehaven School in Marietta, Georgia, and author of three books, including most recently *Teaching for Spiritual Formation: A Patristic Approach to Christian Education in a Convulsed Age* (Cascade, 2022). He also serves on the clergy team and as Director of Catechesis at Christ the King Anglican Church in Marietta.



8. Anglican Church in North America, *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 104-105. Classically, see also St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Good of Marriage*. The extent to which the Church’s acquiescence to no-fault divorce and uncritical embrace of all forms of contraception in obscuring the purposes of marriage is, regretfully, another article for another time.

9. For more, see <https://stonehavenschool.org/student-life/lords-and-ladies>.

10. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 26.



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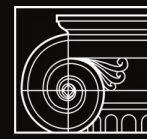
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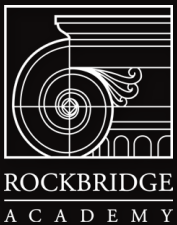
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“In Ellul’s view, a technological society is not a society that simply uses machines. It is a society made for machines. It is a society where machines become the paradigm for understanding and framing everything else, from our own bodies to our brains, from governments to natural ecosystems. That is technique.”

Avoiding the Tyranny of Technique in the Classroom:

Applying Jacques Ellul's Warning to Educators

Joshua Pauling, All Saints Lutheran Church



In 1954, French theologian, sociologist, and legal scholar Jacques Ellul published a massive tome entitled *La Technique*. Translated into English ten years later as *The Technological Society*,¹ the book warned that principles of technique and efficiency were coming to consume all realms of life and swallowing up a uniquely human way of being in the process. Ellul digs much deeper than just technological changes and new gadgets. He lays the axe to the root of what he sees as the real problem: technique itself, which he defines as the “totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency...in every field of human activity.”² Ellul connected the dots between things like factory optimization according to efficiency, government bureaucracies centralizing control, humanity’s changing relationship with one another and the world due to new technologies, and how all such related shifts were undermining human life and thought.

As the ever-growing techno-tentacles of modern society further instantiate the principles of technique and efficiency into our lives, Ellul’s concern still holds: that we might be painting ourselves into a corner as computational understandings of human thought and mechanistic views of man swallow up other ways of knowing and being. With the capability to

measure, record, and analyze everything – when data, information, and algorithms rule the day—even classical education can fall prey to the tyranny of technique. Ellul’s concerns deserve a fair hearing among classical educators today, if for no other reason than to help ensure that education remains oriented properly toward human goods, humanely scaled.

Ellul and Technique

When Ellul refers to “the technological society,” he is not simply referring to a society that uses machines and complex tools; much more than that, he is referring to the pervasive yet subtle underlying ideologies that take root in society as traditional ways of life are overshadowed by the principles of technique and efficiency, which those machines and tools represent and by which they function.

To put it another way, in Ellul’s view, a technological society is not a society that simply *uses* machines. It is a society *made* for machines. It is a society where machines become the paradigm for understanding and framing everything else, from our own bodies to our brains, from governments to natural ecosystems. *That* is technique. Think of the ways we describe our bodies as “well-oiled machines” or “flesh robots.” So too our brains are frequently compared to

1. There has been much written about the English title, and how it can draw attention to specific technologies, whereas Ellul’s main focus is on the underlying mindset of technique. In 1970 Robert Nisbet addressed this in an article entitled “The Grand Illusion: An Appreciation of Jacques Ellul” in *Commentary*. Nisbet noted how Ellul’s thought was being misapplied by Progressives and Leftists and suggests, “again we are forced to go back, I suppose, to the harm done by the title given to the translation of *La Technique* in this country. Eyes fasten on the wonderful words, ‘The Technological Society,’ the mind grasps quickly that Ellul is far from happy about the state of things in the West. Ergo: he must hate technology and, with it, the middle class and all it stands for, and be ‘one of us,’ consecrated to the politics of love, of obscenity, of sincerity, of identity, of politics itself.” But as Nisbet points out, the radicals of the 1970s were “as far from Ellul’s thought as anything I can possibly imagine.”

2. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (NY: Vintage Books, 1964), xxv.



“computers” or “information processors.” This is the trajectory Ellul saw in the mid-20th century as industrial and technological change was causing social life and self-understanding “to be reconsidered in terms of the machine” as “technique integrates the machine into society. It constructs the kind of world the machine needs.”³ Human interests and needs are eclipsed by the needs of the machine. Humans end up submitting and structuring their thinking and life patterns to fit into the technological society, with the machine as the standard.

Ellul then turns the screws further by arguing that we can no longer speak of a clear demarcation between man and machine because “when technique enters into every area of life, including the human, it ceases to be external to man and becomes his very substance. It is no longer face to face with man but is integrated with him, and it progressively absorbs him.”⁴ Perhaps most stunning here is that Ellul wrote this in 1954, long before the possibility of personal computing, wearable or implantable technologies, or screen-based digital devices — all of which so easily

become reality-mediating mechanisms that extend technique’s totalizing reign. More from Ellul:

Technique has penetrated the deepest recesses of the human being. The machine tends not only to create a new human environment but also to modify man’s very essence...to a universe for which he was not created. He was made to go six kilometers an hour, and he goes a thousand. He was made to eat when he was hungry and to sleep when he was sleepy; instead, he obeys a clock. He was made to have contact with living things, and he lives in a world of stone. He was created with a certain essential unity, and he is fragmented by all the forces of the modern world.... He has been liberated little by little from physical constraints, but he is all the more the slave of abstract ones. He acts through intermediaries and consequently has lost contact with reality.⁵

And the trends have only continued. Think of how easily technique takes over even in our personal lives. Do you have a problem with time management? *There’s an app for that.* How about your weight? *There’s an app for that, too.* Do you have a problem with anger management? *Read this self-help book.* How about focus and attention? *Employ these techniques to self-optimize.* Notice how even the language of behavior management and “optimization” employs a concept from the industrial economy to address human problems — not good, according to Ellul. The focus on efficiency, productivity, optimization, and self-improvement easily overwhelms us and eclipses

He was created with a certain essential unity, and he is fragmented by all the forces of the modern world.... He has been liberated little by little from physical constraints, but he is all the more the slave of abstract ones. He acts through intermediaries and consequently has lost contact with reality.

3. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 5.

4. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 6.

5. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 325.



human-to-human, hand-to-hand, and heart-to-heart approaches to life.

Alan Noble explores Ellul's concept of technique further in his recent book *You Are Not Your Own* and shows how it creates an environment of competition for attention and success, turns efficiency into a "judgment of human value," which "morally malforms both the winners and the losers."⁶ In other words, when we apply the unflinching standards of efficiency and technique to the mess of human experience, we risk dehumanizing ourselves into efficiency machines or technique-bots. As more aspects of the human experience are quantified into the newest data points for analytics, "they overwhelm us with the sense that all of life is essentially a competition."⁷ Noble laments where this leads:

Technique promises a better world but produces only a more efficient world with different problems. Technique is then used to solve the problems that technique unintentionally created, which only produces new unintended consequences. The further it goes, the more absurd it becomes and the more helpless we feel to stop it.⁸

And that leaves us in a very inhumane place. "Men now live in conditions that are less than human," Ellul wrote over half a century ago. "Life in such an environment has no meaning."⁹ And if soaring anxiety rates, deaths of despair, and the growing crisis of meaning and loneliness are any indication, he was right.

How Then Shall We Learn?

Ellul warned of similar trends in the world of education which was being influenced by

progressive pedagogy in his native France and other modernized nations around the globe. Ellul thought that some goals of progressive education had a place, compared to past "dismal schools where teachers were enemies and punishment was a constant menace; of narrow, barred windows, gloomy brown walls, and uncomfortable benches hollowed out by generations of bored students."¹⁰

Technique promises a better world but produces only a more efficient world with different problems. Technique is then used to solve the problems that technique unintentionally created.

But Ellul questioned the overall direction of progressive education as the "ancient and familiar categories of school life...were suddenly overthrown by the extension of a series of techniques."¹¹ What took primacy was the socialization and adjustment of the child, who "must be 'relaxed,' and enjoy himself; he must exist in a 'balanced environment,' get rid of his 'complexes,' and 'play while he is learning.'"¹² Ellul viewed this "educational procedure" as a "highly refined technique" which makes the "most exacting demands on the technician himself, who must indeed be a remarkable pedagogue to be able to apply it."¹³

Not only that, the dream of "happy children" and democratic values based on progressive

6. Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God in an Inhuman World* (IL: Downers Grove, 2021), 75.

7. Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*, 77.

8. Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*, 111.

9. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 4-5.

10. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 344.

11. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 344.

12. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 344-345.

13. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 345.



education's "new psychopedagogic technique" doesn't even make students truly happy anyway. Instead, "it makes men happy in a milieu which normally would have made them unhappy, if they had not been worked on, molded, and formed for just that milieu. In other words, what looks like the apex of humanism is the pinnacle of human

Education will no longer be an unpredictable and exciting adventure in human enlightenment, but an exercise in conformity and an apprenticeship to whatever gadgetry is useful in a technical world.

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submission: children are educated to become precisely what society expects of them.”¹⁴ So much for a freeing, joyful, liberating education. Instead, we end up with more techniques and more mechanistic button-pushers. Ellul concludes that “the new pedagogical methods correspond exactly to the role assigned to education in modern technological society,” where “education no longer has a humanist end or any value in itself; it has only one goal, to create technicians.” Even, “the human brain must be made to conform to the much more advanced brain of the machine. And education will no longer be an unpredictable and exciting adventure in human enlightenment, but an exercise in conformity and an apprenticeship to whatever gadgetry is useful in a technical world.”¹⁵

What does this mean for those of us in the classical world? Any model or form of education is prone to an unhealthy relationship to technique and efficiency of which Ellul warned — even classical education. *If we just implement this curriculum sequence, then everything will work just right. If teachers just use these techniques, then students will listen and behave. If we just educate all our kids in the “virtues,” then they will be good people. If we teach everyone Latin and logic then society will be so much better.* Certainly, there is a valid place for mastering teaching techniques, designing a well-ordered curriculum, and running a classroom efficiently. But we must maintain the human aspects of teaching and learning, which frequently transcend technique and are sometimes anything but efficient.

Applying Ellul to Education: Human Goods, Humanely Scaled

Ellul's core insights concerning education are that proper human formation is not easily quantifiable with numbers, nor is it mechanistically ensured via certain techniques. Education is much more than a transaction. Educators, parents, and administrators should consider the following to help their students (and themselves!) stay anchored in the humane orbit of the real. To help translate Ellul's somewhat cryptic and abstract points, I'll employ the cultural critic Neil Postman, who drew heavily on Ellul's work and applied much of it to education.

Be a technological skeptic.

Postman clearly built on Ellul in his 1992 book *Technopoly*, which was the term Postman coined to describe a stage of civilization where the control of industrial resources, the reform of financial



14. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 348.

15. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 348-349.

institutions, and the reorganization of social systems are all based on the findings of technologists and engineers. This, Postman argues, degrades education into a transactional and mechanistic system, driven by accompanying educational narratives, which he called the myths of technological progress and economic utility. Within such a framework, education is primarily directed towards economic ends, where students are fungible commodities being prepared for the 21st-century workforce. Swimming in this cultural milieu means we frequently absorb this way of thinking without even realizing it. That is why a dose of technological skepticism is necessary and helpful.

Instead, by tackling the philosophy and history of technology, students can learn of humanity's confrontation with nature and of technology's impacts on culture and society. Postman makes technology itself an object of inquiry so that students are "more interested in asking questions about the computer than in getting answers from it."

Channeling Ellul, Postman suggests serious thought be undertaken before any technology is employed in the classroom: "Every technology — from an IQ test to an automobile to a television set to a computer — is a product of a particular economic and political context and carries with it a program, an agenda, and a philosophy that may or may not be life-enhancing and that therefore requires scrutiny, criticism, and control."¹⁶ Whether it be a film strip or video clip, a computer or Chromebook, a Smartboard or smartphone, educators cannot be too cautious about implementation and should always maintain "an epistemological and psychic distance from any technology, so that it always appears somewhat strange, never inevitable, never natural."¹⁷ This means our classrooms shouldn't always be buzzing or beeping or blinking with ubiquitous blue lights or alluring backlit slabs of glass we call screens.

Don't just teach how to use technology; also teach how it uses us.

Understanding, like Ellul, that technology is never neutral, Postman suggests that the subject of technology itself be taught historically. Students need a serious form of technology education, but not in how to use technology — frequently students are already technologically more adept than their teachers, and predicting which skills will still be relevant when students reach adulthood is nearly impossible. Instead, by tackling the philosophy and history of technology, students can learn of humanity's confrontation with nature and of technology's impacts on culture and society. Postman makes technology itself an object of inquiry so that students are

16. Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 184-185.

17. Postman, *Technopoly*, 185.



“more interested in asking questions about the computer than in getting answers from it.”¹⁸

This concern gains importance as the realities of large language models like ChatGPT and other forms of machine learning (which I think is a more accurate term than “artificial intelligence”) gain traction and offer up full-fledged answers, fully written papers, and much more than search engines ever could. Educators must especially be prepared to engage their students in how to use and not use such things, and how to think about them from a Christian perspective using classical philosophical categories to better understand their inherent limitations.¹⁹

Remember students can’t be quantified fully by a number.

There is a tendency to measure everything in education. Standardized tests, numerical grades, and more. But what does it really mean to say that Johnny got an 87% in US History this year? Can one’s knowledge of a subject be so neatly captured in this way? Are my rubrics and grading metrics really precise enough to capture the essence of a human being and their knowledge of a certain subject down to a percentage point? What about intellectual growth over the semester? What about older methods of student evaluation that involved more direct human-to-human engagement?

Classical education isn’t immune from this tendency towards quantification. I found myself thinking about this at a recent classical education conference organized by one of the well-known publishers of classical education materials. Perhaps it was because Ellul was fresh in my

mind, but there seemed to be a growing focus on measurement, standardized tests, using this lesson plan format, employing that technique, and formulating these specific policies. Of course, such things have their place, especially as schools grow in size. But that makes it all the more important to remember Ellul’s warnings. We need to ensure that students are always perceived as full persons, even in how we evaluate their work.

Education requires a human being directly caring for and engaging with another human being through discussion, listening, eye contact, and much more — very simple and low-tech things.

Follow the master.

Our goals as educators are much broader than helping students get good grades, win that college scholarship, or land a high-powered career. We are forming human beings: shaping, and molding them toward the true, the good, and the beautiful. Such human goods as cultivating biblical wisdom and virtue, and preparing students for their lifelong vocations as members of families, churches, and communities go far beyond productivity, efficiency, and transaction which reign in the technological society. Education requires a human being directly caring for and engaging with another human being



18. Neil Postman, “Some New Gods that Fail,” in *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Technology and Learning*, ed. Roy Pea (CA: Jossey Bass, 2000), 294.

19. Robin Phillips has been developing some helpful guidelines along this front in a series of articles for *Salvo* magazine entitled “ChatGPT in the Classroom,” which can be found at www.salvomag.com. Robin and I are also working on a forthcoming book on navigating such technological dilemmas in ways that maintain our humanity and Christian fidelity. It should be available in 2024.

through discussion, listening, eye contact, and much more — very simple and low-tech things. It is in this modeling on a human scale that education's imitative nature is on full display and fully unleashed. Here we find the ancient idea of the teacher surrounded by his disciples, coming together in discussion around topics and texts under the master's wise tutelage.

"You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things," explains philosopher Michael Polanyi. "By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known by the master himself."²⁰ Modeling and imitation are powerful forces in human formation, revealing an inherent moral dimension to education. The unique nature of the teacher-pupil relationship must not be lost. David Hicks reminds us that "classical education's emphasis on mastering an inherited body of knowledge rather than on developing a happy, well-adjusted child makes possible a profound and intimate relationship between the schoolmaster and his pupils. Knowledge — the activity of learning — gives the teacher and student a common ground for friendship while accentuating their unequal status."²¹

Carve out spaces and times for restful reflection.

In the rush of the school day, is there ever a moment for reflecting upon a new insight or reveling in a deep truth? Is the school day itself one large technique designed to just get students through like an assembly line product? We must

find room for fruitful rest. A school must leave some nooks and crannies for contemplation that birth new insight, some sanctified spaces for silence that bring forth peace, and some alcoves for awkward boredom that blossom into creativity. We all need moments of meditation where we are uninterrupted by flashing screens, notification dings, PowerPoint presentations, the ringing of bells, or the ticking of clocks. It is in such moments and places where we encounter the Divine, the profound, the sublime, and yes, darkness too, and truly grow as persons.

It is vital that we retain a humane education, where students and teachers, parents and children are fully present with one another, gathered around the perennial subjects and questions that form humanity's Great Conversation.

Ellul's warnings about technique and efficiency drive us back to education's low-tech core as a better way to secure human flourishing amid a technological society. We are brought back to each other and the topics and texts that have stood the test of time, and their ordinary transmission through dialogue and discussion where words are spoken, read, written, and shared.

20. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 49.

21. David Hicks, *Norms and Nobility: A Treatise on Education* (MD: University Press of America, 1999), 40-41.



When education's driving force is human-to-human interaction — small in scale, personal in nature, historical in focus — we can better treasure the fully human ways of knowing and being that were familiar to generations past. These are the foods that nourish and strengthen humanity to resist technique's tyranny. It is vital that we retain a humane education, where students and teachers, parents and children are fully present with one another, gathered around the perennial subjects and questions that form humanity's Great Conversation. "At stake is our very life, and we shall need all the energy, inventiveness, imagination, goodness, and strength we can muster to triumph in our predicament," Ellul reminds us. "Each of us, in his own life, must seek ways of resisting and transcending technological determinants. Each man must make this effort in every area of life, in his profession and his social, religious, and family relationships."²²

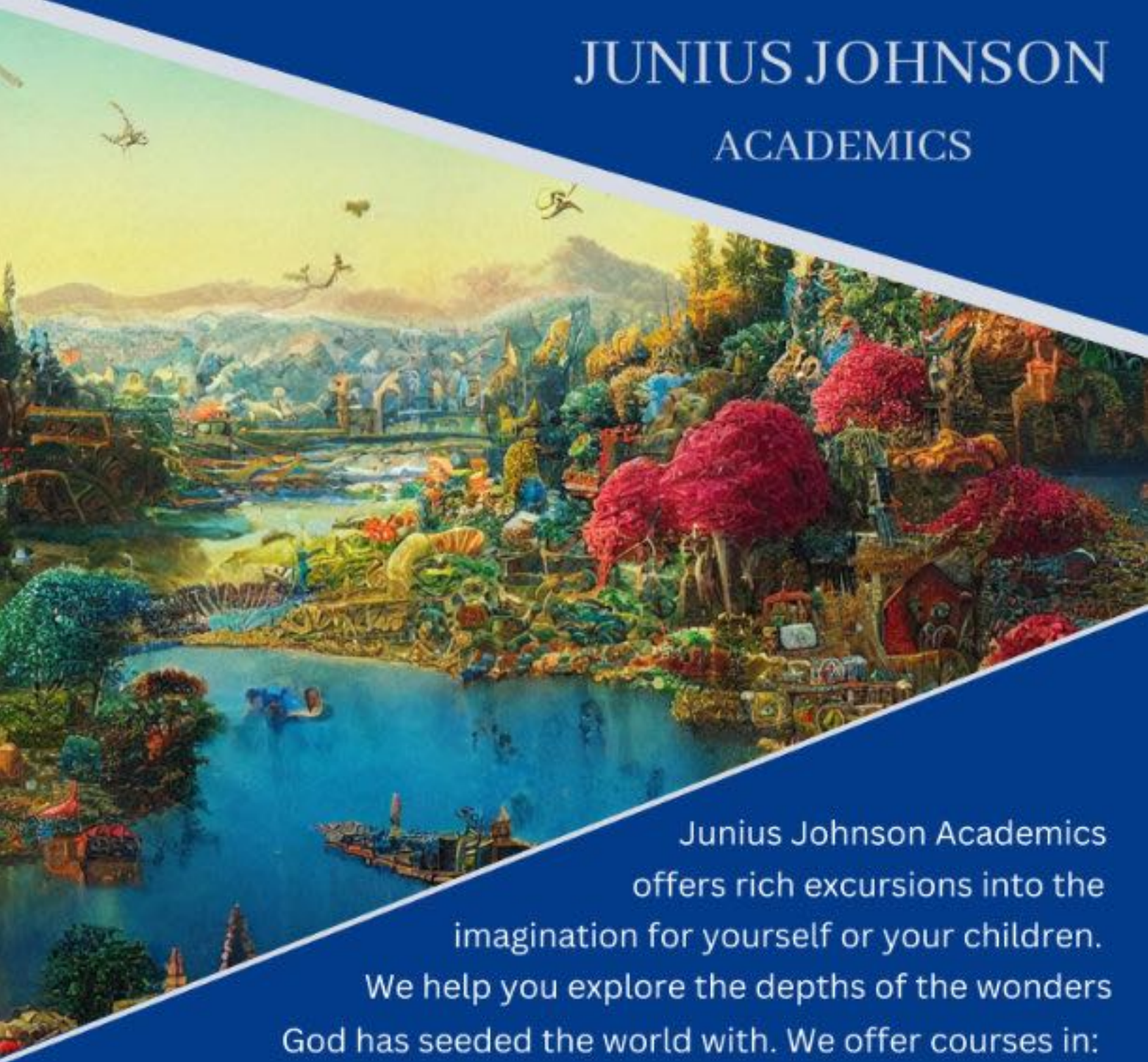
Joshua Pauling is a classical educator, furniture-maker, and head elder at All Saints Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Charlotte, NC. He is a contributing editor at *Salvo Magazine*, columnist at *Modern Reformation*, and has written for a variety of other publications including *Touchstone*, *Public Discourse*, *FORMA*, *Classical Lutheran Education Journal*, *The South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society Journal*, *Front Porch Republic*, *Mere Orthodoxy*, *Quillette*, *The Imaginative Conservative*, among others. He studied at Messiah University, Reformed Theological Seminary, and Winthrop University, and also worked in education for thirteen years as a high school history teacher and coach.



22. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxii.

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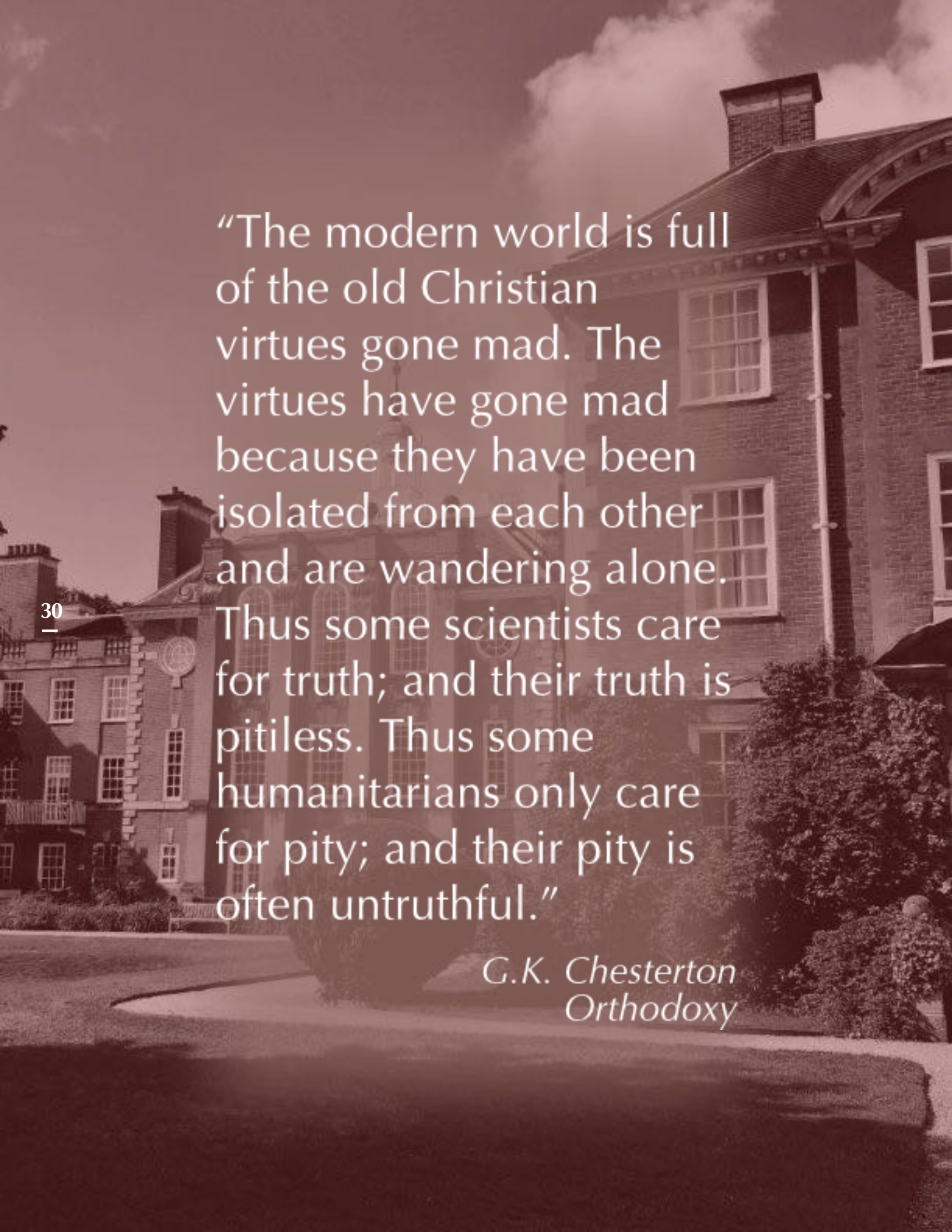
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“The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. Thus some scientists care for truth; and their truth is pitiless. Thus some humanitarians only care for pity; and their pity is often untruthful.”

*G.K. Chesterton
Orthodoxy*

The Riot of Fashionable Virtues and a Thing Called Truth

*A Classical Christian Response to Critical Race Theory*¹

Devin O'Donnell, ACCS



The use of Fashions in thought is to distract the attention of men from their real dangers. We direct the fashionable outcry of each generation against those vices of which it is least in danger and fix its approval on the virtue nearest to that vice which we are trying to make endemic. The game is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers whenever there is a flood, and all crowding to that side of the boat which is already nearly gunwale under. Thus we make it fashionable to expose the dangers of enthusiasm at the very moment when they are all really becoming worldly and lukewarm; a century later, when we are really making them all Byronic and drunk with emotion, the fashionable outcry is directed against the dangers of the mere “understanding” (137). — C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. — G.K. Chesterton, “The Suicide of Thought”

When Ideas Have Consequences

Consider the following scene. A mother and father cross the threshold of the headmaster’s office and take a seat in the chairs facing the desk. As part of the admissions process for this

classical Christian school, the parents have been invited to the routine family interview with the administration. The parents communicate their love for the program — for the attention to safety, the high standards, or how this kind of education addresses the “whole person.” But somewhere in the middle of the hour-long conversation, the parents kindly ask about the reading list for upper school students. They express an innocent concern about the lack of racial diversity in literature and history classes. They ask why the school has not adjusted the reading to include more voices of color. At the very least, the parents ask how the school plans to answer the present call to change the corpus of studies in the Humanities and how to expand its cultural representation. Why is this happening?

For some heads of school, this scene is an opportunity, a consummation devoutly to be wished — a chance to better explain to parents the *raison d’être* of classical education by defending Christian civilization and Western culture in general. For other leaders, however, this moment may be rather painful and awkward, not unlike visiting the dentist to find you have not been brushing well and need to deal with a cavity.

The truth is that these moments have been happening for some time now and will continue to happen. It may come from without, or from

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1. In the spring of 2022, Wade Ortego, Head of The Ambrose School invited a small group of classical Christian educators to discuss and debate how classical Christian schools ought to respond to rising cultural concerns, namely Critical Race Theory (CRT). The council was playfully dubbed the “Wokium Colloquium,” but the goal was serious: to equip school leaders and teachers with a coherent and practicable Christian response to CRT and Critical Theory in general. Those who attended represented thoughtful leadership within the broader CCE movement and the contributing guests included David Goodwin, author and president of ACCS; Dr. Chris Schlect, Senior Fellow of History and Head of Humanities at New Saint Andrews College; Andrew Kern, founder and president of the CiRCE Institute; Martin Cothran, Senior Policy Analyst for The Family Foundation and co-founder of Memoria Press and Highlands Latin School; Dr. Christopher Perrin, co-founder and CEO of Classical Academic Press, and myself. This paper was the result of the sincere conversations and formal dialogues that took place during the days of that gathering



within — a teacher perhaps who raises this same question with other faculty members, or who feels morally obligated to work subversively toward constructing a more equitable vision of history for students. But whatever the scenario might be, the head of school, as well as the faculty, ought to be able to give a reasonable defense in the face of such pressing cultural questions. One of the distinguishing differences between classical learning and progressive education is that it is not utilitarian or servile. Education is not about *information* but *formation*. A student will be more or less free to the degree that he or she can cultivate virtue in themselves, right habits and affections oriented to the transcendent Good. For classical Christian learning, this means the formation of Christ-like virtue, which is another way of saying that we enculturate our children in “the *paideia* of the Lord.” Because education is always about what it means to be human, this necessarily involves notions of virtue and vice on levels that are both individual and corporate, personal and social. Every education cultivates some vision of virtue or nobility; the question is how that vision corresponds to a more or less true picture of Reality.

Thus, when it comes to including more voices of color in the Western canon,² redefining our ideal of justice, or whether we learn good things from “critical race theory,” we ought to consider the simple and essential meaning of such questions in the light of something that doesn’t change with the times: Truth. Even in basic ordinary life, we cannot go far without encountering popular claims that essentially rest upon religious or moral premises, upon fundamental beliefs about the nature of the universe. These claims might be attended with great moral outrage, but they nevertheless are

predicated on metaphysical assumptions about virtue and vice, norms and nobility. But as we shall see, herein lies the problem.

The Riot of the Virtues

If the modern world is full of the “old Christian virtues gone mad,” as Chesterton remarks, then sanity may appear in the form of a newly-christened vice. One of the virtues gone most mad today is justice. We’ve heard much of “social justice” in the last decade, and even now with the expansion of “human rights,” the social justice organism multiplies daily, mutating into new species of potential offense and resentment. We have the darkly euphemistic “reproductive justice,” for instance, or “environmental justice,” as the White House calls it,³ or, according to the Harvard Kennedy School, “racial justice.”⁴ And so on. Whence comes this disintegration of justice into separate parts?

Much of it has to do with the collapse of the Christian metaphysics. Not long after Chesterton was inveighing against the medicalized sanction of vivisection in science,⁵ Humanities departments in the West — those last vestiges of a classical Christian curriculum — were beginning to “vivisect” the united ideals of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty (as well as the virtue and meaning we derive from them). Take justice again. Once regarded as a “cardinal virtue,” justice was understood as the moral virtue that gives God and neighbor their due, perhaps best expressed in the Law: “You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor” (Lev. 19:15). C. S. Lewis says justice “is the old name for everything we should now call ‘fairness’; it includes honesty, give and take,

2. For a more indepth scholarly exchange on this particular topic, see the upcoming panel discussion, “The Canon of Great Books,” at this year’s *Repairing the Ruins Conference* (2024), featuring Dr. Christopher Schlect, Dr. Grant Horner, and Dr. David Diener.

3. The White House, “News and Updates: Environmental Justice.” Accessed 5 Jan. 2024; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/news-and-updates/>.

4. Harvard Kennedy School, “Racial Justice, Racial Equity, and Anti-Racism Reading List.” Accessed 5 Jan. 2024; <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/library-research-services/collections/diversity-inclusion-belonging/anti-racist>.

5. A good working definition is in C. S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*, where he describes the practice of vivisection as an evil group of scientists who cut up “thousands of pounds’ worth of living animality...like paper on the mere chance of some interesting discovery.” *That Hideous Strength* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946) 111.



truthfulness, keeping promises, and all that side of life.” Classically understood, it assumes a transcendent standard and is in accord with the *common* good, and because of this, it can be applied to all men everywhere at all times. “[I]f you leave out justice,” argues Lewis, “you will find yourself breaking agreements and faking evidence in trials ‘for the sake of humanity,’ and become in the end a cruel and treacherous man.” With the crumbling of the Christian sacred order, however, the Western social order has fragmented, resembling the antique chaos of polytheism. “Justice,” along with other ideals, has simply become a word to go out in the war against other words; the word justice is now only a vessel emptied of its essential representation of reality and filled back in with some new privatized claim on this or that aspect of life.

“If you leave out justice, you will find yourself breaking agreements and faking evidence in trials ‘for the sake of humanity,’ and become in the end a cruel and treacherous man.” C.S. Lewis

So this modern world of ours is “full of wild and wasted virtues,” Chesterton explains.⁶ We do well to remember this as a description of so many college English courses now, or as the confusing state of progressive education in general. Chesterton writes,

The modern world is not evil; in some ways, the modern world is far too good.

It is full of wild and wasted virtues. When a religious scheme is shattered (as Christianity was shattered at the Reformation), it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also, and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. Thus some scientists care for truth, and their truth is pitiless. Thus some humanitarians only care for pity, and their pity (I am sorry to say) is often untruthful.⁷

Let us overlook his backhanded insult of the Reformation and consider his main point, that virtues untethered to a coherent Christian metaphysics do more damage than the rampant vices. The reason is that a person, such as a doctor, might think they are doing good, when in reality they are doing evil, such as in the practice of abortion. Consider the virtue of humility.

Certainly, humility is good. Socrates was considered to be the wisest man on earth precisely because he confessed, “I know nothing.” And this prejudice has in some form remained in the West and has been sanctified (and in some ways amplified) by Christian revelation. “But what we suffer from today,” argues Chesterton, “is humility in the wrong place.” Modesty is another name for it. But he writes, “Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the

6. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995) 35-36.

7. *Ibid.*, 37.



truth; this has been exactly reversed.” This in part explains the place in which we now find ourselves, a culture that has forgotten its heritage and has lost faith in its ideals and in the divine order that made sense of them.

“The reason we can feel guilty for slavery,” Martin Cothran has said, “is that Western man is uniquely self-critical and conscientious.” The Delphic Oracle who declared Socrates the wisest man that ever lived knew that he was aware of his ignorance, perhaps even a bit uncertain of his own epistemology. Add to this the Christian doctrine of “original sin” and the need for Christ, and presto, we have a Western self-consciousness that seems to naturally sympathize with the victim and a social imaginary that identifies more with Hector than with Achilles.⁸ Hector was always the underdog in Homer’s epic, and Chesterton quips, “All sorts of people thought it the most superb sort of heraldry to claim to be descended from Hector. Nobody seems to have wanted to be descended from Achilles.”⁹ It was a nod to the virtue of humility that Western Man had even a slight care for the oppressed and the guest, the stranger and the refugee. But now this virtue of self-doubt has been relocated and has resettled upon the convictions about who we are and what we believe.

We identify this tendency in normal and obvious ways. Just as a man can feel compunction about his past sins, so a country can feel remorse over their corporate transgressions. Germany is haunted by the war guilt of the Third Reich. The U.S. is haunted by the guilt of slavery and its

social fallout. This fact does not make the sin any less grievous, but that one feels any remorse at all is usually a sign of a somewhat healthy conscience. Thus, as Cothran observed, “We can only have these discussions and debates about racism in the year 2024 precisely *because* we’re Westerners. No other culture does this.” Although slavery was at times alive and well in Western Civilization, it was also recognized as an evil in Western Christian Civilization alone.¹⁰ But in the last few decades, this historical narrative has been altered, and the academic framework of “Critical Race Theory” (CRT) has sought to restructure our understanding of race, as well as to reinterpret intellectually honest historical narratives. This is especially felt in America.

“The reason we can feel guilty for slavery is that Western man is uniquely self-critical and conscientious...We can only have these discussions and debates about racism in the year 2024 precisely because we’re Westerners. No other culture does this.”

The *New York Times Magazine*’s “1619 Project,”¹¹ created by Nikole Hannah-Jones, is one popular example of CRT and is what Brown professor emeritus and historian Gordon Wood

8. I’m borrowing from Charles Taylor here. Carl Trueman notes, that Taylor “introduces the idea of the social imaginary to address the question of how theories developed by social elites might be related to the way ordinary people think and act, even when such people have never read these elites or spent any time self-consciously reflecting on the implications of their theories.” *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020) 36-37.

9. *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Dover, 2007) 152. Chesterton goes on: “The very fact that the Trojan name has become a Christian name, and been scattered to the last limits of Christendom, to Ireland or the Gaelic Highlands, while the Greek name has remained relatively rare and pedantic, is a tribute to the same truth.”

10. The abolitionists who ended slavery were Christians. William Wilburforce is an obvious example of one whose Christian faith was the reason for his fight to end the British slave trade.

11. *The 1619 Project* “conceived by Nikole Hannah-Jones.” Accessed 5 June 2022: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html?mtref=undefined&gwh=038A2ED812B1DFCB776C1E50CC01D24D&gwt=pay&assetType=PAYWALL>.



has called “wrong in so many ways.”¹² The claim that CRT is only an abstract theoretical exercise and is not actually taught in schools today is another instance of the contradictions surrounding it. On the one hand, CRT has no practical effect on education; on the other hand, even if it is taught in schools, it’s worth it to redress the wrongs of slavery in this country. However, according to Zach Goldberg and Eric Kaufman at *City Journal*, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that CRT is in fact being taught in schools today.¹³ The effect is that teaching CRT looks more like a catechism than a simple lesson plan. This kind of catechism, however, is one steeped in “secular religion.” Goldberg and Kaufman write, “Publicly funded schools that teach and pass off left-wing racial-ideological theories and concepts as if they are undisputed factual knowledge — or that impart tendentiously curated readings of history — are therefore engaging in indoctrination, not education.” But why should this matter to classical Christian schools?

The answer to this question lies in a devil’s mouth. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis reminds us that the devil’s job is to distract us from Truth, which transcends time and place, by having us attend to the prevailing winds of popular opinion. As the senior tempter explains, “[W]e make it fashionable to expose the dangers of enthusiasm at the very moment when they are all really becoming worldly and lukewarm.”¹⁴ It is diabolically simple:

The use of Fashions in thought is to distract the attention of men from their real dangers. We direct the fashionable

outcry of each generation against those vices of which it is least in danger and fix its approval on the virtue nearest to that vice which we are trying to make endemic. (137)

Here Lewis identifies the same problem about the modern (and post-modern) world that Chesterton makes plain: it is full of a riot of fashionable virtues, noble actions, and sentiments that have been dislocated from their proper place. What is CRT in our generation, but the latest “fashionable outcry” against the vice of systemic racism, a vice which, if we are honest, is one we are now “least in danger” of committing? Conversely, “the virtue nearest to that vice which [the devils] are trying to make endemic” vaguely resembles something like self-loathing. At times of cultural decline, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine whether a virtue is *true*, rather than merely popular. But classical Christian teachers and leaders should take their cues from Chesterton and Lewis, identifying the confusion between real virtues and their timely counterfeits. But even if we can recognize the danger of real vices, not merely those of the maddening crowd, how can classical educators be equipped with a coherent and practicable Christian response to the claims of CRT (and its parent system of thought, Critical Theory)?

What is CRT and its Claims?

Before we consider a response, it’s important to define terms. In April 2022, Colorado Christian University put together a statement on Critical Race Theory, providing a reliable



12. Wood is one of the leading scholars on the American Revolution and has authored numerous books on the subject. Tom Mackaman, “An interview with historian Gordon Wood on the New York Times’ 1619 Project.” Accessed 5 June 2022: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2019/11/28/wood-n28.html>. There is no shortage of historical and academic criticism of the 1619 Project, from those on the Left and the Right. See also the *Politico* article, “I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me.” Accessed 5 June 2022: <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248>. In addition, see the letter to the *New York Times*, where “Twelve Scholars Critique the 1619 Project.” Accessed 8 Jan. 2024: <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/174140>.

13. Zach Goldberg, Eric Kaufman, “Yes, Critical Race Theory Is Being Taught in Schools” *City Journal*, Oct. 20, 2022. Accessed 8 Jan 2024: <https://www.city-journal.org/article/yes-critical-race-theory-is-being-taught-in-schools>.

14. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001) 137-138.

template for forming a faithful response to this topic. They define CRT as

a post-Civil Rights social philosophy, legal theory, and strategy for addressing racism and our changing society. Its underlying framework — critical theory — was formed as an attempt to understand human brokenness and oppression and to point a way toward liberation. It was formulated upon a neo-Marxist philosophy and worldview as developed by the Frankfurt School in Germany in the 1930s.¹⁵

As the child of “Critical Theory,” CRT bears all the genetic traits of its Marxist parent. Critical Theory (CT) was an interpretative framework formed in 1918 as an alternative to the classical curricula and epistemology of Western culture, which was shaped and undergirded by Christian thought and teaching. If CT was the titan progenitor, then it produced a pantheon of other “frameworks,” each with its own complex epistemological assumptions, undergirded by a materialistic worldview. CT (and CRT by extension) is a *story* of human society, a meta-narrative that shows how all conflict is not a result of individual sin but of power struggles and inequalities.

In their statement on CRT, Colorado Christian University (CCU) defines Critical Theory as a “master narrative,” one

that reduces human associations to relations of power. Adopting a neo-Marxist framework, one is either oppressed or an oppressor. Critical theorists go on to classify capitalism, “heteronormativity,” Christianity, etc., as forms of oppression that keep oppressed groups in bondage. It aims to

dismantle these norms in order to bring “true liberation.”

What begins in the lab often spills out into the streets. This is why education matters, for it is the primary means by which the recent proliferation of identity groups has fueled the emancipatory politics of our current age. CCU states further that

Critical race theory (one outworking of critical theory) critiques society through the lens of racial oppression. It denies a biblical view of human nature and sees everything through racial categories. One is either a racist or a victim of racism. Selectively, it makes whiteness the foundation of evil. Being white and non-racist is impossible.

Some secular critics of CRT have pointed out the ludicrous contradictions here, noting the maddening result of being told, on the one hand, “You can never understand my lived experience, because you are not me and are not oppressed as I am,” while simultaneously being told, “You *must* understand my lived experience and submit to my demands, precisely because you are not me and not oppressed.”¹⁶ Pastors such as Voddie Baucham have called this phenomenon “Ethnic Gnosticism,” the re-emergent ghost of an old heresy that once haunted the church in its childhood.¹⁷ And there is no shortage of other Christian critiques of CRT and its contradictions in thought and dangers in practice.

How is CRT (and the Like) Advanced? Or, Beware of HR Departments

It is important to note how CRT enters into daily life. CCU notes that

CRT is often advanced through DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion)



15. Accessed May 4, 2022; <https://www.ccu.edu/about/position-statements/statement-on-critical-race-theory/>

16. See Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019).

17. Voddie T. Baucham Jr., *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021) 91.

initiatives where those seemingly benign words take on new meaning. Stripped from any biblical foundation, diversity becomes an absolute, the dominant concern of every agenda or discipline. Equity becomes, not equal dignity and equal opportunity, but equal outcomes promoting the redistribution of wealth. And inclusion is reframed by agendas that are at odds with biblical truth.

And to those who believed this only existed as academic theory, Christopher Rufo reported in 2020 detailed reports that government employees were in fact being subjected to CRT-based training programs.¹⁸ In his book, *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, Ibram X. Kendi points out what seems to be the ultimate goal of CRT: “The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.” Again because the West is “uniquely self-critical” and morally conscientious, caring about virtue and vice, these ideas were not dismissed but taken seriously at a policy-making level.

Classical Christian educators must understand that a kind of secular morality has come to occupy the place of classical Christian moral philosophy, and this has been deeply shaped by Marxist doctrines regarding power conflicts and inequalities. The debate has been seen in some of the more established Christian liberal arts colleges. The 2021 Grove City College controversy is yet another example of why this matters.¹⁹ Reports emerged of a “creeping wokeness” at GCC, largely due to some new course offerings that studied proponents of CRT but gave no evaluation of

their arguments. This seemed at odds with GCC’s mission, which led to an investigation. In response to claims of “mission-drift,” the special committee formed to look into these concerns found “some specific instances of misalignment,” that the mission of GCC “has not changed,” and that the college “categorically rejects Critical Race Theory and similar ‘critical’ schools of thought as antithetical to GCC’s vision, mission, and values.”²⁰ This is good news, as some concerned parties have noted.

How Should CCE Schools Respond?

As the tenets of CRT have filtered down into popular consciousness (by either coercive or natural means), it is an issue with which educators in the classical Christian world must contend. We cannot afford to be ignorant or unequipped in dealing with it. As Paul notes, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Thus, whether it is a student or a parent, persons within or without the organization, we must respond in wisdom and truth, as much as with grace and love.

Again, consider the following statement by Colorado Christian University as a succinct model for classical Christian schools and colleges:

We at CCU do not believe that racism is the defining feature of Western society. Nor do we believe it is the defining feature of the American founding or that a free market economy

18. Christopher Rufo, “The Truth About Critical Race Theory,” *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 4, 2020. Accessed 8 May 2022: https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-truth-about-critical-race-theory-11601841968?mod=article_inline.

19. See Josh Abbot’s “Wide Awake at Grove City College,” *American Reformer*, Nov. 29, 2021. Accessed 15 May 2022: <https://americanreformer.org/2021/11/wide-awake-at-grove-city-college/>.

20. See GCC’s April 2022 “Report and Recommendation of the Special Committee.” Accessed 15 May 2022: https://www.gcc.edu/Portals/0/Special-Committee-Report-and-Recommendation_0422.pdf.



is racist. We also take issue with the 1619 Project's central thesis and favor the rebuttal offered by Robert Woodson's 1776 Unites Project.

In saying this, we are not blind to America's racial sins and the blind spots of our nation's founders. We are very much aware of the sad legacy of chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws, debt servitude, black codes, lynchings, forced relocations, and various race-based laws, urban policies, and local codes. We are aware of the effect of this history on the black family. We do not believe this history should be ignored.

We believe that America is not essentially nor uniquely racist. Racism afflicts all nations and people groups. We are thankful for the amazing progress made in overturning racially unjust laws to the point of African Americans rising to the highest ranks in government, business, and law. While America is certainly not the New Jerusalem or the Kingdom of God, we are grateful for the way the prosperity and freedom of this great republic have impacted so many people, including people of color.

In making its extreme claims, CRT asserts that members of oppressed groups have special access to truth due to their lived experience of oppression. Whereas, everyone else, i.e. the oppressors, are thoroughly blinded by their privilege.

Arguments to the contrary and appeals to reason or objective evidence are actually, so it is claimed, white supremacist bids for power. Hence any disagreement with CRT is said to be racist. In other words, CRT denies the legitimacy of evidence to refute it. It is

unfalsifiable and hence anti-intellectual. This alone is reason to deny it a prominent place in the academy.

Building on this stance, CRT attacks the very foundation of the classical liberal legal order — which includes legal reasoning, equality theory, and supposed neutral principles of constitutional law.

Furthermore, CRT is opposed to the dominant social order and proposes dismantling the oppressive structures of Western society to "liberate" and bring revolutionary change.

...

Sadly, the all too common outcome of CRT is that it reduces personal responsibility and fosters a victimhood culture, i.e. instilling into youth a victim mentality. It also creates a culture of non-resilience on university campuses, replete with safe spaces, micro-aggressions, and trigger warnings. In a strange twist of outcomes, since it absolutizes race, it actually fosters more racism and not less.

Epistemology and What Classical Christians Actually Believe

Critical Theory (and CRT) obviously operates from a worldview antithetical to the revelation of Holy Scripture and the Christian account of Reality. But this is not simply one worldview against another, both competing for dominance in the arena of secular space. Rather, it is a contest of rival epistemologies, not unlike the early church's struggle with rival religions. In "Critical Theory and Christian Affirmations: A Dashboard Summary," Dr. Christopher Schlect has assembled a matrix that allows us to compare these differences, as well as note the divergent points of cosmology, identity, language, and freedom.²¹ In what Dr. Schlect has called



21. See Dr. Chris Schlect's "Critical Theory and Christian Affirmations: A Dashboard Summary" (Appendix A). Here Dr. Schlect provides a helpful schema to map the differences between the tenets and claims of Critical Theory and those of historic Christian doctrine (including those norms and dogmas of traditional metaphysics).

“Standpoint Epistemology,” a person critiques the world from a position outside the human world in which he finds himself. This leads to the ironic and impossible problem of trying to build something with a wrecking ball.

There is a difference between building up and tearing down, between making improvements and making innovations. C. S. Lewis notes this difference in *The Abolition of Man*:

There is a difference between a real moral advance and a mere innovation. From the Confucian ‘Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you’ to the Christian ‘Do as you would be done by’ is a real advance. The morality of Nietzsche is a mere innovation.²²

Thus, the purpose of criticism is to correct or improve the object of one’s critique, not simply to deconstruct it and leave it meaningless. If, for instance, the structures of society need critique, it cannot be done standing outside of the common human experience. Profitable criticism can only be done from within the tradition of human value, what C. S. Lewis calls “the *Tao*.” The *Tao* is what “others may call Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason or the First Platitudes” (43). This *Tao* is applied to all and is, Lewis explains, “not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgments.”

When it comes to our individual identity, we as Christians hold it as a first principle that we are made in the image of God, and that because of this, all men share a fundamental identity as sons of Adam. Because of sin, however, Christians must reckon their identity by membership in the second Adam, the perfect man, Jesus Christ. A beautiful prayer in the Book of Common Prayer expresses this sentiment well:

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (24)²³

God has made all men of one blood. All this, of course, rests on an epistemology that receives Creation in good faith and is grounded in both common grace (or natural revelation) and in special revelation (i.e. Holy Scripture). This demonstrates an acknowledgment of the transcendent and Divine Logic of the *universe*.

Regarding CRT, however, we have a Standpoint Epistemology. “One’s social position,” Dr. Schlect argues, “determines his or her capacity to know and understand.” A few implications follow from this. “Members of oppressed classes experience structures of oppression that hem them in. Because members of privileged classes lack this experience, they are blind to these structures of oppression.” This is because CRT, along with critical theory and all its Marxist predecessors, is based on seeing reality Creation as raw “undesigned matter,” where people must “fashion reality as it suits them.” This leads to a fundamentally violent social vision, where men and women engage in competing acts of self-fashioning, producing, in the end, a host of “adversarial power differentials (i.e., oppressor and oppressed).”

In contrast to this, classical Christian metaphysics sees Creation as good, a gift, and an extension of God’s love, who created it and called it “very good,” imbued with order and meaning. As man bears God’s image, he stands as God’s vice-regent, “called to govern himself and the rest of creation according to divine law and

22. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001) 46.

23. “The Daily Office,” *The Book of Common Prayer*, according to the Anglican Church in North America. Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019.



order.” If there is a master story or meta-narrative that explains the problems of society, then it must be in accord with Reality; and if society does indeed require some critical indictment, then it must conform to the logic of God’s purpose and plan for the cosmos. In other words, the stories we tell must be true — be it the genesis of the world or the founding of the United States.

The same goes for the critiques of our age. Although the world is a broken place, Truth remains, and criticism must be accountable for what is true. The devils, C.S. Lewis warns, want us to believe a thing “not because it is true, but for some other reason.” But anything good or true has substance in reality. Critical theory, however, is without substance in this sense. It exists only as an instrumental good, if at all. James Lindsay, author of numerous books on the fake scholarship and harmful effects of Marxist critical theories, describes critical theory as a kind of intellectual parasite.²⁴ Using infected language, the parasite latches onto a host (often an academic discipline) and begins to feed on the life of that host until the philosophy or discipline has been completely broken down and disintegrated. Just as a vice acts as a parasite of a virtue, so critical theory acts as a parasite of true scholastic substance. This is one of the reasons why critical theory in general has enjoyed such an honored place in academia. It preys on the unique genetic code of guilt and self-suspicion in Western Man, in the end operating almost like an autoimmune disease that attacks the body. The concept of “white privilege” is an example of the way this works in the domain of Critical Race Theory. This is a fake scholarship. For some, it may be amusing to analyze a novel or historical event and to imagine how all “white people” — a ludicrously ambiguous category — are the collective source of evil. But this would be false, not to mention boring. Lewis explains how the devils might think:

Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily “true” or “false”, but as “academic” or “practical”, “outworn” or “contemporary”, “conventional” or “ruthless”. Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church. Don't waste time trying to make him think that materialism is true! Make him think it is strong, or stark, or courageous — that it is the philosophy of the future. That's the sort of thing he cares about.²⁵

For those purveyors of CRT, whether or not “whiteness studies” is *true* or is a discipline that even remotely reflects reality is beside the point. What matters is that it is “academic.” Alas. Even a donkey clothed in the rhetorical garb of a lion might convince some Narnians that Aslan has returned, but it is only a sham.

This leads to a final thought on the importance of language and why true words and true speech are so vital to classical learning. Whether a word or an idea corresponds to Truth, and not mere collective fancy, is one of the best means to inoculate an academic discipline against the parasitic “critical” theories. In a real sense, we should be cautious of totally critical approaches to learning, not merely because of their inherent skepticism but also because of their inherent scientific Standpoint Epistemology. Think of the way this can be reflected in the words we commonly use to study something. We tell our students to “analyze” this book or that passage. But do we understand what this really signifies? To “analyze,” as the Greek suggests, means to loosen up and separate. This can be good, provided we don’t forget that we are still part of the world we are studying. We must guard our



24. See also Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay’s *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Pitchstone Publishing, 2020).

25. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 1.

analysis of history, for instance, against the notion that we are outside of it, and not, as reality would have it, mixed up in the middle of that human history.

While we can gain knowledge from that critical approach, we may not always gain wisdom. This again is reminiscent of that old vivisection against which G. K. Chesterton railed in his day. If we assume that we are outside the created order, then we are inclined to employ our studies only for power over nature or neighbor. It should not surprise us, then, that Screwtape knew well how to exploit the efforts of those in the quest for knowledge. There will always be attempts to create one's own private system of value — indeed, that seems to be the whole aim of the modern secular world — but Lewis warns us in *The Abolition of Man* that such efforts are fruitless:

The effort to refute [the *Tao*] and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There has never been and never will be, a radically new judgment of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems or (as they now call them) ‘ideologies’, all consist of fragments from the *Tao* itself, arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to the *Tao* and to it alone such validity as they possess. (43-44)

Again, we have Chesterton's riotous and rebellious virtues. In the case of CRT, it seems

that racial justice and systemic racism have been “arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation.”

It seems Standpoint Epistemology fosters an unnatural kind of separation and division that is quite literally “diabolical,” a Greek word that testifies to the work of the devil because it means “to throw apart,” to divide things that ought to be united. This is a good way to measure the substance of truth in fashionable ideas. Opposed to the diabolical, Christians have traditionally found wisdom and truth in that which is “symbolic,” a Greek word, meaning to bring together in an image or sign. As Christ is the Image of God, we believe all humans have value and dignity, regardless of class, wealth, or race, and we look to the Cross — the historic *symbol* that continues to “draw all men to himself” — as the true and lasting atonement for sin.²⁶

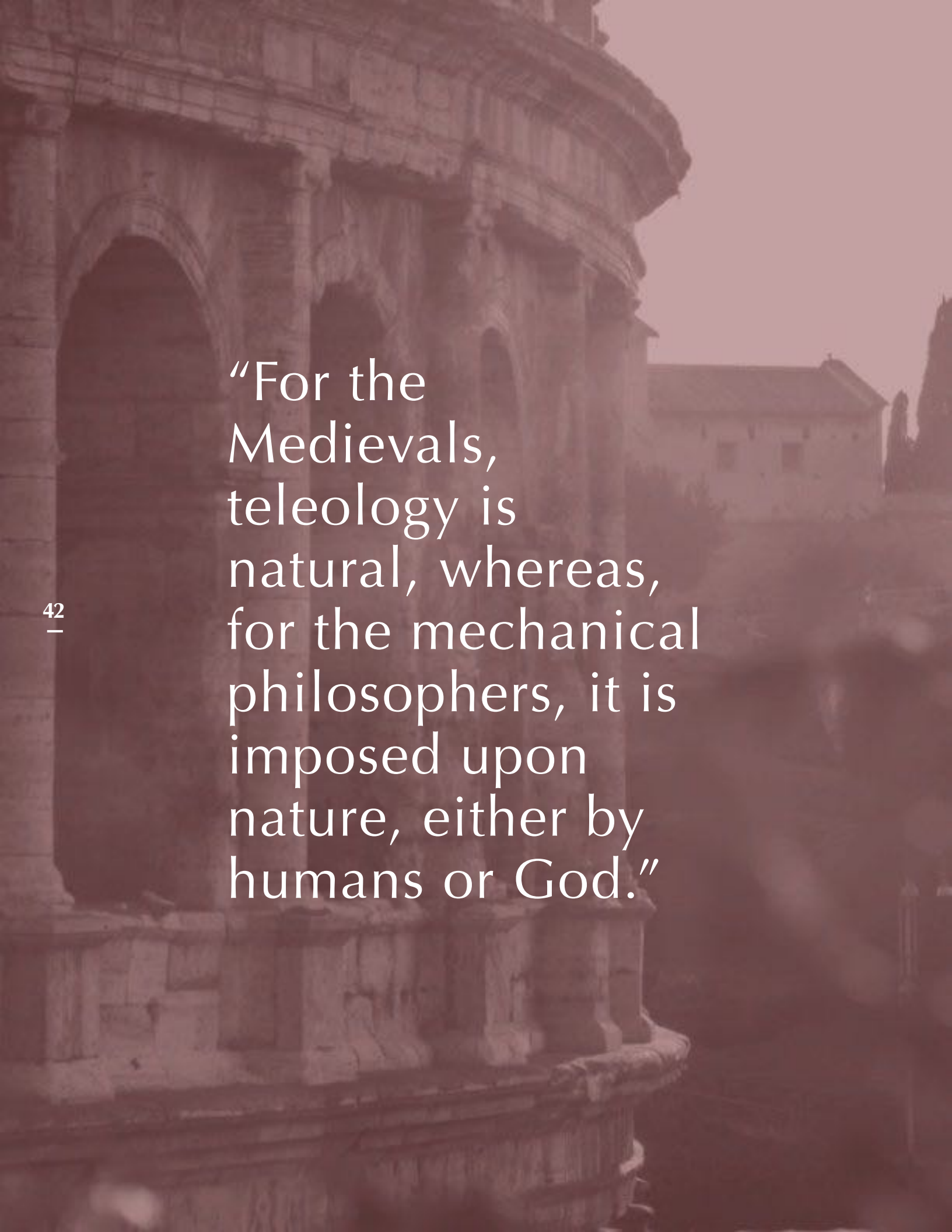
While it is our task to cast down imaginations or any other pretension that exalts itself against the knowledge of God — CRT or the like — we must not lose sight of the Good that is common to all who are made in God's image. Aristotle and Boethius believed that virtue should not be divided, and “Plato,” as Lewis notes, “rightly taught that virtue is one. You cannot be kind unless you have all the other virtues.”²⁷ This is how we take thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ, not simply by complaining about the rampant vices but by putting the isolated virtues back in their proper place, restoring order not merely to the city but also to the cosmos.

Devin O'Donnell is the Vice President of Membership and Publishing at the Association of Classical Christian Schools. He is the author of *The Age of Martha: A Call to Contemplative Learning in Frenzied Culture* (2019). He was the Research Editor of *Bibliotheca* in 2015 and has worked in classical Christian education for 20 years. He and his family live in the Northwest, where he writes, fly fishes, and remains a classical hack.

26. John 12:32.

27. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: MacMillan Company, 1955) 53.





“For the
Medievals,
teleology is
natural, whereas,
for the mechanical
philosophers, it is
imposed upon
nature, either by
humans or God.”

Intelligent Design: Medieval or Modern?

Nicholas C. DiDonato, *Delaware Valley Classical School*



One of our favorite villains is Charles Darwin. The one who convinced the world that man is but an ape, morality is but a survival mechanism, and that the book of Genesis is but a fairy tale. How could one man single-handedly topple the foundations of the classical Christian view of what it means to be human?

The answer is, of course, that he couldn't. At most, he delivered the *coup de grace*, but we Christians enabled him to do so by abandoning classical teleology and theism in favor of mechanical philosophy.¹ Suddenly, we're surprised that we can't grow the same fruit in different soil. Yet, the Intelligent Design movement promises just that: that we can have a scientific account of the origins of life that plays by the rules of mechanical philosophy, while simultaneously supports Christian theology.

This article will argue that Intelligent Design's commitments to mechanical philosophy bar it from serving as a handmaiden to classical Christian theology – where to be a “handmaiden” requires, minimally, not to have any different or incompatible views with that for which it is a handmaiden. Intelligent Design

holds to a modern (mechanical) view of teleology and theism, which is different, if not incompatible, with classical Christian theology, and therefore Intelligent Design cannot work as a handmaiden for classical Christian theology. Before diving into the argument, first, “mechanical philosophy,” “teleology,” and other important terms will need to be defined; only then can the contrast between modern and Medieval views of teleology be best explored, followed by the contrast between modern and Medieval views of theism.

The phrase “mechanical philosophy” refers to the view that nature is effectively a machine. Thus, one understands nature by dissecting her like a machine: determining the key parts and how they move. Robert Boyle summarized the view as “matter and motion.”² Nature has physical pieces (matter) that move (motion). While Boyle himself opposed the idea of applying mathematics literally to nature (ironic considering “Boyle's Law”),³ post-Newton, treating mathematics as the language of nature became standard for mechanical philosophers.⁴

Critically, in reducing nature to matter, motion, and (later) mathematics, the mechanical philosophers jettisoned two of Aristotle's four

1. To be sure, as William B. Ashworth Jr., “Christianity and the Mechanistic Universe,” in *When Christianity & Science Meet*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 61-62, says: “...the proponents of a mechanical philosophy were driven by religious concerns, the debate between different forms of the mechanical philosophy was waged on religious grounds, and the success of the mechanical philosophy was hailed as a Christian triumph.” While initially Christians embraced mechanical philosophy, its compatibility with Christian thought has been questioned as of late. That said, Ashworth, 84, also notes how the early church fathers and Medieval thinkers rejected it.

2. Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 46ff.

3. Shapin, 111f.

4. Shapin, 62f, on how Newton “perfected” mechanical philosophy with mathematics.



causes: final and formal. “Final causation,” describes how any object’s action has a goal, purpose, or *telos*; some point or end which, when reached, will bring that action to rest, completion, or perfection. Given the Greek *telos*, “teleology” is the philosophy concerning the *teloi* or ends of actions. Finally, “formal causation” describes the “whatness” or Form of an object. Classically understood, the Forms are the content of God’s own Intellect. Contrary to popular misconceptions, Forms are not, for example, the “ideal couch” or “perfect couch,” but the *fullness* of the reality of all couches across time and place in one undifferentiated unity. As such, they can be known only by the intellect (*nous*), not by the senses. As Plato argued, Form is what truly is (in this case, the Form Couch) *rather than* the many particular instances of it (the infinite possibilities of what a couch could be).⁵ Each Form is one unity, a unity which the intellect can see, but to the senses appears as many.⁶

While a thorough assessment of mechanical philosophy’s influence on Intelligent Design cannot be given here,⁷ one key area of influence is in teleology, specifically, whether *telos* can be intrinsic to objects.⁸ Are objects *naturally* or intrinsically oriented or directed toward a particular point of rest, completion, or perfection, or are they naturally purposeless but can be directed toward a particular end by an outside intelligence?⁹ For the Medievals, teleology is natural, whereas, for the mechanical

philosophers, it is *imposed* upon nature, either by humans or God.¹⁰

Difficult as it may be for us moderns to think of teleology as anything other than imposed or extrinsic to objects, classically, even something as seemingly purposeless as an asteroid wandering through space has *telos*: the endpoint at which its motion would stop. Granted, for some asteroids, this would take quite some time, but, rest assured, eventually, all motion will cease. Note, however, that it is not the asteroid itself that has *telos*, but its motion, or, more precisely, its change.¹¹ Classically, efficient and final causation were intertwined such that any efficient cause follows a final cause.

Suddenly, we’re surprised that we can’t grow the same fruit in different soil. Yet, the intelligent design movement promises just that: that we can have a scientific account of the origins of life that plays by the rules of mechanical philosophy, while simultaneously supports Christian theology.

5. Plato, *Republic*, VI, 494a, 507b.

6. Plato, *Republic*, V, 476a.

7. A great place to start for those interested is Edward Feser, *Aristotle’s Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid, Germany: Editiones Scholasticae, 2019), 434ff. The classic treatment of mechanical philosophy’s influence on modern thought in general is E. A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science; a Historical and Critical Essay*.

8. As Shapin, 142, puts it: “That nature showed solid evidence of design—that it was artfully contrived—was wholly accepted by mechanical philosophers. But if that design was not to be accounted for by the indwelling intelligence of material nature, then artful contrivance had to arise from something outside nature itself. This train of inference was the basis of the most pervasive seventeenth-century argument for the existence and intelligence of a deity — *the argument from design* — which linked the practice of science to religious values from the early modern period through the nineteenth century.” N.B. Shapin does not trace this design argument back to the Medieval Era.

9. Feser, 34-36.

10. Saying all teleology resides in God’s Wisdom was, for example, the view of Rene Descartes. See Jacques Roger, “The Mechanistic Conception of Life,” in *God & Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 281.

11. Both being translations of the same Greek word *kinēsis*. I say “more precisely” because motion is but a type of change.



For another example: if I throw a ball at you, you will catch it by moving your body to its end point. That is, you will think *teleologically*. Is this imposition, or did the ball objectively have an end that you were able to discern? Critically, in the classical view, *all* change has an objective *telos* because, if not, how is it determinate? Why is it this way rather than that? Because it has this endpoint rather than that one. To be clear, this is not anthropomorphizing an asteroid or a ball, but noting that nothing is intelligible without teleology. A better way to understand classical teleology is to think of it in terms of metaphysical determinacy.

If creation does not have intrinsic teleology – a built-in telos towards which every creature strives – then God cannot be said to be the ultimate final cause.

At this point, one may be wondering what this has to do with theology. Much could be said, but consider two applications: proving God and understanding God as the Beautiful Itself. First, given that for an action to be intelligible requires it to have determinacy, God is the ultimate final cause of every act. As Thomas Aquinas argues, God contains within Himself

the perfection of all creatures (and thus is the end to which all creatures move, since every creature desires its perfection),¹² and therefore is their final cause.¹³ In other words, the classic design argument for God hinges upon intrinsic teleology.¹⁴

Second, intrinsic teleology also shows how God is the Beautiful Itself.¹⁵ Maximus the Confessor argues that all objects continue to change until they reach their *telos* (again, their state of perfection), and God, as the Beautiful, is ultimately desirable, and thus is the only final point of rest (nothing else is more desirable than God).¹⁶ If creation does not have intrinsic teleology – a built-in *telos* towards which every creature strives – then God cannot be said to be the ultimate final cause (because there isn't one) or the Beautiful Itself (or, if He still is, it must be on an entirely different basis other than He is the fulfillment of every *telos*).

Contrast the Medieval understanding of teleology and its corresponding argument for God, with the modern one, best exemplified by William Paley's watch argument: suppose someone were to find a watch in the woods. Since the watch has a clear purpose and is complex, and that purpose could only come from an intelligent being, the watch must have been designed by an intelligent being. Only a designer could have imposed such a purpose on an object with such complexity.

Intelligent Design arguments take their inspiration from Paley, not the Medievals.

12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I,4,2.

13. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I,44,4.

14. More on specifically Thomas's design argument below.

15. Of course, this assumes Beauty is a transcendental. Thomists accept classical teleology but since they reject Beauty as a transcendental they would not call God the Beautiful Itself.

16. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7.5, 7, 12, 28.



Whether it's William Dembski's probabilistic arguments against certain purposeful, complex features occurring by chance or Michael Behe's irreducibly complex arguments showing the same, the core assumption is straight from mechanical philosophy: *telos* is found outside of the object.¹⁷ For Dembski and Behe, the answer is an "Intelligent Designer". In contrast, for evolutionists, it's through a process of mutation and natural selection, but from a classical perspective the wrong question is being asked. The question is not, "Who or what imposed this *telos* upon this organism?" but, "What is the ultimate *telos* of this organism – and everything else?"

The core assumption is straight from mechanical philosophy: telos is found outside of the object.

Note also the differences in the kinds of arguments produced. The Medieval argument for God is metaphysical and deductive. That is, it directly concerns first principles (and thus is at a level of reality deeper and more fundamental than science) and works logically from premises

to a conclusion. The modern argument is scientific and abductive: it tries to establish itself using scientific evidence (which can change radically – hence "paradigm shifts"). In other words, it is at most an argument appealing to the best explanation. In sum, the design argument has shifted from being core to reality (metaphysical) to contingent upon certain scientific evidence, and from being logically compelling (deductive) to suggestive (abductive).

But even if it were more than suggestive, what would it suggest? The classical view of God? It's hard to see how. Besides the clash over teleology, there is also a clash over theism. In classical theism, God is Being Itself, *actus purus*, *ipsum esse, o òn*, or simply "The One Who Is." God is the act of infinite determinacy, the fullness of being, in Whom every creature participates analogically.¹⁸ Needless to say, the chasm between a being (no matter how supreme) and Being Itself is infinite.¹⁹ Further, appealing to "Being Itself" presupposes formal causation ("Being" as in the Form Being).²⁰

However, modern thought embraces nominalism, the rejection of Forms.²¹ Consequently, Intelligent Design arguments in principle cannot argue for Being Itself because they have no notion of Form in the first place. Supposing they did, or supposing simply that nothing stops an advocate of Intelligent Design

17. Again, see Feser, 434ff, for a detailed critique of Dembski's mechanical philosophy and rejection of intrinsic teleology. Joel Dowers has pointed me to the work of Paul Nelson, who argues that orphan genes show that fetuses must have an *intrinsic* drive to live, suggesting intrinsic teleology. This is the closest argument for intrinsic teleology among intelligent design advocates that I could find, but it is limited to organisms. As the above examples hopefully made clear, classical teleology applies to all change, living or otherwise.

18. For a masterful treatment of this, see David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 241f.

19. This chasm is a key theme in postmodern thought. See Hart for a Christian analysis and response.

20. God is the ultimate formal cause of all things. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I,44,3.

21. Interestingly, Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 24, connects nominalism with the rejection of classical teleology: "The nominalist rejection of universals was thus a rejection not merely of formal but also of final causes. If there were no universals, there could be no universal ends to be actualized."



from accepting formal causation, what kind of “God” do Intelligent Design arguments prove?²² At most, a “God” who has sufficient power and knowledge to engineer feature x, where x is the feature demonstrated to have come from the intelligent designer. Unless x can be expanded to include all of reality, one cannot legitimately attribute omnipotence or omniscience to the intelligent designer. It’s not even certain that the intelligent designer came up with the design himself – perhaps, like Plato’s demiurge, he contemplates the Forms and arranges matter accordingly.²³ Even Intelligent Design advocates themselves refrain from claiming that the

Traditional arguments for God, unlike modern ones, do not try to show how God had to exist at the beginning of the universe or at specific intervals within time, but rather how God is necessarily present for there to be anything present.

“intelligent designer” is the Christian God, preferring terms such as “the agent” or “agent

causation.”²⁴ To put a fine point on it: the intelligent designer can merely be a being who meddles in physical processes occasionally (the maximum possible frequency of meddling being granting every single Intelligent Design argument). Creatures do not analogically participate in God, or have Him as their ultimate end or whence of their Form, but at most can be grateful that some powerful being intervened at some point(s) to tilt biological development in our favor. Wherever Intelligent Design leads, it does not lead to classical theism.

Those familiar with Thomas Aquinas will surely retort that he *does* have a Paley-style design argument:

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things that lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it is directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its

22. This was also an issue for Paley’s argument, whether it be the burden of show that his designer was personal, or simply that the purported design only appeared to be so. As John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 195, notes: “The point is not that science undermined the design argument – certainly not in the eighteenth century. Quite the contrary. It was rather that religious apologists were asking too much of it. A religious burden was placed on the sciences, which they were eventually unable to carry.” The same applies to intelligent design arguments.

23. Plato, *Timaeus*, 30d.

24. Special thanks to Joel Dowers for this clarification.



mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end, and this being we call God.²⁵

While one can read modern assumptions *into* Medieval thinkers, they are simply not there.²⁶ After all, why would Thomas Aquinas have four arguments for God that prove the God of classical theism and a fifth argument that proves an entirely different idea of God?

Understanding Thomas's argument requires beginning with classical theism and teleology. He argues that "all natural things are directed to their end" by "some intelligent being" meaning that the *telos* of all natural things exist in the Divine Intellect. The Thomist Edward Feser gives the example of an architect: the *telos* of construction is the house, and the house exists in the architect's mind and guides the actions of the builders.²⁷ Likewise, the perfections of all creatures exist in God,²⁸ Who at all times is drawing creation to Himself.²⁹ Consequently, Thomas's proof for God shows how God is present *here and now*.³⁰ What is at issue is not biological complexity, but why there is causal regularity (regularity gives actions *telos*).³¹ Traditional arguments for God, unlike modern ones, do not try to show how God had to exist at the beginning of the universe or at specific intervals within time (e.g., to create a bacterial flagellum), but rather how God is necessarily

present for there to be *anything* present (in this case, being the ultimate Final Cause towards and by which all things "are directed" here and now).

Intelligent Design cannot serve as a handmaiden to classical Christian theology. To be a "handmaiden" requires, minimally, not to have any different or incompatible views with that for which it is a handmaiden, and intelligent design holds different, if not incompatible, views contra classical Christian theology regarding teleology and theism: classical teleology is intrinsic not extrinsic (undermining theology's (a) God as ultimate

We often say we are "repairing the ruins," but this must be done at the very foundations, recovering from the ground up the classical views of teleology and theism. Ruins repaired upon ruinous foundations, like the "restored" Ecce Homo, are simply ruined.



25. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1947, I,2,3.

26. In fact, as Feser, 37, says, it would have been a *non sequitur*: "Both 'design argument' proponents and their atheistic critics tend to assume that to admit that there is real teleology in nature is *ipso facto* to commit oneself to an artificer who put it there. From the Aristotelian point of view, this is too quick and reflects too crude an understanding of teleology; for not all teleology is of the extrinsic or artifact-like kind that *by definition* entails a mind that put it there" (emphases original). In other words, proving that there is teleology in nature does *not* prove that there is an "intelligent designer" because such teleology could simply be intrinsic, requiring no outside intelligence.

27. Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 117.

28. Again, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I,4,2.

29. Again, see Thomas, I,44,4, and also Maximus the Confessor, 7.10.

30. Feser, *Aquinas*, 117. As Feser here rightly notes, the issue of whether the universe had a beginning being is irrelevant in classical arguments for God.

31. Feser, *Aquinas*, 113. Indeed, as Feser there notes, *simple* regularities would equally suffice. In fact, Feser, 114-115, goes so far as to say, "...to the extent that biological processes like evolution manifest causal regularities, they if anything only *support* the Fifth Way rather than undermine it" (emphasis original).

final cause argument and (b) God as the Beautiful Itself), and classical theism posits God as Being Itself, Who is necessarily attested to by every moment, rather than a being who is possibly attested to by particular moments in natural history. The Intelligent Design movement has tried to make the best of a bad situation: given mechanical philosophy, with its rejection of intrinsic teleology and formal causation, how can God be the Creator of the cosmos? Within those constraints, it has fared well. The challenge posed here, though, is why accept these constraints at all. Why try to build Christian theology upon a modern foundation? Or, if we insist upon doing so, we should not lament figures such as Darwin who show us what actually can be built upon such a foundation, or what kind of fruits such soil supports. We often say we are “repairing the ruins,” but this must be done at the very foundations, recovering from the ground up the classical views of teleology and theism. Ruins repaired upon ruinous foundations, like the “restored” *Ecce Homo*,³² are simply ruined.

Nicholas C. DiDonato, Ph.D., teaches history and theology at Delaware Valley Classical School. He has previously published in *Theology & Science*, appeared on *Reason & Theology*, and presented at the ACCS annual conference. His research focuses on the intersection of theology, metaphysics, and philosophy of science.

32. Which is a fitting comparison because it was “restored” with the best and sincerest of intentions.





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COMMONPLACE

The Importance of Language:

A Logical Explosion in Orwell's 1984

Reagan Charlier, *Paideia Classical Christian School*



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To know or not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which canceled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic...that was the ultimate subtlety.”¹ In his cautionary tale, *1984*, George Orwell crafts a vivid illustration of the consequences of language deconstruction, compelling the reader to consider the role of language in a functioning society. What consequences would follow if the distortion of language rendered truth obsolete, creating a maze of contradictions that defy logic? Ultimately, thoughts could no longer be expressed because there is no defined language with which to articulate them. In clear antithesis to God’s design, the destruction of language hypothesized in *1984* prohibits the expression of ideas, which robs civilization of the ability to logically convey and process information.

Before going further, it is important to understand the necessity of truth in classical logic. Logic requires some basic rules, known as the three laws of thought, that act as guidelines for rational argument. First, the Law of Identity affirms absolute truth in a statement; in other words, if a statement is true then it is true without exception. For example: if the statement “God is love” is true, then it is true under all

circumstances. The Law of Excluded Middle reveals the binary nature of truth, saying that a logical statement must be either true or false. By this law, the statement “God is love” must be either true or false with no third option. Lastly, the Law of Noncontradiction asserts that a statement cannot be both true and false. Therefore, the statement “God is love” cannot be both true and false at the same time. These three laws of thought set the boundaries for how truth is utilized in logical reasoning, developing a clear idea of the nature of truth.

With the destruction of language, the laws of thought as stated above become open to manipulation and distortion. In *1984*, “Newspeak” replaced the English language, destroying the concept of truth with nonsensical terms such as “blackwhite”, a term that “has two mutually contradictory meanings.”² Language must correspond to reality, otherwise, words contain no logical meaning. As Winston soon discovers in *1984*, the goal of Newspeak is to “make thought-crime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.”³ With words rendered useless, any notion of truth cannot exist, creating a pseudo-reality in which logical reasoning is discarded.

As truth is disregarded, contradictions become standard across all areas of Orwell’s society. Throughout his life and career under Big Brother,



1. George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classics, 1977), 35.

2. Orwell, *1984*, 212.

3. Orwell, *1984*, 52.

Winston is forced to ignore the painstakingly evident contradictions made by leading political figures. Reality becomes indiscernible as media outlets use constant prevarication to manipulate the minds of the proletariat by promoting “doublethink,” the idea that two contradictory statements can be true at the same time. Where there is no truth, the irrationality of contradictions is ignored, as contradictions require some idea of true and false. This nonsense is the result of the Party’s disregard for the three laws of thought, whose purpose is to promote logical reasoning while rejecting fallacies. As a result, thoughts are no longer grounded in rationality, demoting all ideas to arbitrary absurdity.

As the logical properties of truth are identified, a firm understanding of how truth is utilized in logic becomes necessary. Logic itself is built on statements which are sentences that are either true or false. Studying the relationships between statements is one of the primary focuses of formal logic. If the statement “God is love” is true, what conclusions can be drawn about the statement “God is not love?” The reader should easily conclude that if it is true that God is love, it cannot also be true that God is not love. But what about more complicated arguments that require a more nuanced understanding of formal logic systems? Arguments like these can be easily explored using the concept of truth value. A statement’s truth value is simply a reflection of the truth or falsity of the statement. For example, since the statement “God is love” is true, then its truth value is: “true.” If the statement were false, then its truth value would be: “false.” These values are then assigned to the statements that make up the argument in question and then are used to test the validity and soundness of the argument. These rigidly defined values of true and false allow the logician to properly examine an argument and test its validity, promoting clearer thinking and more effective communication.

In a society where contradictions are prevalent, logical thought collapses. Orwell illustrates this

through his character Winston, who recognizes blatant contradictions made by the Party while simultaneously being forced to accept that no contradiction exists. Such reasoning has severe consequences. The logical law *Ex Falso Sequitur Quodlibet*, otherwise known as the principle of explosion, states that from a logical contradiction, any statement can follow as a valid conclusion. If a statement and its negation are both assumed true simultaneously, any statement, chosen indiscriminately, can be proven. For example, an argument with the premises “It is Monday” and “It is not Monday” could validly prove the statement “It is Thursday,” or any other statement no matter how absurd. The reason for this lies in the nature of the logical operator “or,” as the rule of disjunction introduction says that for any statement, an “or” operator can be added without compromising the truth value of the statement. If the statement “It is Monday” is true, then the statement “It is Monday or it is Thursday” is also true. Since the statements “It is Monday” and “It is not Monday” are the original premises, and the statement “It is Monday or it is Thursday” has been proven, it is possible to prove that “It is Thursday” simply by restating premise two. The argument would take this form:

Premise 1: “It is Monday”

Premise 2: “It is not Monday”

Premise 1 implies: “It is Monday or it is Thursday”

But, Premise 2 tells us that: “It is not Monday”

Therefore, “It is Thursday,” the logical consequence appears, reducing the argument to absurdity as an arbitrary conclusion is proven from nonsense. Some logicians have tried to reason around this, creating a system of logic that denies the principle of explosion by disregarding fundamental logical rules. Others decide to reject the law of non-contradiction, a system of beliefs known as dialetheism. In 1984, dialetheism

became a common practice, as the distortion of language engenders constant contradictions. Using Newspeak to promote propaganda, the Party constantly rewrites the past to cover its lies. Facts disappear as information provided by the Party contains “no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a complete lie.”⁴ In making these contradictions, the Party completely disregards the principle of explosion, pushing logical reasoning aside to promote its fabricated version of reality.

“My son be attentive to my words...keep them within your heart, for they are life to those who find them” (Proverbs 4:20-22).⁵ In *1984*, the value of language is disregarded while God’s design for communication is discarded in pursuit of Big Brother. Under these circumstances, Winston is trapped in a totalitarian regime where logic explodes due to a collapse in language. With no basis in reality, words are constantly misused, engendering contradictions that defy any fragment of rationality. Language is a gift from God that allows us to form conclusions about the world

around us, and articulate ideas logically and effectively. Where language is informed through truth and logical thought as God intended, communication is restored, allowing us to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).⁶

Reagan Charlier is a sophomore at Paideia Classical Christian School in Tampa, Florida, where she especially enjoys studying logic, philosophy, and engaging in literary analysis. Her greatest passion is her pursuit of Christ and the study of His word. Outside school, she enjoys participating in theatrical performances, academic competitions, bowling, and tutoring younger students. She hopes to be a teacher one day.



4. Orwell, *1984*, 40-41.

5. *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (ESV) (2001, Crossway, Good News Publishers).

6. *The Holy Bible* (ESV)

Knowing Creation and Its Creator

Kai Schmiedel, *Delaware Valley Classical School*



Imagine being tasked with explaining the concept of television to someone who has never seen one before. To do this, you must first start from things that he might already know to build a knowledge of television. But even after you have done your explaining, can you be sure he knows what one is? Oftentimes this is the case with explaining things, and it is a big component within the sphere of natural theology. How much can we know about God? What is lost within the space of special revelation? I will argue that non-Christians via reason can know *about* God, but not know him directly. To do this, I will first lay down some definitions and then give my argument. My argument will be split into three segments. The first segment will establish that non-believers can know about God's existence. I will argue in the second part that God is knowable to some degree. Finally, I will argue that non-believers cannot know God directly. After my argument, I will respond to an opposing view, and after that, I will conclude.

But first, I need to clarify some terms. When I say "non-Christians" or "non-believers," I only mean those who seek to know God through pure reason and general revelation. By God I mean the Christian God. When I say something is known, I am referring to it having a reality grasped. This means that unreal or fictional possibilities such as unicorns can only be known in relationship to real things like horses or horns, but cannot be known

as living because we cannot grasp their existence. However, knowing something is not the same as knowing *about* something. I will use the example of a rock star to illustrate this. One could say they know about a certain rockstar and his albums and concerts, but it would be a different case of knowing him if they had talked to him themselves or been to one of his concerts.

My first stage of the argument is that God is knowable to some degree. As I have stated earlier in the definitions, knowing something is grasping its reality. But when we apply this to God we run into some problems, because God is beyond knowing. He is Knowledge itself and yet even beyond this.¹ Even though this problem of knowing seemingly exists, God has a "way around" this: we can know God through Jesus. He bridges the gap between the unknowability of the Father and our humanity, being the Logos, or the Word incarnate, as we can see in verses such as John 14:6, Matthew 11:27, and 1 John 5:20. Knowledge of God becomes more complete once you grasp the reality of Jesus. Knowing truths about the world implies that you have grasped things connected to Christ, but it is not the same as knowing Jesus himself.

Secondly, non-believers know about God. Biblically, this is the most straightforward part of the argument, because we know that all are aware of God and his divine attributes as it says in Romans 1:20. All of mankind has in some way

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton Pegis, (St. Isidore) <https://isidore.co/aquinas/ContraGentiles1.htm#14>.



been exposed to God and they will be without excuse before him on the day of judgment (John 12:47-48).² The separation between Christians and non-Christians is whether they have rejected pursuing God or not. This includes both believers and non-believers. In this way, we can all know *about* God as being Truth and outside time and space. So the question is less about whether anyone can know *about* him but more about whether we can *know* him.

Finally, non-believers cannot know God directly. As I have set up in the first part, knowledge of God comes first through knowledge of Jesus. So then, it must follow that non-Christians cannot know God, because they do not know Jesus. What separates knowing about God from knowing God is what I have described in the definitions. Grasping the reality of God through Jesus can only be done through a right relationship with him because reason cannot guarantee the proper apprehension of truth (especially in a corrupted world). It is only through the truth becoming incarnate that we can know God on this earth, and that realm of history is beyond corrupted human nature.³

Now some might deny the distinction between knowing about and knowing, pointing out that ancient philosophers have discovered God's qualities, such as Being or Goodness without seeking Jesus (and sometimes even explicitly rejecting him). How is this not knowing

God? Ultimately, we can only know God as much as he has decided to reveal to us, even though we may use reason. Only when we have touched on the unchanging truth, who is Jesus, can we begin to truly know God. This process is made perfect through faith as Jean-Paul Juge argues, and that faith only blooms in those who are not seeking God only through general revelation and reason.⁴ Yet, we all still have some basic knowledge of God as I have noted earlier. So there must be a distinction between having some apprehension of something's existence and fundamentally knowing it. To take this one step further, there are qualities of God that cannot be known without special revelation, such as God is incarnate.⁵ That is an essential quality of God that we cannot know by pure reason.

All in all, reason and general revelation can help us know *about* God but cannot let us *know* God. All people have been exposed to the existence of God and know about him but do not know him themselves. This sad truth about reality is evident within all of nature, as mankind's proper connection to God has been lost by sin. While natural theology can help us regain some of what we have lost about knowing God, it cannot solve our questions only on its footing. Just as describing a TV to someone who has never seen one before might be frustrating, trying to make an unbeliever know God would seem a Herculean task.

Kai Schmiedel is an alumnus of Delaware Valley Classical School in New Castle, Delaware, graduating in the Spring of 2023. He is currently studying overseas in Japan.

2. *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (ESV) (2001, Crossway, Good News Publishers).

3. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, (Fig. 2013), 24-25.

4. Jean-Paul Juge, "The Primacy of Personal Knowledge of God's Existence," *Church Life Journal* (blog), University of Notre Dame, July 21, 2023, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-primacy-of-personal-knowledge-of-gods-existence/>.

5. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 11.



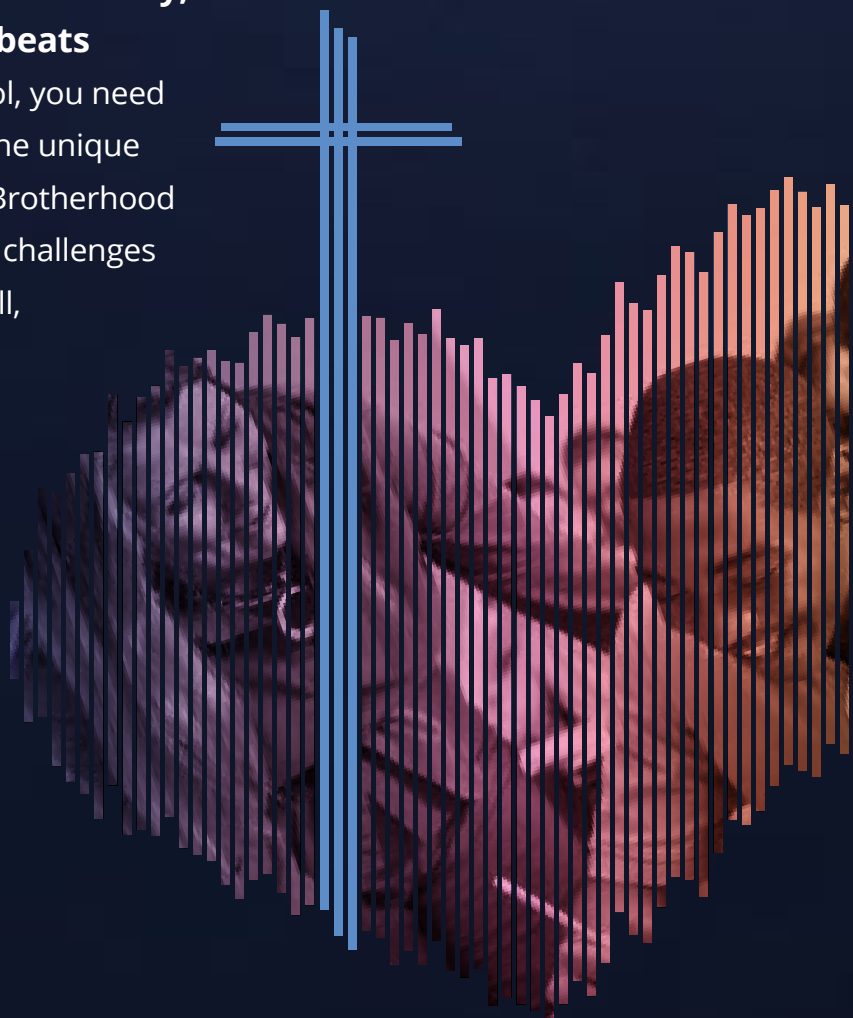
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OLD VOICES

The Dialogue of the Noblest Royal Youth Pippin with Alcuin the Scholar

Translated by Carter Ehnis, Emily Kapuscak, and Anneliese Mattern,
New St. Andrews College



Introduction

Alcuin of York (c.735-804 AD) was an educational reformer in the court of Charlemagne and a leading figure in the Carolingian Renaissance. Before he entered Charlemagne's court, he held a prominent teaching position at the Cathedral School of York, in northern England. When Charlemagne invited Alcuin to his court in Aachen, he joined a circle of intellectuals, hand-picked by Charlemagne, who were tasked to enact political, social, and educational reforms across an expanding empire. Alcuin set about his work by gathering sources from across the centuries to develop an educational program, a program designed to actualize Charlemagne's vision for a godly, literate society. Where Alcuin found no material suitable to his pedagogical needs, he composed his own. One such work is the *Disputatio Pippini*.

In this unique work, Alcuin presents a stylized exchange that combines two popular genres. One is riddle-collection, drawing inspiration from Alcuin's own Anglo-Saxon heritage; the other is literary dialogue, a classical form of instructional writing championed by the likes of Plato and Cicero. In this dialogue, Alcuin casts himself in the role of teacher, and Pippin, Charlemagne's son, is his student. As these two characters exchange questions and answers, they model Alcuin's ideal for how teachers and students should interact.

The *Disputatio Pippini* is, at its core, a practical guide to teaching the liberal art of grammar. Grammar fosters skill in language; it is concerned with

words and how words carry meaning. The dialogue opens with grammar's most basic element, the letter. At its close, when the student graduates, he holds in his possession a complete literary work, an epistle. Along the way, we follow the student as he progresses toward literacy. As he nears maturity in his study of grammar, Pippin interprets what words mean, and can fashion words to communicate his own ideas. Thus the dialogue highlights a defining feature of Alcuin's educational philosophy: the power of the written word.

A second feature of Alcuin's educational philosophy, also highlighted in the *Disputatio Pippini*, addresses the relationship between teacher and student. The teacher, as a master of his art, models the art to his student. Yet teaching involves far more than a teacher's virtuosity. A good teacher stoops to meet the student at his own level. This requires the teacher to see the material as his student sees it, and when his student encounters difficulty, the teacher tarries with him. A good teacher's instruction is not complete when he finishes an explanation, but when a student undertakes the art on his own. In Alcuin's pedagogy, a teacher's work is done only when his student can do the work himself.

This version of the *Disputatio Pippini* was translated by a team of alumni and faculty from New Saint Andrews College.¹ The project was spearheaded and overseen by Anneliese Mattern; contributors included Carter Ehnis and Emily Kapuscak, with editorial assistance from Caleb Harris, Joseph Roberts, and Christopher Schlect.

1. This translation is based upon *Disputatio regalis et nobilissimi iuvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico*, Latin text edited by W. Williams, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum* 14 (1869): 530-555. Introduction by Dr. Christopher Schlect and Anneliese Mattern.



P [Pippin]: “What is a letter?”²

A [Alcuin]: “The guardian of history.”

P: “What is a word?”

A: “The revealer of the mind.”³

P: “What forms a word?”

A: “The tongue.”

P: “What is a tongue?”

A: “A whip of breath.”

P: “What is breath?”

A: “The guardian of life.”

P: “What is life?”

A: “The joy of the fortunate, the despair of the downtrodden, the expectation of death.”

P: “What is death?”

A: “An inevitable event, an uncertain journey, the tears of the living, the crux of covenant, the thief of man.”

P: “What is a man?”

A: “A slave of death, a passing wanderer, a guest in this realm.”⁴

P: “What is man like?”

A: “An apple.”⁵

P: “How is a man positioned?”

A: “Like a lantern in the wind.”

P: “Where is he positioned?”

A: “Between six walls.”

P: “Which walls?”

A: “Above, below; in front, behind; on the right and on the left.”

P: “How many companions does he have?”

A: “Four.”

P: “Which?”

A: “Heat, cold, dryness, wetness.”

P: “In how many ways is he changeable?”

A: “Six.”

P: “In which ways?”

A: “Starvation and satiation, rest and labor, vigilance and slumber.”

P: “What is slumber?”

A: “A shadow of death.”

P: “What is a man’s freedom?”

A: “Virtue.”⁶

P: “What is the head?”

A: “The apex of the body.”

P: “What is the body?”

A: “The home of the soul.”

P: “What is hair?”

A: “The veil of the head.”

P: “What is a beard?”

A: “A distinction of sex, the honor of age.”

P: “What is the brain?”

A: “The preserver of memory.”



2. *Littera*. This word most commonly means “letter,” as in a letter of the alphabet.

3. The word used here is *animi*, which could also be translated as “soul.” We employ this translation of *animi* elsewhere in the work, as in the definition of friendship “an affinity of *souls*,” based on the context of the word.

4. *Loci hospes* (literally “a guest in this place”).

5. Orchard and Spraggs both translate *pomo* as “fruit tree,” which is linguistically coherent. However, considering the answer to the parallel question in the *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti Philosophi*, we have chosen to translate this as “apple,” which captures the tangibility of the metaphor implicit in this question. The question and answer set of the parallel dialogue reads as follows: “H. *Quid est homo?* — E. *Pomo similis: Poma in arboribus pendent, sic sunt et corpora nostra, aut matura cadunt, aut cito acerba ruunt.*” L.W. Daly and W. Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti Philosophi*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 24, (Urbana, IL, 1939). See also Andy Orchard, trans., “Debate between the Royal and Most Noble Youth Pippin and the Scholar Alcuin,” in *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), 231; and Gillian Spraggs, trans., “The Debate between the princely and noble youth Pippin and Alcuin the scholar,” 2006, accessed September 22, 2022, www.gillianspraggs.com/translations/alcuin.html.

6. *Innocentia* (literally “harmlessness”) is most commonly translated as “innocence,” a translation which would also make sense here. However, we have chosen the word “virtue” to capture the moral connotations implicit in *innocentia*.

P: "What are the eyes?"

A: "Guides of the body, vessels of light,
windows to the soul."⁷

P: "What is the nose?"

A: "The pathway of smells."⁸

P: "What are the ears?"

A: "The collectors of sound."

P: "What is the brow?"

A: "An image of the mind."

P: "What is the mouth?"

A: "The nourisher of the body."

P: "What are the teeth?"

A: "The millstones of chewing."

P: "What are the lips?"

A: "The doors of the mouth."

P: "What is the throat?"

A: "The devourer of food."

P: "What are the hands?"

A: "The workmen of the body."

P: "What are the fingers?"

A: "The pluckers of strings."

P: "What is a lung?"

A: "The preserver of breath."

P: "What is the heart?"

A: "The shelter of life."

P: "What is the liver?"

A: "The guardian of passion."⁹

P: "What is the gall-bladder?"

A: "The awakener of wrath."

P: "What is the spleen?"

A: "The vessel of laughter and joy."

P: "What is the stomach?"

A: "The cook of food."

P: "What is the gut?"

A: "The saver of scraps."

P: "What are the bones?"

A: "The strength of the body."

P: "What are the hips?"

A: "The lintels of the pillars."¹⁰

P: "What are the legs?"

A: "The pillars of the body."

P: "What are the feet?"

A: "An ambulating foundation."

P: "What is blood?"

A: "The fluid of the veins, the nourishment
of life."

P: "What are the veins?"

A: "The fountains of the flesh."

P: "What are the heavens?"

A: "A turning sphere, a boundless height."

P: "What is light?"

A: "The illumination of all things."

P: "What is a day?"

A: "The impetus to labor."

P: "What is the sun?"

A: "The splendor of the world, the beauty
of the sky, the grace of nature, the dignity
of day, the giver of hours."

P: "What is the moon?"

A: "Eye of the night, generous with dew,
the seer of storms."

P: "What are the stars?"

A: "A painting of the heavens, the
steersmen of sailors, the elegance of night."

7. *Animi indices* (literally "the indicator" or "betrayer of the soul"). Here the English idiom captures the sense of the answer.

8. *Adductio* (literally "the bringer-up of smells").

9. While the word *caloris* translates more literally to "heat," the following question-and-answer sets make it clear that Alcuin is referring to the medieval understanding of the humors, and thus "passion" is a more coherent translation.

10. The word *epistylia* translates most literally to "architrave," a load-bearing beam that rests upon the capital of columns or over doorways and passageways.



P: “What is rain?”

A: “The conception of the earth, the mother of crops.”¹¹

P: “What is fog?”

A: “Night during the day, the eyes’ toil.”

P: “What is the wind?”

A: “A disordering of air, flowing of waters, drought of the earth.”

P: “What is the earth?”

A: “Mother of growth, nurse of all living, a storehouse of life: the devourer of all.”

P: “What is the sea?”

A: “Road of recklessness, edge of the earth, the divider of kingdoms, the sanctuary of streams, a fount of rain. Preservation in peril, a grace in delights.”

P: “What are rivers?”

A: “An unceasing path, a relief from the sun, the watering of the earth.”

P: “What is water?”

A: “The restoration of life, the ablution of filth.”

P: “What is fire?”

A: “An excess of heat, the warmth of new life, the ripening of fruit.”

P: “What is the cold?”

A: “A fever of the limbs.”¹²

P: “What is ice?”

A: “The persecutor of plants, the destroyer of leaves, the chains of the earth, the source of water.”¹³

P: “What is snow?”

A: “Dry water.”

P: “What is winter?”

A: “The exile of summer.”

P: “What is spring?”

A: “The artist of the earth.”

P: “What is summer?”

A: “The reclothing of the earth, the ripening of fruit.”

P: “What is autumn?”

A: “The year’s storehouse.”

P: “What is a year?”

A: “The four-horse chariot of the world.”

P: “Who draws it?”

A: “Night and day, cold and heat.”

P: “Who is their charioteer?”

A: “The sun and the moon.”

P: “How many palaces do they have?”

A: “Twelve.”

P: “Who are the governors of these palaces?”

A: “Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Libra, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpius, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces.”

P: “How many days do they live in each palace?”

A: “The sun [lives there] thirty days and half of ten hours; the moon two days and eight hours, and forty minutes of one hour.”

P: “Teacher! I am afraid to go higher.”¹⁴

A: “Who led you up?”



11. *Conceptio terrae, frugum generatrix*. It is not obvious how to translate *conceptio* here. Orchard translates this line “The fertilizer of earth, the spawn of produce,” whereas Spragg renders it, “The earth’s fertilizer, engenderer of fruits.”

12. While the word *febricitas* appears to be *hapax legomenon*, it is clearly derived from “febris” (fever). Considering the question this answers, Alcuin appears to be cleverly using *febricitas* as a metonymy for one symptom of fever (a shuddering or trembling of the limbs). We have chosen to leave the translation as “fever,” for it captures most faithfully the riddling ambiguity of Alcuin’s reply.

13. See Andy Orchard, trans., “Debate between the Royal and Most Noble Youth Pippin and the Scholar Alcuin,” in *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*.

14. While the comparative (“higher”) is not grammatically implicit in the Latin word *altum*, Alcuin’s answer implies that Alcuin is already “up.” Thus a comparative is the more fitting translation.

P: "Curiosity."¹⁵

A: "If you are afraid, we will go back down.
I will follow wherever you go."

P: "If I knew what a ship was, I would ready
one for you, that you might come to me."

A: "A ship is a drifting home, a lodging
anywhere, a traveler without tracks, a
neighbor to the shore."¹⁶

P: "What is the shore?"

A: "The wall of the earth."

P: "What is grass?"

A: "The earth's garment."

P: "What are herbs?"

A: "Friends of doctors, the glory of cooks."

P: "What is it that makes the bitter sweet?"

A: "Hunger."

P: "What is it that does not tire a man?"

A: "Profit."

P: "What is sleep to the wakeful?"

A: "Hope."

P: "What is hope?"

A: "Consolation of labor, an uncertain
fate."

P: "What is friendship?"

A: "An affinity of souls."

P: "What is faith?"

A: "A certainty of things unknown and
miraculous."

P: "What is miraculous?"

A: "I recently saw a man standing, moving,
and walking who never existed."

P: "Explain to me how this could be."¹⁷

A: "He was an image in the water."

P: "Why did I not understand this on my own,
when I saw that very man so many times?"

A: "Because you are a boy of good
character and of innate quality, I will show
you other such mysteries; try to discern
these things for yourself."

P: "Let us do it like this: if I speak incorrectly,
correct me."

A: "I will do as you wish. A stranger spoke
to me without tongue or voice, who never
was before, nor will be after, and whom I
had not heard nor known."

P: "Perhaps a dream disturbed you, teacher?"¹⁸

A: "Indeed, son. And hear another: I saw
the dead beget the living, and the dead
were consumed by the breath of the living."

P: "Fire is born from the friction of wood, and
consumes the wood."

A: "It is true. I heard the dead speaking
many words."

P: "Never well, unless they are suspended in the
air."

A: "Indeed. I saw an unextinguished fire
frozen in the water."

P: "I think you mean to signify flint in water"

A: "It is as you suppose. I saw the dead
sitting above the living, and the living died
in the laughter of the dead."



15. Roman and early Christian writers viewed *curiositas* as a vice, an intemperate desire for knowledge—such as pursuing knowledge out of vainglory, or longing to know what is forbidden. The corresponding virtue is *studiositas*, a proper desire for knowledge, motivated by love of God and service to neighbor. See Thomas Aquinas in ST II-II, qq 166, 167; also P. G. Walsh, "The Rights and Wrongs of Curiosity (Plutarch to Augustine)," *Greece & Rome* 35, no. 1 (April 1988): 73-85; Alice Ramos, "*Studiositas* and *Curiositas*: Matters for Self-Examination," *Educational Horizons* 83, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 272-281.

16. See also Andy Orchard, trans., "Debate between the Royal and Most Noble Youth Pippin and the Scholar Alcuin," in *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*.

17. *Pande* (literally "spread it out for me").

18. See Andy Orchard, trans., "Debate between the Royal and Most Noble Youth Pippin and the Scholar Alcuin," in *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*.

P: “Our cooks know this.”

A: “They know it. But place your finger over your mouth, lest the boys hear what it is. I was in a hunt with others where we carried nothing with us that we captured; we took home with us what we could not capture.”

P: “This is the hunt of peasants.”

A: “It is. I saw something born before it had been conceived.”

P: “You saw this, and perhaps you ate it.”

A: “I ate it. Who is the one who is not, and has a name, and gives a response to the speaker?”

P: “Ask the rushes in the woods.”

A: “I saw a traveler running with his home; and he was silent, and his home echoed.”

P: “Prepare a net for me and I will set it out for you.”

A: “Who is it, whom you cannot see, except with closed eyes?”

P: “He who snores reveals it to you.”

A: “I saw a person holding eight in his hand, and he suddenly seized seven from the eight, and six remained.”¹⁹

P: “The boys in school understand this.”

A: “What is the thing which, if the head is removed, grows back taller?”²⁰

P: “Go to your bed and find it there.”

A: “There were three: one was never born and once dead, the other born once and never dead, the third once born and twice dead.”

P: “The first is like to the earth; the second, to my God; the third, to a poor man.”²¹

A: “Nevertheless, speak the first letters of the names.”

P: “I V XXX”²²

A: “I saw a woman flying with an iron beak and a wooden body and a feathered tail, carrying death.”

P: “She is the ally of soldiers.”

A: “What is a soldier?”

P: “The wall of the empire, the dread of enemies, a glorious servitude.”

A: “What is it, that is and is not?”

P: “Nothing.”

A: “How can something exist and not exist?”

P: “It exists in name and not in actuality.”²³

A: “What is the silent messenger?”

P: “It is what I hold in my hand.”

A: “What do you hold in your hand?”

P: “Your letter, teacher.”²⁴

A: “Read joyfully, son!”



19. This riddle refers to medieval finger-counting. For more on the subject, see Martha Bayless’ commentary on this riddle. Martha Bayless, “Alcuin’s *Disputatio Pippini* and the Early Medieval Riddle Tradition,” in *Humor, History, and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

20. *Quid est, cui si caput abstuleris, resurgit altior?* (literally “if you remove the head”).

21. For a probable explanation of this riddle, see L.W. Daly and W. Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicleti Philosophi*, 145 and Martha Bayless, “Alcuin’s *Disputatio Pippini* and the Early Medieval Riddle Tradition.”

22. The manuscripts vary here. Williams’ manuscript reads “I III|XXX.” Some translations, such as Spraggs’, omit this line altogether. Considering the question immediately preceding, as well as probable solutions offered to the riddle by Daly and Suchier, it seems “I V XXX” is the most coherent version. Daly proposes that the numerals correspond to the alphabetical location of the “first letters of the names” from the previous question. “I” stands for the “A” of Adam, who was made from dust and thus “like to the earth;” “V” for Enoch or Elijah, who serve as archetypes of Christ; and “XXX” likely refers to the Greek *lambda*, which would stand for the L of Lazurus, a poor man. See L. W. Daly and W. Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicleti Philosophi*, 145; and Martha Bayless, “Alcuin’s *Disputatio Pippini* and the Early Medieval Riddle Tradition.”

23. *Nomine est, et re non est* (literally “it is by name and not by thing”).

24. The first and last lines are paralleled in the Latin text and frame the entire dialogue. Alcuin utilizes different, but related, terms. Whereas the operative word in the opening lines is *littera*, here the word is *epistula*, a written communication. We have chosen to translate both *littera* and *epistula* as “letter,” as it neatly captures the trajectory of the dialogue—from a discrete letter, the most basic unit of written language, to a complete text.

Critical Theory and Christian Affirmations: A Dashboard Summary

Christopher Schlect, New Saint Andrews College

tenets of Critical Theory dogma; these tenets counterfeit truths that Christians affirm (compare affirmations in the center column)	Christian affirmations that adherents of Critical Theory commandeer	Christian affirmations that counter the corrosive dogmas of Critical Theory
<p>1. <i>Cosmology, Creation, and Culture</i>: Reality is undesignated matter; it is up to people to fashion reality as it suits them. All culture is a human construction that arises not from patterns embedded in nature, but rather from the creative human acts that assign to nature its form and shape.</p> <p>2. <i>Power and Identity Reckoning</i>: (a) Competing cultural constructions of self and other yield adversarial power differentials (i.e., oppressors vs oppressed). (b) One's identity is reckoned by his or her social position within these power differentials.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriarchal power structures: male over female • Racial power structures: White over Black, Hispanic, Native American, etc. • Gendered and sexual power structures: cis- and heteronormativity over LGBTQ+ • Colonial power structures: colonizers over subalterns • Intersectionality: those who identify with more than one oppressed class face compounded oppression; thus they possess unique identities <p>3. <i>Standpoint Epistemology</i>: One's social position determines his or her capacity to know and understand. Members of oppressed classes experience structures of oppression that hem them in. Because members of privileged classes lack this experience, they are blind to these structures of oppression. Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slogans such as "believe all women;" "you cannot know my truth;" "check your white (or male) 	<p>1. Creation is a wilderness that humans are charged to cultivate; humans creatively introduce order to nature.</p> <p>2. (a) In human social relations we do encounter power differentials; corrupt individuals in power can and do wield their power in exploitative ways. (b) One way people forge genuine bonds with one another is by sharing in common the experience of suffering, including suffering under oppression.</p> <p>3. All people are differently situated, differently called and gifted, and thus we all have unique life experiences. Unique experiences give rise to unique perspectives. An individual's experience is a legitimate factor to weigh when assessing that person's credibility or fitness for a task.</p>	<p>1. God created the world, He created it good, and He imbues creation with order and meaning. Man is God's creation and bears His image; man is called to govern himself and the rest of creation according to divine law and order. Thus man has ministerial authority to form and shape culture, while honoring and yielding to God's order and design.</p> <p>2. (a) Certain hierarchies comport with God's design and, when rightly ordered and faithfully lived out, they foster human flourishing (e.g., husband-wife, parent-child, ruler-ruled, employer-employee, teacher-student). Deviations from God's order and design lead to fractured relationships and oppression. (b) All people share a fundamental nature and a common identity as sons of Adam. We Christians reckon our identity by their membership in a social class, but as members of the second Adam, Jesus Christ; we are one with one another through our fellowship in His suffering and in His triumph. Other community bonds (whether national, familial and tribal, ethnic, professional/guild, social class, etc.) are subordinate to and should bear witness to our basic identity as members of Adam, and even more, to our holy identity as members of the New Adam.</p> <p>3. Christian epistemology is grounded in the truth that God efficaciously reveals Himself to all people through nature and by common grace, and also to His people through special revelation in His word. While God has ordained people to be different from one another (e.g., men and women; tribes, tongues, and nations; various gifts and callings), we as His image-bearers share in common both our humanity and our capacity for communication. These qualities render us competent to grasp one another's ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Thus it is possible for different people to truly</p>

<p>privilege;” “I am expressing my gender/racial identity—who are you to question me?” “my body my choice” (men cannot understand women’s health)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demanding that school curricula include “representation” from various oppressed classes 		<p>understand one another. The gifts of shared humanity and of communication make it possible for us to truly understand others, even those whose situations, callings, and experiences differ from our own.</p>
<p>4. <i>Language</i>: People use language to forge bonds with those in the same social class, and to deconstruct the bonds that strengthen opposing classes. Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cancel culture: because the voices of the privileged classes are violent weapons of ongoing oppression, members of oppressed groups insist upon de-platforming or “canceling” such voices • insisting that others refer to oneself by the gendered pronouns one assigns to oneself • calling for “safe spaces,” venues where contrary voices are absent (= freedom from violence) • lobbying to “decolonize the canon/the curriculum”: demanding the removal of white/male/cis/hetero authors in order to quiet their (violent) voices of ongoing oppression 	<p>4. “And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name” (Genesis 2:19). Language is creative and formative. As God’s image-bearers, we humans exercise our agency through language—by naming and categorizing; by storytelling; by assenting and affirming; by gainsaying, objecting, and cross-examining; by asserting and arguing, etc.</p>	<p>4. Language is a shared resource of meaning and communion. Yes, it is powerful, for the tongue is a fire: a source of strife and division, and also of blessing and healing (James 3). We fight the good fight of faith by confessing the good confession before witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12-14). Language is a gift that makes it possible for a person (or a community) to truly understand others, even if the others are differently situated. Language is a powerful vehicle for instruction, encouragement, praise, correction, admonition, and rebuke.</p>
<p>5. <i>Emancipation</i>: Victims deploy language (or other expressive means) to disrupt or tear down the power structures that oppress them, thereby freeing themselves from oppression. Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting slogans such as “speak truth to power,” “smash the patriarchy” • demanding representation from oppressed and subaltern voices in school curricula; these voices disrupt the prevailing structures of oppression • insisting that “silence is consent”: those who refuse to speak out acquiesce to oppressors and perpetuate their violence upon victims • on victims: denouncing “blaming the victim” or “victim shaming”: victims must be blameless, and holding victims in any way responsible for their own suffering subverts their empowered role in the liberating narrative of emancipation 	<p>5. God chose the weak in the world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). The story of redemption is one of deliverance from slavery and oppression.</p>	<p>5. Humans are saved by God’s deliverance in human history. God humbled Himself, and He, though sinless, suffered unto death. Jesus is the only sinless victim. Then He rose from the dead, and thus God restores creation and glorifies it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naming and storytelling are powerful tools of loving God and neighbor; with our words “we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5); thus words are potent tools for confounding falsehoods and unseating oppressors. • The preeminent emancipatory use of words is to confess that Jesus is lord (Romans 10:9); the way to liberation is by exalting Christ and not ourselves. • On victims: Only Jesus is a sinless victim; His resurrection proves that His suffering satisfied divine justice.

**Association of Classical
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317 West 6th, Suit 211,
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Association of Classical Christian Schools
Phone: (208) 882-6101

Editorial: dodonnell@accsedu.org

Advertisement: rortego@accsedu.org

Web: www.classicalchristian.org