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**Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of The Journal. I would first like to introduce myself. My name is Paul Drake and I have accepted the Director of Operations position here at the Society for Classical Learning. I am thankful for this opportunity to expand SCL’s reach and resources. I hope to aid in equipping the classical education movement for generations to come. During the past five years in classical education, I have worked diligently to understand, empower, and expand the movement. My passion for education originated during my undergrad, where I first experienced a truly classical liberal arts education. Since that initial inspiration, my passion for classical education has led me to further develop my skills through graduate work, training, and seminars. I strive to take advantage of every opportunity God gives to me. Just two years ago, I accepted a position at Covenant Classical School in Fort Worth, TX. I am excited to take capitalize on this opportunity to enrich the work of SCL to make classical Christian schools thrive.

Springtime is here, which means the Annual SCL Conference is near. I hope you are all looking forward to your experience in Austin, TX! It will surely be an edifying time of development, the sharing of resources and ideas, and fellowship. This year’s conference theme is Classical Christian Education on Mission. The theme will explore how the vision of classical Christian education push out to engage with our communities, our cities, and the kingdom of God. This is an important topic for both teachers and administrators. To help us explore this theme, we are honored to have four exceptional plenary speakers, including Ryan T. Anderson, Dr. Gregory Thornbury, Dr. Michael Lindsay, and Davies Owens. I pray that each of you will be encouraged, challenged, and inspired by attending.

Finally, this edition of The Journal explores the topic of virtue and its importance in every arena of life; for both educators and students. Christians are called to live in the “political economy of ordered loves.” This idea should inform how we root our classical education in the ancient, because it provides a foundation from which our loves transformed. This foundation, paired with intentional academic rigor prepares students to explore numerous advanced fields; including the humanities, sciences, and mathematics. Simply put we need to remind ourselves as educators and administrators that, that which is not ancient quickly becomes old. A classical education rooted in the virtue will lead, by God’s grace, to flourishing educators, teaching refined lessons to a vast array of students in need of this same reminder.

In Christ,

Paul Drake
Director of Operations
Society for Classical Learning
The Church, the School and the Political Economy of Virtue

Ravi Jain

The final book in the Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle, paints a provocative political scenario. A talking ape dresses up a talking donkey in a lion skin to impersonate Aslan. The ape hopes to rule Narnia by using the lion-donkey as his puppet mouthpiece. When the donkey, named Puzzle, objects that he does not want to rule Narnia, the ape, named Shift, tries to convince him of the benefits.

“Everyone would do whatever you tell them.”

“But I don’t want to tell them anything.”

“But think of the good we could do!” said Shift. “You’d have me to advise you, you know. I’d think of sensible orders for you to give. And everyone would have to obey us, even the King himself. We would set everything right in Narnia.”

“But isn’t everything right already?” said Puzzle.

“What!” cried Shift. “Everything right? When there are no oranges or bananas?”

“Well, you know,” said Puzzle, “there aren’t many people – in fact, I don’t think there’s anyone but yourself – who wants those sort of things.”

“There’s sugar, too,” said Shift.

“H’m, yes,” said the Ass. “It would be nice if there was more sugar.”

“Well then, that’s settled,” said the Ape. “You will pretend to be Aslan, and I’ll tell you what to say.”

In The Last Battle, C. S. Lewis brings Narnia to an end. Father Time rolls up the sky, and the stars are each summoned to Aslan’s side. But this occurs only after Narnia falls to the bizarre and tyrannical rule of the ape, aligned with the Calormenes who worship the evil god Tash. At first, the true king of Narnia, Tirian, does not know that Aslan has not appeared and is only being impersonated. The talking beasts all report to Tirian that Aslan has come and that indeed he is “not a tame lion.” The beasts did not perceive the ape and donkey’s lie. But Tirian and his steed, Jewel the Unicorn, conclude by the disgusting behavior and vicious commands of the false Aslan that something was dreadfully amiss. Tirian begins:

“Horrible thoughts arise in my heart. If we had died before today we should have been happy.”

“Yes,” said Jewel. “The worst thing in the world has come upon us.”

What is this worst thing in the world? It is to conclude that the lord whom one has worshiped and placed hope in is in fact an unjust and cruel tyrant. It is to conclude that the foundation of justice is itself unjust. The reported deeds of this false Aslan nearly convince Jewel and Tirian that he is an impostor. But it is finally the words of the Ape that
ring as blatant heresy and spring Tirian into action. The Ape says:

“Tash is only another name for Aslan. All that old idea of us being right and the Calormenes wrong is silly. We know better now …. Tash is Aslan: Aslan is Tash.”

To this Tirian finally objects:


Slowly the plot thickens and the differences between the two sorts of government emerge. Both the traditional Narnian rule and the government of the ape have habits, causal explanations and theological foundations. But one ruling culture believes in a transcendent source of divine goodness, and the other says good and evil are the same.

The statements of the Ape and the Calormenes feel familiar even to a child – familiar but disingenuous. They have the recognizable tinge of hypocrisy. At the bottom of that system lie the arbitrary wants and desires of the Ape and the king of the Calormenes, the Tisroc. While they claim to serve everyone, they serve only themselves. Nonetheless a whole government emerges around these motivations. How? In contrast to the Narnians, the Calormenes are ruled not by their own consciences or by alignment with what is right. The Calormenes are full of trickery and deceit and are compelled by force. The Narnians who defect to their side are willing to affirm their deplorable practices grounded in Realpolitik.

The true and faithful Narnians, on the other hand, are ruled by a transcendent code of conduct, the pursuit of virtue. At one point King Tirian and Jewel strike down two Calormenes without first warning them of attack and calling them to arms. After some reflection, the two Narnians feel disgraced. While the Calormenes were indeed part of an evil plot, the Narnians conclude that the way they themselves attacked the Calormenes was outside the bounds of proper combat. The end did not justify the means.

Lewis, a master of history, in Narnia and elsewhere often contrasts the ideologies of the present with the ideals of the past. In his Funeral for a Great Myth, he criticizes the myth of progress, the notion that things are inevitably getting better all the time. And nowhere else in The Chronicles of Narnia besides The Last Battle does he more vividly depict the differences between the ancient and modern visions of political economy.

While readers of the Chronicles feel the contrast, they may still wonder, “What would a political economy founded in Christian virtue look like?” This is a good question because the term “political economy” did not enter into the Western lexicon until after politics itself had departed from upholding the primacy of virtue for public life. The word “economics” is an old one, used by Aristotle and meaning “the law of the household” or “household management.” In ancient Greece, households were also small businesses, often specializing in a craft such as the production of cloth or another trade. But the word “economics” did not come to have its contemporary meaning until after the days of Adam Smith. Adam Smith wrote about political economy, “the household management of nations.” He extended Aristotle’s meaning to ask about the relations not merely within the city but between cities and nations – between polities.

For both Aristotle and Adam Smith, economics and politics were within the discourse of moral philosophy, the mother of contemporary social science. As Gladys Bryson explains in The Emergence of the Social Sciences from Moral Philosophy, “From the time of Socrates until the emergence of the social sciences in the 19th century, moral philosophy consistently offered the most comprehensive discussion of human relations and institutions.”

Aristotle wrote two key books on moral philosophy – what he called practical philosophy – Nicomachean Ethics and Politics. In Aristotle’s point of view, human bonds
are natural, and one cannot learn to be ethical in a social vacuum. Rather, one learns virtue in the context of the community, the city, the polis. “Man is by nature a political animal,” he wrote in *Politics*. Virtue was historically a central concern of moral philosophy and, therefore, of both politics and economics. To grow in virtue was a lifelong pursuit that began in childhood and was not finished until death. Aristotle writes *Nicomachean Ethics* that, “Moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name (ethike) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word ethos (habit).” He goes on to explain that, “It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference.” Moreover, the majority of moral philosophers throughout the ancient and medieval world believed that one could not live a happy or blessed life without growing in virtue. Virtue was essential to the purpose of life.

While there are key differences between the ancient pagan notions of virtue and Christian notions, they do share similarities that are now rejected by the modern moral order. Both the pagans and the Christians believed that there is a transcendent order and that to grow in virtue is to grow more aligned with that order. As C. S. Lewis writes in *The Abolition of Man*, “For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; and both, in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious.”

In the modern moral order, there are no given goals or ends for human beings. Machiavelli and Hobbes stand at the headwaters of the modern political tradition. Both are less interested in the development of virtue among the citizens of the polis than they are interested in the means to accomplish the purposes of the ruler. How can The Prince (or the state) accomplish his goals, whatever they may be? The questions ignore ends and ask only of means. Only in this post-Hobbesian context could Adam Smith advance in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* the centrality of self-interest or “self-love” for accomplishing desirable ends without falling afoul of historic Christian thought. Nonetheless, Adam Smith sounds more balanced than his immediate predecessor, Bernard Mandeville, who in 1705 wrote a book titled *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Lives, Public Benefits*. Just four centuries earlier at the time of Dante, the Augustinian notion of virtue as “ordered loves” was still axiomatic. While Augustine conceded that the “City of Man” is indeed ordered around self-love, the “City of God” is ordered around the love of God. Christians are called to a political economy of ordered loves, a political economy of virtue.

In a telling passage from *The Last Battle*, the Ape explains the goals of his rule. What does it mean to “set everything right in Narnia” and what does a well-governed productive society look like?

> “Everybody who can work is going to be made to work in the future. Aslan has it all settled with the King of Calormen…”

> “No, no, no,” howled the Beasts. “It can’t be true. Aslan would never sell us into slavery to the King of Calormen.”

> “None of that! Hold your noise!” said the Ape with a snarl. “Who said anything about slavery? You won’t be slaves. You’ll be paid – very good wages, too. That is to say, your pay will be paid in to Aslan’s treasury and he will use it all for everybody’s good … There, you see!” said the Ape. “It’s all arranged. And all for your own good. We’ll be able, with the money you earn, to make Narnia a country worth living in. There’ll be oranges and bananas pouring in – and roads and big cities and schools and offices and whips and muzzles and saddles and cages and kennels and prisons. Oh, everything.”

> “But we don’t want all those things,” said an old Bear. “We want to be free. And we want to hear Aslan speak himself.”

> “Now don’t you start arguing,” said the Ape, “for it’s a thing I won’t stand. I’m a Man: you’re only a fat, stupid old Bear. What do you know about freedom? You think freedom
means doing what you like. Well, you’re wrong. That isn’t true freedom. True freedom means doing what I tell you.”

No arguing, says the Ape. More pointedly, no moral discourse. In the modern moral order the foundation for applying moral reasoning has been eroded. (See Alisdair MacIntyre’s After Virtue.) The traditional notion of the liberal arts supported exactly the polity that was founded upon the freedom of conscience. Though in Cicero’s Orator he uses the Latin words probare, delectare and flectere (to test, to delight and to persuade) in describing the duties of the orator, by the Renaissance the Ciceronian duties of the orator are commonly listed as movere, docere and delectare (to move, to teach and to delight). The goals of dialectic are to discover and demonstrate arguments through reasoned dialogue. Aquinas writes in Summa Theologica that they are called liberal arts “in order to distinguish them from those arts which are ordained to works done by the body, which arts are, in a fashion, servile, inasmuch as the body is in servile subjection to the soul, and man as regards his soul is free.” The church fathers recognized in the liberal arts those studies that support the freedom of conscience. Regarding this freedom, Christ said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28). Aquinas similarly wrote that, “Man as regards his soul is free.” One can say that 2+2=37 all day long and threaten another’s life and limb if he does not accept this as true. While the mathematically persecuted man may repeat any phrase that is demanded, when the threat is removed he will again acknowledge that 2+2=4. You cannot make somebody believe something against his will. He must be persuaded. This is the job of the liberal arts. The opposite is when states of affairs are enacted by force not by reason and conscience. This kind of dogmatic bureaucracy is too often a marker of contemporary social ideology. Nonetheless, it can be detected. The behavior and commands of the Ape, despite all his platitudes, brought slavery, not freedom.

Surely Lewis was aware of the political philosophy of Jean Jacque Rousseau who describes the role of the state thus:

He who dares to undertake the making of a people’s institutions ought to feel himself capable, so to speak, of changing human nature, of transforming each individual who is by himself a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he in a manner receives his life and being … He must, in a word, take away from man his own resources and give him instead new ones alien to him, and incapable of being made use of without the help of other men.

The 20th-century UC Berkeley and Columbia University professor, Robert Nisbet, says this of the modern state in Twilight of Authority:

The word bureaucracy has come to symbolize, above all others in our time, the transfer of government from the people, as organized in their natural communities in the social order, as equipped with the tastes, desires and aspirations which are the natural elements of their nurture, to a class of professional technicians whose principal job is that of substituting their organizations their tastes, desires and aspirations, for those of the people. It is this seemingly ineradicable aspect of bureaucracy that makes for the relentless, unending conflict between bureaucracy and freedom that more and more people in the present age have come to regard as very nearly central. And it is this same aspect that has led so many persons in the present age to despair of restoring to political government those foundations in popular will which are utterly vital to the political community.

Or in other words, “You think freedom means doing what you like. Well, you’re wrong. That isn’t true freedom. True freedom means doing what I tell you.”

Interestingly, these words themselves are not altogether wrong. Consider this prayer of St. Augustine which
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informs an Anglican liturgy that C. S. Lewis would have known: “Grant us so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

There is one whom to serve is perfect freedom. It is the one who is himself the way, the truth and the life. It is the one who is the foundation of all virtue. Hans Boersma, the J. I. Packer Professor of Systematic Theology at Regent College, speaks of the way the church fathers thought about virtue. He writes this of the 4th-century Christian thinker Gregory of Nyssa in Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa:

First, for Gregory, virtue is primarily identified with God or Christ. Virtue, insists Gregory, is identical to divine characteristics such as blamelessness, holiness, purity, and incorruptibility. The reason, therefore, that Gregory expounds on virtue . . . is [because] by expounding on virtue one discusses the goodness and beauty of God himself. Second, human virtue is participatory in character. It is by putting on the “garb of Christ” that we become virtuous, and it is through our eating of the body of Christ in the Eucharist that we ourselves are transformed. The metaphor of Christ as the head and the Church as his body points to the participatory character of human virtue. The bride’s beauty is, in a real sense, the Bridegroom’s beauty, because the former is derived from and participates in the latter.

Thus, to grow in Christ is to grow in virtue. And to grow in virtue is to experience true freedom. Here we encounter the centrality of the church for the fostering of true freedom. As it was for the ancient Greeks, virtue is something that is nurtured in community. But for Christians that community is not the Greek city state; it is the Church. “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (2 Corinthians 12:27). It is within the context of the Church that parents are to raise their children. As it says in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers do not exasperate your children, but raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

It is precisely this older vision of raising up children within the context of the Church for growth in virtue and growth in Christ that is today threatened. Harvard historian, Christopher Dawson explains in Crisis:

In the new America the socialization and secularization of education has created an immense professionalized organ for the creation of moral and intellectual uniformity. In this way the constitutional principle of the separateness of Church and State which was intended to secure religious freedom has become the means of secularizing the American mind so that the churches have lost all control over the religious formation of the people. This was not so in the earlier phase of American history when the churches were the chief, and often the only, organs of education and culture. The American way of life was built on a threefold tradition of freedom – political, economic, and religious – and if the new secularist forces were to subjugate these freedoms to a monolithic technological order, it would destroy the foundations on which American culture was based. The American way of life can only maintain its character within the general framework of Western Christian culture. If this relation is lost, something essential to the life of the nation will be lost and American democracy itself will become subordinated to the technological order.

This is why The Last Battle feels so familiar. It describes the order of the Ape, a bureaucratic order in which the natural organizations of the Narnians have been replaced with the artificially imposed order of the Calormenes and the Ape. It is an order in which the Narnians’ desires for virtue and freedom have been replaced with intemperance and an inordinate lust for goods and progress – goods detached from natural desires and progress detached from reasonable human purposes. It is an order in which there is no basis for moral discourse and public reasoning, only various thinly veiled coercive techniques. What is instead needed is a political economy of virtue. And the only polis that can support this economy of virtue is the city of God, that city ordered around the love of God and not the love of self.
In Defense of the Humanities
Louis Markos, PhD

In the past few years I have noticed three troubling trends with regard to the humanities. I have been an English professor at Houston Baptist University for nearly three decades. During that time, I have seen the number of humanities majors – literature, history, philosophy, Spanish, Latin, classics, etc. – rise and fall, but never in all those years have I witnessed the kind of precipitous decline I have seen recently.

Secondly, in addition to teaching literature I have devoted the last nine years to lecturing for our Honors College, a program that allows students to obtain a full classical Christian Great Books education while also majoring in a field of their choice. In the beginning, a significant number of Honors College students chose a major in the humanities; today, more and more are majoring in the sciences, in business or in the social sciences.

Finally, I have spent the last 12 years speaking for classical Christian schools and conferences across the country. Though the movement as a whole is healthy and growing, I have noticed as of late a slow, but increasing danger. Parents who have been supportive of classical education and pleased by the intellectual and moral progress of their children are feeling the temptation to jump ship mid-stream and move their classically-trained middle school students to a non-classical high school.

What do these three troubling trends have in common? A growing perception on the part of students and their parents that an education grounded in the humanities/liberal arts is somehow impractical and will leave graduates without the resources to find a good college or a good job. “A passion for literature, Latin, history or philosophy is all well and good,” so the current wisdom goes, “but those pursuits will not provide the kind of training that students need to survive and thrive in the modern age.”

I’ve always known in my gut that this knee-jerk, utilitarian response to the humanities is false, but I never dreamed that its falsehood would be exposed by the very business world that the utilitarians invariably point to as their greatest ally and their key source of proof.

Now, before I proceed, I must confess that as a lifelong humanities person I feel an aversion to quoting statistics and current events. I have always preferred, and continue to prefer, time-tested wisdom to the latest trends, the testimonies and experiences of individual human beings to reductive and often anti-humanistic statistics. Still, I will here break my rule (temporarily) since the news and the numbers are punching holes in the current wisdom and letting the true light shine through.

Try typing this phrase into your favorite search engine: “Employers want liberal arts majors.” You will be greeted,
if not deluged, with articles, reports, book reviews and studies asserting that the naysayers are wrong and that companies do very much want employees who have cut their teeth in a good humanities program. You might be skeptical at first, figuring these articles must have been posted by humanities departments or classical schools. If so, you quickly will realize that you are wrong. Here is a brief sampling of what you will find:

1. From the Bureau of Labor Statistics: “According to studies from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers often rank skills such as critical thinking and communication – hallmarks of liberal arts training – above technical aptitude as essential for career readiness.”

2. From the New York Times’ review of George Anders’s *You Can Do Anything: The Surprising Power of a “Useless” Liberal Arts Education* and Randall Stross’ *A Practical Education: Why Liberal Arts Majors Make Great Employees*: “According to both Anders and Stross, the ever-expanding tech sector is now producing career opportunities in fields – project management, recruitment, human relations, branding, data analysis, market research, design, fundraising, and sourcing, to name some – that specifically require the skills taught in the humanities. To thrive in these areas, one must be able to communicate effectively, read subtle social and emotional cues, make persuasive arguments, adapt quickly to fluid environments, interpret new forms of information while translating them into a compelling narrative and anticipate obstacles and opportunities before they arise. Programs like English or history represent better preparation, the two authors argue, for the demands of the newly emerging ‘rapport sector’ than vocationally oriented disciplines like engineering or finance.”

3. From the Harvard Business Review: “From Silicon Valley to the Pentagon, people are beginning to realize that to effectively tackle today’s biggest social and technological challenges, we need to think critically about their human context – something humanities graduates happen to be well trained to do. Call it the revenge of the film, history and philosophy nerds.”

4. And, an Investopedia survey of executives – including CEOs, presidents, vice presidents and C-level executives – by the Association of American Colleges and Universities revealed:
   - 93% of executives say “demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems is more important than a particular degree.”
   - 80% of executives say that regardless of a student’s major, they should have “a broad knowledge” of the liberal arts and sciences.
   - 80% of executives say schools should place more emphasis on oral and written communication skills.
   - 71% of executives say schools should place more emphasis on the ability to innovate and be creative.
   - 74% of executives would “recommend a liberal education to their own child or a young child they know.”

I easily could quote another dozen passages, but I hope these will suffice to show that the humanities/liberal arts are not as divorced from the needs of real-life employers as has been supposed. In taking a non-utilitarian approach, one in which the discipline is studied as an end-in-itself, the humanities end up producing graduates who excel in just the skills that modern companies are demanding from their employees. Furthermore, because the graduates acquired those skills not through direct vocational training, but as a natural consequence of dialoging with the great works of literature, history and philosophy, they internalize them in...
a way that better enables growth, flexibility and innovation over time.

Quote two above does a fine job listing some of the skills that develop organically from the humanistic disciplines, but I, as a humanities professor, prefer to flesh out the exact nature of those critical thinking skills by looking to the past for guidance, clarity and illumination. When I do so, I discover, to my delight, that all that needs to be said on the subject was said a century-and-a-half ago by a British Victorian sage who lived and wrote in the heyday of the industrial revolution: Cardinal Newman.

In 1852, Newman delivered a series of nine discourses – later published as The Idea of a University – in which he laid down foundational principles for a proposed classical Christian liberal arts Catholic university in Dublin, Ireland. In discourse VII, chapter X, Newman describes, in terms prophetic of the passages I quoted above, the fruits of a liberal arts education grounded in the humanities:

A University training is the great ordinary means to a great, but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power and refining the intercourse of private life. It is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them and a force in urging them.

In the language of classical Christian education, such a student has successfully worked his way through the trivium (“three ways”) of grammar, logic and rhetoric. He, like the college humanities major, has learned to “think for himself,” not by parroting the words of others or rejecting all that came before him, but by measuring his ideas against standards of goodness, truth and beauty, synthesizing them into a coherent thesis or worldview, and then sharing that schema with his peers in a persuasive, but irenic manner. A humanities student learns to do this without knowing he is doing it – by wrestling with the timeless issues raised by Sophocles or Plutarch or Aquinas – and he will carry it with him into committee board rooms when to speak and when to be silent; he is able to converse, he is able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently, and gain a lesson seasonably, when he has nothing to impart himself.

Were my concern here the ability of the humanities to shape virtuous, morally self-regulating citizens who can redeem public discourse and uphold and preserve a deliberative representational democracy, I would zero in on the first sentence. Heaven knows, our modern, fractured society is in desperate need of such college graduates! Since, however, my focus is the link between the liberal arts and the workplace, I will turn instead to the remainder of the paragraph – not to enshrine it, but to explicate, parse and interpret it as though it were a poem or a historical event or a Latin verb. For that is the way humanities majors interact with the world around them; it is as familiar to them as breathing or walking or falling in love.
where such integrative, high-level thinking is required and valued.

It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical and to discard what is irrelevant.

The humanities excel at training students to read a text — any kind of text — and go for the jugular. That is to say, students who spend their college years intensively studying literature or history or philosophy become adept at cutting through what is peripheral to get to the core, to what is most essential, most lasting and most human. The business world very much needs employees who can analyze a situation and identify, quickly and with precision, the root causes of that situation and the consequences it is likely to produce. True, some of that can be gained by studying business case studies, but what those studies lack are the simultaneously particular and universal issues that confront humanities majors in every class.

It prepares him to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility.

It may sound like a cliché to refer to the humanities major as a Renaissance man, but it should not. The liberal arts strive to produce graduates who can speak intelligently and with passion on a wide range of topics, not because they have memorized a packet of trivial pursuit cards, but because they have spent four years actively participating in the Great Conversation that has been going on since Homer and the books of Moses. Though they are sometimes ridiculed for being jacks of all trades, but masters of none, they are in truth generalists who see and appreciate the connections between all areas of thought. Such employees will be able to connect with clients in a way that goes beyond small talk at the bar or restaurant. Their training will allow them to see the client, not to mention their officemates, as fellow travelers on a journey of self-discovery.

It shows him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them.

One thing that the humanities are particularly good at fostering and strengthening in their students is a sense of what I like to call, after Percy Shelley, the sympathetic imagination. To open oneself to the joys and sorrows, passions and fears, convictions and foibles of people from various ages and cultures — as humanities majors do every week in their classes — is to gain, by slow osmosis, the ability to see the world through different eyes. Although the characters that humanities majors meet in their studies share with them a common humanity, they all have unique struggles that draw students out of their comfort zones and cultural bubbles. Whether they be fictional (Achilles, Antigone, Aeneas, Elizabeth Bennet) or non-fictional (Alexander, Caesar Augustus, Henry VIII, Elizabeth I), poets (Dante, Shakespeare, Milton) or philosophers (Plato, Augustine, Kierkegaard), their intense reality forces those who encounter them to get inside their heads, to understand their actions and motivations, to sympathize with rather than stand in judgment over them. Needless to say, a company that employs workers who possess these skills will attract clients and customers who feel that their needs, desires and apprehensions have been understood and respected.

He is at home in any society, he has common ground with every class; he knows when to speak and when to be silent; he is able to converse, he is able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently and gain a lesson seasonably, when he has nothing to impart himself.

To immerse oneself in the literary, historical and philosophical records that have been passed down to us over the last three millennia is to be confronted at once with our great potential and our profound limits. The humanities present man at his best and his worst, as a noble and glorious creature created in the image of God.
who is yet broken, fallen and depraved. Not until a student comes to grips with the good he is capable of – and the bad he is equally capable of – will he gain both the confidence and the humility to serve his fellow man. Only then will he know when to speak and when to remain silent, when to voice his own opinion and when to listen to the opinions of others. Employees who are firm in what they believe, yet open to correction and new ideas, are a rare and precious commodity in the business world. Employers are eager to hire such people!

It thrills my heart that the business world has finally caught up with what Newman wrote 150 years ago. Now, if only students (and their parents) could read and interpret the signs of the times. There are now, and always will be, students who do not feel drawn to classical schools or humanities majors. That is fine and as it should be. But for those students who are passionate about an education that immerses them in the liberal arts, please rest assured that the skills such an education fosters in them will serve those students well in whatever career they choose to pursue.
Success in mathematics requires a variety of skills, all of which are perfectly situated within classical Christian schools. Classical Christian educators can use God’s Word to help students develop these skills. Recognizing the good information from the bad is a key objective sought by classical educators. The ability to see truth in a world full of untruths is imperative. The same skill applies to mathematics: Students must be able to recognize relationships in mathematics to be able to know how to proceed. This recognition, the first R, will help students get started on one of the toughest parts of mathematics at any age, problem-solving. The second R, retrieval, is a basic tenet of classical education: Students must memorize their basic facts and be able to retrieve the facts quickly. Finally, the third R, resolve, can be taught both biblically and through developing students’ mindsets. Classical Christian educators have at their disposal biblical truths in developing students’ resolve.

RECOGNITION

Developing students who have good number sense is critical in mathematics. Nguyen et al. discovered that early numeracy ability in preschool is a strong predictor of fifth-grade mathematics achievement scores (2016). What is number sense? It is a group of skills that allows people to work with numbers. Witzel, Ferguson and Mink discuss five components of number sense: magnitude comparisons, strategic counting, retrieval of basic arithmetic facts, word problems and numerical recognition (2012). The authors go on to discuss three methods for improving number sense. First, the authors support constructivist claims that children construct their knowledge through manipulating concrete materials. Second, they discuss how proficiency of skill should not just include algorithms, but also the meaning behind the algorithms. Finally, the third key element of the theory, the importance of making language connections, is offered to integrate math to everyday life. The first R, recognition, is best accomplished through these language connections. In her article on this idea of language in mathematics, Susperreguy emphasizes the importance of math talk, specifically the use of language comparisons. The use of math talk that includes cardinality and counting is ubiquitous in homes. What is missing, according to Susperreguy, is the use of comparisons: more than, less than, parts and wholes (2016). It is the recognition of parts and wholes in problems that unlocks mathematical understanding. Knowing that two parts are given in a problem allows the solver to add, no matter what the numerals are that are being added. Knowing that a whole and a part are given allows the solver to subtract. Taking time to recognize the information in the problem is key. This is best understood in the context it is required: problem-solving.

Nicholas needed to distribute 5 ¼ bags of grass seed on a lawn. He distributed 3 ½ bags in the morning. What is the total amount of seed he still needs to distribute before running out?
These rational adjectives (5 \(\frac{1}{4}\) and 3 \(\frac{1}{2}\)) can sometimes cause angst for students, and students then struggle with knowing which operation to choose. What if, on the other hand, the problem had no fractions in it?

Nicholas needed to distribute 5 bags of grass seed on a lawn. He distributed 3 bags in the morning. What is the total amount of seed he still needs to distribute before running out?

The problem becomes much easier for upper elementary students and they can immediately recognize that a whole and a part are known and that they need to subtract. By using the language of parts and wholes, students recognize the relationship and are on their way to solving. Knowing the operation required to solve problems eliminates one of the most common errors: choosing the wrong operation (Ferrucci, Yeap, & Carter, 2003). The same idea applies to multiplication and division, the only difference being that the parts are equal parts and that if you have equal parts and know the number of parts, you multiply to determine the product.

When we encourage students to seek truth in the relationships and carefully work through problems, we encourage the biblical virtue of carefulness. Phillip Dow writes in his book *Virtuous Minds* that, “Those who are intellectually careful earnestly want to know the truth; thus, they are reasonable and consistently careful that they do not overlook important details and habitually avoid hasty conclusions based on limited evidence.” When we teach students to take time to discover parts and wholes in mathematical problems, we are teaching this carefulness. And finally, from John 8:32, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” God’s truth illuminates the need for seeking truth.

**RETRIEVAL**

Retrieval of basic mathematics facts is a hot topic in education. Classical educators, however, have consistently held students responsible for memorizing basic facts. The importance of quick retrieval of basic facts cannot be overemphasized. A study by Calderon-Tena and Carerino in the *Journal of Science and Mathematics Education* in 2016 supports this return to holding students accountable for memorizing their basic facts – something classical educators never left. The researchers found that long-term retrieval skills became a better predictor of both mathematics calculation and mathematics problem-solving as age and grade increased.

The time that is devoted to fact retrieval tends to focus most on the initial counting stages and on the ubiquitous practice of timed tests. How to get effective practice at that middle stage will be the focus of this section, and brain-based research will help explain why it is important. In his 2014 book *The Confident Student*, Kanar discusses the three stages of memory: sensory memory, short-term memory and long-term memory. Sensory memory is the memory that takes in information. What a person sees, hears and touches all are taken in and sensed by the brain. If what the brain senses is attended to and processed, then it makes it into short-term memory. Short-term memory manipulates and processes information for about 30 seconds. Finally, if the information is rich enough and engaging enough, the information gets transferred into long-term memory. How does knowing this information help with basic fact retrieval? Simply put, attention matters. Students typically are first taught basic facts through a progression similar to the following: counting, adding zero, doubles, doubles +1, combinations of ten, make ten, doubles +2, +9, +4 in addition, then using addition facts to help retrieve subtraction facts (Purpura, Baroody, Eiland, & Reid, 2016). When they are taught these strategies, such as doubles plus one, teachers use effective manipulatives and visuals to first teach the meaning behind the basic facts. This follows cognitive learning theory first introduced by Jean Piaget and further developed by Jerome Bruner. Bruner significantly added to learning theory by stating that children first need to use concrete manipulatives to learn concepts, then transition into pictures of the objects,
and finally transfer to abstract numerals to represent the number of objects. In math fact retrieval, they may count eight blocks, then add two blocks to work in the concrete stage. Next they might use a ten-frame to show pictures of blocks and visualize that 8 and 2 always make 10. Finally, they will write the equation \(8 + 2 = 10\) and work with numerals. This type of practice is in every mathematics curriculum in the United States, including those used by classical Christian schools. This is as it should be, for students who have good number sense and practice with rich strategies are more successful at transferring the information into long-term memory (Purpura, Baroody, Eiland, & Reid, 2016).

The question should follow then, why we have so many students who struggle with their retrieval of basic facts? The answer lies in what comes next in schools around the country. Students who initially practice retrieving their facts by spending time counting to retrieve them, such as \(8 + 2 = 9\), then 10, do not experience the same level of richness as students who associated their facts with known facts. Utilizing what is known in memory to learn unknown information is key to all of learning, but especially to basic fact retrieval. Students must be fair-minded enough to try new methods for retrieving information.
facts. Dow speaks of the importance of fair-mindedness as well in developing students who have virtuous minds (2013). Fair-mindedness in mathematics is crucial to understanding the subject. Fair-mindedness comes into play in problem-solving, understanding relationships, and yes, in basic fact retrieval. Students who are retrieving their facts by counting as fast as they can should learn new retrieval routes, but in order to do so they must be fair-minded.

Classical Christian schools traditionally emphasize the importance of basic fact retrieval, and they should. I am not saying that basic fact retrieval is time wasted. On the contrary, research demonstrates that it is time well spent. What comes next, however, in many schools is the use of timed tests to retrieve basic facts before students are ready to be timed. Much research has shown that the overemphasis on timed tests at too early of an age results in math anxiety, something we all want to avoid for our students (Boaler, 2016).

Why not allow more practice for basic fact retrieval within the associative, strategic stage? This is no small task, and I do not mean to trivialize it. Most educators do not know what this looks like. What I am calling for is a change in both curriculum and instructional practices that still allow for accountability, a key component of classical Christian education. Students who are struggling with their fact retrieval do not need more timed tests or more manipulatives. Instead, they need more time associating, or deriving their facts. At our school, The Geneva School of Boerne, students are doing just that. If they show signs of counting or skip-counting while trying to retrieve their addition, subtraction, multiplication or division facts, they are given the tools to help them practice more in the deriving stage. We still require them to spend time retrieving their facts, and we hold them responsible for memorizing those facts. However, using standard flash cards can be just as detrimental to developing math anxiety as timed tests if pressure is placed on students to retrieve them quickly. Rather they should spend time altering their retrieval by associating the unknown fact to known facts. Students need rich practice to transfer information from short-term memory to long-term memory, as Kanar suggests (2014). They also must be fair-minded enough to try new methods to retrieve their facts if they have continuously built the counting pathway in their brain. The second R, retrieval of basic facts, is a key tool that students must possess.

RESOLVE

Finally, the third R, resolve, must be considered as an important characteristic for students to develop. Students who think they can solve math problems are the most successful. Self-efficacy, or beliefs about one’s abilities to accomplish goals, can influence activities people participate in (or not), the amount of effort they give to tasks and the persistence of effort and level of achievement reached (Boaler, 2016; Cerit, 2013). Self-efficacy is an area of study that needs to be further investigated in all teacher research studies, but specifically in the content area of mathematics.

Additional research on self-efficacy has been conducted recently by Carol Dweck (2006), who clearly shows the importance of students’ mindsets in her book, Mindset, by elucidating the difference between students who have a fixed mindset and those with a growth mindset. Those with fixed mindsets believe that they either have a talent, or do not. Those with growth mindsets, on the other hand, believe that if they work hard enough they can learn anything. Boaler has connected mindset research from Dweck to the area of mathematics in her book Mathematical Mindsets (2016). Students who have growth mindsets score higher on mathematics achievement tests. Teachers, according to Boaler, can encourage a growth mindset in their students in several ways. For example, the praise that teachers direct towards students is extremely influential. Praise suggesting a student is smart furthers the fixed
mindset, whereas praise suggesting the student has worked hard furthers a growth mindset.

Classical Christian educators, however, have the best tool available to help develop students’ mindsets: God’s Word. We can first give examples of grit from the Bible. Moses took a long time to reach the promised land and faced great strife. Yet he persevered. We also know from 1 Peter 1:3-5 that we have a promise of hope and that this promise is not wishful thinking, but rather confidence in God’s faithfulness. A second way to inspire grit is to remind students of times when they were successful in the past. If you develop a relationship with students and know their past success stories, you will be better equipped to help them through challenges they encounter in the future. The third method for mindset development is to model it yourself as a leader. Students look up to their leaders who have grit and are honest about their struggles. We know that one way students establish their own self-efficacy is by watching it modeled by their peers. Tenacity, or resolve, is a virtuous trait that can be developed by reminding students that hard work pays off. Resolve, a virtuous trait, is worthy of being titled the third R in mathematics.

**CONCLUSION**

The three R’s in mathematics – recognition of relationships, retrieval of basic facts and resolve to work through difficult problems – can be developed by parents, teachers, coaches and mentors. Students need to be surrounded by people who show that they care and take time to help students develop these traits. The Christian virtues of carefulness, fair-mindedness and tenacity can help students develop the three Rs, which, in turn, will help them succeed in their mastery of mathematics.

**References**


Enforced Mediocrity:  
How Schools with Too Many Subjects Destroy Academic Standards  
Christopher A. Perrin, PhD

In athletics, we have all learned the value of limits. The right training in the right amounts leads us toward excellence. But one can over-train too, or train in the wrong way and make bad habits nearly permanent. Hack golfers, for example, eventually realize that they practiced the wrong things for too long to hope for much improvement.

As educators, we too know the value of limits and right training. Most teachers have had to manage one of those perfectionist, anxious students who over-studies and is never content without a 100% on homework or test. There also, of course, are lazy students who do not practice or attend sufficiently. We also know many students who study wrongly – for example by surrounding themselves with distraction and noise that clutter their minds and inhibit focused attention to their work.

We might say that education should be ordered and arranged according to the discipline of what it is and to the nature of the child who receives it. In ordering an education, we should pay attention both to quality and quantity, both to what we teach and also to how often and for how long we teach. We should note education’s proper limits.

The problem, however, is that we have inherited poorly ordered practices of education, some of which are so familiar that we hardly notice them. Even as we seek to renew the classical tradition of education, we wrestle with these inherited, normalized educational practices that were born out of modern, progressive education, most of which (though not all) are in tension with our professed aims.

In this article, I wish only to draw attention to one such inherited, modern practice: the seven- or eight-period school day with the multitude of subjects we teach during those periods. If we are to have eight periods, it seems to follow (though in fact it doesn’t) that we should teach eight subjects. Just as we were taught within the 100-point/ABCDF/4.0 grading matrix, so we were all patterned with the seven- or eight-period school day and often attended classes for a dozen discrete subjects in a given year. Sound familiar? It is so familiar, in fact, that we rarely question it. But should we divide the school day (say from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.) into eight periods? And if eight periods, should we teach eight discrete subjects – or perhaps even 12?

In The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Lewis writes in a 1958 letter to a friend: “You seem to be doing a pretty wide curriculum; too wide in my opinion. All schools, both here and in America, ought to teach far fewer subjects and
teach them far better.” In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis unfolds his thinking about the wide curriculum while remembering his “junior high” teacher whom the students called Smewgy:

In those days a boy on the classical side officially did almost nothing but classics. I think this was wise; the greatest service we can do to education today is to teach fewer subjects. No one has time to do more than a very few things well before he is twenty, and when we force a boy to be a mediocrity in a dozen subjects we destroy his standards, perhaps for life. Smewgy taught us Latin and Greek, but everything else came in incidentally. The books I liked best under his teaching were Horace’s *Odes*, *Aeneid IV*, and Euripides’ *Bacchae*. I had always in one sense “liked” my classical work, but hitherto this had only been the pleasure that everyone feels in mastering a craft.

In the same autobiography, Lewis also details his three-year study during his “high school” years with the retired Scottish schoolmaster W.T. Kirkpatrick whom he called the Great Knock. Lewis studied three main subjects with him: Latin, Greek and English classics. This focused study of course led Lewis into many great works of history, literature, poetry and philosophy. And through the dialectical teaching of the Great Knock he also learned logic, dialectic and writing, for the Great Knock required of Lewis evidence and reason for any statement he uttered. What Lewis studied merely “incidentally” thus turned out to be, in fact, quite significant.

Lewis in effect argues for a narrow, focused curriculum – following the dictum of multum non multa (much not many). He says that the greatest change or service we could make to modern education would be to teach fewer subjects. Really? Is this the greatest thing we can do? Does he really mean this? If we believe he means it, do we believe it to be true?

If we are clear-eyed about our curriculum, we must confess to teaching many subjects indeed: Bible, phonics, spelling, reading, handwriting, history, language arts, literature, math, science, foreign language, logic, rhetoric, theology, art, music, electives. One colleague of mine (an academic dean) reported that he discovered that students in his grammar school appeared to be tracking and studying in 13 separate domains or disciplines. In American K-12 education, we are quite comfortable with many over much; we skim more than we dive.

Given Lewis’ credentials and his widespread respect in the present renewal of classical education, should we not think deeply about his suggestion to teach fewer subjects? His argument is brief and simple: Studying too many subjects will destroy a student’s standards for what an education should be and thereby enforce a resignation to mediocrity. Mediocrity will become normalized and that to which the student will be content to attain. A student may become aware of this enforced mediocrity at some point and realize he is dabbling and being required to dabble, for he has time for nothing else. Worse, a student may not become aware of this dabbling and think that this, after all, is a good education. What student, marching forward in 12 different subjects over eight periods a day, thinks he will ever master anything? It is his ideal for mastery that is destroyed, perhaps even his imagination for mastery.

We can try to defend our wide curriculum, however. There is so much with which students should be familiar. This is the time to give them breadth and wide exposure – let them sample dishes from the banqueting table! Later they can choose to go deeper with what they like (ostensibly at college). Note that Lewis reverses this claim, saying essentially that breadth will come through depth (or focus). The wide comes via the narrow, not the narrow via the wide. The open arms don’t lead to the embrace; rather it is the embrace of love that leads one to embrace yet another lovely thing, and then another.

Clearly this is another paradox of learning: Focus narrowly and love one thing, and the wide world will open up to you. Master one thing, and you find that you
have mastered others and acquired a taste for mastery. Lewis puts it this way: “Smewgy taught us Latin and Greek, but everything else came in incidentally.” I think perhaps our (American) instinct to manage all of a student’s education leads many of us to be quite nervous about any important learning “coming in incidentally.” Are we not more comfortable specifying all that must be learned with a named subject, assigned teacher (preferably with specialized training) and dedicated class periods? This is not how C. S. Lewis was educated. In describing his education with Kirkpatrick, Lewis notes how he was led (and then permitted) to read all manner of English literature, most of it on his own. The focus and mastery of his studies in Latin, Greek and English led him on a passionate ongoing journey of reading, study, conversation and contemplation which in turn helped him to earn a scholarship to Oxford.

Finally, we may object, but this was C. S. Lewis. “Certainly,” we might say, “we should not compare the education given to a genius-level academic like Lewis – nor the education he recommends – to the kind of education we are seeking to give the average American child.” Yet Lewis nowhere singles himself out as the uniquely gifted student; he describes himself as inquisitive and studious, but also as sometimes dark and pessimistic. He was tutored for three years by a competent teacher (Kirkpatrick), a noteworthy privilege, but interestingly this tutor-student relationship is similar to what many competent homeschooling moms are providing for thousands of students today.

Even if Lewis was that one-in-a-thousand kind of student, does that mean teaching fewer subjects far better would not help the average student, as well? Will only gifted students suffer from the forced mediocrity and ruined standards resulting from teaching a dozen subjects? If his suggestion is unworkable, is it his very genius that leads him to make an unworkable, unwise suggestion about education? I do not think that is likely. I think it is more likely that what Lewis recommends as best for him is best for all of us, as well.

To achieve what is best in athletics, school or life generally, we learn to note and heed limits and to order things according to their nature. Lewis reminds us that educators should learn the difference between too little and too much, the dance between breadth and depth, the relationship of quality to quantity in our curriculum.

I have said nothing about just how we might implement Lewis’ advice, nor have I room to do so here. That question is vitally important, but nonetheless a comparatively secondary matter. Of primary importance is whether we think Lewis is right. If he is, then we must begin the hard work of making changes to our current model. We must learn and determine how to teach far fewer subjects far better and how to flee from mediocrity. We must also learn to trust the deep embrace of sustained study along with the incidental learning that it spawns.
In his famous commencement address to the graduates of Kenyon College in 2005, David Foster Wallace begins with a wry, beautiful image of two generations of fish. One day two young fish are swimming along and happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way. The older fish nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” The two young fish continue swimming on their way for a bit, and eventually one of them looks over at the other and asks, “What is water?”

The point is that the younger fish are living in water, breathing the water, saturated by the water and acclimated to the water such that they don’t even realize the medium within which they move. The older fish, who perhaps has breached the surface or has been the temporary prize of a catch-and-release fisherman, knows a larger metaphysics. He has been to the edge and seen. He knows how to recognize – and analyze – the water.

Remember the old days of the programmable VCR? My dad eventually learned how to use it, but my brother and I, both agile young pre-teens, figured it out under pressure in about three minutes, a full five minutes before the Armie movie marathon we were dying to record teed up on the VHF dial. We were swimming in the earliest rising waters of the technology tide, and while my father
was savvy enough with technologies of his time, we were beginning to live and breathe in the technologies of ours. By the time we went to college, the pace had accelerated. My freshman colloquy in 1991 involved reading and discussing eight books; my brother’s, in 1994 at the same college, involved no books, but rather a sweeping tutorial on how to use Netscape, message boards and Eudora.

Now that I’m a middle-aged fish, the saturation of electronic technology in our general culture reminds me of that water. Electronic technology feels increasingly like our natural medium, a medium intimately connected to our ideas about progress, convenience, the narrative that new is indeed improved, and even our story of how to live the Good Life. It permeates nearly all aspects of our existence, and we are becoming increasingly numb to its sensible parameters and boundaries in direct proportion to its familiarity and ubiquity.

The challenge is that the rising water is also developing a sort of riptide. There is a constant pull, born of economics and social implications, out into the sea of electronic technology, where the sky is wide open and the depths are unplumbed. Out there we are free to move in any direction we want without fear of running aground: it’s all possibility. And yet, there are eyes and entities below the surface studying our moves. Some of them are sharks, and nearly all of them are hungry.

It is important to note that in addition to carrying one out to sea at a rapid rate, riptides also limit one’s ability to move freely. The radius of our vision about electronic technology has, for a variety of reasons, become akin to the radius of the selfie. The reference points about electronic technology increasingly orient inwards, to ourselves and our desires, rather than outward to the best ways we could be leveraging these for the love of our neighbors. Voices in public discourse, education and business, not to mention the private voices of parents concerned for their children’s economic future, speak increasingly about the fear of not keeping up, the fear of not being prepared, the necessity of being ready for the projected job market, the vital online image we must put out there for public display. We use technology to increase our convenience. Amazon, Basecamp, Chromebooks, Drive, Echo, Facebook, Google and the rest of the alphabet give us ways of shopping, collaborating, organizing and gathering information. While all this seems to make life easier, all the while these technologies are gathering vast amounts of information about us, information that becomes monetized and potentially, if you ever run for office or apply for a job, weaponized. We invite microphones into our living rooms and our pockets, cameras into our refrigerators and trackers into our car keys. The tags from these are used to build bubbles of shopping and news around us, echo chambers specifically targeted to our wants, all the while helping us to forget that there’s a medium moving us in particular directions. The medium used to be the message; now it’s also the massage. While futurists continue to rave about The Singularity – now a scant 20 years away! – the more mundane, perhaps even banal push is for cars that drive themselves, controlled by artificial intelligence, GPS and algorithms. What could possibly go wrong?

Before the darkness closes in on this article, I want to be clear that not everything about electronic technology is bad. For all the challenges that come with our moment, there are myriad benefits. I’m typing this article on a laptop using Word, a process that would take me far longer to complete (not to mention edit and submit) if I worked by pencil and paper alone. I used several search engines to gather information before writing, and I used electronic media to store my thoughts ahead of time. I took a break from writing this paragraph to help a homeschooled son use Khan Academy to assess his basic understanding of Algebra, and my younger two are upstairs building a Lego robot, practicing their engineering and logic. This afternoon I will use email and a cellphone with GPS to help some fellow homeschoolers access a discussion group. I checked the church bulletin online this morning to see who needs what for the most recent school drive. These are just my personal references from the past couple of hours, the radius of my own tech selfie. There also are far larger structures, supports and systems at work keeping the lights on, the fridge cooling, the waves
flowing to carry our calls and our communications back and forth that knit my community to yours.

In trying to make sense of all this, I fall back on my training. As a science teacher, I know that applied knowledge always offers a mixed return of benefits and challenges. I also know that the thing to do once the data has been gathered is to proceed with the analysis: find the patterns, trace the relationships and the connections, discern the big picture. In scientific investigations, one set of (temporary) conclusions always leads to more questions. What is the next layer up or in? How does this situate or relate to that? What is the larger picture? These are the questions that define and order the depths of the process, couched within the larger context of metaphysics. If this is God’s order, and these are the things that are seen, to what end (telos) are they oriented?

With this in mind, I would like to suggest that the most important thing we can do as classical Christian educators about electronic technology is not to “find solutions.” Not yet. We have plenty of data on electronic technology’s use, and on its effects both intended and unintended. The voices out there push, alternate and overlap, telling us to use it more, proceed with caution or back off entirely before the sky falls. In the midst of these competing voices, it seems like the prudent thing to do is to take a breath, put all the points on the table and focus first on formulating the right questions. I would argue that the questions we should start with are the ones that help us perceive the water. After that, we can move into some specifics about how to put the water around us to use according to our telos. Consider, for example, the following questions:

1. **What is technology?** The root of the term is the Greek word techne which means craft, craftsmanship or art. How does our use of the term “technology” reflect that root? Do we use this term to refer only to electronic technology, or do we also consider technologies like the pen, the book, the rake, the shovel and the scissors? These technologies also are formative in their use, requiring discipline and technique, as well as insight into how to use them well.

2. **What is our narrative around technology?** How do we talk about technology? Do our actions match our words regarding technology in our schools? Does our narrative around and application of technologies fit with our goals and mission? Students have a remarkable capacity to see right through anything inconsistent – it is a survival skill of youth. If what we say and what we do are not in alignment, the narrative will be muddled and, at the least, we will lose credibility. At the worst, we could lose them entirely.

3. **Do we balance our approach to electronic technologies by teaching students not only how to use technology, but also how technology is using them?** Jaron Lanier, Internet and virtual reality pioneer, brought this question to the forefront in his book You Are Not a Gadget. Now that the “internet of things” is up and running, teaching students how to use platforms such as Word or Excel must also include teaching students how these platforms are gathering data on them. Do we overtly show students that using Google docs, a convenient form of collaboration and storage, also allows Google to collect information on when and how you use its platform? Do we overtly educate students about cookies, the monetization of data or the experiments that Facebook runs on its users to manipulate their emotions? Do we show students how writers of video games, such as Fortnite, are deliberately tapping their dopamine levels? Without this kind of education, we are only telling part of the story. Awareness of these facts is important and should influence the decisions that our students make online, decisions that can have lasting repercussions on their professional and personal lives.

4. **How do we reform the formers?** In what ways do we demonstrate virtue and vice in our own technology use, especially in front of children? How should we live? If there is a gap between our answer to that question and our current practices, how can we move from where we are to where we should be?
5. **While these are questions we all should ask, the answers to these questions will vary.** We all work with our own strategic plans, our own constituencies, our own communities, each of which has a unique set of circumstances, desires, fears and resources. Even if we share a common philosophical framework as we ask these questions, the differences between our answers to them may be profound based on the situations we face on the ground.

Whatever we discover as we seek to understand the technological water in which we are swimming, it is important to remember that riptides are strong. If you fight one head on, you will tire yourself out and be swept out to sea. The solution to being caught in a riptide is to swim parallel to the shore – not against the current, but perpendicular to it. That draws you out of the current and gives you a landmark to swim toward once you are no longer being swept out to sea. I think there is an apt analogy here: The first step is to keep your eyes on land, the solid ground, the principles. Then, using a good set of questions, swim laterally. Asking the right questions provides the ability to get out of the current as you orient yourself to a fixed point on land. The point towards which you swim after you have escaped the riptide’s pull is up to the swimmer. As you swim toward that point, though, remember the sky above, the depths below and the value of the sidestroke: It can be a long way to where you want to go, so use a resting stroke to keep from tiring out on the way.

In other words, classically speaking, festina lente.
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