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A journal for restless minds

Colloquī *: to discuss*

Elementary, My Dear, Or Is It?

From ignorance to knowledge and retreat

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

Incognizant of Cognizance

The obvious is never obvious to the oblivious

With the miasma of issues now confronting us, there is one that begs far greater attention than any sidebar or casual remark yet often enough garners far less than either. In large measure, such an issue can be said to be old news, certainly nothing new considering the passage of time and distorted history; only now has it been dreadfully redefined and monstrously reimagined, studiously ignoring ancestry and the cancellation of Socrates¹. Perhaps it was Chesterton who so singularly declared the obvious: "It is simply the reversal and obstruction of a perfectly ordinary human function; and it is this human function, like the feeding of an infant, that lies behind all its subsequent developments in what we call education. Only the educationists do not start with the simple fact of the child; they start with all the complicated claims of their own political factions or fashionable theories, and end by practically leaving out the simple thing from which the whole institution sprang."²



Now the point upon which I propose to impale myself has long ago corroded, rubbed dull over generations of pedagogical abuse. "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,"³ a near perfect metaphor of the multi-generational rot and decay now part and parcel of elementary pedagogy, though perhaps "the blind leading the blind leading the blind" the more accurate prescription. Objective reality betrays subjective "truth": clutches of chattering chalkies have been and continue to be released from the molting feather coop each half-decade for more than a half-century, each knowing less but preening and clucking more than the preceding nattering know-nothing know-it-alls, thus the cycle recycles in its downward spiral into the abyssal crawl of meaninglessness. Simply put, educating educators educates merely in the how (*do*), not the what (*be*). A common elementary educator's curriculum includes such topics as: child devel-

opment, assessment, classroom management, teaching methods, and instructional planning; of course, this must be followed by a period of "student teaching" which is, in and of itself, illustrative of the blind leading the blind. Commonsense and pedagogical tradition calls for a teacher to teach students, not the inverse. "Practice teaching" would make more sense, but these days, any sense is nonsense, "simply the reversal and obstruction of a perfectly ordinary human function." The obvious result: would-be educators are "educated" in the "arts and sciences" of pedagogy, not in the subject knowledge to be imparted to their future students. While knowledge may be the arrow notched in the educator's bow, it is sorely bent and crooked, missing tail feathers, suction head to suck the marrow but do no harm to tender mercies, thus guaranteed to miss whatever targets sit before them no matter how far-fetched the rawhide might be stretched.

As Thomas Sowell writes, "Ideas are everywhere, but knowledge is rare. Even a so-called 'knowledgeable' person usually has solid knowledge only within some special area, representing a tiny fraction of the whole spectrum of human concerns. Humorist Will Rogers said, 'Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects.'" For educators then, we have generations knowledgeable in the narrow "pedagogical arts and sciences" specifically, but utterly ignorant in commonsense and mundane knowledge⁴ pedagogically.

Physicists have determined that even the most solid and heavy mass of matter we see is mostly empty space. But at the submicroscopic level, specks of matter scattered through a vast emptiness have such incredible density and weight, and are linked to one another by such powerful forces, that together they produce all the properties of concrete, cast iron and solid rock. In much the same way, specks of knowledge are scattered through a vast emptiness of ignorance, and everything depends upon how solid the individual specks of knowledge are, and on how powerfully linked and coordinated they are with one another. The vast spaces of ignorance do not prevent the specks of knowledge from forming a solid structure, though sufficient *misunder-*

standing can disintegrate it in much the same way that radioactive atomic structures can disintegrate (uranium into lead) or even explode.⁵

Thomas Sowell, recently now 93 years upon this earth, has been a towering voice of reason and knowledge for more than 60 years, and yet, any mention of him most often draws no recognition of either himself or his prodigious volume of work. That he is a black man is, or ought to be, of no consequence or intellectual significance; the fact that he is of great consequence and even greater significance as a human being of magnificent achievement obliges one to ignore the surface superficiality of color. For myself, I cannot resist the truth which he so eloquently insists.

Although the phrase “ignorant savage” may be virtually self-contradictory, it is a common conception, and one with a certain basis. The savage is wholly lacking in a narrowly specific kind of knowledge: abstract, systematized, knowledge of the sort generally taught in schools. Considering the enormous range of human knowledge, from intimate personal knowledge of specific individuals to the complexities of organization and the subtleties of feelings, it is remarkable that one speck in this firmament should be the sole determinant of whether someone is considered knowledgeable or ignorant *in general*. Yet it is a fact of life that an unlettered peasant is considered ignorant, however much he may know about nature and man, and a Ph.D. is never considered ignorant, however barren his mind might be outside his narrow specialty and however little he grasps about human feelings or social complexities. We do sometimes refer to a “learned fool,” but the notion of a “fool” implies deficiencies in the *reasoning* process (so that one is easily deceived or fooled), whereas it may actually be *knowledge* that is lacking, so that the “learned” person has simply not learned enough outside a certain sliver of human experience.

The point here is not simply to deplore the use of certain words. The point is to avoid having our own discussion of knowledge drastically shrunk, arbitrarily, and virtually without our realizing what is happening. We need to consider the full breadth of knowledge and its depth as well. That is, we need to consider not only how much we know, but how well we know it.⁶

As those who regularly slog through these Pauline epistles are well aware, reading is more than a quiet moment with a book, much more than a research project to verify a fact or two; neither is it foraging for a tasty quip

or quote to use within an essay—though I often discover a word or paragraph or two worth repeating—it is a passionate love affair, an often-pleasant sojourn into the mind of another. As I have often told a guest: my books are like children, I could not bear to part with a single volume, though I must confess to having favorites. Literature, especially, captivates and enthralls me; I quite *literally* lose myself in the words behind the cover.

Though I spend much of my waking hours exercising my fingers on a keyboard, staring at the words I write as they appear and travel from left to right across a computer screen, I must admit to the rather injudicious habit of printing everything I write, often printing pages after changing but a single word. Words are meant to be inked on sheets of vellum, then held reverently in the hand; the slightest error in spelling or grammar cleverly hiding among the electric bits and blots, are embarrassed when so cruelly exposed, viciously unmasked when found out upon the printed page. The truth, no digital impression satisfies the soul as does a vellum leaf permanently tattooed with words.

Sadly, “Kids aren’t hooked on books anymore. They’re wired instead.” So writes my friend, Michael Dennis Cassity to begin a marvelous recounting of his four decades of teaching English, “most of those years in a slower and quieter world bereft of these electronics,”

and I wonder how increasingly difficult it must be for teachers today to compete against these unbroken waves of technology, each generation of which demands more of their students’ time, attention, and interest—becoming, finally, an end in itself: our primary social connection to each other is through our computers and other cyberworld devices. The new world of instant sharing of ideas across multiple continents is a spectacular renaissance, but it needn’t stifle what it means to be human. We have not yet learned how to use technology to the extent that it does not use us. It is both fabulous and scary.

I still believe that the strongest single binding cultural tie is the narrative, a story that can be passed from one generation to the next. A story feeds the soul, transforms the mind, nourishes the imagination. A story on paper, in books they hold in their hands and read, a story they listen to and share together—and in this new technological world of ours, a story or an idea linked instantly with anyone, anywhere.

I could not have said it better; fortunately, Michael did, and so it is as he has written. "Teaching and learning are not primarily matters of *doing*. They are first matters of *being*. The new teacher who asks *What am I to do?* is really asking for a convenient, hopefully effective, way to teach a lesson. But he or she is well on the way to becoming what I call a 'practitioner' instead of a teacher."

And although the craft of teaching literature can be learned by putting these tactical models to use as a practitioner, only teachers disciplined to *be* literature teachers will ever have any lasting and meaningful success in matters of *doing*. The fundamental question is this: *What am I to be?* This may seem a subtle abstraction. So let me explain this idea with these examples: The teacher who *is* a lover of literature can help others to be lovers of literature. The teacher who *is* an observer and listener will come to understand that each day brings its stories. The teacher who reads with a degree of enthusiasm and intensity *is* a teacher who infects others to develop the same habits. The teacher who *is* responsive can expect a life of sharing. The teacher who *is* a learner understands that it is not particular systems or strategies that teach, but the desire to know. The teacher who *is* unafraid to trust his honest reactions to literature will value the novelty of others' responses. The teacher who *is* a risk-taker will instill the same sense of adventure in students.⁷

Obviously—at least I believe it obvious—Michael and I share similar views on what it means to *be* a teacher. Whether it is teaching literature or language, mathematics or science, history, civics, or geography, it is the *being* not the *doing* that is essential to learning. For the most part, over the latter half of the twentieth century and the two decades of the twenty-first, the education hatcheries have produced practitioners, not teachers, and our children have dearly paid the price. Practitioners are merely the byproduct of "Practice Teaching" which, in the end, they may never escape the exercise.

A more recent addition to the practitioner-in-training handbook is the sugar-coated, heart-warming, equity-for-all cult fiction, codenamed Social Justice. Social Justice also comes under the guises of an ever-shifting set of aliases: "*Critical Race Theory*," "*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training*," "*Transformative Social Emotional Learning*," etc., etc., etc. Such ideological mind-numbing programs have become pervasive, pushed, prodded, and promoted by

progressive teachers' unions and socialist organizations, and imposed by school boards drunk from socialist engineered Kool-Aid.

Pre-pandemic Social Justice programs remained well below the radar for parents whose children attend public schools. As pandemic-mandated online learning became the norm and parents gained heretofore unprecedented classroom access, the uncontrolled Social Justice virus was revealed, and, just as quickly, vehemently reviled. The reason for such revulsion is easy to understand: Social Justice, by any other name is dehumanizing, it indoctrinates, inculcating young children to see each other as oppressor (white) and oppressed (black or brown or any other color other than oppressor white). Racism is the knife and hatred the flame that maims and scars, too often kills the innocence of youth; there is nothing good or wholesome that may come of them.

Parents and advocates are now speaking out, angrily and loudly, demanding the removal of Social Justice propaganda from their children's classrooms; school boards and teachers' unions have yet to turn on their surgically indoctrinated hearing aids. Any response, beyond stoic silence, is straight out of the Communist playbook. In 1943, the following directive was issued from Party headquarters to all Communists in the United States: "When certain obstructionists become too irritating, label them after suitable buildups, as fascist or Nazi or anti-Semitic, and use the prestige of anti-fascist and tolerance organizations to discredit them. In the public mind constantly associate those who oppose us with those names which already have a bad smell. The association will, after enough repetition, become fact in the public mind." There is nothing new under the sun.

Tragically, removal of Social Justice from classrooms will only serve to cleanse the surface, for still the blind lead the blind. Pedagogical practitioners taught by pedagogical practitioners taught by pedagogical practitioners are culpably ignorant and blind to any truth not of their own progressive indoctrination, thus, they are incapable of seeing the awful offal poisoning their students' minds.

"Social Justice is coming after science," so writes Emily Morales, "in a few short years it is likely your children's science textbook will bear no semblance to your own."

Having shred the humanities to ribbons – to an unrecognizable shell of what they once were – Justice’s lust for revisionism *remains* unsatiated. Sadly, while the more “temperate” among us passively watched the progressive throng tear down monuments to confederate generals, we *continued* in sinful acquiescence as founding fathers found their way in the mob’s malevolent crosshairs. The toppling and defacing of historical physical symbols of oppression was but the beginning – as in typical totalitarian fashion, what soon followed was *history* itself undergoing a rebranding. In the frenzied vortex of revisionism, definitions have changed, formerly recognized heroes have become villainized, and even official dates of founding have shifted (1776 to 1619). At *present*, your child’s history textbook likely does not resemble the anachronistic one you read; in the *near future*, neither will their science.

Until a few years ago, many of us in the field of science likely felt our discipline would be safe from savage Justice. “After all,” we may have opined, “the recounting of *history* is often vulnerable to the lenses of subjectivity – we know that it is typically the ‘winners’ who write history.” Or perhaps we believed because our respective disciplines are established on the bedrock of a solid epistemology – one built on making objective observations, generating hypotheses, putting them to the test, and demanding reproducibility of results – the subjectivism in Social Justice would have no power over the objectivism in science. As you will discover, this view is naïve.

To emphasize what may at first appear to be mere naivete, Morales cites from an editorial written by Soviet immigrant Dr. Anna Krylov for *The Journal of Physical Chemistry* in which Dr. Krylov acknowledges “the signs of totalitarianism now forcing its way into the *sciences* under the auspices of Social Justice (more specifically, *diversity*, *equity*, and *inclusion*).” In her editorial, she presents an historical narrative of Donetsk, the industrial city where she grew up and how totalitarianism ravaged the town. Originally named Hughesovka (Yuzovka) after Welsh industrialist John Hughes, the city was renamed because the Bolshevik commissars deemed the founder “... representative of the hostile class of oppressors and a Westerner.”

Prior to Trotsky’s cancellation, the city enjoyed the name Trotsk for but a few short months. In 1924, with Stalin as the totalitarians darling the city was renamed Stalino, but alas when the Communist party he led underwent a reckoning for its campaign of terror and the murder of millions of citizens, Stalin was canceled, and

the city was then named after the river Severeckii Donets.

Dr. Krylov clearly draws parallels between the ideological purging demanded by Soviet revolutionaries and the Social Justice mob today. In her editorial she writes,

...today we are told that racism, patriarchy, misogyny, and other reprehensible ideas are encoded in scientific terms, names of equations, and in plain English words ... and in order to build a better world and to address societal inequalities, we need to purge our [scientific] literature of the names of people whose personal records are not up to the high standards of the self-anointed bearers of the new truth, the Elect.

These “Elect” of course are now directing education practitioners to rewrite their syllabi and change the way they instruct and speak in the classroom. She offers two examples of diversity and inclusion statements obeisant grovelers for tenure can include in their syllabus. One recommended statement specifically for use in science curricula reads:

“In an ideal world, science would be objective. However, much of science is subjective and is historically built on a small subset of privileged voices. I acknowledge that the readings for this course...were authored by white men.”

If the foregoing statement is insufficiently woke, the uber-woke practitioner can add:

“I acknowledge that it is possible that there may be both overt and covert biases in the material due to the lens with which it was written, even though the material is primarily of a scientific nature. Integrating a diverse set of experiences is important for a more comprehensive understanding of science.”

“Not satisfied with making a mockery of the humanities,” Morales writes, “the Social Justice czars not only want to change the way science teachers teach, they now have their sights on revising science itself, so as to ‘decenter Whiteness’ as a part of facilitating antiracist pedagogy.” She notes that with the tacit and explicit approval of people in science, there is growing recognition that “there are perils with immortalizing the inventors of theories, methods, instruments, mathematical laws and models by naming these after them.”

If history tells us anything, however, a circumspect view to *future* nomenclature will not quell the demands for “justice” and decolonization from Social Justice ideologues. Krylov points out that in many schools already, physics classes have replaced teaching “Newton’s Laws” with the “three fundamental laws of physics.” Apparently, with the new standard for decentering whiteness and decolonizing the curriculum, the Englishman has to go. Newton is but an initiation point.

With science having its origins in Christianized Western Europe and enjoying consolidation as a very legitimate enterprise with the founding of the Royal Society in England in the mid-17th century, the Social Justice warlords will have their work cut out for them. Imagine the careers that could be built for those who will faithfully scrub the textbooks clean of the offensive units of *watt* (denoting power), *joule* (energy), *Dalton* (mass), *coulomb* (electric charge), *pascal* and *torr* (pressure), and *kelvin* (temperature) to literally name a few.

In addition to the oppressive units, it will take a rather large antiracist bureaucracy to wipe the names of the oppressive patriarchy from scientific theories and laws: *Archimedes* (principle of buoyancy), *Newton* (laws of motion), *Boyle*, *Charles*, *Gay-Lussac*, and *Avogadro* (various gas laws), *Hooke* (laws governing springs), *Dalton* (atomic theory), and *Kepler* (laws of planetary motion), again to name but a few.

From this sampling, it is obvious the ambitious decolonization of the science curriculum - starting with seemingly innocent “suggestions” to make classrooms more inclusive – will prove disastrous. Decolonization efforts demanding the wholesale expunging of thousands of words (names) from the science lexicon will significantly impact our ability to even communicate science information. Consider Orwell’s eerie statement that Krylov opens her own article with regarding the destruction of words from 1984:

“It’s a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.”

The destruction of words is the destruction of the ability to *think*. We best heed the warnings from Dr. Krylov: “Normalizing ideological intrusion into science . . . will cost us dearly. We cannot afford it.” Parents, save your textbooks, you may need them to teach your children science.⁸

Beneath the mass production of “practical” pedagogy lies an insidious dehumanizing ideology: Transhuman-

ism⁹. I do not mean to unnecessarily discriminate here by narrowing the focus to such an esoteric subject, rather, I mean to use it as vehicle for a broader explication as first mentioned by C.S. Lewis in “*The Abolition of Man*”. Transhumanism comes in many forms, from transgenderism to artificial intelligence, enhanced bionics to robotics and cyborg technologies, artificial wombs to the creation of super-babies, all have two things in common: an atheistic god-complex and the cruel dehumanization of *homo sapiens*, Man; and as the song goes, “you can’t have one without the other.” This is no longer science fiction; it is science reality, now. Lewis begins with an apology: “I have chosen this story as my point of departure in order to make it clear that I do not wish to disparage all that is really beneficial in the process described as ‘Man’s conquest’, much less all the real devotion and self-sacrifice that has gone to make it possible. But having done so I must proceed to analyse this conception a little more closely. In what sense is Man the possessor of increasing power over Nature?”

Let us consider three typical examples: the aeroplane, the wireless, and the contraceptive. In a civilized community, in peace-time, anyone who can pay for them may use these things. But it cannot strictly be said that when he does so he is exercising his own proper and individual power over Nature. If I pay you to carry me, I am not therefore myself a strong man. Any or all of the three things I have mentioned can be withheld from some men by other men—by those who sell, or those who allow the sale, or those who own the sources of production, or those who make the goods. What we call Man’s power is, in reality, a power possessed by some men which they may, or may not, allow other men to profit by. Again, as regards the powers manifested in the aeroplane or the wireless, Man is as much the patient or subject as the possessor, since he is the target both for bombs and for propaganda. And as regards contraceptives, there is a paradoxical, negative sense in which all possible future generations are the patients or subjects of a power wielded by those already alive. By contraception simply, they are denied existence; by contraception used as a means of selective breeding, they are, without their concurring voice, made to be what one generation, for its own reasons, may choose to prefer. From this point of view, what we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.¹⁰

What Lewis saw clearly was the dehumanization of Man, human beings cultivated for technocratic control,

just as Huxley had described a dozen years earlier (1932) in his social science fiction novel *Brave New World*. Set in a futuristic World State, whose citizens are environmentally engineered into an intelligence-based social hierarchy, the novel anticipated huge scientific advancements in reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation and classical conditioning. Much of Huxley's imaginative dystopia have become, are now very, very real.

In a recent essay on transhumanism, Joe Allen writes, "Even if authorities truly believe their dehumanizing programs are for our own good, there's scant evidence that our betters understand what our best interests are. A quick survey of the present situation is a grim predictor of the future: addictive smartphones, robotic warehouses, smart city surveillance states, algorithmic mate-sorting, corporate opioids, adolescent hormone-blockers—it's as if we're subjects of a misguided experiment." The author goes on to explain one "well-funded effort to create digital models of babies' brains, and then adapt actual baby brains to idealized digital models." Three questions: Who is doing the research? On whom? To what end? The author replies: "Unaccountable experts. On us. For the benefits of elites." More specifically, the research (i.e., surveillance) code-named "The First 1000 Days" program is being conducted (note the present tense) by well-funded, DARPA¹¹-connected, WEF¹²-sanctioned, Silicon Valley-empowered global health experts on as many babies as they can slip on a smart jumpsuit (explained in the article). "On its face, Wellcome Leap's¹³ purpose appears to improve life outcomes for at-risk children who may otherwise lack self-control." Two examples illustrate what this technocratic control process looks like on a large or global scale: "online education and the Amazon Fulfillment Center—where your fulfillment is maximized by algorithms."

In the wake of COVID-19, schoolchildren were handed fresh laptops, told to watch instructional videos, forced to interact via monitored apps, and given digital standardized test to track their progress. For years, software developers and penny-pinching school administrators had pushed for these cheap, efficient, e-learning models. Now, even as pandemic fears subside, many schools are ramping up their online offerings.

Are laptops the best vehicle for a well-rounded education?

You're missing the bigger picture: Are computers more

compliant than teachers or not? And more importantly, are they more profitable? If nothing else, online education is preparing young people for life in the Amazon Fulfillment Center.

Jeff Bezos is famous for many things: building *swole*¹⁴ biceps, crushing local businesses across the world, slipping Alexa eavesdropping software into 100 million devices, and emerging from Covid lockdowns as history's richest man.

His most enduring mark may be creating a job environment where every worker's actions are constantly surveilled from multiple angles. The Amazon Fulfillment Center is basically a "smart jumpsuit" writ large. Amazon's overall social organization is dictated by AI algorithms, from the hiring process to warehouse management to the "deactivation" of inefficient workers.

Sounds great on paper—at least if you read in 1's and 0's. But as one flesh-and-blood former employee, who got canned by a chatbot, told *Bloomberg*. "Whenever there's an issue, there's no support. It's just you against the machine, so you don't even try."¹⁵

Dehumanization is real, very real. It is important to recognize that dehumanization has its roots at the beginning of the human experience and has played an ever-increasing role in the history of the human race, culminating in the single most destructive dehumanizing event in human history: the Second World War. "More than seventy million people died in the war, most of them civilians. Millions died in combat. Many were burned alive by incendiary bombs and, in the end, nuclear weapons. Millions more were victims of systematic genocide. Dehumanization made much of this carnage possible."

The 1946 Nuremberg doctors' trial was the first of twelve military tribunals held in Germany after the defeat of Germany and Japan. Twenty doctors and three administrators—twenty-two men and a single woman—stood accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. They had participated in Hitler's euthanasia program, in which around 200,000 mentally and physically handicapped people deemed unfit to live were gassed to death, and they performed fiendish medical experiments on thousands of Jewish, Russian, Roma and Polish prisoners.

Principal prosecutor Telford Taylor began his opening statement with these somber words:

The defendants in this case are charged with murders, tortures and other atrocities committed in the name of medical science. The

victims of these crimes are numbered in the hundreds of thousands. A handful only are still alive; a few of the survivors will appear in this courtroom. But most of these miserable victims were slaughtered ... To their murderers, these wretched people were not individuals at all. They came in wholesale lots and were treated worse than animals.

He went on to describe the experiments in detail. Some of these human guinea pigs were deprived of oxygen to simulate high altitude parachute jumps. Others were frozen, infested with malaria, or exposed to mustard gas. Doctors made incisions in their flesh to simulate wounds, inserted pieces of broken glass or wood shavings into them, and then, tying off the blood vessels, introduced bacteria to induce gangrene. Taylor described how men and women were made to drink seawater, were infected with typhus and other deadly diseases, were poisoned and burned with phosphorus, and how medical personnel conscientiously recorded their agonized screams and violent convulsions.

The descriptions in Taylor's narrative are so horrifying that it's easy to overlook what might seem like an insignificant rhetorical flourish: his comment that "these wretched people were ... treated *worse than animals*". But this comment raises a question of deep and fundamental importance. What is it that enables one group of human beings to treat another group as though they were subhuman creatures?

A rough answer isn't hard to come by. Thinking sets the agenda for action, and thinking of humans as less than human paves the way for atrocity. The Nazis were explicit about the status of their victims. They were *Untermenschen*—subhumans—and as such were excluded from the system of moral rights and obligations that bind humankind together. It's wrong to kill a person, but permissible to exterminate a rat. To the Nazis, all the Jews, Gypsies and others were rats: dangerous, disease-carrying rats.¹⁶

Though Smith assesses the Second World War as the most destructive dehumanizing event in human history, he fails to account for, or mention, the dehumanizing effect of nearly seventy-million elective and forced abortions performed since 1970 worldwide. Abortion is the ultimate dehumanizer both for the unwilling unborn child as well as those who have reduced procreation to a selective breeding program as Lewis predicted.

To describe dehumanization solely in terms of its destructive and demented effects fail to fully uncover the

root of such dementia: the atheistic god complex. It is easy, too easy, to ignore or dismiss the transcendent, to convince oneself of the truth of self-creation. Man has been made in the image and likeness of God; God is not made in the image and likeness of man, as many now profess to believe. This delusion is what Lewis so wisely noted: "what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument." Just as "The First 1000 Days" program claims its *raison d'être* to be the improvement of life outcomes for at-risk children—a worthy sounding goal, at least, superficially—at its root lies the overweening hubris of some men over other men. Who decides whose lives are to be "improved" by how much or how little? Who decides what *improvement* means or who are those *at-risk*?

I cannot leave these thoughts without a final word or two from Michael Cassity. It may at first seem oddly out of place given what has come before, but it is a thought that stabs at the heart of the dehumanizing of the human race. Michael writes in Chapter 5, *Books for the Gifted Child?* of the dehumanizing effects that result from categorizing children by perceived giftedness or lack thereof. Such categorization is, to a lesser extent, as misguided and de-formative of young minds as Social Justice, Critical Race Theory, or Transformative Social Emotional Learning for it sets one group apart from others. It divides us, which makes us weaker in the end. As Michael notes during the last half of his teaching career at a California community college, "I had been privileged to work with hundreds of talented, intelligent students—of all ages: Shelley, coming to college twenty years after dropping out of high school in the tenth grade; Kevin, a gas station owner who wanted to pursue studies in engineering; Sophie, a mother of four whose husband abandoned the family several years ago; Dean, who spent the last sixteen years of his formal public schooling in a "pull-out" special education program because his teachers mistook a severe dyslexia for lack of aptitude; and Sean, a student fresh from high school full of promise but with little experience in reading and literature. Each of the above shares something special in common: they are honor students, in Phi Theta Kappa, on the National Dean's List."

Each of these students was once labeled as “average,” “below average,” or “learning disabled.” Shawn went on to be named to the USA Today All-USA Academic Team, one of only twenty students nationally to be so named. All of these students went on to earn post-graduate degrees, two from the University of California, Berkeley.

Michael continues, describing how three eleven-year-olds forced him to reexamine his thinking on the idea of giftedness. “They are not gifted in a conventional sense, but in other ways they have expanded the definition.”

In their *Books for the Gifted Child* (Volume One by Barbara Baskin and Karen Harris; and Volume Two by Paula Hauser and Gail Nelson, 1988) the authors begin, “Our purpose in writing this book is to provide assistance in the selection of books that respond to the special capabilities and promote the intellectual growth of gifted youngsters.”

I have no argument with the idea of “assistance in selecting books,” since that is the kind of business we parents and teachers should promote. We love lists of books. We share lists of books. We listen eagerly when someone tells us about a special book he has just come across—and, if he has a LIST of books, well, all to the better. The Davidson Institute for Talent Development (Reno, Nevada) has compiled a comprehensive bibliography of books and materials for use with gifted education. The Davidson list is scholarly research, not lists of books to share with children; nevertheless many lists of books can be found there. Who can resist somebody’s list? Although I agree we must do everything we can to challenge and nurture the gifted and talented students in our educational systems, I flinch at the prospect that somewhere out there is a list of books which is advertised and marketed as appealing especially to gifted children, a list of books which “promotes the intellectual growth of intellectual youngsters.”

I’m not sure what the authors mean by “intellectual youngster.” I’ve encountered so precious few of that particular variety of student that I wonder if the authors and I are on the same planet. I tend to agree with the eminent British journalist and historian, Paul Johnson, that “intellectual” is more often a pejorative term than a positive one. If by *intellectual* they mean as opposed to *emotional* and *expressive*, I don’t think I’ve seen any at all. If, on the other hand, they mean children who are given to using their faculties of reasoning and judgment more than the average child, I’ve experienced many intellectual children.

I suspect, however, the authors mean something else entirely. They would have us believe that there are

whole groups of very special young people out there (“out there” among the millions of children where Amanda, Brady, and Anthony take their places each day) who need desperately to be stimulated with something MORE than we are giving them, that these particular groups of youngsters are so starved for good literature they require a list just for their *exclusive* use; that the standard fodder offered up in literature classes is stunting their growth. We are betraying their unique birthright; the aging inventory of books in our typical elementary libraries is so empty of challenging literature and so easily filled up with the too conventional recommendations of parents, librarians, teachers, and principals that we are fostering neglect and offering little to promote the “satisfying and productive opportunities of individualization and self-directed learning” so preferred by such youngsters.

Now I like this definition the best, of course, but for a very different reason: I like to think I’ve had whole classes of *non-intellectuals* (whatever that means) in this same predicament. Nearly twenty-five years have gone by since the publication of *Books for the Gifted Child*, enough time to know that while the picture given here reflects the plight of just about every student, the authors Hauser and Nelson would suggest that it is the gifted who more acutely need this kind of attention. Following this logic, why not a Book of Lists for the *Normal Child*? a List for the *Average Child*? Worse yet—a List of Books for the *Ungifted Child*? The lure which drew me in the first place to the ironic title, *Books for the Gifted Child*, beyond an irreverent curiosity, was the *radical* notion that I had an entire class of gifted children described by the authors’ definition above, that gifted children needed “satisfying and productive opportunities of individualization and self-directed learning.”

Maybe I was the doting teacher—like the doting parents Roald Dahl describes in his book *Matilda*:

It’s a funny thing about mothers and fathers. Even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister you could ever imagine, they still think that he or she is wonderful. Some parents go further. They become so blinded by adoration they manage to convince themselves their child has qualities of genius.

Dahl, in his inimitable and irreverent way, pokes fun at the way we label our children. But that’s the point. Parents label, teachers label, and it’s always wrong. Paradoxically, I was at once resisting the elite notion that the truly gifted can be identified—that a special curriculum can be put in place to satisfy just *their* needs—and embracing the more plebeian applications of this same model, that we need that kind of effort in curricular reform to challenge *all* students.

Certainly we need to make sure that those students who demonstrate outstanding abilities are not set adrift in a weak curriculum characterized by unimaginative drills and repetition with only the concession given to talented students an occasional “different” curriculum or acceleration through the easy stuff. But it seems to me that if we educators offered a challenging comprehensive curriculum to all students, we could “differentiate” it to meet the needs of not just our able students but everyone.

Michael goes on to describe *natural differentiation* “which occurs when students, with their individual differences, come together in a classroom,” where “the curriculum can be differentiated through the uses of *acceleration*, *complexity*, *depth*, and *novelty*.”

Although acceleration too often is used to the exclusion of other strategies, it is still a good option for teachers to use with more capable students, just as a slower pacing can be constructive for students having a difficult time with new concepts. In either case, the mix of having all students in the class works to the advantage of all—so long as the curriculum is personally challenging to all.

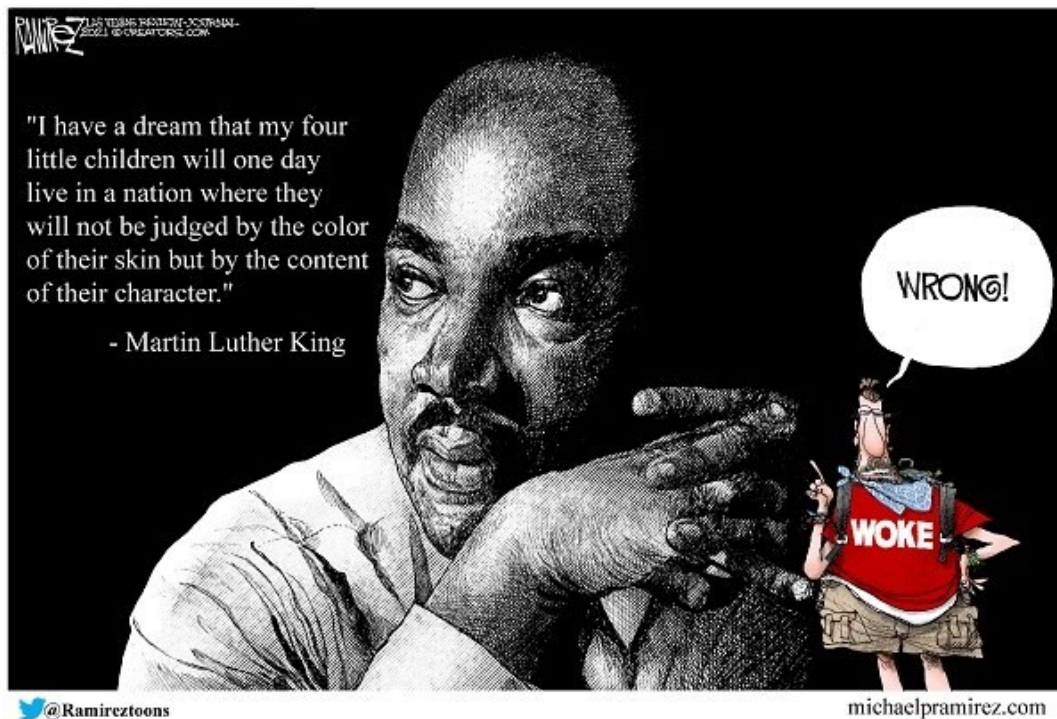
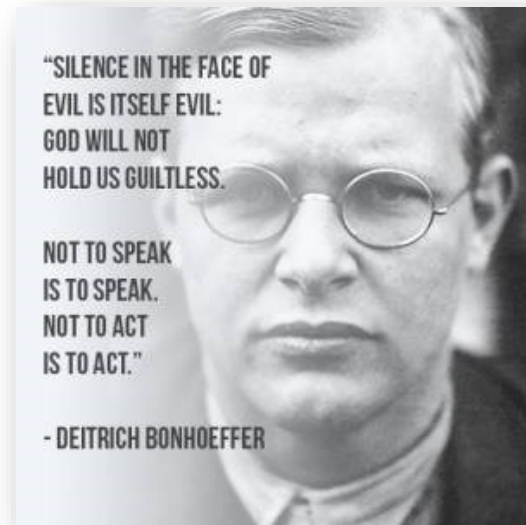
Complexity connects. It provides relationships and bridges, layers, and provides associations among diverse subjects and levels. Studying a topic in *depth* provides an opportunity for the student extend a more a more challenging layer of the curriculum. And *novelty* allows the student to seek original interpretations and to approach the study of a topic in non-traditional ways.

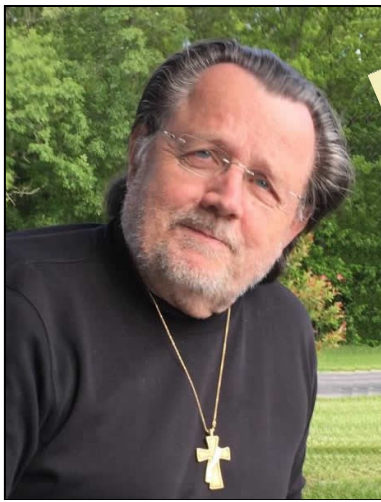
Why do we need to encourage such differentiation? Because there are more gifted students in our classrooms than we expect. We’ve been hoodwinked into accepting standard methods of identification as holy. We’ve swallowed the bait of simplistic labeling and fixed our vision on the few.¹⁷

Herein then lies the pedagogic conundrum: how to escape the dehumanizing self-replicating trap created by generations of progressive pedagogical practitioners and those too long addicted to the Kool-Aid of unbridled power. One cannot extricate oneself from a hole by digging deeper, though tunneling sideways and upward may eventually find a way to freedom. Recognition of the problem is only the first but necessary step. Speaking out, loud and often, is essential. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer so eloquently and heroically wrote: “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

1. Socrates (470-399BC) was a Greek philosopher from Athens, credited as founder of Western philosophy and the first moral philosopher of the Western ethical tradition of thought. As much as the modern world admires Socrates today, he was not popular among many during his lifetime. Athens was a radical democracy that prided itself on freedom of speech. All that Socrates did was talk and yet he was sentenced to death. He was accused of “refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state” and of “corrupting the youth.” Sounds eerily familiar to this post-modern ear.
2. G.K. Chesterton, “Education and Standardisation”, January 12, 1935. Cf. G.K. Chesterton Collected Works, Volume XXXVII, The Illustrated London News 1935-1936 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 20-21.
3. Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás, known in English as George Santayana, was a philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist. Originally from Spain, Santayana was raised and educated in the US from the age of eight and identified himself as an American, although he always retained a valid Spanish passport. At the age of 48, Santayana left his position at Harvard and returned to Europe permanently.
4. Thomas Sowell, “Intellectuals and Society” (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011). “The way the word knowledge is used by many intellectuals often arbitrarily limits what verified information is considered knowledge. ... Someone who is considered to be a ‘knowledgeable’ person usually has a special kind of knowledge—perhaps academic or other kinds of knowledge not widely found in the population at large. Someone who has even more knowledge of more mundane things—plumbing, carpentry, or automobile transmissions, for example—is less likely to be called ‘knowledgeable’ by those intellectuals for whom what they don’t know isn’t knowledge. Although the special kind of knowledge associated with intellectuals is usually valued more, and those who have such knowledge are usually accorded more prestige, it is by no means certain that the kind of knowledge mastered by intellectuals is necessarily more consequential in its effects in the real world.”
5. Thomas Sowell, Ph.D., Hoover Institute Senior Fellow, “Knowledge and Decisions” (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1980), 3-5.
6. *Ibid.*, 8. To add insult to injury, Donald Rumsfeld once famously quipped, “There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don’t know we don’t know.”
7. Michael Dennis Cassity, “What Happens Next? : Celebrating Stories with Children” (Reno, NV: 2012), Preface vii-ix.

8. Emily Morales, "Revisionist Science: Expunging the Privileged Patriarchy from the Annals of Discovery", Salvo: Culture, July 13, 2021.
9. **Transhumanism:** *noun*, the belief or theory that the human race can evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations, especially by means of science and technology.
10. C.S. Lewis, "The Abolition of Man" (London: C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., 1944); cf. The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics, 718-19.
11. **DARPA:** Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the central research and development organization for the US Department of Defense.
12. **WEF:** World Economic Forum, an international organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, that brings together its membership of political and business leaders on a yearly basis to discuss major issues concerning the world political economy.
13. **Wellcome Leap:** (wellcomeleap.org) a U.S.-based non-profit organization founded by the Wellcome Trust to accelerate innovations that benefit global health.
14. **Swole:** *verb*, US dialect form of swollen or swelled; *adjective*, extremely muscular (used especially of a man).
15. Joe Allen, "Cultivated for Technocratic Control: If we want smart cities staffed by super-citizens, health experts need to create super-babies", Salvo, 2021, <https://salvomag.com/post/cultivated-for-technocratic-control>.
16. David Livingstone Smith, "Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others" (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2011).
17. Michael David Cassity, "What Happens Next?", Chapter 5: Books for the Gifted Child, 65-69.





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Deacon Chuck Lanham is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) and a servant of God. He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and has written over 500 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

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