# Contemplation as a Corrective
# to Technological Education

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## Abstract

This paper argues that noetic studies, contemplation, or *theoria* ought to take greater pre-cedence in education than is currently the case. Our modern focus on and fascination with information technologies serves in many ways to thwart and to discourage the cultivation of noetic studies and the pursuit of wisdom in schools. The suggestion throughout this paper is that if the significance of pre-modern and non-technological ways of knowing could be made clear and convincing to education stakeholders, it seems likely that the appropriateness of such pursuits might be recognized, and their practice rendered more frequent as a kind of corrective to technological education.

*Keywords*: technology, ancient philosophy, contemplative studies, education

## Precis

Cet article soutient que les études en « sciences noétiques, » la méditation ou la con-templation  devraient actuellement occuper une plus grande place qu'elles ne le font en matière d'éducation. Aujourd'hui, notre fascination pour les technologies de l'in-formation, et l'importance qu'on y accorde, sert à bien des égards à contrecarrer et à

décourager la culture des études en sciences noétiques et la quête de la sagesse dans les écoles. Cet article s'applique à démontrer, que si l'importance des moyens pré-modernes et non technologiques liés au savoir pouvait être rendue claire et convaincante aux yeux des responsables des politiques éducatives, il semble probable que la pertinence de telles activités pourrait être reconnue, et leur pratique rendue plus fréquente, constituant une sorte de « correction » à l'enseignement technologique.

# Introduction:
# A Recollection of Pre-Technological Ways of Knowing

Today, we often use the word *contemplation* to name any sort of deep thinking. However, the ancient roots of this word are rich with a specific meaning that has largely been forgotten and that merits recollection. It is correct to suppose that contemplation (Lt. *contemplatio*; Gk. *theoria*) names a kind of cognitive activity; however, the ancient sense of this word must be distinguished from critical-analytic reasoning (*ratio*) that is the mainstay of our modern educational efforts. Rather than describing the laborious cognitive activity of a thinking subject standing over against its object (Lt. *ob-iectum*, meaning "thrown against") as it moves from point to point in a line of reasoning, the ancient sense of contemplation refers to *direct*, non-linear knowing; it involves not *separation* but rather the *union* of knower with what is known in the act of seeing (*theoria*); not through the discursiveness of *ratio* but in the immediate apprehension of *intellectus* does the loving gaze of contemplation unify seer with what is seen. And where the discursive thought of *ratio* is indeed a form of work, the passive, receptive gaze of *intellectus* is not; rather, it is an effortless, immediate grasping of (or perhaps being grasped by) what is *seen*. Contemplative knowing is therefore always associated not with toil but instead with leisure. Our language still pays lip service to this important relation between contemplation, leisure, and education inasmuch as our word *school* is derived from the Greek word for leisure (*schole*). In ancient understanding, *intellectus* was always esteemed more highly than *ratio* as the mode of our perfection in genuine happiness (Gk. *eudaimonia*; Lt. *beatitudo*). Aristotle uses the word *immortalization* (*to athanatizein,* 2001, *Nicomachean Ethics,* X.vii.8) to describe the activity of the *intellectus* in relation to what is perfect or best (the *Ariston*); today, however, the significance of the *intellectus* and its contemplative activity has been drastically diminished (if not entirely forgotten) in favour of exclusive attention to the discursive skills of the *ratio*—a fact not lost on contemporary contemplative writers on education like Laurence Freeman (Freeman, 2012, p. 5). Responding to this need, educators like Charles and Patricia Posnett advocate for the incorporation of simple contemplative activities within the school days of elementary children (Posnett, 2013).

Where Latin authors used the terms *ratio* and *intellectus* to distinguish the discursive power of thinking from contemplative cognition, Greek authors spoke in terms

of *dianoia* (thought) and *noesis* (intellection). Dianoetic thought includes the deductive, inductive, and evaluative use of fundamentals or principles (*archai*) discovered by the mind, whether these underlie mathematics, science, the arts, or stand as the basic cultural presuppositions or "first things" of a culture or community. In any case, *dianoia* applies these *archai* downward into the realm of human activity; *noesis*, by contrast, takes up (*anairesis*) all such *archai* towards their true beginning or ground (*Arche*). In this regard, *noesis* names that desire of the *intellectus* not just to see (*theorein*), but to see what *is* in its entirety, and to grasp through its gaze the very ground of all that *is*.

Traditionally, the pursuit of wisdom, or philosophy (Gk. *philia-sophia*: literally "the love of wisdom") has been called the "science of being *qua* being" (Aristotle, 2001, *Metaphysics* IV.ii; 1005a.5), or of the things that are (*ta onta*) due to its character as a noetic activity as opposed to a scientific or dianoetic one. However, the noetic pursuit of wisdom is not the exclusive preserve of philosophers. The *vipassana* meditation of the Buddhist, the *samatha* meditation of the yogin, and the contemplative prayer of the Christian or Muslim practitioner all embody the upward movement (*anairesis*) of the mind towards its ground. Moreover, the activity of the *intellectus* is not to be conceived of as an elite activity. Plato remarks in his *Phaedrus* that lovers of beauty (*philokalos*) relish the noetic movement of the *intellectus*, as do musical souls (*mousikou tinos*) or, for that matter, souls of a loving (*erotikou*) or erotic nature (Plato, 1961, 248d). In short, *anytime* we come to know what *is* by loving—that is, when we experience knowing as joy in the appreciation of our union as seers with what is seen—we engage in *theoria*. There are, indeed, many such modes of pursuing wisdom and engaging our students in contemplative activities in today's classroom.

If we are to understand the ancient meaning of contemplation properly, it is important to recognize that noetic and dianoetic activity may never be completely divorced from one another. Rather, the ancients held knowing to be a unity of *ratio* and *intellectus*—a simultaneous functioning of the two. In today's schools, where testing and accountability structures predominate, however, the dianoetic applications of reason are cultivated to the exclusion of *noesis*. But according to ancient understanding, the exclusively dianoetic machinations of *ratio* cannot bring about a knowledge of the Highest Good (*Summum Bonum*) that might enable us to know the true Measure (*Metron*) of all the other goods we enjoy; even the most adept movements of *ratio* cannot tell us which innovations are good and which are not, nor can they tell us to what end we ought to innovate.

In other words, the sort of learning that predominates in schools today is insufficient to cultivate wisdom. Without also attending to and cultivating the noetic component of our rationality, we are left with only our own diverse passions and appetites as the means to make decisions about such things.

Reawakening awareness of the *intellectus* in our pedagogy and incorporating noetic thinking into the classroom need not be considered an onerous or impossible task; such activity might occur anywhere and at any time. For instance, scientific investigations might, where an openness of spirit is cultivated, give rise to philosophic questions—so too mathematical studies, the investigation of literature and mythology, as well as reflection on our own experiences of love and suffering. Indeed, any sort of basic understanding (*intellectus*) that we have gleaned about *anything* already presupposes the operations of *intellectus,* which *sees* or apprehends the truth. *Intellectus* is active in the student's immediate grasp of the axioms (*axiomata*) and principles (*archai*) of mathematics and the various sciences. It therefore stands at the beginning (*arche*) of all our thinking, but it also appears at the end of a line of reasoning when *ratio* moves us towards yet another *seeing* of a truth. *Intellectus* is active in the student's witness to beauty, whether that beauty takes a physical or non-physical form; moreover, the joy of *intellectus* in uniting with its beloved is especially sought out by students in relation to their friends, music, art, dance, or any other pursuit they love for the beauty they find in it.

Since the operation of *intellectus* is omnipresent in thinking, the challenge of *schole* is not simply *to see* (*theorein*), but to take what one sees upward (*anairein*) toward its source noetically. Put another way, the challenge of *schole* is to offer the *intellectus* evermore-beautiful sights and joyful experiences of beholding the Lovable. The danger for students is not so much that they will *not* see, but rather that they will suppose that they have already seen everything there is to see—that they will close themselves off to the investigation of what *is*, that they will refuse to cultivate the broadest and most open form of listening, supposing their own cognition of beauty has already shown them what is truly Beautiful. In short, the danger for students in thinking is for them to suppose that they know what they do not know due to their ignorance or unfamiliarity with higher and better sights worth seeing.

Our current emphasis in schools on being accountable to the predetermined goals and outcomes of the educational system is well known to everyone who has taught in the last twenty years. Our inordinate stress on high-stakes testing and assessment across

Canada and the United States, with its demand that students demonstrate their knowledge of the correct answers and that they provide evidence of what they know, certainly does little to promote an openness to wonder, a readiness to question, or an eagerness to know the extent of their own ignorance. In fact, our educational system is arguably quite damaging noetically inasmuch as it encourages students to beware of demonstrating that they do *not* know—certainly, they are *never* to take delight in such a discovery! Yet delight in the discovery that leads one to know thyself (*gnothi seauton*) is precisely the pleasure associated with the noetic movement towards the highest sights. The dearth of contemplative activity (with its associated joys) in today's schools is well documented in massive studies performed by groups like the Garrison Institute, which have taken great pains to map out the current state of contemplative education in schools (2005). In particular, the Garrison Institute points to the need for the incorporation of contemplative educational activities into our schools as a counterweight to our mainstream concerns with outcomes, assessment, and accountability (2009, p. 2).

How is it, then, that the exercise of *intellectus* is so ubiquitous, yet so little attended to and largely dismissed in modern education? How is it that our attention in schools has almost completely shifted to the cultivation of the *ratio*? Why is it that our schools indulge in the discursive work and toil of reason without inviting students to enjoy the leisure of intellection? Most troublesome is the effect that this lopsidedness has had on mass societal consciousness of reality. When all of our knowing becomes a matter of standing over against objects in a position of control, use, and mastery, we cease to see the contemplative or relational aspect of knowing as loving. Our awareness of our own innate ability to gaze upon (*theoria*) what is and to experience loving union with what is through the contemplative movements of the *intellectus* fades, yet our craving for this sort of knowing remains. The result of this modern confusion has been that we seek to gratify our desires for such union through the only means of knowing with which we are in any way deeply familiar: namely, the calculative subject-object knowing of the *ratio*. Hence, our deepest desires to know take their peculiarly modern form of technological mastery through the adept use and integration of information technologies. What follows in this paper is an exploration of our modern technological confusion. I argue that the solution to our modern day confusions about technology is not evermore education technology, but rather the incorporation of contemplative studies that might, with the relaxation of our focus upon assessment and accountability structures, cultivate *noesis* throughout the school day.

# On the Deformations of Contemplation in the Allure of Technological Homogeneity

It is incorrect to suppose that *theoria*, or the immediate seeing of *intellectus*, is not currently a component of our educational efforts; rather, any time that understanding (*intellectus*) is acquired, the capacity of *intellectus* for seeing is involved. Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman (2006) makes a similar point when he remarks that the contemplative mind exists in all cultures, and that it can be quite misleading to speak of our own culture as lacking contemplative minds. He explains, "When we make that claim, we are rather lamenting the deplorable contemplative states within which the common mind is absorbed" (p. 1766). Thurman offers television as an example of the sort of contemplative trance in which millions of people imbibe "for hours on end, day after day, year in and year out" (p. 1766). Unfortunately, he explains, it is a trance "in which sensory dissatisfaction is constantly reinforced, anger and violence is imprinted, and confusion and the delusion of materialism is constructed and maintained" (p. 1766). Hence, "when we talk about seeking to increase and intensify contemplative mind in our culture, we are actually talking about methods of transferring contemplative energies from one focus to another" (p. 1766).

Thurman's astute observations about television also apply to our current fascination with computers and the Internet—especially in educational circles where the fulfillment of ICT outcomes is mandated and strictly enforced both in curriculum documents and as part of Teacher Professional Growth Plans (TPGPs). Teachers are under constant and ever-increasing pressure to bring the latest technologies to bear upon their pedagogy. The fervour of this pressure becomes all the more peculiar when we recognize that it is doubtful if teachers anywhere have ever experienced similar pressures and threats that they *must* use television or radio broadcasts (let alone books, paper, pens, and pencils) with their students. Indeed, there seems to be a special kind of *seeing* that Information Technology (IT) is believed to afford, such that its use has taken on a strange power in our understanding (*intellectus*) of ourselves and of what it means to know. The peculiar allure of IT arises on two counts. On the one hand, IT offers us the false promise of knowing everything, or, at the very least, of gaining access to seemingly infinite information about the world-as-object; on the other hand, it purports to make available an *ersatz* transcendence, or a kind of substitute for the joy experienced relationally in a true

community of being with others, with the world, and with the divine. Put more simply, in terms developed and clarified by Martin Buber, computer technologies promise us a form of omniscience in the realm of *I-It* experience while at the same time offering us assurances about our connectivity to all other *users* in a communal *I-Thou* world-wide web of being (Buber, 1970). IT has, in this regard, become a widely accepted substitute for the genuine spiritual exercise of pursuing wisdom, or immortalizing.

With a high degree of prescience at the beginning of the age of personal computers, the Venerable Chan Buddhist Master Hsuan Hua referred to computers—like their predecessors in television and radio—as "people eaters" and "man-eating goblins" inasmuch as their use typically causes human beings to "forget about everything else" (Hua, 1985). Ironically, the promise of computers—literally "electric brains" in Chinese—to increase student engagement and educational accessibility may actually serve most powerfully to undermine our awareness of and attention to *what is*—the everything else of which Hsuan Hua speaks. Also writing at the beginning of the age of computers, the Canadian philosopher George Grant challenged the notion that computers are simply neutral instruments in our hands:

> The phrase "the computer does not impose" misleads, because it abstracts the computer from the destiny that was required for its making. Common sense may tell us that the computer is an instrument, but it is an instrument from within the destiny which *does* 'impose' itself upon us, and therefore the computer *does* impose. (1986, p. 23)

The destiny of which Grant speaks is that dominant form of knowing that treats the world strictly as an object for mastery by the critical-analytic intellect, which understands everything only in terms of its use. Following Grant's (1986) insights about technology, we might say that our modern educational penchant for IT has been formed from within this destiny wherein "information is about objects, and comes forth as part of that science which summons objects to give us their reasons" (p. 24). Moreover, Grant calls the technological destiny that brought forth the computer "homogenizing" (p. 24); when the only legitimate way of knowing the world is to treat it as an object, then what is known must *always* be "thrown over against" (*ob-iectum*) oneself. In such an homogenizing environment, what is known is *not* known through a relation of love in which the beloved is known by the lover—as Romeo knows Juliet, as the philosopher loves wisdom,

or in *theoria*, as seer and seen are united. Quite the opposite, in technological society, true knowledge of any object is premised upon the suspension of love in objectivity. As "the ontology of the age" (Grant, 1986, p. 32), technological knowing—the knowing in which the computer finds its origin—is founded upon the denial of love as a legitimate way of knowing (Grant, 1986, p. 35–78; cf. Palmer, 1993, p. 1–16). Using Buber's distinctions, modern technological knowing is an all-encompassing *I-It* knowing that dominates to the exclusion of *I-Thou* knowing (1970). Most important for our study is Grant's insight that, at the heart of the technological ontology from which has arisen our modern penchant for computers necessarily lies the rejection of both philosophy and contemplation—of what Arthur Zajonc has referred to as "an epistemology of love" (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1742–1759).

There is a true lie (*alethos pseudos*) at the heart of our fervour and our faith in technology that has resulted in a mass deformation of consciousness; it is a lie about the things that are (*ta onta*), or what Socrates in the *Republic* calls a lie about the most sovereign things (*ta kyriotata*) to what is most sovereign (*to kyriotato*) in ourselves (Plato, 1961, 382ab). Certainly, an infinite number of things may be known as objects, just as an infinite number of things might also be used. The sort of infinite knowing that IT offers us in this regard depends upon our becoming *users*. The lie and consequent deformation of consciousness in our acceptance of IT's alluring promise is *not* that a myriad of things might be known as use-objects by computer users; nor is it that IT can provide us with access to this sort of knowing. The lie is rather that adopting the stance of the user is the *only* way of knowing the world, that being cut off from the network is akin to being cut off from all knowing, and that all knowledge and enjoyment is necessarily mediated to us through our status as users and, specifically, by our use of computer technologies.

In order to understand the deformation of consciousness that has occurred, it is valuable to examine St. Augustine's famous distinction between use (*uti*) and enjoyment (*frui*). In his work, *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine writes:

> There are some things, then, which are to be enjoyed, others which are to be used, others still which we enjoy and use. Those things which are objects of enjoyment make us happy. Those things which are objects of use assist, and (so to speak) support us in our efforts after happiness, so that we can attain the things that make us happy and rest in them. We ourselves, again, who enjoy and use these things, being placed among both kinds of objects, if we set ourselves to enjoy those

which we ought to use, are hindered in our course, and sometimes even led away from it; so that, getting entangled in the love of lower gratifications, we lag behind in, or even altogether turn back from, the pursuit of the real and proper objects of enjoyment. (Augustine, www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.html)

To enjoy a thing means to accept it for and by itself and to find joy in it. To use a thing, by contrast, is to make it the means to obtain what we enjoy. According to Augustine, the world of things must be used, but not enjoyed; only God may be enjoyed. Put another way, we ought only to enjoy the things of this world inasmuch as we use them to enjoy God, in which all things participate by virtue of their *being*—that is, by virtue of their goodness, their beauty, and their truth.

Our fascination with computer technologies has led us to confuse use (*uti*) with enjoyment (*frui*). Certainly, human beings are regularly beset by temptations and confusions whereby we, as Augustine notes above, set ourselves to enjoy those things which we ought to use. The inappropriate enjoyment of worldly things is not a specifically technological development, however; the particular danger of computer technology lies more in its similarity with sorcery as a magical means of supposing that we might enjoy *by use* what must not be used through becoming its users. That is, when we relate to the transcendent—i.e., that which may be *enjoyed* but never *used*—as computer users who seek out true community through a relation of technological mastery, we are essentially engaged in the same activity as the ancient sorcerer who attempts to compel the gods to work favours for him. This paper suggests that genuine contemplative practices are the best way to extricate both students and teachers from this delusion.

The allure of IT confuses us in two respects about use (*uti*) and enjoyment (*frui*). First, it purports to offer us all knowledge of the things that are (*ta onta*). Indeed, the Internet is believed to make all the world's knowledge immediately accessible at the click of a few buttons. It offers users access to seemingly infinite information—certainly more than can be contained in any book—that may be found instantly and that is constantly being updated in real time. This technological promise of infinite knowledge is best illustrated by the web's most popular search engine, Google, whose name is a misspelling of the mid-twentieth century term *googol*. Officially defined as "10 raised to the hundredth power" (*New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1993), the term (along with its variant *googolplex*) was originally coined in 1938 by the nine-year-old nephew of mathematician

Edward Kasner in order to name the largest countable number this side of infinity, or "one, followed by writing zeroes until you get tired" (Kasner and Newman, 1940). Google Corporation self-consciously sells itself as a kind of God-like knowing of all that human beings have ever come to know or understand. This practically infinite knowledge of the world is made available only to users such that *knowing by using* is held to be the exclusive means towards omniscient—and in this regard, immortalizing—knowledge. However, by making our participation in divine omniscience conditional upon our status as users, computer technology obscures our awareness of what constitutes genuine immortalization—namely, the pursuit of wisdom. We are duped into believing that becoming users is the *only* way to know *ta onta*; indeed, there is a deeper and more fundamental knowing that is lost to our consciousness when it becomes over-ridden with the fervour of such technological promises. This obscured form of knowing does *not* entail use, and it arises as a testimony to the truth that not all things derive their enjoyment from use. This realization is experientially available to all of us whenever we adopt the relational *I-Thou* attitude wherein the *one who sees* is united by loving gaze with the *seen*; it is this relation that is cultivated and embodied in genuine contemplation or *theoria*, and it is precisely this sort of knowing that the *googol-knowing* or the *all-knowing* of IT implicitly denies. Hence, in its offer to provide us with access to all knowing, IT *appears* to tell the truth, but in fact invites us to suppose we know what we do not know. As students and teachers, when we are enticed by the fervour surrounding technological innovation, we easily become ignorant of our own ignorance, and hence are liable to what Gareth Matthews has called "pretentious learning" (Matthews, 1980, p. 94). In this regard, our faith in computer technology serves to impede the pursuit of wisdom in schools.

Second, at the same time as it offers us omniscient, world-as-object knowledge, IT simultaneously proposes to deliver an *ersatz* or substitute mode of *theoria*. Particularly among young people, constant interface with networked communications provides them with a feeling that they are connected in an *I-Thou* relation to their friends, to their intimates, and, more generally, to the things that are. Moreover, such technologies provide this theoretical substitute as something that is mediated by use (*uti*)—that is, inasmuch as we become users of technology, we are connected to everyone and everything else. The geometric complement of this claim, of course, is that inasmuch as we are *not* users of technology, we are *not* connected to anyone or anything else. I surmise that it is for this reason that so many of the young people I have taught report a deep spiritual need

for their technological devices. Indeed, the allure of technology for young people—far more than its claim to offer us infinite knowledge of the world-of-objects, which perhaps entices teachers to a much greater degree—is that it espouses the ability to render the enjoyment (*frui*) of a transcendent *I-Thou* relation through the mode of use (*uti*) that is associated with *I-It* experience. IT claims for itself magical powers to render known through use (*uti*) what *cannot* be known through use, but only through enjoyment (*frui*). This delusion, which has begun to be recognized by modern psychologists, results in compulsive Internet use, depression, and loneliness (van den Eijnden, Meekerk, Vermults, Spijkerman, Engels, 2008, 655–665). Josef Pieper's philosophic writings from 1966 are particularly enlightening when read in light of what has become the mass phenomenon of *ersatz* transcendence in the googolplex of technology:

> Where considerations of pure 'usefulness' reign supreme, there will appear, almost inevitably, certain phony replicas, counterfeit imitations of the genuine religious, artistic, and philosophical endeavour. The danger lies in the difficulty of recognizing the deception, or rather, the self-deception; it seems, since all areas are "covered," there is nothing missing. The place of genuine prayer, for instance, may be taken by some "magical" practice, the attempt to put supernatural powers at our disposal, even to make God himself into a mere functional potency that becomes part of the utilitarian purposes of worldly calculations. (p. 35)

It is important to remember that genuine *theoria* can never be cultivated through the medium of use. As Pieper points out, "We can only be theoretical in the full sense of the word ... so long as the world is something other (and something more) than a field for human activity, its material, or even its raw material" (1981, p. 116–117). *Theoria* is rather destroyed by the medium of use, and inasmuch as we are simply users, we are not theoretic in our disposition toward reality. As long as we conceive of ourselves solely as users—and even if we crave transcendence as so many young people do, but are duped into believing that transcendence is a matter of use—we are necessarily incapacitated for the pursuit of wisdom. In this regard, our fascination with ICT outcomes may serve as perhaps one of the greatest impediments to the cultivation of wisdom in schools. As Pieper remarks, "the suicide of philosophy is this—once the world begins to be looked upon merely as the raw material of human activity, it is only a step to the abolition of the theoretical character of philosophy" (1981, p. 117). When offered as a function available

only to users, the promise of theoretical transcendence serves as a deformation of consciousness and marks the destruction of *theoria*. It distorts our sense of what it means to engage in the contemplative life by deluding us into believing that our *I-It* experience of computer-use might be a genuine replacement for enjoyment of the *I-Thou* relation that arises only where use is *not* present. In diverting us from genuine theorizing—an activity *not* arising in the atmosphere of use (*uti*), but in the leisure (*schole*) of simple enjoyment (*frui*)—our faith in technology cuts us off from that highest activity of the best part of ourselves in relation to its most perfect object. Aristotle calls this activity "happiness" (*eudaimonia*, 2001, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.vi.2), and this happiness is identical with *theoria* as the true mode of our immortalization.

Academics such as R. W. Burniske have suggested that these technological dangers can be avoided simply by limiting computer use in schools, by exposing students more consistently to the non-cyberspace world of nature, by using computers to access information about the *real world* of nature, and by using online discussion boards to discuss the relation between technology and nature (2005, p. 50–52). However, I contend that philosophic, meditative, or contemplative practices among both students and teachers are, in fact, the best cure for our technological delusions; such practices involve the recognition of all that is refused by the homogenizing technological ontology. Simply by seeing the truth that is beheld through contemplation, we are released from all the technological delusions that might befall both students and teachers in the modern school. The Ven. Hsuan Hua remarks:

> Don't get scared when you hear me call television, radios, and computers man-eating goblins. No need to be afraid. My hope is that you will clearly recognize these things for what they are. Once you recognize them, then electric gadgets lose their power to confuse you. That's enough to know. But if you're confused by them, then they can gobble you down.
>
> The same principle applies to beauty. If the sight of a pretty figure has the power to confuse you, then you've been swallowed by a man-eater. If the sight of money confuses you, then you've just been devoured by a man-eater. If your purpose is to establish a big reputation, and fame confuses you, then you've just been swallowed by the goblin of fame. If good food confuses you, although you feel you've

just enjoyed a tasty dish, in fact, the food has eaten you. The food has eaten your spiritual soul, your Dharma-body. It has eaten up your wisdom, and left you as stupid as can be. (1985)

# Contemplation and the Danger
# of Seeing Only What We Have Made

A second problem that arises when we accept the technological ontology is that, if we assume that all of our knowing depends upon our becoming users, we come to accept that we only really know those things that we ourselves have made. As makers and as users of what we have made, our gaze is narrowed and fixed upon the products of our own creative powers; consequently, it is diverted from what we have *not* made—the everything else of which Hsuan Hua speaks. Our technological gaze therefore lacks the openness of the philosophic gaze that seeks to know reality *as such*; but the very possibility for *theoria* rests upon our ability to be receptive to what *is* apart from our own making and control. What Pieper refers to as the precondition for wisdom's pursuit—namely, the acknowledgement that reality is "*good in itself*" (1981, p. 120) even apart from being mastered, made, or transformed by human efforts—is absent where the goodness of what *is* depends upon its being made by us according to our specifications and personal preferences. James Schall write:

> Teachers and students are in the same condition with regard to truth—they stand before something neither the one nor the other made. The modern idea that the only truth is the 'truth' we ourselves make is a narrow view that quickly cuts us off from *what* is. (2001, p. 65)

We should therefore be much more cautious about the pervasive manner in which technology is being incorporated into classroom learning for our young, impressionable students; the narrowing of their gaze that occurs as a result of their continual immersion in the technological paradigm of knowing-as-making affects not only the way that they see the world, but also the way that they see and interact with each other. In particular, some evidence has been found to suggest that rather than opening students to the relational knowing-as-loving that is cultivated through contemplative or noetic studies,

technology instead encourages them to focus on control over inter-personal interactions (Madell, Muncer, 2007, 137–140; cf. Pierce, 2009, 1367–1372).

For instance, the technologies with which students are most familiar and which they employ for their most intimate relations are designed to empower them as users in order that they might exert a high degree of control over their social interactions. Indeed, the allure and marketing success of these technologies lies, at least in part, in their ergonomic capabilities—that is, in the ease with which all features of the technology might be personalized or shaped according to individual user preferences. Students become easily acclimatized to the high degree of control that these technologies afford, and it is precisely from within this atmosphere of control that they aspire as users to communicate and to commune with one another in a world-wide web of being. However, a true *I-Thou* relation is not possible where the need to control and to shape everything according to one's own preferences—to tailor everything according to one's own individual, "psychomental" identity (Eliade, 1958, p. 14)—remains paramount. Indeed, the personalized atmosphere of technological mediation between users only reinforces what contemplative traditions refer to as "the illusion of self." By contrast, immersion in a true *I-Thou* relation necessarily involves *not* the reinforcement of the psychomental "I"—the "i" that is marketed in the iPhone, the iMac, the iPad, and the iPod—but rather the *loosening* of our attachments to ourselves and our own preferences. Just as true education (like genuine dialogue) can never be child centred or teacher centred, but must instead be truth centred, so too must we be wary of the arc of educational reforms that express too great a fervour for the individualization of education according to psychomental preferences through technological making and mastery.

James Schall writes that, "We become luminous to ourselves only when we know what is not ourselves" (2006, p. 11). Schall bids us to look beyond ourselves for a measure of ourselves. Rather than remaining in the 2500 year-old stream of education that arises from Protagoras' sophisticated claim that "Man is the measure of all things," rather than being dazzled by modern educational reforms that ostensibly transform education, but in fact simply offer novel ways of measuring all things according to our own psychomental states, one who genuinely pursues wisdom must seek a true Measure (*Metron*) of all things. It is for this reason that Plato writes against Protagoras in his *Laws* that "the god is the measure of all things in the highest degree" (1961, 716c). Protagoras allowed that Man (*ho anthropos*), as a species, ought to be considered as this measure, and neither

modern educational reforms nor the IT that supports them can be accurately described as a revolution in Protagorean education. Rather, they are only more of the same, and can perhaps be more aptly characterized as a kind of hyper-actualization of the Protagorean dictum, wherein not the generic Man, but the atomized individual—or for that matter, the individual's own fluctuating psychomental states—is, and ought to be, the measure of all things. James Conroy expresses similar concerns over finding the correct measure in education when he criticizes "growing calls for an individualized, negotiated curriculum," wherein "not man but the individual is to be the measure of all things" (2008, p. 148). Burniske's solution to the sophistic of modern technological education is to say neither Man nor the individual, but rather Nature is the true *Metron*. However, following the ancient philosophers and the world's wisdom traditions, even Nature cannot be its own measure. Contemplative seeing—that unbounded seeing that seeks the true *Metron* and to know reality *as such*—is the most powerful and best way of overcoming the dangers of the technological attitude that sees only what it has made.

## Contemplation (*contemplatio*) as Opposed to Lust of the Eyes (*concupiscentia oculorum*)

Our fascination with IT, like our penchant for gazing upon the television, is problematic for a third reason. As we have seen, Thurman remarks that when we talk about seeking to increase and intensify contemplative mind in our culture, "we are actually talking about methods of transferring contemplative energies from one focus to another" (2006, p. 1766). Students who gaze into the screens of their laptops, their iPhones, their iPads, and other communications devices are certainly engaged in a kind of seeing; however, their *surfing* on these devices is by and large a distracted and inattentive gaze "in which sensory dissatisfaction is constantly reinforced, anger and violence is imprinted, and confusion and the delusion of materialism is constructed and maintained" (Thurman, 2006, p. 1766). Indeed, the very term *surfing* implies sliding along the surface of things for the stimulation that it provides, never going down (*katabasis*) into the depth of things or deriving any insight into the things that are (*ta onta*). Our proclivity for such techno-logical surfing arises as a result of our not knowing what to do with ourselves in our free time—that is, with this precious time of life in which students are not compelled to work

for a living and teachers are granted the most wonderful of all gifts in having an occupation that provides them with the opportunity to share their eagerness to pursue wisdom with their students and to beckon them towards the study and search for what *is*.

Students in school do not generally know what it really means to *be* in school. I frequently break into a smile when I pick up my youngest child from Grade 2. At the sound of the bell that marks the end of the day, a troupe of young boys very often bursts through the school doors (barely stopping to open them!) with a cheer and a roar of delight as though they were being released from prison. Schools—our only non-religious institutionalized places of leisure or *schole*—do not cultivate the experience of leisure (Lt. *otium*), with the result that the possibilty for *otium* is replaced by experiences of enmity or aversion (Lt. *odium*). Indeed, both teachers and students are so unfamiliar with what it means to engage in leisure or *schole* that the liberty of the socially prescibed free space in which true schooling might take place becomes a problem for us—a problem we most often address with busy work, with evermore-diverse modes of technological stimulation, and with numerous distractions that masquerade as engaged learning. However, what is needed in this situation is not *more* stimulation to engage learners, but rather *less* stimulation in order to develop more careful attention so that awareness of the significance of *schole* might be generated, and so that we might begin to cultivate the experience and practice of *schole* in the classroom. What is needed is something akin to the silence discussed in the introduction to this paper that enables us to listen, to be open and receptive. Marilyn Nelson has commented on how the noise of technology might actually serve to impede this sort of listening:

> How can we teach young Americans to listen to silence? The noise of our lives is—sometimes literally—deafening. Technology has given us the 24-hour soundtrack, our own background music, our "score." . . . When do young Americans ever experience silence? Perhaps only when they are glaring reproachfully at their parents with their arms folded. (2006, p. 1734)

As many academics have noted, in our current school environment, "the demands for constant activity, the habit of electronic stimulation, and the production orientation of modern society make it very difficult to keep the contemplative alive" (Hart, 2004, p. 43). In such an "era of fragmentation, ever-increasing speed, multi-tasking, and continuously interrupted attention" (Haynes, 2005, p. 8), what is needed, as Thurman suggests, is the

*re-direction* of our natural desire to see. Essentially, what is needed is the introduction of some form of contemplative practice into the classroom.

In my experience of student inquiry in the classroom, much of what passes for learning is best described by the Latin term *curiositas* as opposed to *studiositas*. The contrasting psychological meanings of these words are respectively "intemperate inquisitiveness" (*curiositas*) and the "temperate desire for knowledge" (*studiositas*). Both *studiositas* and *curiositas* arise from the natural wish *to see*. However, *studiositas* distinguishes itself as zealous attention in the desire to know what *is*; it remains true to its objective of seeing what *is*, and, for this reason, our word "study" has sometimes been called "a prayer to truth" (Sertillanges, 1998, p. 69). By contrast, *curiositas* is associated with meddlesomeness—the *polypragmosyne* or "doing-of-many-things" that the Greeks took as their definition of injustice. It is a kind of *many-knowing* that seeks out the experience and the stimulation of seeing rather than what is seen. *Curiositas* runs amok in the contemporary technological classroom where one-to-one policies make it every child's right to have a networked computer at all times. Instead of being studious, students engage in all sorts of distractions and multi-tasking, such as playing computer games, social networking, watching mindless spectacles on Youtube, or even shopping online. Essentially, *curiositas* arises wherever the desire to see is not rooted in the desire to take up whatever is seen toward the most beautiful (*kallistos*) of sights. The allure of technology for many young people is *not* that it engages them in learning about what *is*, but rather that it provides them with a means of escape from themselves and from the hollowness of being rootless in school, which, prior to computer technologies, found its release along other routes. Indeed, Pieper's comments on the nature of *curiositas* serve as particularly apt descriptions of many classrooms:

> The degeneration into *curiositas* of the natural wish to see may be much more than a harmless confusion on the surface of the human being. It may be the sign of complete rootlessness. It may mean that man has lost his capacity for living with himself; that, in flight from himself, nauseated and bored by the void of an interior life gutted by despair, he is seeking with selfish anxiety and on a thousand futile paths that which is given only to the noble stillness of a heart held ready for sacrifice and thus in possession of itself, namely the fullness of being. (1981, p. 86)

Citing the *Journals* of André Gide, Pieper (1981) remarks that lacking cultivated exposure to the experience and practice of leisure, we tend to encounter time that is not filled with work as "deadly emptiness" and "endless ennui" (p. 122). School—but also life outside of school—becomes for us a kind of spiritual desert as a result of "the destruction of the *vita contemplativa*" (p. 122). We become prone in our freedom (now experienced as spiritual displeasure and discomfort) to seek escape—or perhaps I might co-opt the term "e-scape" from gerontological and management studies (Buse, 2010, p. 987–1009; Moshinskie, 2001, p. 30–37) as it relates specifically to the use of computer technologies among students and educators—in the distracted movements of the interested eye that careens from one object to the next in search of novelty and titillation. This desire to see resembles contemplation (*contemplatio*) inasmuch as it is a kind of gaze. However, whereas the contemplative gaze seeks to know reality, the gaze of the unleisured eye is, by contrast, concerned with the pleasure to be derived from seeing rather than the seeing of what *is* for its own sake.

This unleisured seeing is, effectively, what is meant in Christian philosophy by the phrase "lust of the eyes" (*concupiscentia oculorum*). Pieper writes,

> There is a gratification in seeing that reverses the original meaning of vision [i.e., contemplation] and works disorder in man himself. The true meaning of seeing is perception of reality. But "concupiscience of the eyes" does not aim to perceive reality, but to enjoy "seeing." (1981, p. 86)

Augustine has written an extensive psychology of *concupiscentia oculorum* in his *Confessions*. He contends that all sins are derived either singularly or from any combination of "lust of the flesh" or "carnal desire" (*concupiscentia carnis*), the "lust of the eyes" (*concupiscentia oculorum*), and the "empty pomp of living" or the "pride of life" (*ambitione saeculi*, 1961, 10.30.41; cf. 3.8.6). Numbered among these three root categories of sin, *concupiscentia oculorum* is a "vain" or "unhealthy curiosity" (*curiosa cupiditas*) that seeks not what is truly desirable, but rather the satisfaction of its own inquisitiveness (1961, 10.35.54–55). Augustine sees this sort of inquisitiveness at the heart of scientific investigations when they are divested of any concern for the Highest Good (*Summum Bonum*), and he likens such pursuits to a kind of sorcery or magic (*artes magicas*) that seeks to obtain knowledge for perverted purposes: "not in the hope of salvation, but simply for the love of the experience" (1961, 10.35.55).

Augustine's psychological analysis locates the root cause of *concupiscentia oculorum* in the inordinate love of worldly things: in misjudging the nature of things through not seeking out the true *Metron* of all these goods in the Supreme Good, or *Summum Bonum*. His psychology is therefore deeply rooted in the tradition of Christian contemplative practice, which involves not the heightening of our sense of self-importance, self-regard, or self-love (*amor sui*), but rather, as Socrates describes in Plato's *Republic*, a turning of the soul (*periagoge*, 1961, 518d ff) away from all these finite goods towards the one true good to be found in the love of wisdom. In Augustine's estimation, this love of wisdom is identical with the love of God (*amor Dei*, 1972, VIII.1, 298). As the author of John's first epistle recommends:

> Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever. (1 John 2:15–17)

For Augustine—as for *all* who pursue wisdom—a genuine education *must* be immortalizing. Aristotle writes that the immortalization (*to athanatizein*) brought about through contemplative practice is the precise activity of our highest happiness (*eudaimonia*). According to Anaxagoras, contemplative practice (*theoria*) is what we were born for (Aristotle, 2001, *Eudemian Ethics* i.5 1216a11). In Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima remarks that "it is in contemplating (*theomenoi*) the Beautiful Itself (*auto to kalon*)" that "human life is to be lived," (Plato, 1961, 211d) for it is only "when a human being looks (*blepontos*) *there* and contemplates (*theomenou*) *that* with that by which one must contemplate it, and be with it" that true virtue is begotten in him, making him "dear to god" (*theophilei*), and "if any other among men is immortal (*athanato*), he is too" (Plato, 1961, 212a).

# Conclusion

Contemplation or *theoria* ought to take greater precedence in education than is currently the case. More specifically, we must encourage a noetic taking up (*anairesis*) of whatever is *seen* towards its ground in what is the highest or best (*Ariston*) of sights. Our modern focus on and fascination with IT serves in many ways to thwart and to discourage the cultivation of noetic studies and the pursuit of wisdom in schools. If the significance of *intellectus* and the cognitive movements of *noesis* could be made clear and convincing to educational policy makers, it seems likely that the appropriateness of leisure or *schole* might be recognized and its practice rendered more frequent.

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