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Holistic Christian Higher Education: A Con(nected)notation

Prelude

We live in a fractured time. Social media in all of its guises is merely the latest attempt to sew up the tattered fragments of our society: the nuclear family (often reduced to single parents); “Mom’s/Dad’s Taxi” driving overscheduled kids around; working for the weekend (i.e., a lack of vocation); each family member with his/her own TV and/or cellphone and/or computer; school (preK to PhD) chopped up into years and subjects and units that rarely (if ever) are reassembled into some form of whole; rapid-fire news programs that leave us feeling bewildered and impotent; a political milieu utterly devoid of meaningful cooperation; a numbing consumerism that leaves our closets and garages full of junk; a violence-saturated media that causes us to distrust our neighbors (not to mention the stranger); gated communities that divorce us from the “less fortunate”; a worship of youthfulness that leaves our elders stranded in inhumane institutions. Every one of these—and many more—aspects of contemporary American society slices reality into bits, and our educational systems, norms, and expectations are no exception.

Humanism offered us freedom from groupthink, and Enlightenment’s analytical perspective gave us an unprecedented technological mastery over nature; the Romantics, Neo-Romantics, and Postmoderns all tried to overthrow the reigning rationalism by emphasizing the “opposite,” intuition or its ilk; but pendular swings will not solve this dilemma (and modern

crisis). And so we seek after a more holistic paradigm, in this case, for higher education. To that end, we turn to six educational theorists in the hope of finding a more meaningful way. Parker J. Palmer is a well-known author and master teacher who writes from a Christian perspective. John P. Miller is a professor at the University of Toronto's prestigious Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Nicholas Wolterstorff is a professor emeritus at the Yale Divinity School and has written often about Christian education. Kieran Egan is a professor of education at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and the founder of the Imaginative Education Research Group. Gregory Cajete is a Native American educator, artist, and professor of education at the University of New Mexico. David W. Orr, professor of environmental studies and politics at Oberlin College, has become well-known and -respected for his level-headed and practical writings on our global environmental crisis. Each of these authors will be analyzed separately (except for Cajete and Orr, who share a common nature-centered approach) and then a synthesis attempted in the concluding section.

Section 1: Imbibing Parker Palmer's *To Know As We Are Known*¹

Introduction

Palmer is revolutionary. Everything ought to be written in light of Palmer's epistemological reclamation. It is not that Palmer offers yet another novel postmodern or post-postmodern epistemology. What he has to say about knowing is in fact quite old, as old as Adam and Eve:

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As a Spiritual Journey* (1983; repr., New York: HarperOne, 1993).

“Adam *knew* Eve his wife.”² This is to say, “The Hebrew Bible uses the word ‘know’ to indicate the conjugal relation of husband and wife..., the same word it uses for knowledge of God and of the created world.”³ This is “the quality of *knowing* at its deepest reaches, the quality of a *truth* that draws us into *community*.”⁴ Knowing. Truth. Community. Palmer’s use of these terms is worth examining. And putting into practice his observations may very well change everything.

Knowing

“Nothing could possibly be known by the solitary self, since the self is inherently communal in nature.”⁵ Not only is the self communal, but all of creation is too. Here, though, Palmer is referring to “the consensus of the community in which we are rooted,”⁶ but it could just as well refer to the fact that each one of us is a walking biological community. We are all connected: within and without to every other creature. This is not news. If anything, talk of connectivity—especially its technological manifestations—is ubiquitous. What *is* new, or “renew” (new again), is “an epistemology of participation and accountability.”⁷ For Palmer, this is a particularly Christian understanding of epistemology, a way of literally incarnating truth (cf. “Truth” section below). To know anything is to participate with it, in it, in the most personal, intimate way. Objectivism, he reminds us, says we know the world via “our *sense organs*, which can apprehend objects, and our *minds*, which can relate those objects in rational, logical patterns.”⁸ Here we have

² Gen. 4:1 (NKJV); emphasis added.

³ Palmer, *To Know*, 58.

⁴ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xv. Cf. 53.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 52; emphasis added.

modernism's handmaidens: empiricism (senses) and reason (mind). But Palmer demands more: "intuition, empathy, emotion, and faith, to name but a few...brought into full partnership with our senses and reason."⁹ He will settle for nothing less than the whole self knowing in relationship (what he calls "wholesight"¹⁰), a relationship that requires two-way participation and, perhaps uniquely for humans, an accountability for our choices, an "ethic of Christian personalism."¹¹

Truth

It is the Gospel of John that augments the synoptic gospels by having Pilate ask, "What is truth?"¹² and, earlier, having Jesus declare, "I am...the truth."¹³ What does that mean: not just speaking the truth but *being* it? "Primitive (premodern) Christianity revolves around personal, not propositional, truth."¹⁴ But let us be clear: personal truth, for Palmer, does not equal subjectivism. The latter "creates as many worlds as there are knowers"¹⁵ and, ironically, lands us in the same antinomy as objectivism: the lie of separation between knower (subject) and known (so-called object). The idea of an *object*, Palmer reminds us, like the verb *to object*, "puts us in an adversarial relationship with each other and our world."¹⁶ On the contrary, personal truth is found in *troth*.¹⁷

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., xxiv.

¹¹ Ibid., 51.

¹² John 18:38 (NRSV).

¹³ John 14:6 (NRSV).

¹⁴ Palmer, *To Know*, 47.

¹⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷ According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2002), *troth*, *truth*, *true*, and *trust* all come from the Sanskrit *dārūna* meaning *hard* and *dāru* meaning *wood*. They are also related to the word *tree* (Sanskrit *dru*). Perhaps the tree's longevity and stability was an early analogy for truth (something one could depend on) and troth (faithful interconnectedness).

This is Palmer's teacherly genius: by changing a single letter (truth->troth) he moves us from a denoted abstraction (truth) to a con(nected)notation (troth). He leads us out (*educare*) of the modernist-objectivist definition of truth—as internal theories of external facts—and into the biblical-relational experience of troth, i.e., a risky relationship of trust bonded by love (not logic).¹⁸ Truth is neither “out there” nor “in here,” for such isolated compartments do not exist. It arises from the inbetweennesses of relationality. Or, to play off the Hebrew definition: It is the interpenetration of intimacy that gives birth to a new reality/realization. Or, to return to the Gospel of John: It is the divine Word/Wisdom that risks the vagaries of incarnation. Relationships are never safe; they are the eternal primordial soup that generates the truth/troth of life and death, joy and sadness, meaning and oblivion.

Community

It is disingenuous to attempt to describe something as multidimensional as our understanding/knowing of reality in this logical, linear fashion. It is also absurd, really, to think we can parse it using terms like epistemology and truth. Who do we think we are fooling? And yet, when I consider our shattered world and distracted culture—of which I am a part—I long for a solution, a conversion to a communal wholeness, a common wealth of interdependence that is a mere microcosm of the greater interdependence of all life on earth.

Community is axiomatic to Palmer's invitation,¹⁹ but do not be deceived. Not every gathering is an example of common-unity. Today's classrooms, for instance, are largely anticomunal. “Students,” Palmer writes, “are made to compete with one another..., so that

¹⁸ Palmer, *To Know*, 31-32.

¹⁹ I use *invitation* instead of *proposition* because the latter connotes an objective presentation. On the contrary, Palmer invites us to participate in the community of truth (cf. the Parable of the Wedding Banquet; Matt. 22:1-13).

only the fittest and smartest will survive.”²⁰ He reminds us that students sharing ideas/answers in many classrooms is still considered cheating. Authentic community is difficult to come by. It requires trust, which is risky. Trust in the other; trust in each other (i.e., reciprocal). Like a dance where first one leads, then the other (and sometimes you are both swept up into a leaderless leading). This kind of trust, a committed faith in the other, is at the heart of truth, which is literally at the heart of betrothal, a neglected word in today’s free-from-care world. Who knows where your betrothed will take you (cf. Song of Solomon 2:10)? When that risky, trusting truth is present, so is truth: “I am the truth.” And who knows where the truth will take you? Again, to be clear, this does not mean that we—individually or communally—make up truth as subjectivism (and postmodernism) might suggest. Truth is revealed, engendered, birthed where two or more are gathered in loving authenticity.

The Hospitable Classroom

“To teach,” says Parker, “is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced.”²¹

That is a demanding and dangerous responsibility. In today’s world of prepackaged curriculum and competitive individualism, Parker’s invitation is subversive. There is no extra space in our school schedules! From standardized test preparation (to secure federal funds) to the special-interest additives (e.g., multicultural awareness and environmental education), there is hardly time for art and physical education let alone time to, what, sit around trying to figure out the truth? The truth is easy, our culture tells our schools: give us worker-consumers that will maintain our country’s economic superiority. *Homo economicus*.

²⁰ Palmer, *To Know*, 37.

²¹ *Ibid.*, xii.

The space that Palmer has in mind is the first step toward a different kind of classroom—and society. It is a space, an openness, where we “set aside the barriers behind which we hid so that truth cannot seek us out.”²² No one wants to appear ignorant or express deep feelings (especially fear or weakness) in an unsafe environment, and our classrooms are too often places where teachers are afraid of losing control and students are afraid of embarrassing themselves in front of their peers. As Palmer reveals, “Teachers lecture longest when they are least sure of what they are doing....[and] students write the longest and most convoluted term papers when they do not know what to say....”²³ Palmer’s space is the embodiment of hospitality, a place to come in from the street, the desert, the storm, and let down your guard, feel welcomed—and loved. Compare Abraham’s warm reception of the three visitors (with 50 pounds of bread!) to Sodom’s salacious overtures to its two visitors.²⁴ In the one, they are made to feel divine, in the other, maligned. The openness of hospitality not only creates a breathing space (i.e., the breath/spirit of life flowing in, out, and through us) but also the boundaries to keep the harmful influences out and to keep our wandering minds from distraction. Abraham’s tent provided the life-giving shade to those desert wanderers. So should our classrooms shade and shelter our students (and ourselves, as teachers) from the searing heat of external, uncaring criticism and provide a clear boundary inside which we put aside a thousand (social networking) diversions and stay focused on becoming a community of truth. We can fill our space with endless chatter and clutter or take “the risk of not speaking”²⁵—the risk of listening attentively. “Objectivism,” Palmer reminds us,

²² Ibid., 71.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gen. 18:1-8 and 19:1-11. Notice the side-by-side placement of the two accounts makes for an easy comparison of hospitality and inhospitality.

²⁵ Palmer, *To Know*, 41.

tells the world what it is rather than listening to what it says about itself. Subjectivism is the decision to listen to no one except ourselves. But truth requires listening in obedience [openness] to each other, responding to what we hear, acknowledging and recreating the bonds of the community of truth.²⁶

Listening attentively, recreating community bonds, and hospitality are all acts of love. In the hospitable classroom—the place/space of a community of truth/troth—the teacher (as a subject) loves the subject (of study) she teaches; she loves her students (subjects) enough to share her love of the subject with them; and she trusts both the subject and her students (subjects) to interact in ways that are new to her, that she may learn from (i.e., she is not jealous).²⁷ There is no object here, no “standing against.” Only intersubjectivity, authentic telling, obedient listening—and patient waiting for truth to appear (like Jesus appearing in the safe place behind locked doors; cf. John 20:19). This tripartite circle of subjects is what Palmer calls an “ecological epistemology, a way of knowing the physical world that approaches its nonhuman members as coparticipants in the community of truth.”²⁸ But isn’t this exclusion of the object (*any* object) from the subjects’ circle an objectification of objectivism? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that objectifying anything can be a helpful cognitive exercise, whether you are an animal identifying a predator, or a scholar artificially separating an aspect of reality for examination. It is how we make sense of the world. Trouble arises when these artificial separations are reified. What thing or event or feeling, observable or describable or not, is utterly free from all else? No, as valuable as the subject-object exercise is, the point here is that it is *only* an exercise and does not reflect the interconnectivity and intersubjectivity of reality.

²⁶ Ibid., 67.

²⁷ Ibid., 104.

²⁸ Ibid., 63.

Educating in Love

Teachers are patient; teachers are kind; they are not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude—at least not most of the time. Educating (teaching, learning, knowing) is often connected to curiosity or mastery (control) of the material, but Palmer reminds us that curiosity can be blind (directionless) and “control is another word for power...[that] tend[s] toward corruption.”²⁹ He prefers a knowledge that springs from compassion or love, the goal of which is “the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds.”³⁰ It is love, he reminds us, that is the origin of knowledge in the biblical tradition (cf. Adam *knowing* Eve). It is love that is “the connective tissue of reality”:

Curiosity and control create a knowledge that distances us from each other and the world, allowing us to use what we know as a plaything and to play the game by our own self-serving rules. But a knowledge that springs from love will implicate us in the web of life; it will wrap the knower and the known in compassion, in a bond of awesome responsibility as well as transforming joy; it will call us to involvement, mutuality, accountability.³¹

Knower and known cannot be wrapped in compassion without a trusting environment, a womblike place of healing and growth for broken selves and worlds.

Summary

Palmer makes a brief comment in his Preface for the Paperback Edition (celebrating the book’s ten-year anniversary) that he “devoted this book to a spirituality of ‘sources’ in education rather than one of ‘ends.’”³² Ends, or outcomes, in education are a “template” or a mold that students

²⁹ Ibid., 8.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 9.

³² Ibid., xi for all quotes in this paragraph.

must be shaped to by the time they graduate, but Palmer calls that “no education at all.” He is also critical of education that shuts down inquiry in the name of religion. As stated above, authentic spirituality—and education—trusts truth wherever it may lead. “Such a spirituality encourages us to welcome diversity and conflict, to tolerate ambiguity, and to embrace paradox.” In my opinion, this sources-based education is a good summary of Palmer’s ideas. In other words, if your source, your starting place, is God (or love, for those less comfortable with the idea of God; cf. 1 John 4:8) then your knowledge of (or loving intimacy with) that Source is an ignition point sending you off to who-knows-where. There *is* no end, and any predetermined end (even if under the guise of spirituality) is indeed no education at all. It is not a leading out (*educare*), a blossoming, a flourishing, but its opposite, a very claustrophobic *induction*.

Palmer’s God/love/source-based, open-ended, spiritually risky trust in the truth of the hospitable community of truth gives us a sketchy outline of an educational philosophy. In that same Preface, Palmer touches on four such related areas: ontology, epistemology, pedagogy, and ethics. Briefly, contrary to “modern America[’s]...cosmology of fragmentation,”³³ his ontology is based on community, cooperation, and interdependence. His epistemology is knowledge-in-relationship as opposed to the myth of objectivity.³⁴ For Palmer, pedagogy grows out of epistemology; therefore, “good teachers bring students into living communion with the subjects they teach”;³⁵ and ethics—how can these things really be separated?—is, contrary to consumer-individualism, the practice of creating “communities of abundance.”³⁶

³³ Ibid., xiv.

³⁴ Ibid., xv.

³⁵ Ibid., xvii.

³⁶ Ibid., xviii.

Palmer says so much more in his little book, especially specific suggestions such as arranging classroom chairs in a circle³⁷ or the importance of prayer and contemplation,³⁸ but as he also says, every learning space must have boundaries. So, to draw this section to a close, allow me to propose a Palmerian Paradigm for the purpose of creating an authentic communal dialogue with the other assigned texts in this course.

- *Ecological epistemology*: Knowledge is the intimate, loving interconnection with the other.
- *Wholesight*: We know and are known with our whole selves in a reciprocal relationship.
- *Truth* is alive, active, personal, incarnational; it seeks you out and changes you; it arises in a community of troth (trusting and committed love).
- A *community* of truth/troth can form where there is openness, hospitality, a safe place where authenticity is risked, a space where the other is heard.
- *Meaning* (spirituality) is revealed in our source(s), not in some (artificial) end(s).

Section 2: A Critical Response to John P. Miller's *The Holistic Curriculum*³⁹

Enroll your child at the PARTIAL ACADEMY!

Our school will mold your son or daughter into an economic success story without wasting time on touchy-feely subjects. Your child will learn just enough mental acumen and creativity to outshine his or her peers but not enough to become a pariah by questioning our country's economic and military superiority. Place the American Dream firmly in your child's hands. Sign up now!

Holism or Holy Schism?

It seems counterintuitive that anyone would want only a *part* of her child developed or taught during the school years. Don't we want what is good for the *whole* child? To use a physical

³⁷ Ibid., 75.

³⁸ Ibid., 19.

³⁹ John P. Miller, *The Holistic Curriculum*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

analogy, who would want only their child's upper body to grow while the lower body remained stunted? And yet this is exactly what our society has purposely designed for its dominant educational paradigm in recent decades. Competing with the Russians in the 1960s and mirroring the Japanese in the '80s, we have reduced our educational systems to assembly lines producing human capital of variable quality. Yet this is not half so shocking as the fact that we democratic citizens stand idly by while our schools are dehumanized—humanities watered down, the arts dropped, teaching to the standardized tests, etc.—in the name of keeping our country economically competitive. The media tell the occasional heroic story of people fighting back (e.g., a bake sale or car wash to support the school choir), but it is difficult to deny the parental instinct to protect one's children from want, i.e., to prepare them to get a job making enough money to live comfortably—especially during a time of economic downturn. “The arts are nice but when push comes to shove....”

And yet, even (maybe especially) during the hard times, a wise parent or culture will want to impart those very things (e.g., art and religion) that give life *meaning*. Economic viability is only one *part* of life, whereas living a life of meaning entails exposure to *all* of life, or at least as much as possible in any given situation. From this wholeness—and its wonderful diversity—comes our idea of health in its broadest sense: emotional health, social health, economic health (the concept of “enough”), etc. This is, of course, a religious statement, and a conflict of beliefs is at the heart of this discussion. From one perspective, fulfillment, happiness, meaning, etc. are found in the accumulation of material goods. From another perspective, those things are found in the celebration of all that it means to be human—and, from a biblical perspective, an expansion of that celebration to include our ongoing, dynamic relationship with the Creator and Sustainer of all things as well as the current reality and future hope of the power of incarnated Love to heal (make whole) and pro/re/create (cf. the Hebrew idea of *shalom*).

It is this biblical sense of wholeness that I hoped to find in Miller's *The Holistic Curriculum* as a remedy for our current educational reductionist predicament, but I was naive. I assumed that "holistic" was simply the adjectival form of "whole" (while wondering what happened to the "w"), but apparently it is more complicated than that. In 1926, the South African statesman Jan C. Smuts used the term "holism" to mean "the tendency in nature to form wholes that are greater than the sum of the parts through creative evolution."⁴⁰ One dictionary adds that "a whole cannot be analyzed without residue into the sum of its parts."⁴¹ Residue? Greater than the sum of its parts? Is this an attempt to use modernism's terms to go beyond modernism's bounds? Is this another example of early twentieth-century Neo-Romanticism such as Art Nouveau or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle chasing fairies? It certainly feels like chasing the ephemeral when Miller's holism ends up being more about higher levels of consciousness than about the whole of reality. To be fair, Miller's mystical bent is intended to raise one's consciousness to a higher level in order to see the bigger picture, as it were, to get up above the trees to see the whole forest. In that sense, I believe he is right, but I also believe that much of the discussion of holism is bogged down in the vocabulary of mysticism. This creates an unnecessary divide between whole-seekers who are and those who are not comfortable with such terms.

Miller's Holism

This second edition of Miller's book is not to be noted for its perspicuity. As he admits, "when I was writing this book, the lack of clarity about holistic education was a factor that encouraged me to explore this area in more depth."⁴² I can relate to his initial lack of clarity—and add my

⁴⁰ Jan C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1926), 88.

⁴¹ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, s.v. "holism" (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2002).

⁴² Miller, *Holistic*, 134. "This book" refers to the first edition, I assume.

confoundedness at why “whole” cannot simply mean “the whole thing” (all of reality)—yet regret to say that his book has helped little.

Miller’s first definition of “holistic education” is on a frontispiece-type page where he defines it as “concerned” with four connections: “between mind and body, between linear and intuitive ways of knowing, between individual and community, and between the personal self and the transpersonal self.”⁴³ Then, in the first chapter, he says it is “founded on three basic principles: balance, inclusion and connection.”⁴⁴ Using the Taoist concepts of *yin* and *yang*, he accuses “Western culture and education [of] hav[ing] been dominated by the yang,”⁴⁵ with which I largely agree, and then briefly describes his idea of a *balance* between several false dichotomies (e.g., assessment/learning) and modal errors (e.g., knowledge/imagination). He continues by explaining *inclusion* in terms of the types of connections between the curriculum and student. Finally, the *connections* are now six: the four from the frontispiece-type page plus two more: relationships among domains of knowledge and relationship to the earth.⁴⁶ A bit confusing, to be sure, but helpful inasmuch as he is at least brainstorming more pieces of the whole.

The rest of the book is divided into two parts: (1) the context of holistic education and (2) its practice, the latter being the unpacking of those six connections. The context, in his mind, is four-fold: philosophical, psychological, social and historical; he devotes a chapter to each. The philosophical chapter sets the groundwork for holistic education in the tradition of perennial philosophy which he calls the “core wisdom...within the mystical thread of most religions and

⁴³ Ibid., i (not numbered).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 14. Also the “connection between the personal self and the transpersonal self” is now called the “relationship to the soul.”

spiritual psychologies.”⁴⁷ For Miller, this means a pluralistic approach to spirituality, a wisdom not confined to doctrine, and an ontology emphasizing process and relationship. After quoting Gandhi, who concludes, “The final goal of all religions is to realize this essential oneness,” Miller paraphrases him by saying that “the interconnectedness of reality should not be relegated to remote forms of mysticism.”⁴⁸ And yet those remote forms (e.g., meditation seeking oneness) are the very presuppositional bedrock of this book. The psychological chapter is actually half about world religions and half about psychology. In a brief survey of major religions, he lists a few random mystical bits (e.g., in Judaism, “the ‘I AM’ is another name for our soul”⁴⁹) and then mentions a few psychological theorists (e.g., Ken Wilber) and their ideas on higher levels of consciousness. Throughout both of these chapters I kept asking myself: Who is his audience? Neither secular public school nor most religious private school teachers and administrators are interested in this mystical education. And where is the holism? Do you have to be a perennial-philosophical religious mystic to pursue holistic education? I certainly do not think so and yet agree with Miller on one thing: “religion...infuses all aspects of life.”⁵⁰

The remaining two chapters in the “context” part of the book, social and historical, continue along much of the same narrow lines. The social chapter posits the cosmology of “the universe as a related set of minds,”⁵¹ lists the six functions of a bioregion (e.g., self-propagation), suggests a slower lifestyle (to avoid the wonderfully phrased “institutional indigestion”⁵²), and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18. Are there non-remote, i.e., earthy, forms of mysticism? I believe there are and may even include myself in that muddy mix, but that’s a discussion for another time.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁵¹ Ibid., 52.

⁵² Ibid., 58.

finishes with androgyny as a metaphor for wholeness. I'm not sure cosmology and bioregionalism belong in a "social" chapter, nor is androgyny a topic most people can relate to, but there it is. The historical chapter describes two strands of holistic education: personal growth and social change. The former includes empathy development, play as a teaching tool, and child-centered approaches, but little about holism. The latter can be summarized by Myles Horton's "holistic view of the educative process. The universe is one: nature and mind and spirit and the heavens and time and the future all are part of the big ball of life."⁵³

The second half of the book, dealing with the *practice* of a holistic curriculum, is little better than the first. A chapter is devoted to each of the aforementioned six connections: linear/intuitive, body/mind, integrated curriculum, individual/community, to the earth, and to the soul. I believe it would be counterproductive at this point to summarize each of these chapters; they fall into the same traps as the first half of the book, and I trust such a repetition is unnecessary. Each of these six "connections" are indeed parts of the whole of reality and, to that end, are helpful as discussion points, but a consistent, overarching model is missing. Ultimately, Miller remains, in my opinion, mired in his "lack of clarity about holistic education."

A Reclamation of the Whole

I do not begrudge mysticism (eastern or western) its ability to offer insight into things like holism and holistic education, but I believe a mistake is made when these topics are inextricably linked to or grounded in the mystical experience. With all due respect to Jan Smuts, the idea that the "sum of the parts" plus a "residue" equals the "whole" leaves open the question of just what the residue is. Is it measurable (materialism/empiricism) or a mystery (mysticism)? Willem H.

⁵³ Ibid., 85.

Vanderburg, in *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*, offers another angle on this maxim. Using the example of workers on an assembly line, he points out that “each worker is able to do far more than the set of simple operations he is charged with,”⁵⁴ and, therefore, the workers (parts) together form a unified production entity (whole) with an immeasurable amount of additional human talents, abilities, insights, etc. (residue) yet to be accounted for. But Vanderburg refuses to leave it there, as if the fragmentation of Western cultures’ mechanistic atomism can be corrected by replacing it with mechanistic holism. He sees the advent of systems theory, for instance, as an example of the latter.

So how do we define the whole (holism) while avoiding Miller’s mysticism and modernity’s mechanistic holism? Vanderburg offers a “unified theory” that should sound familiar to readers of Herman Dooyeweerd: “The lives of individual members of a society cannot be conveniently split into economic, social, political, legal, or religious sectors. These are at best facets of whole lives....”⁵⁵ Similarly, there are no “autonomous economic, social, political, legal or religious structures either.... [T]hese structures are abstractions from the fabric of a society. In reality they are woven together into one fabric.” Therefore, “many of the current theories [within the social sciences and humanities] can be shown to be limiting cases that can be derived from the general theory by some reductionist assumptions.”⁵⁶ Vanderburg’s general theory has “as its basis and point of departure the realization that we are part of an interrelated reality in which nothing is autonomous or self-sufficient.”

⁵⁴ Willem H. Vanderburg, *The Growth of Minds and Cultures: A Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Experience* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 28.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 36. Also the next quote.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 37. Also the next quote.

The concluding section of this paper will attempt to draw the most helpful parts of Palmer's paradigm, Miller's holism, and the other authors herein for the purpose of creating a working definition of holistic education in general and its relevance to higher education in particular. For now, I will conclude this section by saying that Miller has been weighed and found wanting.

Section 3: Wrestling with Wolterstorff's *Educating for Shalom*⁵⁷

Shalom

After John P. Miller soured the word “holistic” with his mystically meandering survey, it was my hope that Nicholas Wolterstorff's concept of “shalom” might be consonant with educating the whole child within the whole context of reality. Shalom is a wonderfully multivalent concept. More than just simply translated as peace (as in “absence of war” or “calm”), shalom includes a sense of health and wholeness that Wolterstorff repeatedly describes as living in “right relationships to God, to one's fellow human beings, to nature, and to oneself.”⁵⁸ It is grounded in social justice and ideally leads to human flourishing and delight.⁵⁹ It encompasses human interrelationality with all of creation—and its Maker—with a special sensitivity to suffering (human and nonhuman). Shalom, in this sense, may paradoxically require times of war or distress (the absence of peace) to create the conditions for its manifestation, but it cannot be extinguished—how can it be?—so long as one human offers one act of kindness to another

⁵⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, ed. Clarence W. Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; also 88-89, 130, 141-42 *et passim*.

creature. I have seen a ruthless criminal tenderly cradle a kitten in his tattooed arms. But we need not be melodramatic. All of us experience moments of shalom every day. Wolterstorff's concept of shalom is preferable to Miller's concept of holism on two accounts. First, Miller delimits his concept to several areas of reality without a clear explanation of why those and not others; Wolterstorff's "right relationships" is comprehensive—everything is related. Second, in contrast to Miller's mystification, Wolterstorff's shalom includes a moral dimension in which our response to suffering and brokenness at every level of creation is to open a space for flourishing (healing, wholeness).

Reformed Shalom

Wolterstorff evokes John Calvin's "deep sacramental consciousness—and...the call for a eucharistic response"⁶⁰ as a background for his concept of shalom. For Wolterstorff, interrelationality of all things begins with the awareness that "as we wind our way through this world we meet God blessing us, chastising us, speaking to us, nourishing us, empowering us forgiving us"⁶¹—all of creation calling us to shalom, toward social justice, toward the right relationships that help us and others to flourish. Of course, this requires that we embrace creation and not abandon it. This celebration—or sacramental consciousness—of creation is the first of six themes that Wolterstorff attributes to a distinctively Reformed vision of shalom. The second, third, and fourth themes are the "holistic" nature of sin, redemption, and faith. In this case, "holistic" means the inability "to draw lines between some area of human existence"⁶² and another—the effect is total, all-encompassing. Sin, for instance, touches every area of life;

⁶⁰ Ibid., 281.

⁶¹ Ibid., 154.

⁶² Ibid., 282.

nothing remains unaffected. The same can be said for the scope of Christ's redemption and the fundamental orientation of faith in our lives. Wolterstorff's fifth theme is the Scriptures' comprehensiveness in forming our worldview and guiding our walk. Finally, he summarizes his sixth theme by quoting Abraham Kuyper, "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"⁶³ *All* of creation, *no* lines drawn, *every* area of life, *fundamental, comprehensive*: now *this* is holism. The common thread in all of these Reformed themes is an embracement (embodiment, incarnation) of creation. God invests Godself in creation—and so must we.

Educating for Shalom

According to Wolterstorff, all of this translates into five features of Christian higher education, especially in the Reformed, Kuyperian tradition: (1) a deep respect for learning, (2) learning as a perspectival enterprise, (3) Christian learning as part of broader, nonchristian academia and not isolationist, (4) an honoring of the long tradition of Christian learning, and (5) an emphasis on Scripture and theology.⁶⁴ This culmination is lackluster, unsatisfying. Wolterstorff's vision of shalom, on the other hand, is a far more robust "holism" than Miller's, and brings to mind Palmer's idea of teaching as an activity that makes room for the nurture of a community of truth (troth). Wolterstorff's five features of Christian higher education are primarily cognitive; only his nod to broader academia refers to community. The interrelatedness of shalom is far more comprehensive—an all-encompassing vision that could interweave our shattered world. We will revisit this in the conclusion to this paper.

⁶³ Ibid., 284; emphasis in original.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 284-87.

Section 4: A Critical Response to Kieran Egan's *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning*⁶⁵

Introduction

Around the 1990s, new technologies such as fMRIs were opening the “black box” of the brain and new fields such as neurophilosophy and neurotheology were being born.⁶⁶ Since then, the wedding of education and cognitive science has spawned a legion of books and seminars to bring teachers up-to-date. For example, in 2004, brain researcher William H. Calvin was still lamenting the state of education: “Today, it is largely empirical and only slightly scientific, much as medicine before 1800. We know some empirical truths about education, but we don’t know *how* the successful ones are implemented in the brain, and thus we don’t know rational ways of improving on them.”⁶⁷

In 2008, Judy Willis, MD, a middle school teacher and former neurologist, wrote that “we are on the brink of the most exciting time in history to be an educator.” After all, “we can look forward to a time when human brain mapping...will reveal additional brain mechanisms involved in memory and learning to help us define the most successful teaching strategies for the variety of learners we teach.”⁶⁸ With references to the amygdala and various neurochemicals,

⁶⁵ Kieran Egan, *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶ Cf. Patricia Smith Churchland, *Neurophilosophy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) and Andrew Newberg, *NeuroTheology* (San Jose, CA: University Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ William H. Calvin, *A Brief History of the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 183.

⁶⁸ Judy Willis, “Building a Bridge from Neuroscience to the Classroom,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 89, no. 6 (February 2008): 424+. Accessed December 2, 2013, <http://www.questia.com>.

brain researchers Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Bivens (2012) write: “Ultimately, much of animal and human learning is closely linked to how certain courses of action make organisms feel.”⁶⁹

Already in the 1980s, Howard Gardner was making a name for himself among educators with his Theory of Multiple Intelligences,⁷⁰ a theory that I attempted to put into practice with countless lesson plans aiming the topics at my students’ visual-spatial or body-kinesthetic or other intelligences. These biologized approaches to education remain popular today, as evidenced by such authoritative websites as the Annenberg Foundation’s Learner site “Neuroscience & the Classroom.”⁷¹

Getting It Wrong

Kieran Egan is no newcomer to the nexus of cognitive science and education. I have been keeping an eye on his work since discovering his *Teaching As Storytelling*⁷² in the early ‘90s. Egan is a professor of education at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and the impetus behind the creation of that university’s Imaginative Education Research Group (IERG).⁷³ I was drawn to his book by the title; as a schoolteacher, I thought of myself primarily as a storyteller, passing along the tales that define our culture. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that, like Calvin Seerveld, Egan considered imagination to be a critical, if not the central, element of education. After all, I was a progressive educator, aiming to spark my students’ imaginations with a child-centered, übercreative (Disneyesque) classroom. I had observed ungraded (no age divisions, no

⁶⁹ Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Bivens, *The Archaeology of the Mind* (New York: Norton, 2012), 450.

⁷⁰ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁷¹ Accessed November 29, 2013, <http://www.learner.org/courses/neuroscience>.

⁷² Kieran Egan, *Teaching As Storytelling* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁷³ Established in 2001. Cf. <http://ierg.ca>.

report cards) schools in Silicon Valley and visited the mecca of progressive education, Summerhill.⁷⁴ Imagine my surprise and dismay when Kieran Egan published a book the title of which stated that “our progressive inheritance” (including St. John Dewey!) had been “getting it wrong from the beginning.” It took me twelve years to get around to reading it.

Egan’s thesis is deceptively simple:

The way forward in improving educational practice...will not likely result from some new facts about learning, development, or the brain—or, at least, it seems unlikely that we will learn much from such sources that can be used in educating. Rather, we might look for reliable help from more adequate—more precise, more extensive—characterizations of our acquisition of cultural-cognitive tools.⁷⁵

These cultural-cognitive tools—also referred to as just “cognitive tools” or “kinds of understanding”—are the core of Egan’s work over the decades and deserve a critique of their own;⁷⁶ however, his negative assessment of progressivism, the theme of this book, warrants our more immediate attention. Egan’s book is an accusation of reductionism: the biologization of psychology and education.⁷⁷ It is not progressive education’s image of a fun and relevant classroom (cf. edutainment) that bothers Egan; indeed, his books and the IERG website are full of engaging ideas. No, it is progressivism’s legacy of hiding behind the white lab coats of the so-called “hard” sciences that he finds insidious. “These scientific methods are...good at exposing the *nature* of things but less good at exposing the *culture* of things—the human meanings of which so much of our consciousness consists.”⁷⁸ Egan’s argument rests on a clear differentiation

⁷⁴ Where I met A. S. Neill’s daughter, Zoë Neill Readhead, the Principal.

⁷⁵ Egan, *Getting It Wrong*, 179-180.

⁷⁶ Cf., e.g., Susan Laird, “Recapitulating?,” *Philosophy of Education* (1998): 62-67, accessed October 3, 2014, <http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/pes/issue/view/20>.

⁷⁷ Egan, *Getting It Wrong*, 113.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 183-4, emphasis mine.

between nature and culture.⁷⁹ The concepts and theories of one do not necessarily apply to the other.

Categorical Error

Is Egan correct? If so, the momentum is surely against him. Contemporary science news is full of *natural* (biochemical) suggestions and solutions for *cultural* (educational) problems.⁸⁰ Egan offers an analogy from his own landscaping experience. “To explain how five tons of stone were moved from the mason’s yard to the back of a garden,” one could study the biomechanics of human physiology (and perhaps learn how to prevent certain knee and back injuries), but the most relevant theories and explanations will come from studying the *tools* that were used: pallet lifter, truck, wheelbarrow, etc. “The analogy,” Egan writes,

is supposed to suggest that understanding human learning, especially from the perspective of parents and teachers who want to help children learn, will not likely be much helped by increasingly refined studies of the *nature* of learning. We would do better to attend to the *cognitive tools* that students employ when they learn.⁸¹

These cognitive tools are not biological mechanisms. To treat them as such is to make a categorical error. Even Noam Chomsky’s “language module” idea—that the brain is predisposed for language—only means that an infant’s brain is genetically primed for “programming” by culture.⁸² It does not spontaneously create meaningful language; it mimics the vocabulary and grammar it is exposed to and makes use of them via such lingual-cognitive tools as the use of

⁷⁹ This is an interesting parallel with Herman Dooyeweerd’s analysis of the central motives (metanarratives) in Western culture over the past 2500 years, the current humanist motive being nature and freedom. Cf. Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1968), ch. 2. Cf. also Dooyeweerd’s differentiation between pre- and post-cultural modalities in his modal scale (Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969)).

⁸⁰ Cf. e.g., Barbara Kantrowitz, “The Science of Learning,” *Scientific American* 311, no. 2 (August 2014), 69-73.

⁸¹ Egan, *Getting It Wrong*, 71; emphasis added.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 57.

oppositions (e.g., hot and cold) and narrative (e.g., this leads to that).⁸³ Egan traces this reductionistic tendency from Herbert Spencer (and Jean-Jacques Rousseau) to John Dewey and Jean Piaget—all long before its current infatuation with neuroscience. Each of these historically significant figures “reacted strongly against traditional forms of education” which they found to be, in Dewey’s words, “remote and dead—abstract and bookish.”⁸⁴ Egan doesn’t disagree: “That knowledge can remain ‘inert’ is indeed a central practical problem of education.”⁸⁵ It is the progressivist’s diagnosis and prescription that Egan finds erroneous. “If children were failing to learn,” the progressivists say, “or learning with difficulty and pressure, the cause lay in the curriculum or in the methods or time of teaching”; therefore, the “material should either be delayed until they were ‘ready’ to learn it or be ditched from the curriculum.”⁸⁶ The ditched material (e.g., Latin) is obviously useless, hence the direct line from Dewey’s pragmatism to the deschooling movement of the 1960s to the hegemony of the Three (measureable) Rs and the disappearance of the arts (and even recess!) in today’s schools.

So, am I, a self-professed progressive educator, making a category error in my methodology? Yes and no. Yes, in so far as I have sought to understand human learning by looking to neuroscience. No, inasmuch as I have been inspired by the most imaginative teachers I have been able to find. Looking to neuroscience for the workings of the student’s mind is a more complex issue. It is helpful, for instance, in addressing brain anomalies such as the autism spectrum or ADHD, but, as Egan says, “most of the research on learning, development, and so

⁸³ Ibid., 72.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 143-4.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 147.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 144.

on is not about education.”⁸⁷ It is about biology; it may even be about mental health; but it is not about the uniquely human sociocultural artifact we call education. Education is an interpersonal initiation into everything we hold dear by way of, among other things, the complex system of metaphors we call language. This initiation and the tool of language could not exist without a biological substratum (i.e., the body, the brain, the senses, etc.) but they are not equivalent (literally, “of the same level”). In the words of Jacob Klapwijk, “Cerebral processes correlate with thought processes; they do support but they do not cause the latter. Causality is level-bound, determined by the idionomy of a domain.... Causality can never form an explanatory link between the domains.”⁸⁸ Our use of language to tell a story, for instance, cannot happen without our domain of neurons acting in a healthy manner, but those neuronal interactions do not *cause* our mental experiences of boredom, excitement, etc. The former is studied by neuroscientists, the latter by psychologists, and the “interpersonal initiation” processes by educators attempting to hone their skills. This does not negate the importance of interdisciplinary research, but we ought to be “skeptical of the...assumption that this knowledge [of neural processes] provides a significant resource to improve education.”⁸⁹

The Big Three

Egan’s *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning* is part of a larger project. “Most people today,” he writes in a more recent book, “use three big ideas when they think about education[:]...socialization, Plato’s academic idea, and Rousseau’s developmental idea.”⁹⁰ All three have their flaws and

⁸⁷ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁸ Jacob Klapwijk, *Purpose in the Living World?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 185. Klapwijk attributes his ideas on levels/domains, idionomy, and causality to the work of Herman Dooyeweerd.

⁸⁹ Egan, *Getting It Wrong*, 157.

⁹⁰ Kieran Egan, *The Future of Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 9.

Getting It Wrong is his scrutinizing of the third “big idea.” The first two—teaching students to be good citizens and exposing them to the greatest ideas of human history—will always compete for space in the curriculum, but the reason Egan targets the third, I believe, is because it has done the most damage. Egan admits that condensing education to just three ideas is a simplification, but it is a helpful heuristic device nonetheless.⁹¹

It could be said that the first two ideas—socialization and academics—are more about *what* is being taught and the third, development, is about *how* things are taught: the *what* (i.e., curriculum) being negotiated between the socializers and academics, and the *how* (i.e., instruction) being led by the neuroscientists and educational philosophers. But Egan is wary of the “binary distinction between an autonomously developing mind and an ‘external’ body of knowledge.”⁹² The twentieth century is pockmarked with the endless battles between those who were “child-centered” and those who were “subject-centered.” I am guilty of fighting for both sides of that war at different times in my career.

Egan’s main point is that each of the “three big ideas” “seems to commit its adherents to a somewhat different conception of the mind”⁹³—for socializers the brain is a social organ, for academics it is a *tabula rasa*, and for developmentalists it is a progressive unfolding of nature—none of which, either individually or altogether, recognizes the the intermediary “cultural-cognitive tools” that he proposes. Egan is looking for the organic patterns that the mind/brain as part of nature has developed into—and by way of—culture. These cognitive tools, or kinds of understanding, unfold as we mature within society. Egan posits five:⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid., 34.

⁹² Ibid., 26.

⁹³ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁴ Drawn from the IERG website, <http://ierg.ca>. Accessed November 27, 2013.

- somatic (pre-linguistic; infants and toddlers): sensations and emotions.
- mythic (oral language; young childhood): binary structuring, fantasy, and rhyme and rhythm.
- romantic (written language; middle/older childhood): limits and extremes, and hero(in)es.
- philosophic (theoretic use of language; young/early adulthood): laws, theories, and generalizations.
- ironic (reflexive use of language; adulthood (if ever)): limits of theoretic thinking.

Egan v. Piaget

At first glance, Egan’s first four stages look familiar. Aren’t they merely a redux of Jean Piaget’s four periods⁹⁵ of mental development? The age levels may correlate approximately, but beyond the first stage, two very important differences appear (see fig. 2.1). First, Piaget limits his observations to the logicomathematical way of experiencing the world, whereas Egan is more

Figure 2.1 Comparing Piaget and Egan

Piaget’s Periods of Mental Development	Egan’s (first four) Cognitive Tools
Sensorimotor: obtain basic knowledge of objects via senses	Somatic: using the senses & emotions to understand the world

⁹⁵ *The World Book Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Piaget, Jean” (Chicago: World Book, 2007).

<p>Preoperational: develop language & drawing abilities</p>	<p>Mythic: using binary thinking to <i>organize & classify knowledge</i>; using <i>abstractions</i> (e.g., good, evil, justice, love, etc.) in fantasy storytelling</p>
<p>Concrete operations: logical thinking, e.g., <i>organize and classify knowledge</i></p>	<p>Romantic: exploring limits and emulating hero(in)es to find one’s place in the world</p>
<p>Formal operations: realistic reasoning about the future & deal with <i>abstractions</i></p>	<p>Philosophic: using theories & generalizations to grasp & control reality</p>

holistic, including the emotions and imagination. This is part of Egan’s criticism of the scientism found within progressivism. Second, Egan does not limit the use of abstractions to older children as Piaget does. For Egan, the use of abstractions is concurrent with the development of the imagination early in life. Consider a small child learning the word “doggie” to describe a neighborhood dog. The child will automatically (if incorrectly) use “doggie” to describe all four-legged animals. It is as if that generalizing ability is built in.⁹⁶ Later corrections will, of course, help the child to generalize about cats and raccoons—and even schnauzers and poodles—all categorical abstractions in his or her imagination.

This difference between Egan and Piaget is critical to formal education. Instead of dealing solely with concrete objects in early education and waiting till the students are older to confront abstract ideas, let us acknowledge the ability of the young mind to create the necessary generalizations and categories in order to make sense of her world. This leads Egan to conclude that the imagination is central to the educational process.

⁹⁶ In his book, *Plato’s Camera: How the Physical Brain Captures a Landscape of Abstract Universals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), Paul M. Churchland offers a fascinating account of how the “ever-changing dynamical state of the brain” (20) learns and even creates novel insights by moving one’s “cognitive trajectory into an importantly different and hitherto unvisited region of your antecedently sculpted neuronal activation space” (21). As much as I enjoy learning about the brain, I must admit that such neurobiological information offers little direct help to the educator. For example, a more helpful way of stating the above might be simply: New insights—aha! moments—are often generated by seeing one topic in terms of another, i.e., by using the power of metaphor.

The Irony of It All

The fifth and final⁹⁷ of Egan's cognitive tools is the ironic. This tool and the previous, philosophic, are the most relevant to our exploration of higher education. Ironic understanding is recognizing "the difference between what is *said and what is meant*."⁹⁸ There is a "gap between meaning and the ability of language to express and communicate meaning," and irony is the tool to move beyond the "overt or literal meaning."⁹⁹ Someone well grounded in philosophic understanding will necessarily stress the importance of clarity and a literal interpretation of language for the purposes of power and control. Without them there is no possibility for technology, research, and exact categorizations. For people stuck in this mode of understanding, science becomes the highest form of knowledge; it is difficult for them to see otherwise. How many people arrive at college—and later graduate—and never move beyond this way of thinking? How many professors are stuck at the philosophic level? Egan fears too many.

The philosophic thinker typically dismisses somatic and mythic understanding as childish and is embarrassed by the time wasted on silly collections and hero(ine) worship at the romantic level, but the ironic thinker is more flexible. She discovers a renewed appreciation for "the contribution to our sense making of each of the previous kinds of understanding.... Irony is that multiperspectival congregation of views in the one mind at the same time."¹⁰⁰ It is, in a word, a more holistic way of understanding. At issue is how we shepherd our college students (and

⁹⁷ It is worth noting that further cognitive tools or ways of understanding have been suggested by other researchers as possibilities for continued maturation throughout life. For a comprehensive survey, cf. Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology* (Boston: Shambala, 2000). Cf. also figure 3.3 in Miller, *Holistic*, 38.

⁹⁸ Egan, *Future*, 80; emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

precocious high schoolers) into ironic understanding. It certainly cannot be done by professors (or teachers) who themselves are not adept at using the ironic cognitive tool.

Obviously, the philosophic way of understanding could be equated with modernism and the ironic with postmodernism. In this way, Egan's levels might be used to describe the evolution of cultural as well as individual ways of seeing the world around us. But perhaps that's too simplistic. After all, postmodernism¹⁰¹ may be typified by multiperspectival and flexible thinking, and even by its critique of scientism and literalism, but it is not usually understood to be appreciative of other (e.g., literal) kinds of knowing. Irony, unchecked by compassion, can become cruel, as Ronald A. Kuipers reminds us in his book on Richard Rorty. In Rorty's words, "the best thing to cause people long-lasting pain is to humiliate them by making the things that seemed most important to them look futile, obsolete, and powerless."¹⁰² I trust that Egan does not mean *ironism* when he refers to irony as the most mature kind of understanding. Perhaps he would agree with Rorty (in Kuipers's words) that "an ironist...is someone who is able to combine a deep sense of commitment with a simultaneous awareness of the contingency of that commitment."¹⁰³

Conclusion

Our brief survey of Egan's book and broader work leaves us with two things to consider. First, the history of progressive education is guilty of biological reductionism, of believing that we can improve education by knowing better how the brain works. It might also be said that Egan is

¹⁰¹ I am using my philosophic cognitive tool to generalize about postmodernism for the sake of communication, yet am fully (ironically) aware that postmodernism as such is far from a monolithic entity.

¹⁰² Richard Rorty quoted in Ronald A. Kuipers, *Richard Rorty* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 102.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 98.

guilty of reducing progressive education to just that one flaw. If anything, reducing a student to a learning brain is a temptation shared across the education spectrum today. Second, Egan's emphasis on cultural-cognitive tools (over brain mechanisms) offers a potential diagnosis for much of the uncritical ("sound-bite") thinking prevalent in mainstream American society today. Too many adults never move beyond the mythic (e.g., "If you're not for us, you're against us!"), romantic (e.g., obsession with professional sports, video games, or military might), or philosophic (e.g., legalism, dogmatism, literalism) ways of understanding the world around them.

Section 5: Gregory Cajete (*Look to the Mountain*) and David W. Orr (*Earth in Mind*) on Education and the Environment¹⁰⁴

Introduction

One cannot consider holism, by any definition, without taking into account the whole of our natural context. For not only are we embedded in nature, we *are* nature. In the words of Carl Sagan, we are made of star stuff. Although our natural context includes the entire universe, of greater concern today is—or should be—our planetwide environmental crisis. Unfortunately, part of that concern for today's American educators is combatting fossil fuel-funded, anti-science propaganda; the near universal faith in progress (i.e., science and technology will fix the problem that science and technology caused); and, for Christian educators, the lethargy caused by those depending on Christ's imminent return. David Orr, in the Introduction to his book written twenty years ago, offers a litany of frightening environmental facts and uses the words "ecological

¹⁰⁴ Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (1994; repr., Skyland, NC: Kivaki Press, 2001) and David W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (1994; repr., Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004).

crisis.”¹⁰⁵ He did not coin that term, of course, others were using it another twenty years earlier. The fact that we (Americans, including a significant number of Christians) are still arguing about whether or not this crisis is real in 2014 is not only discouraging but criminal. It is my opinion that there is no greater or more urgent issue for educators today than training up the next several generations to live in a different way and create a different society in the business of healing our planet and serving the needs of the millions (or billions) of people who will inevitably suffer due to the last several generations’—including our own—destruction of our natural context. In the words of Yale University historian Paul Kennedy, the twenty-first century calls for “nothing less than the re-education of humankind.”¹⁰⁶

Gregory Cajete, a Tewa Indian, professor, and artist, represents a North American nature-centered philosophy from time immemorial. His life’s work is primarily about helping Native American educators reclaim the wisdom of their past and, secondarily, about sharing that wisdom with non-Native American educators so that we all might work together to heal the earth. David Orr, acclaimed author and professor, represents the non-Native American (Western, Euro-American) community attempting to teach ecological wholeness. Think of “white” Western arms and “red” Indian arms embracing across North America.

Wholeness

Interestingly, although both authors use “wholeness” and “holistic,” neither stops to define them nor makes the underlying concept a central part of their mission. For Cajete, the concept is indicative of reality being multidimensional and relational,¹⁰⁷ moving from “a focus on structures

¹⁰⁵ Orr, *Earth*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Cajete, *Look*, 20.

to understanding processes,”¹⁰⁸ using all of one’s senses,¹⁰⁹ individuals as part of communities,¹¹⁰ and self-knowledge and wisdom.¹¹¹ Orr, on the other hand, is more concerned with thinking in whole systems. For example, one of the dangers of formal schooling is that it instills “the belief that the world really is as disconnected as the divisions, disciplines, and subdisciplines of the typical curriculum.”¹¹² Such a fragmented view of reality, when combined with a proclivity for short-range thinking, leads to universities becoming mere knowledge factories, or in Orr’s words, teaching “know how” rather than “know why.”¹¹³ Cajete calls this “the transfer of academic skills...generally devoid of substantial ethical or moral content...”¹¹⁴ Obviously, “know how” has a legitimate place in the curriculum, and divisions and disciplines are necessary for analytical study. The problem arises when they become the dominant or exclusive paradigm, squeezing out the opportunity to reassemble the pieces and consider the moral implications of the topic at hand. “Just because we can doesn’t mean we should” (Dr. Ian Malcolm in *Jurassic Park*). It is the pseudo-irreversibility of objectivity that both authors note, waste little time on, and counter with their own educational models of wholeness.

Grow Where You’re Planted

Neither author uses the term “place-based education” (used elsewhere in the environmental education literature), but the importance of place, of one’s local environs, is of central concern to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 34.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 209.

¹¹² Orr, *Earth*, 23. Cf. 60 and 159.

¹¹³ Ibid., 49.

¹¹⁴ Cajete, *Look*, 19.

both of them. Orr speaks of “becoming native to our places”¹¹⁵ and Cajete of what can be called reindigenization, that is, for people of Native American lineage, a return to tribal lifeways of walking in harmony with one’s land, and, for non-Natives, a reimagining of their own traditions (or recreating if they have none) to the same end. For almost all of human history, we have co-evolved with our natural environment; only very recently have we been able to close ourselves off from the voices of creation and, to use the canary-in-the-mineshaft analogy, not notice the signs of danger when those voices stop singing. The solution, Cajete and Orr tell us, is to open our windows, (re)acquaint ourselves with our human and nonhuman community, and realize that our health (and wholeness) is completely interwoven with the health/wholeness of the place (bioregion) where we live (and, by concentric extension, that bioregion’s interrelation with all the other bioregions on the planet). “We are,” after all, “highly evolved deep air mammals”¹¹⁶—and like all mammals, I would add, we remain unaware of our natural habitat at our peril.

Education throughout history has been the passing from one generation to the next the most valued parts of culture, and culture has been more or less embedded in the place where one lives—more embedded in tribal, indigenous communities and less so in modern industrial communities. Cajete and Orr represent a growing movement of educators that literally ground the school experience (from pre-K to PhD) in the earth, in the local place wherever we find ourselves. Orr’s plan achieves this in primarily two ways. First, a deconstruction of the hidden curriculum of mainstream American education, namely: “human domination of nature is good,” “the growth of economy is natural,” a “blind acceptance of the notion of progress,” a

¹¹⁵ Orr, *Earth*, 147.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 212 (quoting Stan Rowe). As Pope Francis has recently reiterated, evolution need not be incompatible with Scripture. Most Christians are not used to thinking about humans as either “evolved” or “mammals,” but I am in favor of doing so more often for the sake of reminding ourselves that we *are* nature, we are products of nature, and all of nature is interconnected. This does not mean that “nature-centered” has to replace “Christ-centered,” but only that we remember our humble (human, humus, earthy) roots.

“technological fundamentalism,” an “appeal to short-term economic self-interest,” the normalcy of a “throwaway economy,” and the development of a socially corrosive “industrial-utilitarian mind.”¹¹⁷ Second, in the place of those negatives, Orr posits a philosophy that “all education’s environmental education.”¹¹⁸ Of course, if one’s environment is limited to an indoor, climate-controlled, personalized, high-tech-mediated reality, then today’s education might seem sufficient; however, once one expands it to include one’s whole environs—cultural and natural—other interconnected complexities come into play causing us to reevaluate our beliefs and ethics. For education, that means learning about “an ecologically honest account of our past”¹¹⁹ (e.g., the European settlement of North America); the economy of nature (i.e., “an accounting system that includes all the costs of [the] consumption”¹²⁰ of natural capital, e.g., soil erosion, the destruction of biotic stocks, and the decades or centuries of clean up ahead); a politics willing “to question [taboos such as] economic growth, the distribution of wealth, . . . population growth, and the scale and purposes of technology”;¹²¹ and what Cajete calls a “natural democracy” (i.e., “the idea that plants, animals, and other entities in the natural world, have rights of their own”).¹²²

The focus of Cajete’s “ecology of indigenous education” is more interpersonal and developmental. It is founded on the idea that in order to help students to “find their face (develop and express their innate character and potential) . . . [and] to find their heart (search out and express their inner passion),”¹²³ the broader community (ecology)—family, elders, tribe, plants,

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* (respectively): 32, 32, 32-33, 33 (also 179), 60, 159, and 213.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹²² Cajete, *Look*, 89.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 35.

animals, mountains, etc.—must be engaged. It is that larger community that teaches us the rhythm of growth, just like the rhythm of the seasons. To learn about one's self and the context of our relationships requires “a tearing apart to create a new order.... Harmony is achieved through such a process, but it lasts only for a short time....”¹²⁴ Similarly, growth (development, education) occurs with the movement between one's inner and outer dimensions, or, in Cajete's words, one's winter and summer elements, respectively. Externally, the community (elders) provides the myths (“renewed with each time and in each place it is told”¹²⁵), the individual internalizes (personalizes) them, and expresses them through his or her art. Myths are the “glue” that hold a community together,¹²⁶ and “art is an alchemy of process in which the artist becomes more himself through each act of true creation.”¹²⁷ These back-and-forth (or circular or spiral) rhythms are the educational methods by which a student (throughout life) finds her face and heart. They are founded in the sacred spirit (breath, wind) that connects all things.¹²⁸ Knowing oneself, one's unique talents, one's place in the world, requires knowing one's community, its myths, and its land.

This cannot be written off as tribal jargon or pantheistic nonsense; it is imminently practicable vis-à-vis the multiple crises we are facing today: the breakdown of ecologies, communities, families, and individuals' self-awareness. I cannot truly know myself (find my face and heart) without knowing my community, its myths, my place in that community, and my personal and communal place in relation to the local land (watershed, bioregion). Today's

¹²⁴ Ibid., 210.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 116.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 117.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 150. For Cajete, everyone is an artist.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 42-43 and 50.

American culture (if it can be spoken of in the singular) and its schools (which mirror the culture) fail miserably on all accounts. The myth of the American dream (faltering in today's economic recession) is a mere "theology of money"¹²⁹ promising fame and fortune to all who bend the knee to instant gratification, eternal youth, consumerism, built-in obsolescence, and narcissism. We have much to (re)learn from our so-called "primitive" cousins and from the lessons, relationships, and rhythms of nature itself.

Section 6: Conclusion

Introduction

A recent *Scientific American* article on technology and higher education pleasantly surprised me by stating that one of the objectives of higher education, personal development, means "the lifelong process of becoming [*inter alia*] a...compassionate human being."¹³⁰ The unexpected humanitarianism turns out to be a passing comment, though, as the remainder of the article, written by the CEO of an educational technology company, attempts to demonstrate that traditional "brick-and-mortar" campuses and "the one-on-one student-teacher bond" of live, in-person classrooms are dissolving before the unstoppable and increasing momentum of technology. Why even bother to outfit your university with the latest technology when it will be obsolete by the time you finish the renovation? The author's conclusion: "use the world as... [your] campus." An inspiring slogan, perhaps, bringing to mind life-changing internships and apprenticeships—valuable experiences for young adults—but only available for those with the resources to travel extensively and, of course, buy the latest technology. When the world is your

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³⁰ Ben Nelson, "Passing the Midterm," *Scientific American* 311, no. 4 (October 2014): 15. Subsequent quotes from this article are from the same page.

campus, you have no campus. A computer screen (or even virtual goggles) will never replace the fidelity of the sights, sounds, smells, feel, and body language of a real classroom setting, of a real learning community. All it does is further our fragmented view of reality. We need *more* interaction with reality, with our shared environment, not *less*.

The purpose of this paper is to explore another direction for education, one that is holistic, interconnected, and shalomic. In the previous five sections of this paper, six books have been informally evaluated in two ways: (1) they were selected from a large range of educational writings, and (2) they were summarized by being filtered through my own interests and experience. In the first two sections in particular, I found myself attracted to one author's approach (Palmer) and disappointed by another (Miller). In all six books, I left aside a sizable amount of material in order to emphasize that which I sought after (I will not feign to be a neutral, objective observer): a counter to today's social fragmented and ecologically destructive culture/education that should include, among other things, a nurturing community as part of—and committed to the health of—the interconnected whole of reality. By way of a more formal evaluation, I will bring the perspectives of these authors to bear on the key terms of this course and paper: holistic, Christian, and higher education. Then I will reassemble the whole to see what theoretical and practical outcomes appear.

Holistic

Unfortunately, Miller's book, *Holistic Curriculum*, sows more confusion than clarity on the concept of holism. Nonetheless, his own six-point summary does include both *intrapersonal* concerns such as the connections between mind and body, linear and intuitive thinking, and one's personal and

transpersonal self; and *interpersonal* concerns such as the relationships between self and community, self and the earth, and between the various domains of knowledge.

Wolterstorff more clearly and succinctly captures the same concept with the word “shalom” by defining it as our having right relationships with God, nature, others, and self. He expands the last two by emphasizing social justice as well as both social and individual flourishing and delight.

Both Cajete and Orr link wholeness and health and see our own and nature’s as inseparable, indeed, as one. Cajete describes reality as multidimensional and relational (cf. Miller’s domains of knowledge) and more about processes than structures, while Orr emphasizes whole-system thinking.

Egan doesn’t speak in terms of holism, but his “ironic” cognitive tool (way of knowing) includes a mature openness to other (less mature) cognitive tools, that is, an understanding that every developmental stage has its necessary place, that the whole of human cognitive development is important.

Finally, Palmer’s entire approach is holistic without using that term. His ecological epistemology is one of complete interrelatedness, of knowledge as the intimate, loving connection with the other. He does use the word “wholesight” to emphasize that we know—and are known—with our whole selves.

Christian

Only Palmer and Wolterstorff write from an explicitly Christian perspective. For Palmer, truth is incarnational, that is, it is not an abstract or ethereal thing, but a very tangible reality found (revealed, discovered) in a community of troth (trust). He also makes the interesting point that

meaning is not revealed in one's goal (*telos*) but in one's source(s). Instead of a search for meaning, life grows out of one's heart-commitment (faith, meaning-source)—in other words, life is religion.

Wolterstorff's "right relationships" includes one's relationship to/with God, which ought to lead to a sacramental consciousness, the responsive awareness that all of creation is "holy ground." Explaining his Reformed perspective, he uses the word "holistic" to describe the all-encompassing effects of sin, redemption, and faith. These things are not partial or limited; they are interwoven into all of reality.

Although not writing from a Christian perspective, Cajete does address religion both positively and negatively. For him, the indigenous lifeway is centered in nature. As Palmer would say, this is the source in which all of Cajete's ideas take root. Cajete also has strong words for our culture's faith in progress and theology of money, two forces that have conspired to bring destruction to his religious source, nature.

Higher Education

Wolterstorff is the only author in this group that deals directly with *higher* education, but that does not hinder us from drawing helpful ideas from the others (who deal with education in general). In fact, Wolterstorff's concluding applications are really only three: Christian higher education is a perspectival enterprise, part of larger (i.e., nonchristian) academia, and should include Scriptural and theological studies. All three are merely cognitive and therefore not holistic. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, his concept of shalom is wonderfully holistic and therefore quite helpful in advancing our understanding of a *holistic* higher education.

Egan's five developmental cognitive tools offer an interesting commentary on secondary and post-secondary education. After moving through the childhood levels of somatic and mythic

knowing, the romantic level (e.g., hero(ine) worship) is exemplified by junior high (middle school) students (i.e., early adolescence), and the philosophic level (e.g., systems thinking) is exemplified by high school (secondary) students (i.e., late adolescence). And, Egan explains, not everyone reaches the ironic level. Yet in today's "youth culture" where immaturity is celebrated, some people have never even reached the philosophic level, remaining a "romantic" adolescent for life. This should be of great concern for institutions of higher education.

Miller also recognizes the need for personal growth in education. His suggestions of small schools, integrated curriculum, and a slower (less frenetic) pace are aimed at K-12 schools, but are potentially scalable to higher education. He also notes that the role of education is to bring about social change, something Wolterstorff would agree with so long as it is grounded in justice and leads to human flourishing.

Cajete emphasizes that personal development within education is grounded in community, in finding one's "face" and "heart" by finding one's place in the greater whole of nature (human and nonhuman). One's community is one's family, one's people, and the local ecosystem (bioregion). Education must be more—far more—than a mere transfer of academic skills devoid of ethics or morals.

Orr also critiques schools—specifically universities—for being mere knowledge factories teaching "know how" without the "know why." For him, curricular divisions may be necessary for analytical learning, but he grieves the loss of reassembling the whole. He also mentions several areas of the hidden curriculum that are in desperate need of deconstruction: human domination of nature, growth economy, myth of progress, technological fundamentalism, throwaway economy, and short-term economic self-interest.

Palmer is simple and profound. To create and nurture a community of truth/truth and a learning environment where knowledge is an intimate, loving connection to the other, we must have a classroom that is hospitable, safe, and open to new and different people and ideas. As I see it, this is the antipode of the virtual “classroom” alluded to in the aforementioned *Scientific American* article.

Putting It All Together

I would like to take a risk and call in an outside expert to help us tie all of these loose ends (*analysis*) together. Taking the liberty to adapt one word (changing his “psychotherapy” to “education”), I quote James H. Olthuis to set the stage:

An integrally spiritual [education] begins from the conviction that there is only one reality, a creation that is thoroughly spiritual all the way down. In fact, creation exists only as spiritual—as a cosmic process of connections and interconnections that hold together in the love of God. Life is a matter of relationships—trees with stars, animals with flowers, humans with rivers, people with people, all creatures with God. Life from beginning to end, in its breadth and height, its depth and length, is life-with-God.¹³¹

So we begin with “connections and interconnections” to all of creation and God. This captures Wolterstorff’s shalom, Miller’s holism, Cajete’s multidimensional reality, and Orr’s whole-system thinking.

Next, Olthuis captures Egan’s idea of ironic (read “spiritually mature”) understanding:

The secret to living is not to adopt a mind of safety in which we try to hold off and control the flux (which is the modernist temptation [and Egan’s philosophic level]) nor to resign ourselves to powerlessness in the flux (the postmodern temptation [and Egan’s ironic level without love]). The secret of a full and abundant life is instead to join forces with the flow of God’s love in the world, and to take up one’s life as a coworker in God’s ministry of healing.¹³²

Finally, Palmer and Olthuis are speaking the same language. For Palmer, love is “the connective tissue of reality”;¹³³ for Olthuis, “Loving is of the essence of being human, the connective tissue of reality, the oxygen of life.”¹³⁴ Wolterstorff measures wholeness/shalom via

¹³¹ James H. Olthuis, *The Beautiful Risk: A New Psychology of Loving and Being Loved* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 55.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³³ Palmer, *To Know*, 9.

¹³⁴ Olthuis, *Beautiful*, 69.

human flourishing; Olthuis writes, “To love is to make proper connections, to promote the flourishing and interconnectedness of all things....”¹³⁵

It seems a shame that we should have to explore holism (*shalom*) in education at all. Shouldn't we want to nurture the whole child into the whole of culture and reality as we know it? And we should be chagrined that our exploration has brought us to the obvious: education as the loving/knowing experienced in an interconnected, hospitable, human and nonhuman community of truth/troth that leads to our flourishing and delight. Is this not the core of Jesus' message and life? Did we not know this already? The fact is that we are creatures of our time. We cannot transcend our historical context, the frayed ends of more than two centuries of Enlightenment reductionism. Analytical thinking is a bold gift to the development of human culture, but it is only a part of the whole. All of education—higher and lower—should be holistic (*shalomic*), that is to say, the *whole* community involved in leading the *whole* student into a betrothal with *all* the wonders of creation.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

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