



## The Principles of Classical Pedagogy

Dr. Christopher Perrin

### Lesson 8: Wonder and Curiosity

#### Outline:

*“The ability to experience wonder is one of the highest possibilities of human nature.”*

Josef Pieper

#### Wonder and Curiosity

- All of a good classical education is characterized by wonder.
- Aristotle said that becoming a wise person begins in wonder.
- Wonder is foundational to education.
- Are you at wonder in this delightful world in which we you are born?

#### Wonder is connected to love

- We need to enable students to see the true, good, and beautiful we need to present them as things that inspire and elicit wonder. We need to remember the wonder we experienced.
- We need to love that which is lovely.
- Wonder → Worship → Wisdom → Meaningful Work (*Leisure the Basis of Culture*, Pieper).
  - Wonder leads us to admire something, which is to worship and ascribe worth to something.
  - Worship leads to wisdom over a life of wonderfully contemplating the true good and the beautiful.

#### Wonder is at the beginning of the educational enterprise: Josef Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture*

- Philosophy has its beginning in the experience of wonder.
- The commonplace mind, rendered deaf-mute, finds everything self-explanatory. But what really is self-explanatory? Is it self-explanatory, then, that we exist? Is it self-explanatory that there is such a thing as seeing?
- “...the one who experiences wonder is one who, astounded by the deeper aspect of the world, cannot hear the immediate demands of life – if even for a moment, that moment when he gazes on the astounding vision of the world.” (102)
- *Theoria* can only exist to the extent that man has not become blind to the wondrous – the wonderful fact that something exists.
- The ability to experience wonder is one of the highest possibilities of human nature. (103)



- One of the greatest experiences for you and your students is to be at wonder in the world. We must return to this and cultivate wonder.

*The Intellectual Life*, by A.G. Sertillanges

- Every intellectual work begins by a moment of ecstasy; only in the second place does the talent of arrangement, the technique of transitions, connections of ideas, construction come into play. Now what is this ecstasy but a flight upwards, away from self, a forgetting to live our own poor life, in order that the object of our delight may live in our thought and in our heart. (Sertillanges, xix)
  - This is the beginning of an education, when a student forgets himself and says, “I would have that live in me.”
  - Our students will want the same delight that they see in our countenance and in our life.
- Both the poet and philosopher are concerned with wonder (from Aquinas).
- The wonderful is not to be found in the world of work.

*The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis

- Education should not be a matter of cutting jungles, but irrigating deserts.
- The aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought.
- The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful.
- It is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them out. Their heads are no bigger than ordinary: **it is the atrophy of the chest** beneath that makes them seem so.
- In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.

Wonder: Musical Education, Plato, *The Republic*

- What kind of education shall we give them? We shall find it difficult to improve on the time-honored distinction between the physical training we give to the body and the education (*mousice*) we give to the mind and character (*psuche*) (Republic Part III, Book II).

Wonder: Nine Muses

- Calliope: **Epic poetry** (Writing tablet)
- Clio: **History** (Scrolls)
- Erato: **Lyric Poetry** (Cithara)
- Euterpe: **Song and Elegiac poetry** (Aulos)
- Melpomene: **Tragedy** (Tragic mask)
- Polyhymnia: **Hymns** (Veil)



- Terpsichore: **Dance** (Lyre)
- Thalia: **Comedy** (Comic mask)
- Urania: **Astronomy** (Globe and compass)

## Latin for Curiosity

- *Studium* (zeal, eagerness, enthusiasm, application, inclination, fondness, affection; party spirit, partisanship; study, literary work)
  - A student is someone who has an affection for the true, good, and the beautiful.
  - These are students who have a full engaged love for the things that are lovely.
- *Studiosus* (eager, zealous, diligent, anxious, striving)
- *Studeo* (to be eager, be earnest, take pains, strive after, be busy with)
- *Miraculum* (that which is astonishing to behold)
- *Curiosus* (careful, thoughtful, inquiring, inquisitive)
- *Curiositas* (curiosity-sometimes inappropriate connotation, when we have excessive curiosity to know and pursue what we need not know and pursue)
- Even education in wonder can become distorted. It is not possible to have every moment be a miracle. Don't fall into the trap of being too ambitious and hyper excessive.

## Wonder: Grammar School

- Lower grade teachers are teaching reading and basic arithmetic, opening the world of literature, language, and mathematics which is preliminary to the liberal arts.
- The teacher can be seen as a muse inspiring a love of the lovely by modeling their own wonder at the cosmos. These teachers are profoundly in the classical tradition.
- These teachers are the pulsing light of wonder that older students need to see.
- The grammar school leads the entire school to continue to extend and deepen wonder as a pedagogical principle for the school at a time when older students are tempted to leave their wonder behind.

## Wonder: Leading by Loving, Learning

- We need to model our own wonder, delight, affection – and embody it.
- It is important during lower school years that the students learn to love the natural world and begin to name the things they find in nature (nature study, nature contemplation), so they begin to love living things (the heavens) before they formally study (critique and analyze) biology and astronomy.

## How to Cultivate Wonder

- Get alone with beauty, nature (exit total world of work).
- Get alone with the best books. Don't move too quickly through books.
- Return to your first loves. Re-experience the wonder of these things.



- Surround yourself with like-minded people.
- Follow your children. Children come to us with wide-eyed wonder. They lead us so that we can lead them.