Chatty Wisdom vs. Thoughtful Sophia

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Reflecting on contemporary students David Brooks describes what he refers to as the "organization kid."[1] Such kids are conditioned by parents and schools (as well as prescription medication) to achieve scholastic success so as to ensure economic well-being. They are focused and strategic about achieving their career goals, ever seeking to maintain a competitive advantage. It is no wonder, notes Mark Shiffman, that *The Hunger Games*—a dystopic portrayal of adolescents strenuously trained by adults to participate in "desperate but meaningless life-or-death competitions"—is one of the most popular novels of this generation.[2] Shiffman goes on to note that interestingly (or disturbingly) the most highlighted passage from *The Hunger Games* trilogy (according to Amazon's Kindle) is the following: "'Because sometimes things happen to people and they're not equipped to deal with them.'" "Organization kids" are driven to equip themselves, as much as possible, for an uncertain future.

More than majoring in a field of study, which excites their intellectual passions, Shiffan sees them majoring in fear. If not fear, perhaps despair that eclipses other possibilities. "It is a characteristic of wisdom," notes Henry David Thoreau, "not to do desperate things."[3] By this measure, contemporary students (and perhaps most of us) lack wisdom, which is understandable given their (and our) despair over an uncertain future. Moreover, it is hardly surprising given that the language of wisdom in education, if it emerges at all (perhaps in a school's mission statement, which tend to hover at around 30,000 feet), often remains abstract. The question of how do or how should schools operationalize wisdom can seem out of place within contemporary educational discourse, fixated, as it is, on securing measurable learning outcomes.

The proliferation of student anxiety can also be seen in the sharp decline (over the past two generations) in students majoring in the humanities or even the hard sciences. The overwhelming majority of students pursue vocational or commercial fields: business, communications, computer science, education, engineering, or health, shoring themselves up for an ever precarious future.[4] Yet perhaps, within this milieu, there is space for a certain kind of wisdom. Certainly, we need doctors, engineers, even computer scientists, who possess *phronesis* or practical wisdom—professionals who are not exclusively driven by perfunctory rules, but rather adept at determining when rules should or should not be followed. The fear and despair that Shiffman and Thoreau speak about, however, intimates a different kind of wisdom. Paul Fides notes a duality in the wisdom tradition: one stream, drawing from Proverbs, involves "dealing capably with others in matters of everyday life; (for example, Prov. 31:10-31)."[5] The other stream, drawing from Job, encompasses "trembling before an unknowable God (as, for example, in Job 38-41)." Wisdom inhabits both the quotidian and the cosmic realms.[6]

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[1] David Brooks, "The Organization Kid," *The Atlantic*, April 2001.
[2] Mark Shiffman, "Majoring in Fear," *First Things*, November 2014.
[3] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2016), 4.
[4] William Deresiewicz, "The Neoliberal Arts," *Harper's Magazine*, September 2015.
[5] Dorothy Bass, *Practical Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), ?.
[6] Ibid.

On the proverbial or practical wisdom front much has been said of late.[7] The resurgence of wisdom research across multiple fields and disciplines is striking, and encouraging. Positive psychology, especially, positions itself at the center of this renewed interest, invoking wisdom as a means for improving human well-being.[8] In the spirit of Proverbs, the positive psychology movement aims to transform what began as a folk science into a genuine science, meticulously correlating human actions and consequences, issuing in a "demonstrated superior ability to understand the nature and behavior of things, people, or events…[resulting] in an increased ability to predict behavior or events which then may be used to benefit self or others."[9]

Yet where the *Proverbs* tradition has much to say about practical wisdom, especially as it plays out in the professions, the wisdom of Job begins where words fall off, where predictions and probabilities collapse. Where proverbial wisdom is chatty and direct, offering an endless midrash on the nature of phronetic judgment, the wisdom of Job is hushed, punctuated by incomprehensibility and an abiding sense of uncertainty. It is wisdom in a minor key. Instead of practical know-how this tradition is shrouded in a cloud of unknowing. These distinctive streams, notes Joseph Dunne, "confront us with two very different and apparently opposing rhetorics: one of strength, mastery, prevailing, excelling; and the other of vulnerability, yieldingness, dependency, receptivity, surrender, supplication."[10]

My focus, in this paper, is on this silent wisdom or the wisdom of how to stand before an "unknowable God." Translated into secular discourse, it relates to what Deborah Kerdeman describes as the phenomenon of being "pulled up short…, where events we neither want nor foresee and to which we may believe we are immune interrupt our lives and challenge our self-understanding in ways we cannot imagine in advance of living through them."[11] I will argue that this phenomenon of being pulled up short, while central to the human condition, is intensified by the teaching endeavor. Teaching involves a disquieting exposure.[12] To deny, avoid, or ignore this is to suffer a certain kind of despair. Moreover, it is to betray ignorance of the silent wisdom that the anxious students Shiffman refers to desperately need.

The Lure of Technique[13]

When thinking about wisdom, it is perhaps always instructive to remember Aristotle's famous caution in Book 1 of his Nicomachean Ethics: "It is the mark of an educated person to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of

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[7] This distinction is somewhat facile, as both streams of wisdom (Proverbs and Job) intermingle. Moreover, positive psychology is not oblivious to the existential despair that is central to the Book of Job and the Book Ecclesiastes. Nevertheless, there is a difference in emphasis, if not quality. The despair one counters, the sheer abyss, far exceeds hat is conveyed in Ecclesiastes and Job…

[8] Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 106.

[9] B.T. Legesse, B.H. Price, and E.D. Murray, "Brain and Behavior Relationships," In *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior (2nd Edition)*, ed. Vilanayur S. Ramachandran (Academic Press, 16 March 2012).

[10] Joseph Dunne, "From Field to Forest? Exploring Limits of Virtue Theory" (paper presented at Varieties of Virtue Ethics, January 8-10, 2015), available at: http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/conference-papers/Varieties_of_Virtue_Ethics/Dunne_Joseph.pdf.

[11] Deborah Kerdeman, "Pulled Up Short: Challenges for Education," *Philosophy of Education* (2003): 208.

[12] For this phrasing, I am indebted to Paul Standish's 2014 Boyd Bode Lecture, "Teaching Exposed: Education in Denial."

[13] Of course, this phrasing intentionally echoes William Barret's trenchant, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1979).

the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs."[14] Considering the field of education, how much precision can we expect? Pondering this question, it is bracing and revealing to revisit B.F. Skinner's vision for education. Though beholden to the posture of the detached, objective scientist, a palpable sense of confidence, even excitement, comes through in Skinner's writings, which otherwise read like a dry how-to-manual for operating living machines. "Once we have determined," Skinner illuminates, "the particular type of consequence called a reinforcement, our techniques permit us to shape up the behavior of an organism almost *at will* (my emphasis)."[15] Far from rhetoric, Skinner believes psychology and education to be, in fact, hard sciences, on a par with physics or math, simply in need of greater analytic and methodological rigor so as to discover universal laws.

"On the practical side," Skinner continues, "we have learned to maintain any given level of activity for daily periods limited only by the physical exhaustion of the organism and from day to day without substantial change throughout its life." Skinner goes on to reassure skeptics that in all of his experiments "the species of the organism has made surprisingly little difference."[16] As a parent or primary school teacher, Skinner's vision or dream of ultimate control is perhaps seductive, but also (one would hope) disturbing, as one ponders what kind of child such a pedagogy would produce. Unperturbed, Skinner goes on to predict that with the right environmental calibration and stimulation, we can, not only a transform education but create a utopia on earth, as envisioned in his Walden II.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's Ridiculous Man also imagines a human paradise, but his dream paradise is short-lived. Its decline is subtle, starting with small insincerities, feigned smiles, mild sarcasm, the arts of irony, which gradually morph into a love of lying, and then pleasure in cruelty.[17] Where Skinner observes behaviors that can be "properly" directed and controlled, with the right mix of carrots and sticks, Dostoevsky perceives a complex, and often contradictory, inner life roiling beneath the persona—a willful intractability that is frequently immune to external promptings.

Skinner is arguably, from our vantage point, an easy straw man to knock down. Presumably Dostoevsky's other protagonist, the *Underground Man*, shatters the Crystal Palace of behaviorism, revealing it as fundamentally misunderstanding the nature of the human condition. As the *Underground Man* insists, human caprice "comes under no classification…. against it [or the mysterious free will] all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms."[18] Yet the scientific-utopian bent of mind, as evidenced by Skinner, writing in the wake of Dostoevsky's revelations, has proven to be ever resilient. In spite of Dostoevsky's protestations, Skinner goes on to assert that free will is but a fiction, contending that it is just a matter of time and more research before we unlock all the variables that account for human behavior. The Underground Man, in

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[14] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 2.
[15] B.F. Skinner, "The Science of Learning and the Art of Teaching," *Harvard Educational Review* Vol. XXIV (1954): 87.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," in *The Short Stories of Dostoevsky*, ed. William Phillips (New York: The Dial Press, 1946), 594.
[18] Fyodor Dostoevesky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1994), 28.

Skinner's lens, is an outlier who will soon be accounted for in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

While Skinner's vaulting educational vision has been tempered, his larger paradigm holds steady. As Hanan Alexander notes, contemporary curriculum thought continues to ignore, undermine, and eclipse the ethical agency of human beings.[19] We continue to live, move, and see within a Skinnerian universe, perhaps with a softer touch that permits some degree of phronetic emollient to soother over the rougher edges. Nevertheless, this vision of education, as a perfectible and objective science (albeit in its infant stage), reigns supreme, especially in the world of policy. The larger educational discourse is characterized by "a vocabulary of performance and delivery, of skills, competences, and the setting of objectives."[20] With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, the U.S. Congress ratified this vision as the gold standard in educational research. "Real" educational research includes findings that are replicable and generalizable, and ultimately enable policy makers to predict, measure, and control educational outcomes.[21]

Recalling the wisdom discourse, theologian Walter Brueggemann describes this objectives/behavioristic approach as a form of fast wisdom. It "assumes that we are free to manage, shape, administer, and master the world…."[22] Mystified by what William Barrett describes as the lure of technique this paradigm seeks to make education "strong, secure, predictable, and...risk-free at all levels."[23] In the spirit of Proverbial wisdom, this paradigm aims to illuminate, with scientific fastidiousness, the causal correlation between actions and consequences. Aristotle's caution about precision, while perhaps true for a simpler time, no longer applies. For this tradition, the problems of education are largely, if not exclusively technical in nature. Like Job's comforters, this tradition, vis-à-vis education, has a lot to say. In an educational desert it promises an oasis of techniques with which to manage educational problems.

The Kenosis of Teaching

This tradition of fast wisdom is antithetical to the wisdom of Job or slow wisdom. Recalling Dunne, fast wisdom is distinguished by "strength, mastery, prevailing, [and] excelling…," slow wisdom is distinguished "vulnerability, yieldingness, dependency, receptivity, surrender, [and] supplication."[24] While fast wisdom may work on ice (within controlled laboratories), it stumbles on rough ground.[25] It aspires for too much precision and control, retreating from what Gert Biesta describes as the inherent weakness of education. It always involves risk: The risk is there because education is not an encounter between robots but is an encounter between human beings."[26] Consequently, education (if it is in fact genuine education vs. indoctrination or automation) must, of

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[19] See Hanan Alexander or what Joseph Dunne describes as the objectives paradigm (and its promise of deliverables). Hanan A. Alexander, "A View from Somewhere: Explaining The Paradigms of Educational Research." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 40.2 (2006): 205-221. Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).
[20] Standish, "Education in Denial."
[21] Alexander, "A View from Somewhere," 208.
[22] Walter Brueggemann, "Slow Wisdom as a Sub-Version of Reality" (lecture presented at Baylor Symposium on Faith and Culture, 28 October, 2011), available at https://vimeo.com/128267883.
[23] Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Paradigm Publishers, 2013), 3.
[24] Dunne, "From Field to Forest."
[25] Of course here I am also referencing Joseph Dunne's *Back to the Rough Ground*, inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein.
[26] Biesta, *Beautiful Risk*, 4.

necessity, be weak. By weakness, Biesta means that education, prefaced on enlisting the cooperation of free human beings, is necessarily weak. Students are not objects but "subjects of action and responsibility."[27] I now turn to Parker Palmer's further illumination of the inherent weakness of the teaching endeavor, the recognition and embrace of which I am aim to position within the slow wisdom tradition.

In contrast to the strong account of education, a field which is particularly prone to magic bullet thinking, Palmer's discourse about education is striking. Palmer shares stories about breakthroughs he has had with students, but also confesses failures…moments when "the classroom is so lifeless or painful" and confused that he feels "powerless to do anything about it," so much so that he sees his "claim to be a teacher" as a transparent sham.[28]

There is a Socratic quality in Palmer's discourse. He disavows being able to say univocally what good teaching is, admitting he hardly understands it himself, yet all the while offering illustration upon illustration of what master teachers do. While acknowledging the importance of methods and techniques, Palmer is quick to steer clear of "methodological reductionism." "Good teaching," Parker Palmer claims, "cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher."[29] This statement reads like a koan—at first it sounds simple and straightforward enough, but it is actually far more demanding and paradoxical to enact.

Techniques are inescapable, and good teachers continually hone their craft on the look-out for better techniques. Palmer's claim, though, is more than deference to the complexities of teaching practice, and it goes further than Aristotle's caution about what kind of precision can be expected. Rather, it points to an existential way of being that attends to the despair that haunts the human condition generally, and the teaching endeavor especially.

And what is this nature of this despair? Jane Tompkins, in her account *On the Teaching Life*, offers a glimpse. Pulling back the veil on the reasons behind her own teaching, Thompkins exposes her less than noble motivations. She shares,

> I had always thought that what I was doing was helping my students to understand the material we were studying-Melville or deconstruction or whatever-I had finally realized that what I was actually concerned with and focused on most of the time were three things: a) to show the students how smart I was, b) to show them how knowledgeable I was, and c) to show them how well-prepared I was for class.[30]

What presumably professes to an endeavor to spark student learning, Tompkins confesses, was in fact a performance, the goal of which "was not to help the students learn but to perform before them in such a way that they would have a good opinion of me."[31]

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 4.
[29] Ibid 6.
[30] Jane Tompkins, *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1996), 27.
[31] Ibid 29.

What is behind this, Tompkins realizes, is fear. “Fear of being shown up for what you are: a fraud, stupid, ignorant, a clod, a dolt, a sap, a weakling…”[32] This fear, she notes, was inscribed in her graduate curriculum. She elaborates: “Thinking about these things, I became aware recently that my own fear of being shown up for what I really am must transmit itself to my students, and insofar as I was afraid to be exposed, they too would be afraid.”[33]

Two points are worth underscoring. The first is Tompkins’ fear of exposing her true self as fundamentally impoverished, what she recognizes as the dark and real truth about herself. Bear in mind that Tompkins was teaching at Duke University—not generally considered a poor place, and she was, presumably, an effective or good teacher, as probably indicated by her student evaluations. Yet for Tompkins teaching had become a form of despair avoidance—or flight from the poverty of the human condition. The second point that bears mentioning is that her fear management or despair avoidance unwittingly becomes part of the latent curriculum. Recalling the fears that haunt the organized kid, the organized teacher seeks to manage and control her fears.

While careful planning is necessary, the negative experiences that are sure to arise with teaching—with the exposing oneself before human beings, whether it is teaching algebra or poetry—are inescapable. Such experiences are often “thought of as something to be avoided or overcome, through better management of the situation.”[34] This assessment, however, is a misdiagnosis. Tompkins’ problem is not a lack of content knowledge or technical know-how. Certainly, management and experience will over time, minimize mistakes, but errors, awkwardness, embarrassment, will most certainly persist. Teaching is fundamentally a spiritual problem or mystery—the mystery of being a self, haunted by despair and a sense of internal poverty despite the feats of one’s accomplishments.

If the deeper problem that is teaching—the exposure of the self and its poverty—is fundamentally spiritual, then it requires a spiritual solution. A solutionary mindset (part of the new lexicon in self-improvement and educational discourse), however, is it itself part of the problem. The mystical or literature on spirituality often does not offer solutions, but rather illuminates more deeply the poverty of the human condition. Echoing Pascal’s famous quote, “The root of evil is a person’s inability to sit quietly in a room,” mystic Henri Nouwen exposes how difficult it is to be a self…to be still.

> In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me---naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken---nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump about in my mind like monkey in a banana tree. . . .The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay

[32] Ibid 30.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Standish.

> in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone.[35]

Though the discipline of solitary prayer is seemingly far afield of the work of teaching endeavor, it sheds light on a deeper existential struggle. We can become adept at bulling over such insecurities, shoring up our defenses. Standish cautions against this rush to manage, noting that such experiences indicate "what is at stake in teaching."[36] To ignore this dimension is to deny or ignore a central part of the lived experience of teachers.

The pressures to ignore or brush over this interior landscape are manifold. Ronald Rolheiser provocatively describes as a conspiracy against interiority, especially in western culture.[37] As noted, the objectives paradigm outlined above, aims for control, which is antithetical to the spiritual vulnerability Nouwen diagnoses. This control ethos permeates the larger culture. There is a tendency, notes Michael Buckley, "recommended by common sense and successful practice, to estimate a person's aptitude for a profession or for a career by listing strengths."[38] In educational discourse, this is described as achieving certain competencies or mastery. But this posture is deeply problematic for the profession of teaching.

Rather than ask if a person strong enough to be teacher, "Buckley asks if they are weak enough. Is this person deficient enough so that she "cannot ward off significant suffering from" their life, so that she "lives with a certain amount of failure, so that she feels what it is to be an average person? Is there any history of confusion, of self-doubt, of interior anguish? Has she had to deal with fear, come to terms with frustrations, or accept deflated expectations? These are critical questions and they probe for weakness."[39]

Kairos and Chronos of Teaching

The poetry of lived experience is trampled underfoot by the technical managerial prose of the curriculum industry. Its linear, programmed approach, informed by a narrow epistemology, fails to appreciate our complex subjective ontologies, specifically our sense of being in time. As Charles Taylor notes, we live within an immanent frame, largely captive to a chronos vision of time, wherein all time is flattened out—all moments homogenous, repetitive points on a line that stretches out ad infinitum, akin to the omnipresent strip malls that look the same in Sacramento, as they do in Cleveland, as they do in El Paso.[40] Within this frame, there are no significant wrinkles or knots (or places) in time; if you've been to one McDonalds, you've been to them all.

In contrast to this dominant chronos vision of time, Taylor recalls a kairotic understanding of time (now largely eclipsed) wherein certain times, certain moments, are not neutral points on an impersonal timeline, but profoundly significant, personal,

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[35] Henri Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), ?.
[36] Standish.
[37] Ron Rolheiser, "A Conspiracy Against Interiority." Available at: http://ronrolheiser.com/a-conspiracy-against-interiority/#.WIVnCbYrJE4
[38] Michael J. Buckley, "Because Beset with Weakness," from *To be a Priest*, ed. Robert E. Terwilliger and Urban T. Holmes (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) 125-130.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), ?.

even sacred moments that puncture and disrupt ordinary time, insinuating that all times, all moments, are potentially sacred—even this moment—this very session, right here, right now. Yet given our chronos sensibilities we are conditioned not to expect too much to happen, beyond what is planned.

Our chronos fixation aside, our desire (and need) for kairos persists. Constructive examples come to mind: a good conversation with an old friend that goes on far longer than we anticipated, being caught up in the "flow" of a worthwhile activity, or simply being captivated by a forest at sunset.[41] Under the spell of kairos, time stands still, and there is release and freedom from the "slack-eyed monster" that is chronos time.[42] Yet the pull of chronos, often fraught with anxiety, yanks us back. There is often a dialectical tug of war between whimsical kairos and agenda-driven chronos, captured musically in the Beatles ballad, "A Day in the Life." The song begins, in the first person, with a dream about events in the daily news, only to be interrupted by the rush of the morning routine: waking up late, gulping coffee, and hurrying to catch a bus on time. This urgent haste is then upended by a kairotic interlude: "Found my way upstairs and had a smoke, somebody spoke, and I went to a dream: ahh."

Yes, the Beatles both reveal the phenomenological zig and zag of time present, past, and future. Yet while kairotic irruptions and diversions are part of our daily fare, chronos reigns supreme. Kairos is but an afterthought, and often when have the experience of kairos we miss "the meaning" or do not know what to make of it.[43] Our educational climate—efficient, goal-driven, and hyper-utilitarian—lacks the conceptual resources to name and recognize kairotic insights and revelations. As a consequence, we forget how to prepare or recognize such encounters. This preparation, drawing from the Job-mystical tradition, requires walking through the desert of the self.

This Jobian sensibility is scarce. Given how weak, intangible, and uncertain it is, we are doubtful that there is much if anything worth finding there. Evidence of this loss is powerfully diagnosed in Diane Senechal's *Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture.*[44] Senechal examines how our hyper-social media and our fidgety turn, pair, and share pedagogies have lost sight of the hard-won yet gracious moments of profound kairos that only come through slowness, solitude, and the kind of attention Simon Weil calls us to.[45] The "chatter of the present," Senechal notes, "about the present, cannot always grasp the present."[46]

So what is a teacher to do? The hegemonic discourse of the objectives-behavioristic paradigm fails to account for what Dwayne Huebner describes as the "third essential ingredient in the educational environment: the moment of vision."[47] By this, Huebner and others those idiosyncratic, breakthrough moments of insight, epiphanies, that can never be vouchsafed by planning, important as it is. Recognizing,

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[41] See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).
[42] For the phrasing, "slack-eyed monster," I am indebted to Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Sraus, and Young, 1951), 5.
[43] T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 14.
[44] Diana Senechal, *Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture* (London: R&L Education, 2014).
[45] See Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies With a View to the Love of God," in *Waiting for God* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 105.
[46] Senechal, *Republic of Noise*, 3.
[47] Dwayne Huebner, "Curriculum as a Concern for Man's Temporality," *Theory Into Practice*, Vol. 26 (Dec., 1987): 330-331.

soliciting, and welcoming such moments of vision, notes Huebner, “is the uniquely human quality of the environment and requires the presence of human wisdom.”[48] The teacher stands as a mediator or high priest between the subject in all its beauty and perplexity and the student, an initiate, often unsure of what it is they are looking for or what might be worth discovering.

Nevertheless, teachers cannot escape the world of chronos, nor should they. Generally classes will still be 50 or 60 minutes; they should start on time, but within that time “what dreams may come,” what insights might emerge. Therein is the space and the need for a human wisdom that can recognize kairotic breakthrough moments. This involves the paradoxical ability to plan for spontaneity—to jettison chronos outcomes at the right time, for the right student, for the right reason.

How do we prepare such teachers? To teach this alternative understanding of time, teachers must first and foremost live it. They must be cultivators of kairos. They need, as Abraham Heschel notes, a Sabbath sensibility and a practiced ability of making kairos the master of chronos, rather than vice versa. They must, like Martha, meticulously plan for the feast. However, like Mary, they must be able to stop the planning and preparation and actually be able to enjoy the feast with the guests (their students)—to have the experience and grasp the meaning.

[48] Ibid.