

## PERENNIALISM: OR, “GIVE ME THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

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### INTRODUCTION (“The William Tell Overture”)

The perennial philosophy goes by many names—e.g., Neo-Thomism, Traditionalism, Rational Humanism, Catholic supernaturalism. Whatever the name, the end result is essentially the same: a belief that certain universal truths or ideas exist at all times and that the level of existence that man attains is determined by his attention, or inattention, to these eternal principles.

The perennialist traces the foundation of his philosophy back to Plato and Aristotle together with the revised understanding of their ideas as interpreted by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. In the modern era, the primary spokesmen are Jacques Maritain, Mortimer Adler, and Robert Hutchins. These writers appeal to the fundamental beliefs held in the time of Aquinas, who subscribed to the fundamental beliefs held by Aristotle, who together with Plato subscribed to the fundamental beliefs held during the Golden Age of Greece.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to consider the fundamental principles of perennialism via the assistance of classical music. The Introduction should fittingly be accompanied by the words "The Lone Perennialist Rides Again." The writer will present a brief history of perennialism accompanied by the music of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*—indicative of the truth that perennialism, like hair, though removed, will certainly make a return. The second section will present the major contributors to the accompaniment of "The Waltz of the Flowers," from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*. The third section will present the philosophical concepts of perennialism while being accompanied by "I Know I'll Love You Till the End of Time," found in Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, in B Minor ("Pathétique"). The

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fourth section will present the educational implications of perennialism to the music of Handel's *Water Music Suite* (it is “sink-or-swim” time).

The writer prepared this document while listening to Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1*.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF PERENNIALISM (“The Barber of Seville”)

A perennialist is “one who believes that certain perennial truths in and about education have existed from the very beginning and continue to have existence and validity as ‘first principles’ which all right-thinking men will accept.”<sup>1</sup> Although these ideas are considered to be eternal truths, they were not put into a philosophical system until the fourth century before Christ. Plato, upon looking at his contemporary society, felt that the people needed to return to the principles held during the Golden Age of Greece. He set out in his *Republic* to discover the highest good which would enable men to have worthwhile standards by which to live.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, a pupil of Plato, sought to give a more practical assessment of reality than that of Plato, for he felt that his teacher was too ethereal.<sup>3</sup> In the early 400s Augustine “baptized” Platonic thought, and his Christianized interpretation of Plato was the dominant philosophy until Aquinas. In the thirteenth century, Aquinas “baptized” Aristotelian thought, and this Christianized interpretation of Aristotle became the dominant thought (with a nod in the direction of Plato and Augustine). Reason and revelation became waltzing partners.

Although the perennial philosophy did not die out—thanks to the Roman Catholic Church—it did slowly lose its influence. During the last century, it declined rapidly because of the industrial revolution. Around the turn of the century, a new philosophy was formulated and gained widespread acceptance. That philosophy was progressivism (or modernism, experimentalism, etc.) and was popularized by John Dewey. From the first decade of the 1900s until 1930, it was

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth H. Hansen, *Philosophy in American Education* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 177.

<sup>2</sup>Theodore Brameld, *Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Dryden Press, 1955), 290-91.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 293

predominant in American educational philosophy.<sup>4</sup> In response to the disintegration of society because of the Great Depression, the traditionalists, as Adler calls the perennialists, suddenly revived for a comeback sometime around 1930. Because of the traditionalist appeal for a return to the fundamental beliefs of a pre-scientific and pre-industrial age, the modernists fought back vigorously. The two factions have had a running verbal feud ever since, and they have developed a whole new vocabulary to describe each other. The traditionalists have identified and “pigeon-holed” the modernists as “child-centered,” “interest-centered,” “fact-centered,” “personality-centered,” “hand-minded,” “presentist,” “permissive,” “emotionalist,” and “faddist.” The modernists describe the traditionalists as “book-centered,” “teacher-centered,” “curriculum-centered,” “disciple-centered,” “compulsory,” “medieval,” “mystic,” and “fascist.”<sup>5</sup>

Because the modernist discounts any pre-scientific thought as outdated and no longer applicable, the traditionalist has had to rethink his posture and has come up with the three following philosophical propositions:

The first is that philosophy is knowledge, not opinion or conjecture, and that it has the validity of knowledge as much as science. The second is that philosophical knowledge is independent of the empirical sciences in that the latter’s methods are incapable of answering philosophical questions or of refuting philosophical conclusions. The third is that philosophical knowledge is superior to empirical science both theoretically and practically—theoretically, in that it is concerned with their phenomenal aspects; and, practically, in that it is concerned with directing human life and society to its ends or goals, while science is concerned with technological applications in the sphere of productivity for man’s use en route.<sup>6</sup>

These propositions claim top priority for the philosopher and that no lesser discipline is capable of judging philosophical truths.

In spite of a continuing struggle with the modernists, the traditionalists are not united. They fall into two branches—the Aristotelians, or non-Christians, and the Thomists, or Christians. Although they disagree concerning God, they both agree that it is of

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<sup>4</sup>Mortimer J. Adler and Milton Mayer, *The Revolution in Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 147.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 167.

utmost importance that the greatest philosophers of all time be given the pre-eminence they deserve if a sick society is to be healed.<sup>7</sup>

### THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS OF PERENNIALISM ("The Waltz of the Flowers")

Thomas Buford lists four philosophers as the major contributors of perennialism while Brameld lists only three (omitting Augustine in the following presentation). Modern writers such as Maritain, Adler, and Hutchins are not treated separately but only in terms of their contributions to the philosophical concepts and educational principles that will be discussed later in this paper.

#### Plato

Plato studied under Socrates and learned from him the need "to strip the superfluous, the secondary, the transitory from the inner core of reality, truth, and value."<sup>8</sup> Living about a hundred years after the Golden Age of Greece, Plato felt that people could find meaning in life if they returned to those ideals of that period—i.e., the ultimate ideals of justice, harmony, moderation, truth, beauty, goodness.<sup>9</sup> Plato felt that "reality is a realm of necessary, immutable, and eternal forms, patterns, or ideas of which men ought to come to an understanding and in terms of which they ought to conduct their lives individually and corporately."<sup>10</sup> These Ideas would provide leaders with moral and political criteria for establishing and maintaining a society within which persons might lead happy lives.<sup>11</sup>

#### Aristotle

Aristotle sought to moderate some of the extremes of Plato's philosophy. His *Ethics* and *Politics* were written to provide men some sensible rules that they might trust in their everyday life experiences.<sup>12</sup> Aristotle posited a single cosmic order of increasing perfection in

<sup>7</sup>Brameld, 291.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas O. Buford, *Toward a Philosophy of Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 417.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Brameld, 292.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 292-93

contrast to the dualistic world-view of Plato. Aristotle believed that reality “must be understood as formed-matter.”<sup>13</sup> He taught that “permanence and change are mingled together in every object of our experience,” and all objects (including humans) are “constantly in the process of becoming what they can and ought to become.”<sup>14</sup> Humans seek to actualize their rational dimension by choosing the moderate path (“golden mean”) in both moral decisions and in contemplating “the meaning of reality, the end toward which it is moving, the unmoved mover.”<sup>15</sup> People will be able to achieve universal ends only in society—i.e., society as understood to exist in the Golden Age. Therefore, Aristotle, like Plato, advocated a return to the “good old days” and the cultural ideals and metaphysical principles held at that time.<sup>16</sup>

### Augustine

Augustine was influenced by Plato through the translations of Plotinus. Platonic thought was helpful in dealing with the crises that were troubling the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries. When Rome fell in 410, many Romans blamed the Christians (and Constantine) for the fall. Augustine set out to defend the Christian faith from such accusations in his *City of God*. He stated that Rome fell because it had not been faithful to either the ideals of Christianity or of its own heritage. He “employed Platonic metaphysics to express Christian meanings and developed a world view which called for men in times of cultural crises *to return to the ideals the Christian faith had always taught* [writer’s emphasis].”<sup>17</sup> Although Augustine did not appeal to the ideals and values of the Golden Age of Greece, he did appeal to the ideals enunciated in a previous era.

### Aquinas

Aquinas sought to bring together Aristotelian and Christian principles “without emasculating the essential qualities of either.” Although agreeing extensively with Aristotle, Aquinas believed that

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<sup>13</sup>Buford, 417.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 417-18.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 418.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

“beyond the substances of soul-body, or spirit-matter, lies a realm of faith which rational judgment cannot sufficiently explore.” Like Aristotle, he “postulated pure form, intellectual and spiritual, as the compelling power, the final end, beyond all matter.” Like Plato and Augustine, he “interpreted man-on-earth as primarily preparation for man-in-heaven.”<sup>18</sup> Aquinas believed that all of the created order was to glorify its creator by becoming what He wanted it to be and that this becoming took place in the context of society. Therefore, the institutions and activity of society needed to be such that it aided persons in that task.<sup>19</sup>

### THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS OF PERENNIALISM (“I Know I’ll Love You Till the End of Time”)

The split of the perennial school into two branches—Ecclesiastical Thomism and Lay Thomism—evidences itself in the philosophical concepts—i.e., metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology.

#### Metaphysics: What Is Real?

To the perennialist, metaphysics is “a knowledge of being” which “must be understood, first, in the sense of the formal object of metaphysical knowledge, namely, anything considered as being; and only second, in the sense of the material object of that part of metaphysics which is natural theology, namely, being as such *existing* simply.” Metaphysics is also “knowledge of physical things,—though not exclusively,—considered at an even higher level of abstraction than mathematics . . . which enables metaphysics to include within its scope beings which transcend the physical order.”<sup>20</sup> These two areas—a world of being and a world of things abstracted by reason—comprise the sum total of reality for the perennialist. There are four main “causes” that are operant in this reality: material cause (matter), efficient cause (motion), formal cause (form), and final cause (end).

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<sup>18</sup>Brameld, 295-96.

<sup>19</sup>Buford, 418-19.

<sup>20</sup>Mortimer J. Adler, *What Man Has Made of Man: A Study of the Consequences of Platonism and Positivism in Psychology* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing House, 1937), 145.

The first three causations find meaningfulness in the purpose-ness of the final cause, for each individual thing has a teleological purpose.<sup>21</sup> That purpose is set forth in Aristotle's "hylomorphic principle," which indicates that each individual thing "tends to develop from matter to form, from potentiality to actuality, from appetite to reason [in this case, of human beings]."<sup>22</sup> Aristotle took the two separate worlds of Plato—the ideal (or real) and the sensory (or unreal)—and joined them into one as Form (the Actuality Principle—or Ideas) joined Matter (the Potentiality Principle—or Sensory). Because of this union of potentiality and actuality, the resulting "thing" gains a character and identity all its own which is called "essence," or its basic "whatness."<sup>23</sup> See figure 1 below.

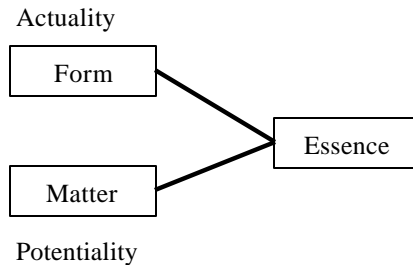


Figure 1. The Aristotelian Model

Thomas Aquinas thought of the essence of man as being like matter in the Aristotelian scheme. Essence was the Potentiality Principle; and, when endowed by Existence (the Actuality Principle), the essence of man "completes itself" and "comes into being." "Existence, like Aristotelian Form, is pure principle, and as principle it is metaphysically of higher rank than Essence. Just as Form outranks Matter as the higher principle in Aristotle's thought, so does Existence outrank Essence as the higher principle in Aquinas's."<sup>24</sup> This statement is a reflection of a Principle of Hierarchy that is

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<sup>21</sup>Brameld, 300.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>23</sup>Van Cleve Morris and Young Pai, *Philosophy of the American School: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 55-56.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 58.

pervasive in perennial philosophy. This hierarchy may be seen in the ascending order of physical matter (such as rocks, plants, animals, people, angels, to Pure Being). Physical matter is almost completely Essence whereas Pure Being is completely Existence (see Figure 2 below). The Ecclesiastical Thomist posits this Pure Being as God by “a leap of faith” based on revelation and supported by reason. The Lay Thomist, on the other hand, sees the Principle of Hierarchy in terms of reason, rather than existence. Hence, the

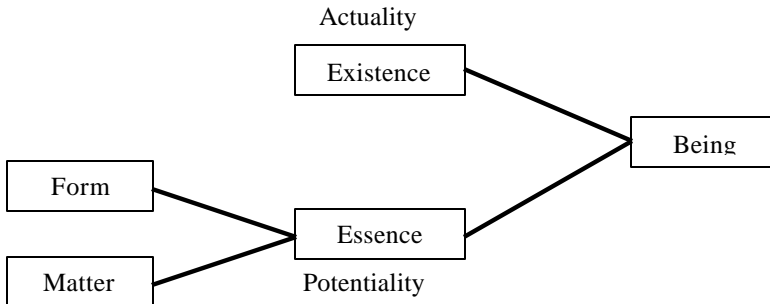


Figure 2. The Ecclesiastical Thomist Model

ultimate reality is designated Truth, “a final culmination of our limited exercise of the faculty of Reason in an Ultimate Truth that stands steady for ever and ever—Man’s ultimate mooring to the cosmos.”<sup>25</sup> See Figure 3 below.

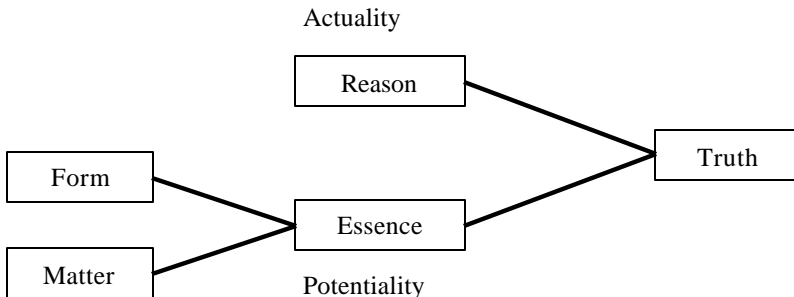


Figure 3. The Lay Thomist Model

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 58, 79.



## Epistemology: What Is True?

Perennialists believe there is an “objective reality beyond experience” which can be known through the faculty of the mind (“not identical with the brain”) which “maintains and advances the life-process” and functions as a “derivative from the essential ability to reason, to abstract from common experience a comprehension of the nature of things.”<sup>26</sup> The mind, in comprehending this reality, does not change it.<sup>27</sup>

The perennialist attributes to truth an “objective external reality” by declaring that truth is “an eternal verity,” not a subjective whim of some person or group.<sup>28</sup> The Principle of Potentiality-and-Actuality carries within it the idea that man has “a natural tendency *to know*, that is, the propensity of the intellect to actualize its inherent potentialities through the apprehension of truth.”<sup>29</sup> There are three ways of knowing: (1) scientific or synthetic knowing (lowest level), (2) analytic or intuitive knowing, and (3) mystical or revelatory knowing (highest level)—the Principle of Hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> All truth is not known—only approximations thereof; and, therefore, the mind must determine what “corresponds to truth.”<sup>31</sup> The perennialist believes that the scientist can only discover the *lowest* form of knowledge because he bases his findings upon analysis of accidentals, those outward characteristics which are subject to chance and change. The philosopher, however, can attain the *highest* knowledge because he is dealing with essence, that inward reality that is eternally stable.<sup>32</sup> Adler offers three propositions concerning truth as ascertained by philosophy and by science:

All human knowledge arises with sense-experience, but most human knowledge goes beyond sense by means of intellectual processes (abstraction, judgment, inference).

All scientific knowledge and all philosophical knowledge, consisting of generalities, must involve both sense and intellect as cognitive faculties.

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<sup>26</sup> Adler and Mayer, 171-73.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> John S. Brubacher, *Modern Philosophies of Education*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 321.

<sup>29</sup> Morris and Pai, 243.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Brubacher, 321.

<sup>32</sup> Brameld, 307.

Because they are different types of knowledge, employing different methods, there can be no conflict between the evidence and proper conclusions of scientific research and the principles and proper conclusions of philosophical analysis.

- (a) "Proper" here does not mean "true in fact" but rather "achieved by the proper method and within the proper province." Thus, there are conflicts between trespassing scientists and dogmatic philosophers in the modern world.
- (b) If a question cannot be answered by a given method, answers given to it cannot be refuted by knowledge achieved through given method. Thus, mathematics and metaphysics are concerned with questions which cannot be answered by any process of investigation; hence no knowledge achieved by investigative procedures can be used to refute philosophical answers to such questions.<sup>33</sup>

Obviously, Adler sees science and philosophy as different entities seeking knowledge in separate and definable arenas. Neither one has the right to judge the findings of the other, for both are using different approaches to discover knowledge. Then, too, the findings of the scientist are not of ultimate value as are the findings of the philosopher, for the findings of science may be outdated by tomorrow's discoveries. The findings of philosophy are eternal truths.

#### Axiology: Ethics and Aesthetics

Axiology, the study of valuing and values, is divided up into two separate but closely identified areas: ethics and aesthetics.

#### Ethics: What Is Good?

That which is good is judged to be good by an act of reason, and it is so judged because reason recognizes that it is eternally good.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, "the good act is that which is controlled by our rational faculty."<sup>35</sup> Knowing and doing right is good and is possible through "habituation," whereas ignorance and doing right is an accident.<sup>36</sup> The highest good is "union with God" for the Ecclesiastical Neo-Thomists, and next in importance is "the life of reason." It is in right reasoning

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<sup>33</sup> Adler, 29-30.

<sup>34</sup> Brubacher, 322.

<sup>35</sup> Morris and Pai, 243.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

that “we come as close as thinkers can to such a union.”<sup>37</sup> For the Lay Neo-Thomists “the exercise of reason, in and for itself, is considered . . . to be the highest good of all.”<sup>38</sup>

The Potentiality-Actuality Doctrine implies that “people naturally tend toward the good.”<sup>39</sup> Since all people are *not* good, it is readily apparent that they must “cooperate with nature in the achievement of moral values”; and the human will, trained and developed by habituation, directs this cooperative process.<sup>40</sup>

The Principle of hierarchy sets out an ascending “tripartite division of moral obligation”: to oneself, to fellow human beings, and to God.<sup>41</sup> If a person wants to know what he should do, the perennialist answer is that the learner should cultivate the rational powers and strive for academic excellence.<sup>42</sup> “Genuine happiness” can only be had when a person leads a moral life and actualizes potential through the exercise of reason.<sup>43</sup>

### Aesthetics: What Is Beautiful?

Aesthetics is not concerned “with what is to be done, which is the sphere of ethics, but with what is to be made, or brought into being.” As with ethics, man has a natural tendency “toward creation of beauty.”<sup>44</sup> True art is controlled by “creative intuition”—i.e., “a somewhat mystical, probing lurch of the intellect beyond itself in the direction of Being.”<sup>45</sup>

There are two spheres of creativity: (1) Fine Arts—in which “beauty is the highest value of esthetics in the same way that the supreme good of speculative reason is the highest value of ethics” and “is a sense self-evident, that is, it is intuited directly rather than demonstrated logically”; and (2) Practical Arts—in which beauty is combined with usefulness. The former is actually beauty for the sake

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<sup>37</sup>Brameld, 308.

<sup>38</sup>Morris and Pai, 247.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>42</sup>Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 113.

<sup>43</sup>Morris and Pai, 247.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 248.

of beauty, while the latter, being utilitarian, is inferior to the other, although it may have redeeming value such as catharsis in a drama.<sup>46</sup> The intellect is “the ultimate producer of art and judges that art by three criteria: integrity, proportion or consonance, and radiance or clarity. If art meets these criteria, it is adjudged as beautiful.”<sup>47</sup>

### THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF PERENNIALISM (“Water Music Suite”)

In the realm of education, it is important to understand that the perennialist believes that man has sufficient intellect and will to encompass “the great universe in its entirety.”<sup>48</sup> He sees the purpose of education as being that effort to shape himself to be a man and to give him knowledge, strength of judgment, and moral virtue.<sup>49</sup> There are three generally accepted stages of education: elementary, or rudiments; humanities, or secondary and college; and advanced studies, or graduate school and specialization.<sup>50</sup>

The perennialists have several propositions upon which they base their educational philosophy—many of them coming directly from Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. Perennialists believe that “exercising and disciplining the mind is . . . paramount in the higher learning.”<sup>51</sup> Because they subscribe to a teleological system of thought, they believe that the end, or purpose, of man is known; and, therefore, they confidently assert that a child needs certain subjects in order to fulfill that purpose as an adult.<sup>52</sup> The perennialists “contradict the assumption that the authority of society to carry on the educational enterprise is a direct derivative of the nature of the society itself” and suggest that that authority rests in “inherent first principles,” not in society.<sup>53</sup> Education is described as “the best for the best”—a statement which originally meant that the highest level of knowledge was reserved for

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<sup>46</sup>Brameld, 309-10.

<sup>47</sup>Morris and Pai, 248.

<sup>48</sup>Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 7-8.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 1, 10.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>51</sup>Brameld, 322.

<sup>52</sup>Morris and Pai, 60.

<sup>53</sup>Hansen, 177.

the ruling class to the exclusion of all others. However, in a democratic society all people are rulers because of their right to vote and are all included as intended recipients of a quality liberal education which seeks to develop the ability to think coherently, to develop oneself to the highest level of thinking possible, and to understand thoroughly the great ideas that have shaped humanity.<sup>54</sup>

Educational philosophy involves the areas of curricular emphasis, preferred method, character education, and developing taste.

### Curricular Emphasis

“Subject matter . . . has two jobs: to explain the world to the student (the metaphysical function) and to train the intellect to understand the world (the psychological or, more generally, the epistemological function).”<sup>55</sup> The perennialist educators prescribe the curriculum because they “cannot permit the students to dictate the course of study unless they are prepared to confess that they are nothing but chaperones, supervising an aimless trial-and-error process which is chiefly valuable because it keeps young people from doing something worse,” nor can they leave the selection of curriculum to the “sporadic, spontaneous interests of children or even of undergraduates.”<sup>56</sup> Learners cannot be trusted to learn appropriate content—i.e., truth—without direction from those teachers who know what the learner needs to learn. Teachers who allow students to learn what they choose to learn, rather than what they need to learn, are teachers who have given up on being teachers and have chosen the line of least resistance. Those teachers have settled for an “intellectual mediocrity” and have done so in the name of “intellectual freedom.”<sup>57</sup> Perennialists believe that “self-realization demands self-discipline, and self-discipline is attained only through external discipline.”<sup>58</sup>

This subject matter is based on the medieval arrangement of subjects into the Trivium (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and Quadrivium

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<sup>54</sup>Robert M. Hutchins, *The Conflict in Education in a Democratic Society* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 78, 83.

<sup>55</sup>Morris and Pai, 88.

<sup>56</sup>Robert M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 65n.

<sup>57</sup>George F. Kneller, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, 2d ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 46.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

(arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music). The first years of schooling would involve reading, writing, and computation—courses that are chiefly preparatory for achieving actuality. The secondary years (ages 12-16) would stress foreign languages together with more advanced material similar to the first years. The college years (16-20) would first stress logic, rhetoric, grammar, and mathematics and later stress the “great books.” Adult education would major upon the great ideas in the great works that have long been respected by philosophers and laymen alike.<sup>59</sup> It is noteworthy that Hutchins adds the possibility of studying history, geography, literature, science, and a foreign language in the early years.<sup>60</sup>

The Lay Thomists employ disciplinary subject matter that attempts to reveal the Absolute Truths of the cosmos, various branches of mathematics, and foreign languages. They place a descending order of value on other subject matter: natural sciences, social sciences, humanities.<sup>61</sup> The Ecclesiastical Thomists include “religious and liturgical material,” the Holy Scriptures, the Catechism, explanatory materials in Christian doctrine and Church Dogma, and theistic writings rather than secular books, whenever possible.<sup>62</sup>

Perennialists generally agree that curriculum should not disregard the utilitarian function of enabling the student to get a job, but such a concern should be so secondary that it does not “imperil the essential aim of education.”<sup>63</sup> The curriculum would certainly include *The Great Books of the Western World*, the classics, and the traditional liberal arts.<sup>64</sup>

Robert Hutchins summarizes the matter by stating:

The pedagogical content of this education may be simply stated. The liberally educated man must know how to read, write, and figure. He must know and understand the ideas that have animated mankind. He must comprehend the tradition in which he lives. He must be able to communicate with his fellow-men. Through familiarity with the best models he must have constantly before him that habitual vision of greatness without which . . . any true education is

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<sup>59</sup>Brameld, 323-35.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 328.

<sup>61</sup>Morris and Pai, 88.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>63</sup>Maritain, 10.

<sup>64</sup>Pazmino, 113.

impossible.<sup>65</sup>

### Preferred Method

Aristotle implied that “children require firm guidance because of the dominance in their natures of matter and motion over form and purpose—a dominance that may recede as their actuality comes to prevail more fully over their potentiality.”<sup>66</sup>

Aquinas felt that the “teacher role is primarily to instruct, in the sense of giving aid to the susceptible human substance, and, above all, to help the learner to reason clearly and to intuit first principles.”<sup>67</sup> He also indicated that “learning through words becomes more fruitful than learning through senses.”<sup>68</sup>

The Neo-Thomists seek to train reason through the use of “formal discipline,” or subject matter most characterized by form, such as mathematics, language, logic. They seek to train the memory through practice and drill; again, form is more important than content. They seek to train the will by getting the students “to exercise will power by forcing themselves through tasks that they find somewhat distasteful.”<sup>69</sup> The Ecclesiastical Neo-Thomists employ prayer and devotional times—tasks which serve almost as “a deliberate invitation to be visited by spiritual truth,” whereas the Lay Neo-Thomists “settle for rigorous and disciplined training of the Reason, leaving meditation, prayer, and contemplation to the individual.”<sup>70</sup>

According to Maritain, there are four fundamental norms of education:

“To foster those fundamental dispositions which enable the principal agent [the student] to grow in the life of the mind”

“To center attention on the inner depths of personality and its preconscious spiritual dynamism, in other words, to lay stress on inwardness and the internalization of the educational influence”

To “tend to unify, not to spread out; it must strive to foster internal unity in man”

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<sup>65</sup>Hutchins, 95.

<sup>66</sup>Brameld, 317.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 318.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Morris and Pai, 180-82.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 183.

To “liberate intelligence instead of burdening it” in other words, that teaching result in the freeing of the mind through the mastery of reason over the things learned.”<sup>71</sup>

Maritain believes that the student’s natural tendency to learn is the “primary, dynamic factor or propelling force” in the learning process but that the teacher’s intellectual guidance is a “secondary—though a genuinely effective—dynamic factor.”<sup>72</sup> The teacher must remember to respect the mind of the child and seek to train that child to think for himself through use of examples and thoughts more familiar to him.

The teacher is one who should be capable of learning by discovery as he teaches others. Although the teacher may have to lecture and enlighten the learner on numerous occasions, he should attempt to lead the learner also to learn by discovery. The teacher, in order to be effective, may have to “disturb the tranquility of his listeners by persistently challenging their vague, half-formed beliefs and by pointing out contradictions and comparisons.”<sup>73</sup> The perennialists do use activity projects and vocational thinking in their schools, but they do so only as a secondary concern.<sup>74</sup> However, perennialists believe that teachers should be “academic scholars, philosophers par excellence who have a grasp of vast areas of knowledge and wisdom.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly, they believe that learners should be “viewed as rational beings who are to be guided by the first principles as revealed in the classics and liberal arts.”<sup>76</sup>

### Character Education

Character training is important in the early years in school and should not be omitted at any of the stages of education. Any effort to develop character will necessarily center on the will, which “is capable of development through controlled didactic measures.”<sup>77</sup> The teacher must know his students well enough to be able to “avoid

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<sup>71</sup>Maritain, 39-50.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 26,31.

<sup>73</sup>Brameld, 326.

<sup>74</sup>Charles J. Brauner, *American Educational Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 238.

<sup>75</sup>Pazmino, 113.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Morris and Pai, 182.



deforming or wounding them by pedagogical blunders” and “not to shape the will and directly to develop moral virtues in the youth, but to enlighten and strengthen reason.”<sup>78</sup>

It is impossible to live “in any morally defensible fashion” unless there is “the authority of the thoroughly educated—meaning the metaphysically equipped—minds.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, the learner must live his life under the rule of reason. The passions must be disciplined and “habituated in obedience to reason.”<sup>80</sup> However, in terms of the adolescent, reason itself will likely have to be disciplined before it can discipline the passions.<sup>81</sup>

The teacher, in order to accomplish the task of “civilizing the Child’s mind,” must “progressively tame the imagination to the rule of reason.”<sup>82</sup>

In order to discipline the will, the teacher must give the learner tasks that require the exercise of will power and in that way will prepare him “for more strenuous undertakings in the future.”<sup>83</sup>

The disciplining of behavior to reason through the study of subject matter brings the rational faculties “to peak power” and “to a potential understanding of the rightness or wrongness of certain acts” on the basis of “purely rational grounds.”<sup>84</sup>

### Developing Taste

To develop taste in the learner, perennial educators stress the importance of reading the classics—those books that are the perennially influential works of the great minds of the past.<sup>85</sup> Perennialists believe that the intellect should be “trained to see truth, not to solve problems; and so the aesthetic powers of the individual are developed to love Beauty-in-abstract, not to render our own experience more lovely.”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, they believe that “the climate of the school should be such as to awaken the young to the love of

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<sup>78</sup>Maritain, 27.

<sup>79</sup>Brameld, 325-26.

<sup>80</sup>Adler, 230.

<sup>81</sup>Maritain, 62.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>83</sup>Morris and Pai, 277.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 276.

<sup>85</sup>Brameld, 329-30.

<sup>86</sup>Morris and Pai, 29.

Truth, in and for itself, and to quicken and motivate the young to begin the rigorous task of attaining it.”<sup>87</sup>

Maritain lists five fundamental dispositions that are to be fostered in the learner:

The love of truth

The love of good and justice, and “even the love of heroic feats”

The love of simplicity and openness with regard to existence

A sense of a job well done (respect for the job and feelings of faithfulness and responsibility regarding it)

A sense of cooperation.<sup>88</sup>

These five dispositions are the basic tasks of education; and, if carried out faithfully, they would inculcate within the learner a proper taste for finding beauty in reason. He concludes:

The objective of education is to see that the youth grasps this truth or beauty by the natural power and gifts of his mind and the natural intuitive energy of his reason backed up by imaginative, and emotional dynamism. In doing that a liberal education will cause his natural intelligence to follow in the footsteps of those intellectual virtues which are the eminent merit of the real scientist or artist.<sup>89</sup>

## CONCLUSION (Brahms’ “Lullaby”)

At the risk of putting the reader to sleep, the writer offers one more quote that summarizes fairly well the perennialist mindset:

In everyday life the traditionalist position is reflected in a preoccupation with the long view. Its proponent is not an enthusiast for novelty as such; whatever novelty presents, he thinks that he has seen something somehow like it somewhere in the prior history of the human race. He is slower to hail progress than some of his neighbors, who may regard him as, at best, a corrigible optimist. He is not a big buyer of new books on bringing up children or getting peace of mind. He does not trade in his car—or his Weltanschauung—very often. Politically, he is likely to be a universalist, because he sees in all men an essentially common and an essentially constant nature. But by the same token, he is not easily convinced that anything better than Beulah Land or worse than the Flood is just around the corner.

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>88</sup>Maritain, 36-38.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 63.

Along with the modernist (and the Apostle) the traditionalist says, "Prove all things," but he thinks that the experience of the ages adds weight to proof. He is likelier than the modernist to add to the injunction (as the Apostle does), "Hold fast that which is good."<sup>90</sup>

Robert Pazmino gives this assessment of perennialism:

Perennialism can be affirmed for its sensitivity to the past, for its concern for rationality, and for its emphasis upon excellence. This philosophy maintains that absolute truth exists and that human nature is consistent. Perennialists recognize the intellectual, spiritual, and ethical purposes of education. Perennialism can be criticized for its preoccupation with the past and a tendency toward rationalization.<sup>91</sup>

By way of critical analysis, Theodore Brameld has raised three points that are of vital importance for consideration: (1) Perennialism is culturally based and must be judged as to the desirability of the cultures within which it arose. (2) Perennialist authority rests in its own wisdom and virtue, for the key to every human experience, every cultural institution, every subject of curriculum would be based on first principles which are "self-evident." (3) Perennialism challenges the democratic conception of culture because of an inherent aristocratic bias.<sup>92</sup>

For the Christian, truth is eternal in nature, unchanging from generation to generation and from culture to culture. All authority rests in the Scriptures, which judge human experience, cultural institutions, and subjects in a curriculum. All wisdom and virtue must be measured by the teachings of the written Word of God. Thus, ideals are eternal only inasmuch as they reflect positively what God has already said. For Christians, the development of faith and faithful living is the desired good, not just emphasis upon developing rational thinking (and living).

Now, let's all stand and sing together the perennial chorus:

Give me that old time religion.  
Give me that old time religion.  
Give me that old time religion.  
It's good enough for me!

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<sup>90</sup>Adler and Mayer, 173.

<sup>91</sup>Pazmino, 67.

<sup>92</sup>Brameld, 347, 363, 366.

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