

Humanities Education in a Globalized World and Our Modern Prejudices

Jon Stewart

Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University

Abstract:

This paper argues that classical education is often misunderstood due to a number of modern prejudices which distort the original concept. These distortions include the general neglect of several large spheres: the natural sciences, religion, and other cultures (beyond the Greco-Roman heritage). The paper attempts to correct these misunderstandings in order to present a model for classical education that is truly “classical.” At the end it is argued that this revised model can help us to make a stronger case for the relevance of classical education in the context of a globalized world.

Education is a field that is unfortunately rather vulnerable to new trends, which all claim to have discovered an innovative method of teaching or learning. These trends tend to come and go at regular intervals, each having a fixed lifespan, and each being surpassed by a new one. It is easy to get frustrated by these kinds of discussions and to take refuge in something that seems to be stable and can endure unperturbed in the face of the storm of such debates, namely, classical education.

However, often when there is talk of classical education this tends to have a rather old-fashioned or outdated ring to it in the ears of some people. Our modern world is dominated by fast changes in the social order and rapid developments in technology. So why on earth would someone think that an educational program based on learning dead languages or studying cultures that perished a couple thousand years ago could in any way be relevant for navigating one’s way through the complexities of modern life? Are we really acting responsibly as educators when we insist on such an old model of education? Is this really doing our young people any service? Would they not be better off studying things that are more directly relevant to the real challenges that they will encounter in later life? These are the kinds of concerns and objections that we as teachers of classical education are used to hearing, and they are worth taking seriously. Although classical

education served people well in previous ages, there is no *a priori* reason to infer from this that it is in any way relevant for life in the 21st century.

In this paper I wish to address this complex constellation of questions about whether classical education is still appropriate for life in the globalized world of the 21st century. I wish to argue that it is and in fact that it is more relevant today than it ever has been in past ages.

In order to make this case, it will be necessary to recall and define more closely what we really mean by “classical education.” This discussion will help us to determine 1) what is “classical” about this program of education, that is, what elements of it reflect something from the classical world, and 2) how well it is suited to answering the needs of the modern world in which we live. I wish to try to show that some of what we usually understand by classical education is in fact a cliché that is badly in need of critical revision. But once we undertake this revision we will be able to develop an educational program that is truly *classical* in that it is an accurate reflection of certain elements of Greek and Roman culture. Moreover, the revision of our understanding of classical education will also have the additional benefit that it will enable us to argue for its importance and relevance more effectively. Armed then with a revised conception of classical education, I wish, at the end of my paper, to reflect on the question of what classical education could mean in the context of the globalized world of the 21st century. Here I wish to argue that classical education is indeed well suited to respond to the demands to produce well-functioning citizens equipped to face effectively the challenges of the complex and fast-changing modern world.

Here at the outset I would like to submit that the terms of the critical discussions about classical education are often based on misunderstandings and stereotyped conceptions of what this kind of education really means. I want to try to show that people are often victims of what I regard as a modern prejudice and ethnocentrism based on modern specialization, which distorts their

understanding of the past. My thesis is that this distorted understanding of what constitutes classical education is what leads to the problems of relevance for classical education. Instead, I submit that if we could modify our conception of classical education to make it fall more in line with what real classical education is, then we would find that substantial headway can be made to meeting the well-known objection of irrelevance.

My goal here is to take this opportunity to test our intuitions about these issues concerning classical education. Some people might perceive this as provocative, but my goal is not to provoke anyone, but instead to help us see things in a new light in order to test our own fixed views of things. Moreover, some people might infer from my analysis that I am critical of classical education, but I assure you here at the start that I have been a student and a teacher of classical education all of my life and am a great advocate of it. I simply find it important that we occasionally take the time to ask ourselves what we really mean by this idea of classical education that we all put so much stock in. So my goal is not to be provocative or threatening but instead to reach a new conceptual clarity, which can help us move forward with the discussion about classical education.

I. The Need to Rethink What We Mean by “Classical Education”

So let us begin by asking the question: what do we mean by classical education? Take a moment and ask yourself what this means to you in connection with your own teaching. Usually classical education is closely associated with the humanities fields, for example, literature, history, philosophy, drama, etc. So standard definitions tend to say something like the following: “Classical education is a program of studies that is based primarily on the humanities, covering the languages,

literature, history, art, and other cultural elements that had their origin in Ancient Greece and Rome.” According to the standard story, it is from the ancient Greek and Roman authors that we have received the rich heritage from these fields that constitutes the basis of Western culture. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Greco-Roman canon became a formalized course of study in Europe as the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* (that is, the seven liberal arts), and this is what we have inherited today in one form or another. While there is of course some truth in definitions like this, I wish to suggest that some misunderstandings also lie concealed in this generally accepted view. In what follows I wish to try to identify a few prejudices that can be found in the common understanding of classical education and the educational policies based on this.

A. The Prejudice about Science and Technology

First, it will be noted that in this definition there is no word about the sciences or technology. Indeed, today we tend to think that education in the sciences is more or less the polar opposite of that of classical education. The standard view is that the two have absolutely nothing to do with one another and that the fields of knowledge involved are different in kind. Here, I want to argue, we find our first fundamental misunderstanding in what classical education really means.

Today we tend to think of Aristotle almost exclusively as a philosopher. But his philosophical studies constitute only a part of his *corpus*. He was also a natural scientist, specifically, a botanist, a geologist, a physicist, a zoologist, an anatomist, and so on. But these quite substantial aspects of his work tend to be largely neglected today. If this does not sound right, then we need only take a quick poll and ask how many people here have read Aristotle’s *Nicomachean*

Ethics, Metaphysics or Politics and contrast this number with how many have read his work *On the Generation of Animals*.

It is of course no secret that what the world has received from the Greeks and the Romans is not just the highbrow studies literature, history and philosophy but also the sciences. Who has not heard of the great Greek mathematicians such as Euclid or scientists such as Archimedes? But the problem is that these fields of the sciences are not usually counted as belonging to the core of classical education, which, as we just noted, is usually reserved for the humanities disciplines. Usually, the sciences are radically separated from these fields. But this is, I submit, entirely arbitrary and, alas, the result of modern specialization. Why don't the sciences count for classical education as well? If classical education means *per definition* what comes from the Greeks and the Romans, then the sciences too are a part of this rich cultural heritage that we have received from them.

When we think of the Roman “classics” we invariably think of literary texts such as Vergil’s *Aeneid* or Livy’s history of Rome, but we tend not to think nearly so readily of Vitruvius’ book on architecture or Frontinus’ book on aqueducts. The classics department at most any university is usually a part of the larger department of literature. The education that people receive in these departments is primarily literary. Why is this the case? Why don’t classics departments tend to treat the culture of the classical world in a generally representative manner?

Most troubling, I believe, is our modern tendency to separate science from the humanities and from culture in general. It is as if there is some fundamental belief that science is something apart from the rest of human culture, as if it develops on its own in a vacuum. Of course, in reality this is not the case. The development of science goes hand-in-hand with social and cultural development, and there is a reciprocal influence of the one sphere on the other. So my suggestion here is for us to try to look beyond this modern blindness that sees science as something different in

kind from culture and the humanities, and instead come to regard it as a fundamental and integral part of human culture as a whole.

This is an important insight for educators who have an investment in classical education since with this idea we can modify our handed-down conception of what classical education means by making room for the sciences as an integrated part of it. This is, I submit, the way in which the Greeks and the Romans conceived of things, and thus it is a more veridical understanding of the concept of classical education. But, moreover, it is also a more veridical reflection of the actual state of things and the practice of the humanities and the sciences in the real world of today. We should not allow ourselves to be fooled into a false separation of things based simply on the division of the fields in the common college catalogue. Science belongs every bit as much to classical education as does history or poetry.

B. The Prejudice about Religion

I want now to move to another example of what I take to be an oddity in our standard conception of classical education. It will be noted that in the standard definition that we gave of classical education at the outset, there was no mention of religion. Once again, I think that it is a common perception that religion is something different in kind from the traditional fields of classical education. In many cases great care has been taken to make sure than no form of instruction in religion appears in the curriculum of classical education. This, I submit, is another example of a modern prejudice that instead of being in harmony with classical education, in fact, radically departs from it.

The works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are often taken to be paradigm cases of texts belonging to the classical canon. If anything, then surely Homer belongs to classical education. These are wonderful works of literature, and, some would argue, they also contain some faint whispers of history. This sounds entirely intuitive and uncontroversial to our ears. But, I wish to submit that this is in part an anachronistic misunderstanding based on a modern perspective. For the Greeks of the archaic and classical period the Homeric poems were far more than simply works of literature or history; rather, they were regarded as objects of great reverence as religious texts. These poems (along with Hesiod's *Theogony*) were the Greeks' main sources of information about the gods and the origin of their deepest religious beliefs and practices.

To take another example, surely the Greek dramas of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes belong to classical education. They are the origin of many forms of modern entertainment from theater to film. They tell wonderful stories about ethical duties and responsibilities, and contain great insight into the human spirit. Thus they have been the source of endless examples from specialists in ethics or psychology. Here again it is not difficult to see how this aspect of Greek culture had a profound influence on modern thinking in these different areas. But all of this is something of a distortion. Greek drama for the Greeks was not primarily about art, entertainment, ethics or psychology. Rather, Greek drama arose from Greek religious rites to the god Dionysius. Dramatic works were always performed in connection with religious festivals. These were never conceived by the Greeks purely as secular works of art or literature. This is a modern way of thinking or, if you prefer, a modern prejudice.

Greek epic poetry and Greek drama are not isolated examples; indeed, many of the canonical texts that we know from the ancient world in other traditions are also in the end religious texts, although in our modern secular world we tend to treat them as literature, history, etc. In the ancient world, religion permeated every aspect of society and culture. Since it tends to be more limited or

compartmentalized in our modern world, people mistakenly take this picture with them when they read ancient texts, and they thus tend not to take too seriously the religious elements in these works, especially when those religious elements seem strange or foreign to us. So, for example, in the Hindu classic the *Ramayana* Rama is regarded by the modern reader just as a great hero, but people forget that he is the seventh avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. Once again there is an overlooked religious element that is absolutely central to the work. Our modern secular mindset thus distorts our understanding of these ancient texts both in the Greco-Roman tradition and in other traditions.

But why then do we tend to think of the classics as literary or historical texts and not religious ones? Why do we tend to exclude religion from the curriculum in classical education? The reason for this, I believe, has to do with the origin and development of the field of the classical studies. The German philologist Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) is credited with coining the term “*Altertumswissenschaft*,” literally the “science of antiquity,” to designate the broad field of classical studies.¹ He established the first department of classical studies in Halle in 1787. During Wolf’s time the study of Greek and Latin at the university had always been the purview of the Faculty of Theology. But Wolf yearned to read texts such as Homer outside of this context. In time he came to develop a sense of animosity towards his colleagues at the Faculty of Theology for monopolizing the instruction of Greek and Latin. His mission was to create a university institute dedicated to the study of the classical languages independent of theology. Thus when this department was established, it was specifically in opposition to the study of theology. In this context there was a tendency for the budding field of classics to identify itself with literature,

¹See Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996, pp. 16-24. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *History of Classical Scholarship*, trans. by Alan Harris, ed. by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, London: Duckworth 1982, pp. 108-109, p. 115. Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300 to 1850*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1976, pp. 173-177. J.F.J. Arnoldt, *Fr. Aug. Wolf in seinem Verhältnisse zum Schulwesen und zur Paedagogik*, vol. 1, *Biographischer Theil*, Braunschweig: C.A. Schwetschke und Sohn 1861. Conrad Bursian, *Geschichte der classischen Philologie in Deutschland von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, vols. 1-2, Munich and Leipzig 1883, vol. 1, pp. 517-664.

history, etc., that is, fields that were as different from the theological fields as possible. But this meant selectively focusing on specific aspects of the ancient world and ignoring others. As a result, scholars in this field and those that sprang from it tended to read the ancient texts in a purely secular manner and ignore whatever religious connotations they otherwise contained. While this development makes perfect sense when seen in the context of Wolf's time, in the big picture this is an obvious distortion caused by modern specialization. The ancients did not divide things in this way. Ancient culture was an organic whole. It was not possible simply to ignore the religious element in Greek culture at will.

This is also a valuable insight for us as educators with an investment in classical education. Again, very often religion is considered to be something different and separate from classical education. Some advocates of classical education pride themselves on their religious tolerance and open-mindedness due to the fact that they do not teach any form of religion in their classroom. They regard such teaching as suspect and inevitably doctrinal in some way. Thus, it is argued, the only way to avoid falling into the trap of indoctrinating or, worse, corrupting young minds with religion is not to teach it. But here we can see clearly that there is a real rub between this view and the way the ancients conceived of things. The modern view reflects certain negative conceptions about religion that come from the Enlightenment, that is, from Wolf's time, whereas the ancient view fully embraced religion and made it an absolutely central part of their culture and life. So to say that one is interested in developing a program of classical education but then to eliminate wholly any trace of religion is simply contradictory. Such a program cannot be rightly termed "classical." When one eliminates religion, one eliminates a major aspect of classical culture. This insight tells us that we need to think carefully about how to integrate religion in a responsible manner into our programs for classical education.

C. The Prejudice about Influence

For my third point, I wish to focus on a set of prejudices or misconceptions surrounding the traditional argument for relevance. In critical discussions about the value of classical education, the argument is often heard that our modern culture derives from classical Greek and Roman culture. So therefore in order to understand the foundations of modern society, we need to learn about the classics. Things such as democracy, literature and drama all have their basis in ancient Greek culture, and so when we learn about the Greeks, we are in a sense learning about ourselves. This is often thought to be a strong counterargument to the reproaches of the lack of relevance of classical education.

It will be noted that this argument is based on the premise of influence. The classics are classics precisely because they have exercised a major influence on subsequent Western thinking. This is why, so the argument goes, we should prioritize the culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans in our educational programs. While at first glance convincing, this argument about influence is problematic if we wish to insist on it dogmatically since it makes the classics in a sense dependent on their influence for modern society. This raises three problems, which I think all show how selective people are in their conception of Greek and Roman culture and the role it plays in our culture today.

1. The Aspects of Greek and Roman Culture that were not Influential

First, there are many aspects of Greco-Roman culture that do not exert any meaningful influence on modern life. Let us take, for example, Greek polytheism; while the stories of the Greek gods and goddesses might be interesting for specialists of mythology or might be useful to literary scholars when identifying specific literary allusions and motifs, it would be inauthentic to say that this aspect of the Greek religion is a central part of our modern Western society. We do not have large numbers of followers of the cult of Apollo; only the tiniest of groups of neopagans today continue to believe in the Greek gods as a living religion, and even this modern phenomenon is arguably quite different from the actual religion of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

So given that there are aspects of Greek or Roman culture like this that exerted little or no long-term influence on modern Western society, should they really be given such a unique privileged position in our educational systems and programs? The point here is simply to show that when we decide to identify Greek and Roman culture as “classic,” we are in fact being selective in an arbitrary way since we do not mean all of Greek and Roman culture but only certain aspects of it.

2. The Aspects of the “Classical” World that are not Worthy of Emulation

Second, part and parcel of the idea of a “classic” in the sense of influence is that the work in question is one worthy of emulation. The idea is that the Greeks and the Romans set the bar high and we have been trying to reach it ever since. Homer is a classic in the sense that later authors, Vergil, Dante, Milton, Joyce, and others, try though they may, can only imitate him imperfectly. He

represents an ideal that will always inspire later ages but which will never be fully attained. In short, the idea of a “classic” is invariably something positive.

But there are a number of aspects of Greek and Roman society that we can hardly regard today in any positive light whatsoever: the cultural arrogance and ethnocentrism of the Greeks; the positive disposition toward military conquest that saw virtue in defeating other peoples; the more or less universal institution of slavery; the merciless suppression of conquered peoples; the oppression of women; the widespread practice of torture and public execution, at times for public entertainment, and on and on. Make no mistake: for all of our adulation of the great cultural achievements of the Greek and Roman world, there was plenty that is and should be utterly repellent and abhorrent to us. Should we regard these institutions and cultural practices as “classics”? Once again, why should we give privilege of place to such cultures that engaged in such terrible brutality and injustice? Are these values that we want to introduce to and instill in our young people via classical education? The point here is again not to knock the Greeks and the Romans but merely to bring home how selective people tend to be when they think of Greek and Roman culture in the context of classical education. There is a tendency to put their culture up on a pedestal and ignore the aspects of it that do not fit with the humanistic picture that educators customarily try to convey. Once again, this shows a serious deviation from the reality of classical culture in all of its aspects. Sadly, the relevance argument still works here. Europe and the West have, alas, inherited a number of these negative institutions and practices from the Greeks and the Romans. But the question this raises is whether this is anything we should be particularly proud of or should enshrine as the foundation of our educational system.

3. The Aspects of Other Cultures that have been Influential

Third, if we make the criterion for what a “classic” is the influence that it has had, then it will be noted that this makes it *independent of* any specific culture such as the Greeks or the Romans. In this sense a classic text could in principle come from anywhere, provided that it exercised an important influence in the development of our modern thinking. Thus this is not in and of itself an argument for studying Greek and Roman culture; rather, it is an argument for studying what has been influential.

If we take a look at the development of science and technology in the European Middle Ages, we find something quite interesting. We see that the leading scientific works of that period come not from the Greeks, the Romans or even the later Europeans but from Arabic authors, for example, Al-Battani’s and Al-Kindi’s works on astronomy, Al-Farabi’s work on geometry, Avicenna’s work on medicine, Abu Ma’shar’s work on botany, Omar Khayyám’s and Thābit ibn Qurra’s work on mathematics. These are all thinkers who had a major impact on the development of Western science. But oddly we do not tend to include them as a part of the “classics” since they are not from the Greco-Roman world, although all of these thinkers were working with Aristotle. But by the very criterion that the advocates of classical education themselves give, namely, influence, they should by all rights be included. For whatever reason these thinkers are generally neglected, although their influence has been so profound.

Let me illustrate this with a simple example. In every school in this country we find zealous young people studying algebra, which is regarded as an important part of their education in mathematics and a preparation for later university studies. If we were to ask all of those zealous students who was the founder of algebra, how many of them could come up with the name of Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī, let alone the title of his main work, *The Compendious Book*

on Calculation by Completion and Balancing? Ask them who invented geometry, and they will tell you immediately: Euclid. Who invented the fundamental laws of classical physics: Newton. But then ask them who invented algebra, and you will see lots of stammering and fidgeting. This should be shocking to us.

The conclusion that we need to draw from this is that our conception of classical education is overly narrow and perhaps somewhat prejudiced. If the goal of education is relevance in the sense of teaching our young people things that they need to know about the origins and development of the society and culture that they live in, then we must recognize that the Western tradition is a highly eclectic one that has always readily taken up and incorporated ideas from other cultures. Indeed, this is one of the things that arguably has made it great. We need to make sure that the texts that we select for our canon are ones that truly represent the development of human thought as a whole. While traditionally this has always been associated with Western civilization, with this example we can see that this is a far more complex story than it is usually thought to be. The West cannot always be easily separated from other cultural traditions.

II. A Revised Conception of Classical Education

These examples of the natural sciences, religion, and other cultural traditions besides the Greeks and the Romans should, I submit, enjoin us to rethink our traditional conception of classical education. They show us that there is much more to this than simply the traditional humanities fields. It is simple prejudice to say that science or religion does not belong to classical education. This is in no way in harmony with the material itself or the way in which the ancient Greeks and Romans themselves thought. It is likewise a prejudice to exclude other cultural traditions that have

played an important role in the development of modern culture. It is a mistaken to insist just on the Greeks and the Romans and put them up on a pedestal of cultural perfection and moral infallibility.

A much more fruitful way of understanding classical education can, I believe, be found in a concept by the 19th century German philosopher Hegel. At the very heart of his complex philosophical system, Hegel makes an absolutely fundamental distinction between what he calls “nature” and what he calls “spirit.” By “nature” he means the physical world that surrounds us and that is governed by the laws of nature. By “spirit” he refers to the human mind and all of its products. Today this is what social anthropologists would refer to generally as human culture. So we might think of nature as something that is simply immediately there before us as we enter the world, but spirit is something that we ourselves as human beings collectively have to create in one way or another. This involves not just the usual things that we associate with culture, such as the academic fields of literature and history, but also language, technical expertise, religious beliefs, and scientific knowledge. In prehistorical times, for example, it was a *cultural* asset to know how to make and preserve fire.

Again, it is mere prejudice that excludes science and technology from what we usually understand by culture. It is likewise mere prejudice to exclude religion from culture. Perhaps most troublesome of all, it is mere prejudice to exclude foreign traditions from culture. These are all products of the human mind that have every right to deserve our respect and be made the object of serious study. We can follow Hegel’s lead and understand classical education as the understanding of human spirit or mind in all of its forms. Thus classical education should include all of these fields. It should also include all peoples as an interconnected, developing whole, that is, humanity in general.

III. The Relevance of Classical Education in the Globalized World

Let us then turn to the specifics of our globalized world and ask what this world demands of its citizens. In modern discussions about education, the idea of an educational program suited to the globalized world and classical education are usually thought to be at opposite ends of the spectrum. While classical education is thought to be traditional or even reactionary, any program of education for a globalized world is supposed to be progressive and modern. The idea is that classical education has nothing to offer us in our modern society of the 21st century. The Greeks and the Romans lived in a very different world and had no inkling of the problems of globalization. I wish to argue that this conception is also based on certain modern prejudices.

What do we really mean with globalization? This means living with an awareness that the entire world is interconnected in a myriad of different ways. These interconnections mean that we should be attentive to people with different languages, religious practices, traditions and ways of thinking. We can no longer be content to stick to our own isolated, local or regional group, so to speak. This all sounds very progressive and modern, but a closer look reveals that this conception was nothing new to the Greeks and the Romans. It is a modern prejudice to think that globalization is something new. This prejudice comes from the experience of the rise of nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, which gave priority to the nation state. It is against this background that globalization sounds like a new phenomenon, but in fact it is not.

The Greeks were acutely aware of their neighboring peoples: the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Phoenicians, etc. Educated Greeks such as Herodotus went abroad to learn from foreign cultures. To be sure, the Greeks had a profoundly ethnocentric side, but nonetheless they also had a keen awareness of other cultures and traditions and in some cases stood in awe of them. The Romans created a vast empire that contained a large number of conquered

peoples with different languages, traditions and religions. It profited from its tolerance towards these differences. Given this, it is difficult to see how their experience differed qualitatively from our modern experience of globalization. In short, the idea of globalization is not a modern one but rather an ancient one.

Let me illustrate this with an example. Polybius, a Greek living in the second century before Christ, wrote a history of, among other things, the Second Punic War that pitted Rome against its archenemy Carthage. Polybius explains that this conflict, that took place from 218 to 201 BC, was an epic event that signaled a major shift in history. Since both the Romans and the Carthaginians had colonies throughout the Mediterranean, the war covered a vast geographical area. In his introduction Polybius explains that “in earlier times the world’s history had consisted, so to speak, of a series of unrelated episodes, the origins and results of each being as widely separated as their localities, but from this point onwards history becomes an organic whole: the affairs of Italy and of Africa are connected with those of Asia and Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end.”² Here we can see already in antiquity, two centuries before Christ, the first glimpses of a globalized perspective. Polybius realizes that with the conflict between Rome and North African Carthage the world had in a sense become smaller. It is no longer possible just to pay attention to one’s one private concerns in one’s own local region. Now the Mediterranean world is interconnected, and what happens in one place has important consequences for what happens elsewhere. So Polybius’ impassioned plea is that in order to understand the Second Punic War, people need to adopt not a local or specialized perspective but a universal, or we would say *global*, one. He complains, “It is impossible for us to achieve this comprehensive view from those histories which record isolated events....The fact is that we can obtain no more than an impression of a whole from a part, but certainly neither a thorough knowledge nor an accurate understanding.”³

²Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. by Ian Scott-Kilvert, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1979, p. 43.

³Ibid., pp. 44f.

Polybius then proposes his own view of universal history: “it is only by combining and comparing the various parts of the whole with one another and noting their resemblances and their differences that we shall arrive at a comprehensive view.”⁴ True understanding is only possible if we can see the whole picture and thus can place the individual parts in their broader context.

Polybius’ progressive vision is highly relevant for our global world today. Things that happen on one side of the globe more and more frequently have an important impact on things on the other side. The world has become smaller as the technological developments in communication, transportation and trade have in a sense made everyone in the world our neighbor. This presents new challenges not least of all to education.

There have been other periods in history like this when the world seemed suddenly to take on a broader perspective, and each of these can be seen as key periods for the development and expansion of globalization. One might refer to the 15th and 16th centuries with the discovery of the new world and the work of the Jesuit missionaries in China, which gave rise to the field of Sinology. One might also refer to the first half of the 19th century, which saw a dramatically increased awareness of non-Western cultures and the birth of what has been referred to as Orientalism or Asian Studies, with the foundation of the scholarly fields of Indology, Egyptology, Persian Studies and Arabic Studies. Similarly, economists in the 18th and 19th centuries became aware of what we today refer to as the global economy, that is, the ways in which modes of production and marketing of goods in one place expand and have an impact on different places around the world. In each of these periods Europe was obliged to re-evaluate its self-image and its position in the world.

⁴Ibid., p. 45.

So the phenomenon of globalization is not unique to our modern world but in fact goes back through history. Thus there is every reason to think that certain aspects of a classical educational system that were well suited to other periods in history might well be appropriate today as well.

Perhaps the key issue with globalization is that it means an increased awareness of one's place in the world as limited as a member of one people, one society, one nation, one religion vis-à-vis others. This sounds quite straightforward, but a great deal is implied here with regard to its consequences for education. This means more than a simple sense of general respect for difference and otherness. This should be a given. But it means, more significantly, a fundamental dedicated and long-term effort to learn about all the things that make people different, or, as Polybius says, to learn about all the parts in all their complexity in order to understand the whole. Here one starts to see that mutual respect is simply the visible tip of a very large iceberg. What globalized education means is a systematic curriculum that educates young people in the history of all the different peoples of the world, in the different religions of the world, the different traditions of art and literature. This means learning foreign languages and different modes of communication that facilitate one's interaction with people from all over the world. Only with such a full commitment truly to learn about the other can one genuinely call oneself a full-fledged global citizen in the modern world.

Here we can heed Polybius' words that true understanding is only possible with an overview of the whole. It is necessary to see the role of the part in the bigger picture, and only in this way are the part and the whole truly comprehensible. This is a daunting task, but I believe that with a revised model of classical education we have the basic tools in hand to accomplish this ambitious goal.

First, it is necessary to understand science and technology as a central part of our classical heritage on equal footing with literature, history and the other fields traditionally associated with

classical education. In this way we can make classical education fit better with the demands of the fast-changing modern world that is based on science and technology.

Second, it is necessary to include instruction in religion as a part of classical education. Specifically, we need to design programs that teach students the basics of the main religious traditions in order to prepare them for life in a multi-cultural globalized world since our young people will be encountering people from different religious traditions.

Finally, it is necessary to expand classical education to include other traditions that have also been influential on modern society. Classical education has always been about learning about different cultures. This needs merely to be expanded from an exclusive occupation with the Greeks and the Romans to include other cultures of the world. Our young students will be meeting people from different countries and traditions and will need some understanding of these.

With these suggestions, it should be clear that I am not proposing any kind of radical or revolutionary change. The basics of all of my proposals are already to be found in classical education if this concept is understood correctly. We do not need to start with something entirely new here, but instead we can build on the old strengths of classical education and expand on them in a way that will make it more suitable for our times.

Given all of this, I can see no reason why we as advocates of classical education need to be on the defensive or need to seek desperately for arguments to justify our educational practices. A correct understanding of classical education provides us with all that we need. But it should be noted that a part of this is a critical understanding, that is, an awareness of the limitations and shortcomings of the Greek and Roman world as the sole basis for an educational program. But I see this critical understanding as a strength and not a weakness. We might have to abandon some cherished clichés and stereotypes about classical education, but nothing will be lost by this, and

ultimately we will end up with a more dynamic and robust conception of education that will better serve our students in the challenges that they will meet in the globalized world.

