An Overview of the Good
(via Plato, Nietzsche, and Augustine)
With a Focus On
Implications for Educational Outcomes and Methods

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Author's Introduction

As far back as I can remember, I have always struggled to do the right thing. It's not that I ever really behaved badly, so it probably wasn't evident. My struggle was not so much in doing the right thing as in knowing what was the right thing to do. I have always seen so many possibilities that I can't always tell if one has more moral merit than the others. The struggle did not disappear when I entered college—certainly not! This question about what the "right" thing was had become a part of me that would not easily be removed. Instead of growing out of it, the conflictual question had become so prominent in my thinking and feeling that I needed to explore it in depth. Hence, my interdisciplinary major centered around the question, "What is Good?"

Allow me to explain. Not so very long ago, in a land very near here …

The Picture's Canvas

I came to college with the questions already in my head and on my heart. Oh yes, I had lots of questions. But until this point, there existed no "appropriate" venue for them. My schooling up to this point had been mostly rote memorization and regurgitation of words the teacher had given me and my classmates. We were not to question: The teacher was always right. Thankfully, a few exceptions stood in the front of my classrooms, so I was not without hope; these teachers really made the effort to cultivate our minds. Unfortunately, this was often not as much of a stretch for me as intended. Looking back, I thank God for calculus, as odd as that sounds!

Not only did I come to college with questions, but I also came with hopes, dreams, and anticipation. I had imagined a community full of people who loved to learn, where scholarship was breathed daily. Perhaps students and faculty would intermingle for stimulating lunch conversations or gather at a fireplace for an evening thought exchange. Books, movies, music, and theater might be the hottest topics on campus—what structured controversy! Maybe, just maybe, I would find people like me.

The first two years here at WLC, I learned a lot, but mostly outside of the classroom. I quickly made friends, but skated by in my classes, going mostly on what I had learned in high school or putting to use natural skills I already had. I did not open many books, unless I was exploring texts that were not mine.

Almost at once, I was drawn into the world of band and music—I became infatuated with it. Wonder and awe increased with every concert I played in or attended, and I thought I had found my life's calling in music. Everything fit into place—passion, drive, ability—except that one last piece, my gut instinct. I could not make the last step of commitment.

So, I floundered for those two-and-a-half years. Floating from hypothetical major to hypothetical major, nothing brought that last piece into place. I just could not find a discipline that made me want to make a commitment to it. A few well-meaning staff were already inquiring as to my future plans at the beginning of my sophomore year. If I was not already nervous about my lack of academic label, I began to be at the prompting of others. The search for intellectual purpose had been actively passive for awhile when I started to hear more about this thing called an "Interdisciplinary Studies" major. Its purported novelty and challenge intrigued me, but it was all so mysterious …
The Good and Education

In the meantime, late night conversations with the fascinating inner worlds of others, learning to crawl out from my sheltered life, and the resultant sleep deprivation all put me in a less-than-ideal mindset for peak classroom performance. Through it all, though, I managed to enjoy some of my classes, and even began to get excited for a few of them. Even this was still not quite what I had envisioned in my pre-college imagination, but it was closer than anything I had experienced up to that point. During this time, I had also begun toying with possibilities for an interdisciplinary major.

“Learning Theories” (PSY-220) was a pivotal class for me, as it combined philosophy and psychology and studied them from a Christian (theological) perspective. In all honesty, though, looking back, what psychology at WLC has offered me is not so much its content, or even the skills, but a person. My advisor from the discipline of psychology has truly been a God-send; she has challenged me in ways I had previously only imagined into existence. I suppose I could refer to our (nearly) weekly visits as “an independent study in life.” My head and heart were both challenged to mature, accompanied by many growing pains in the process. Most importantly, though, she pointed me to Christ when I needed it most. I need Him all the time, but sometimes I forget that it is not God’s will for me to actually be Jesus, but to be Beth, a unique and forgiven child of God. This is the greatest lesson I have learned at WLC, and in the style of a truly “Augustinian education,” too. Perhaps I received a good education—in content and process—after all. Back to the story ...

Junior year was “M-Day.” In other words, I had to choose a major. With my probable disciplines in mind, I enrolled accordingly in PHI, THE, PSY, and COM classes. I had my best academic semester to date and was thrilled. I had found areas that drove me to crave more.

My PHI course that semester, “Apologetics” (PHI-202), was my first, and it was positive. This class finally provided a safe environment for raising questions that had previously been dismissed with, “You think too hard, Beth.” Finally, I had a place to speak with peers about significant topics and their consequences; I had a place where an instructor listened and respected my thoughts, even if they had to be corrected. My two THE classes explored topics that had previously received little attention in my schooling, so my interest was piqued. The other three classes on my schedule that semester were refreshingly unique. Overall, except for a few all-nighters, I genuinely liked school.

Even so, life issues remained, and making a commitment to a major was still difficult. At the encouragement and urging from my now present advisors, I started putting together the paperwork necessary for an interdisciplinary major. The last piece had fallen into place, but I was still doubting every other piece.

Without certainty of the outcome(s), I lacked confidence that I could do justice to this dream program. I did not want to fail; the surest way to do that is to not try. Thankfully, my advisors did not allow me to get away with that thinking, and I declared my major in spring of my junior year.

Welcome to the “Interdisciplinary Studies” aspect of my major. This is where the most excitement, the most mischief, and the most sorrow took place. This is where the moral of the story can be found. This is where my heart learned. But it was not always easy ... in fact, it was rarely easy at all.
The Call

I entered into this major wanting to change the world. I fervently sought the key to turning the formal educational system into a proponent of the Good, because I felt that my own system had been flawed. The scenario that continually haunted my mind, though, was the possibility that at the end of my work I would have nothing to say. My skin still goes cold to think of investing myself in vain. How dare I be all talk and not make the next step in the walk! I longed to find my Calling and make a difference.

One big question I had going into this program of study revolved around discovering what my personal spiritual gifts are, what my service to the Kingdom would be. I was hoping that by composing a rigorously challenging major I would figure this out, even if by the process of elimination. Alas, instead of narrowing my possibilities, they seem to have only increased in number. Historically, I have viewed “too many” choices as a burden, and trying to change this thinking is difficult.

For now, His answer to me is, “Wait, My child. Yes, a little longer.” This answer has been a consistent theme throughout my years. Inconsistent, though, has been my ability to wait patiently. Sometimes I enjoy riding a situation out, knowing that God has always provided in the past and will provide in “the now.” But sometimes, especially when other well-meaning people begin to be quite concerned about my lack of answer, I slip into their way of thinking and become frustrated with my call to wait. I go back and forth between peace and turbulence. Hope has pushed me on through the years when nothing else could, and those years feel like many.

For nearly all my life, I have known that I am ... different; and all this time I have been trying to figure out the reason why. There is a reason, right? All I have to do is try really hard to find it, right? And when I find it, everything else will just fall into place, right? One reason I was drawn to the interdisciplinary program was that I saw it as a potential opportunity to create my unique gift of service.

As you will see in the body of this paper, good education prepares one for service with the head, heart, and hands. Shortly, I will be leaving WLC. During my years here, and especially the last couple, I have begun to learn how to dedicate my thinking to God, how to dedicate my feelings to God, but I do not yet understand what my service of doing is to be. Head and heart, but not hands ... I do not yet know what my Calling is.

Silence

Amidst all these grand dreams and hopeful expectations, there was only one thing to fear: failure. The scenario that continually haunted my mind was the possibility that at the end of my work I would have nothing to say. My skin still goes cold to think of investing myself in vain. How dare I be all talk and not make the next step in the walk!

This fear was enough to paralyze my vision a number of times throughout the project. Oh, did I ever dread being faced with a decision and making the “wrong” choice, meaning anything other than the “perfect” choice. How could I, a mere student, even think of challenging the guidance and assertions of those with more training than I? Insolence, even perceived insolence, is not acceptable. Certainly it is better to be silent than to be wrong, is it not? This is the question that ate at me day in and day out as I attempted to
find some meaning in my program, to forge some path using my God-given intelligence. Now—worn and weary, yet wiser—I have the answer: No, it is not.

Silence does not start conversations, but it most certainly can end them. I discovered this by trial and error—a lot of trial and a lot of error. Even when I was finally compelled to say something I only spoke once, for fear of being repeatedly wrong (versus being just a one-time offender). It turns out that silence oftentimes does not even show the respect that I thought it did. In very few cases does silence actually change anything.

Instead, it is the word—the spoken and heard word—that initiates conversation, that offers respect, that has the power to change. Making use of the word’s power is more important than being right. Offering the “wrong” word would have actually brought me closer to my goal of change, because the word makes the issue heard. Even the “wrong” words, once spoken, can be crafted and molded into something beautiful, but not if they never come down from the head and out the mouth.

At the end of this project, I realize that I have confronted my failure through failure. Ironically, it was not because I said something wrong; it was because I did not risk speaking to even find out if I had something to say or not. In fact, even as I write, it makes me sick to think that I still may not be saying anything of value. But, I am saying it anyway. I have learned something.

The Bottom Line

Ultimately, before testing real life examples, it is important to note that an educational relationship does not need to be ideal in order for it to be good. After all, it is God who works Good out of my life circumstances and not me myself. If I have been led to give my heart’s questions to Christ, all the relationships and questioning—no matter the accompanying frustrations in the meantime—have served their purpose.

Being mortal, I cannot always know how God has used, or will use, life events to show me the Good; I can only go by what I do know, seen through the lens of my own worldview and personal biases. Therefore, I humbly submit to you my interpretation of poignant educational moments in my life over the past four years. I do not expect my observations and views to be universalized—at least not without further work and development. I do expect to be heard.
Overview of the Good: Reaching for the Answer

What?

Although societies change with time—politics, economics, and technology are in constant flux—the essence of man does not. Man has regularly and recurrently desired to know what his potential is, what his purpose is, what the ultimate goal of life is: what the Good\(^1\) is. The consistent relevance of the topic is what makes it an important issue still today. “What is the Good?”—the question is alive and well.

How?

A survey of philosophies sufficiently orients a student amidst the multitude of responses to the question “What is Good?” Representing diverse chronological eras and trends in thinking, ancient, modern, and medieval Christian views provide significant landmarks in the quest for the Good. After examining these reactions to the Good, one may weigh the options and become convicted in his own understanding of the Good. Additionally, as an exercise in applying the Good, the educational implications of each view will be explored.

PLATO—Ancient Pagan View

Among thinkers of the ancient paradigm (Greek civilization, B.C.), Plato stands out from the rest in terms of both popularity and prolificacy. In his widely

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\(^1\) Throughout this paper, “Good” refers to the noun form of Good, as in the standard—Plato’s sun, Nietzsche’s despised concept, and Augustine’s truth. In contrast, “good” refers to the adjective form of Good. If anything is described as “good,” this is because it participates in the Good; it is not the Good itself, but is a product of being in contact with the Good.
read dialogue, Republic, Plato records a conversation between Socrates and the townspeople of his day. Topics of discussion include justice, virtue, the ideal society, and, notably, the Good.

The crowd of people conversing with Socrates pleads with him to reveal his idea of the Good. Plato, using the form of Socrates’ reply to the people, formulates his contribution to the conversation surrounding the Good. During Plato’s explanation of the Good, he describes the Good itself, the journey to the Good, and what is to be done with the Good once it is found.

**Good in the Future Tense: Just Out of Reach**

In Plato’s discourse, Socrates asks the crowd to picture in their minds a group of “peculiar prisoners” who have been chained in a cave all their lives (Plato, Republic, 515a). They cannot move anything, not even their heads. In other words, their sensory input is extremely controlled. The only source of light present in the cave is a fire flickering behind the prisoners, casting shadows on the cave wall they are facing. Since shadows are all the prisoners have ever known, shadows comprise their reality.

After a time, one of the prisoners is unshackled. He can finally turn around and view the light source behind him. However, upon being blinded by the direct light of the fire, the freedman intentionally returns to his chains, where perception is familiar and comfortable, and thus desirable.

On a second occasion, the same prisoner is unshackled. This time, however, the freedman is dragged up an incline to the mouth of the cave, placing him in the
environs of the sun. Because of the sudden increase in light, his eyes need time to adjust to these new surroundings. First the former prisoner can only look at reflections of physical objects themselves. After further optical adjustment, he can gaze at the heavenly bodies of the night: the moon and the stars. Finally, the man can visually feast upon the sun itself and begin contemplating its significance in this “new” world.

This is where the allegory ends and the interpretation begins. In his full description of the Good, Plato uses three complementary accounts:

1) “the Sun,” 2) “the Line,” and 3) “the Cave” (paraphrased above).

Plato’s first account parallels the sun with the Good, clarifying the meaning of the sun in the allegory of “The Cave.” The sun, according to Plato, is “the child of the Good” (Plato, Republic, 508b-c). As relatives, they bear remarkable familial resemblance: both are governors, enablers of the senses, transcendent of all else, and are the sources of being in their respective physical and intelligible realms. The points to be especially stressed are the Good’s transcendence and its role as illuminator of the truth.

Plato’s second account exegetes the journey out of the cave. “The Line” describes a line divided into halves, then quarters (See Figure 2.1).

![Figure 2.1](image-url)
The sections of the line represent different progressive abilities of seeing (with the eyes) and then also for knowing (with the mind). The closer the section is to “A,” the closer the contemplated content is to the Good.

Attached to each section of the line are landmarks that highlight the step-by-step journey of leaving the cave for the sunlight, the Good. Each person necessarily begins in section “D,” a shackled prisoner in the cave, knowing only reflections and shadows as reality. However, as a person’s mind matures, which takes effort, he grows closer to gazing at the sun, closer to realizing the Good. Plato’s “Line” demonstrates that the journey to the Good is gradual and not for the apathetic.

Plato’s familiar third account, “The Cave,” upholds these principles: 1) the Good is the transcendent illuminator of truth, and 2) the journey to the Good is gradual and requires work. As the allegory unfolds, Plato introduces a new principle to the discussion: what is to be done with the Good once it is realized.

The former prisoner, now freed from the cave, is faced with a choice: He can bask in the Good or he can return to the dark cave in an attempt to share the light. The freedman would return for the sake of the Good, while the prisoners forsake all change and thus forsake even the Good.

If the Good-knower went back into the cave, his former society would initially ignore, misunderstand, reject, or possibly even kill him—if they could (Plato, Republic, 517a). With this in mind, what would possibly prompt anyone to leave the sun for the cave? Plato’s focus in Republic is the formation of the ideal
society, so he suggests that a man in the sun—the Good—is obligated to go back and use his vision to benefit the society that originally underwrote it (520a-b).

Plato speaks as though the person blessed with a vision of the Good is simply another cog in the wheel of society needed for his unique, yet expected, service to his fellow citizens. Most people will reject intended enlightenment. However, the role of the Good-knower, the educator, is not to coerce people into loving the Good, but to give them the opportunity to react to it.²

Although the journey to the Good is not easy and requires an exercise of will, its treasure is worth hardship. If and when the Good has been realized, it is to be used to benefit others and will hopefully be passed on as well. Based on Plato’s view of the Good, one naturally concludes that education is vital to the integrity of fully knowing the Good. Education is the way to the Good.

NIETZSCHE—Modern Pagan View

Since Plato’s time, man has continued the driving search for the Good. The number of potential paradigms has only increased. Which “Good” is the Good? Perhaps it has not even been found yet. Friedrich Nietzsche, a German thinker, came onto the philosophical scene in the late 1800’s and turned the question of the Good back on the ones asking it.

² Even the mere fact of being faced with the Good requires a person to react to it: they either begin to seek it or they reject it. This choice turns a person away from ignorant illusion either to belief in their illusion or to journeying toward the Good.
**Good in the Past Tense: The Reaching Stops**

During the infancy of modernism/post-modernism, Nietzsche deemed the question of the Good foolish. It was a convenient distraction from facing the reality that there is no Good, no purpose. Life is meaningless—unless one takes control of his life and creates a purpose for it. Nietzsche's parable of "The Madman" poignantly reflects his thoughts on the standard of the Good:

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has He got lost? Asked one. Did He lose his way like a child? Asked another. Or is He hiding? Is He afraid of us? Has He gone on a voyage? Emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" He cried; "I will tell you. We have killed Him—you and I. All of us are His murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed Him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightening and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and
heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves."

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his requiem aeternam deo. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: “What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?” (Nietzsche, The Gay Science)

Modern Western civilization has succeeded in doing the unthinkable. In “The Madman,” Nietzsche confronts them with a startling diagnostic message: God—and consequently every standard of meaning He brings to the world—is dead … because the people of the age have killed Him.

The madman materializes to ask these murderers if they are prepared to face the consequences for their fatal act. Before accusing the crowd, the madman tests their understanding by calling out that he “seeks God.” Instead of acknowledging the role God—as Absolute—had played in their culture, the postmoderns reflexively default to atheism. They begin patronizing the madman, mocking his apparent naïveté. In being jocular they have missed the point; the people do not comprehend the ramifications of their own actions.

For a civilization blinded by its own ignorance and folly, the madman becomes its eyes. With eagle vision, he sees that God is dead … because the blind civilization has killed Him. He also sees that this event turns the world upside down. The effect of this portentous act, this murder, is a world stripped of order.

No longer is there God, and no longer is there an Absolute. No longer is there a

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3 The man appears “mad” because his message is so starkly different from what his society fosters and glorifies. Any modern messenger of objective truth, of an Absolute, must be starkly different from such surroundings—indeed, he must be “mad.”
ground for hope, and no longer is there a ground for peace and security. No longer is there a ground for purpose in life.

Without this Absolute, this standard of Good and Evil, each man is left with only his own mortal, mutable perspective, formed merely from his own sensory perceptions, opinions, and emotions. This elastic approach to morality—“what’s morality?”—leaves no common standard and leads to no common knowledge, values, or purpose. Without a goal or direction, man is forced to look at his existence, at humanity, and ask, “What is the meaning of all this?”

Without God, man must not only ask the question, but he must also answer the question: Man must invent, or create, meaning in his life. Indeed, the murder of God is a point of no return. From now on, man must either continue to assert himself as guarantor of humanity’s destiny or else, fumbling and faltering, he will succumb to the pit of hopelessness he has generated by murdering God.

In response to the people’s blank stares, the madman declares that it is yet too early for anyone to realize what has happened. Being God-murderers is the product of obsession and tunnel vision, not careful contemplation. For as light and sound take time to reach the senses, so the ramifications of killing God will take time to reach the societal consciousness.4

4 The light from the closest star to Earth, Proxima Centauri, takes four years to reach Earth. If this star were to explode, vaporize, fall out of its orbit, or get eaten by a giant space monster, Earth’s inhabitants would not know about it until four years after the fact; light, and its absence, take time to reach the senses. In the same way, God and His Absolute continue to influence society, even though He is dead.
In the meantime, modern society lives in the residual effects of a God-fearing people as they acknowledge His created moral code in traditions, in speech, in courts of law, in their very mental framework. Thus, it appears that God is still present among them … but now in the past tense.

In view of Nietzsche, knowledge of the Good does not exist: it died with God. Without the Good, the Absolute, the only knowledge worth sharing is that which man has arbitrarily chosen to have relative meaning. The passing on of knowledge is no longer a means of liberation, but a means of manipulation via relativism. From Nietzsche, then, one gathers that the sharing of knowledge—education—is the way to perpetuating the illusion of the Good, for no one can actually know the Good … It does not exist.

**AUGUSTINE—Medieval Christian View**

In between the Greek culture of Plato’s day and the post-modern culture of Nietzsche’s day were two major shifts in cultural definition: the medieval period and the Renaissance period. Because the Renaissance functions as the revival of ancient Greek culture, it is the medieval period that brings new perspective to the perennial discussion of the Good.

During the Middle Ages, Christianity became more than a quirky new religious movement. Ripples spread with its followers into the political, social, and creative arenas. Because of its powerful message, it grew quickly and became the major influencing factor in medieval culture: law, war, art, music, and philosophy
were allowed, even encouraged, to reflect Christianity without fear of opposition. St. Augustine, a proselyte to Christianity, formed his work at the beginning of this time period. What follows is his medieval, and Christian, view of the Good.

**Good in the Present Tense: God Reaches Out to Man**

In *The Teacher*, Augustine speaks of the Good as what is true. When one knows what is true, then he is in communion with the Good. However, man cannot access the Good by himself: He needs a mediator. “The Teacher” fulfills that necessary role by illuminating the truth for each person.

Truth is made known “by the enlightening action of God from within” (*The Teacher, 12.40*). Because the Good involves interaction, it is personal. Hence, while truth—Augustine’s Good—is transcendent of man, it is also intensely immanent. The revealed identity of Augustine’s Teacher clarifies this: “Now He who is consulted and who is said to ‘dwell in the inner man,’ He it is who teaches us, namely Christ, that is to say, ‘the unchangeable Power of God and everlasting wisdom’” (*The Teacher, 11.38*). Again, the truth is made known “by the enlightening action of God from within” (*The Teacher, 12.40*). God, Jesus Christ, is the Teacher.

According to Augustine, then, God Himself is the giver of truth, the giver of the Good. Since Christ, the Teacher, is the Source of truth and Good, He is also the Good Himself. Therefore, Augustine’s Good is defined as, and revealed to man by, the same person: Jesus Christ, the Teacher.
While Augustine speaks of God as the Teacher, he also comments on the role of human teachers in the acquisition of the truth, of the Good. Man himself cannot reveal the truth to other men, for no man is the Teacher. Even so, one man can question another so that he turns to Christ for the truth. In Augustine's words, "If he is brought around to [the truth] by the words of his questioner, the words still do not teach him, but only propose questions in a way suited to his capacity to learn from his inner light" (The Teacher, 12.40).

For Augustine, education is the process of coming to know the truth. This truth, the Good, can solely be taught by Christ, the Teacher. However, the man who has already been enlightened by God, to one degree or another, can help his fellow man to weaken natural, mortal barriers to the truth. Christ calls man to serve Him, to serve the Good, in this capacity.

Man's role in education, therefore, is not to mass-produce common knowledge in pupils, but to gently guide them into a Teach-able moment. In this moment, the Teacher enters the heart and illuminates the Good. Augustinian education, then, is the intimate process between "teacher" and student whereby the student opens up to the Teacher, followed by the intimate process between Christ and student whereby the student learns God's truth, the Good.

In Review

A succinct summary of the selected views on the Good shows:

1) Plato's Good is transcendent and enlightening, but impersonal;
2) Nietzsche's Good, as a common standard, is non-existent;
3) Augustine's Good is transcendent and enlightening, and personal.
**Education and the Good: the Connection**

The purpose of examining the Good, and varied views of it, is not simply to “think deep thoughts,” but to apply it by viewing the educational experience in terms of the Good. First, context must be built through selection of a paradigm and accompanying terms. Once this informed perspective has been established, the evaluative process may begin.

**DEFINITION(S)—The Feasible Good**

Within the framework of a society that promotes “tolerance” above all else, one standard of evaluation dare not be chosen above any other. This can-do-no-right view of education today is that spawned by Nietzsche’s description of the Good, or rather the lack thereof.5 Within the broader scope of education, however, not all educational establishments choose Nietzsche’s post-modern approach to education. Some institutions of learning stand out because they defend one standard of evaluation above all others. In such a standard-ized setting, “good education” may exist, and “bad education” for that matter. In either case, the continuum created by the standard is honored.

The other two philosophers discussed earlier, Plato and Augustine, do describe and defend a standard called the Good, in which “good education” may

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5Nietzsche claimed that God, the Absolute standard of the Good, had died—He had been killed by people seeking freedom from such a standard. In the absence of the Good, each man must decide for himself what is good and bad. Nietzsche’s mindset continues to be the mindset of present society.
exist. Upon comparing Plato’s and Augustine’s views of the Good, significant similarities appear. However, whereas Plato’s Good is nebulous and impersonal—undefined, Augustine’s Good is specific and personal—defined by the God named Jesus Christ.

As seen, Plato, Nietzsche, and Augustine are all classified as philosophers. In spite of this commonality, their different approaches to the same issue clearly separate them, bringing communication to a standstill. For instance, Plato would look at Nietzsche’s nihilism and think that Nietzsche is defaulting by throwing out the question. Nietzsche would look at Plato and see his description of the Good as an illusion and a crutch to get through life. Similarly would Nietzsche look on Augustine’s answer as a crutch. Augustine would look at Nietzsche and rebuke him for not acknowledging the authority of divine revelation. In the same way, Augustine would lament that Plato seems to hint at revelation but in no way brings the Christian God into the picture. Everything would then come full circle when Plato would look at Augustine and think that he is defaulting by making the Good too personal, thus lessening the role of man—the philosopher—in journeying to the light of the Good.

Of these three views, Augustine presents the clearest picture by first of all acknowledging the Good to exist, and then by introducing man to who the Good is

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6 Both describe the Good as transcendent and as an “enlightener,” and both admit that the Good can be, and often is, rejected by man.
instead of leaving man to wonder what the Good is. The inspired Apostle Paul supports this:

“The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment:
‘For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:15-16).

Therefore, it is with Augustine’s definition in mind—Christ as the Good—that divisions disappear and discussing good education becomes fruitful.

**DEFINITION(S)—Feasible Evidence**

Augustine goes deeper than the common standard-less view in his investigation of education. The Augustinian view of Good equates Good with Christ. Therefore, the Good is Christ-ian, and seeing the Christian Good in education demands seeing Christ in, and through, education. Good Augustinian education is God’s revelation of truth to the individual man, by which he sees Christ more clearly. This definition of education is beautiful and appropriate, but leaves the concrete pragmatics a touch foggy. Truth, God’s truth, is the most excellent goal for education, but how do humans facilitate that? What ought man to do about it? An Augustinian insight expounds on what such actions entail:

7 The goal and end of (good?) education is commonly thought to be an individual who possesses “education,” who has been educated. Upon consulting Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1998), one finds the following entry:

“Education, properly a ‘drawing forth,’ implies not so much the communication of knowledge as the discipline of the intellect [instruction], but the establishment of the principles, the regulation of the heart.”

This definition validates the mindset of education as a means to fostering in its students such skills as: critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving.
“The only things worthy of love for their own sake are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; all other things are to be used for the sake of them. This holds, of course, for all subject matters we study: In principle, non-Christian subject matters are not suspect, so long as their relationship to the highest objects in Christian doctrine is respected. Subject matters of poetry, philosophy, and rhetoric are to be taken as means to Christian ends, never as ends themselves” (Chambliss, 1996).

Assessing good Augustinian education is dependent upon the heart, and although the heart cannot be seen explicitly, it shows itself implicitly through action. If a person has had a good education, others will see this in the student’s life and be drawn to Jesus by the student’s praise of Him. Such praise takes the forms of: testimony—use of the mind (head); attitude—use of the heart; and service—use of the hands. All of these forms are worship of the Good—of God—and show Christ to others. Therefore, good education teaches its students to honor, serve, glorify, and share the Good—who is Christ—with one’s head, heart, and hands.
EVALUATING ONE WLC EDUCATION—Reaching Out and Reaching Up

The above paragraphs have exhibited that good education can exist. The question left is whether or not it does exist. For example, take the author’s undergraduate educational institution, Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC). This school identifies itself as an Augustinian-Good-standard-based (Christian) college.\(^8\) Further examination shall discover how this good Christian institution has achieved the goal of furthering the Good.

EVALUATION—Via Experience and Observation

For the remainder of this discussion, the author’s own experiences within the institution will be the test case. The following equation will be used to represent the aim of a good Augustinian education:

\[
\text{Good education} = \text{Truth} = \text{Christ’s teaching.}
\]

As shown, good education opens the student’s heart to be taught Truth by Christ. Experiences at WLC will be further weighed against an equation that expresses the human role in the educational process:

\[
\text{Teachable moment} = \text{relationship + tailored questioning.}
\]

\(^8\) Judging by its declaration of faith, teaching is approached with an explicit Good, which its faculty strives toward within the walls of WLC. This Good, this standard, is God’s Word, as deduced from WLC’s identity statements. In these formative confessions, WLC refers to the Word as: the root of teaching, scholarship, and service; the main source of life and growth; the framework for the college’s paradigm; and the creator of worth for inquiry into all areas of human thought ([http://www.wlc.edu/president/identity.html](http://www.wlc.edu/president/identity.html), \(04/05/03\)). Consistent placement of God’s Word in such prominent roles throughout its identity statements shows this Word to be WLC’s Absolute. By definition, then, WLC’s view of the Good is Augustinian in nature, naming God as the Good. With this equation established, the quest for good education at WLC will occur using the context set with the discussion on Augustinian Good and education.
This human role is to be taken seriously, respected highly, and fulfilled humbly:

“So neither he who plants [the seed of faith] nor he who waters [the seed of faith] is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor 3:7-9a).

The Big Picture

Overall, the Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology faculty at WLC have led students into Teach-able moments. These instructors have proven faithful to the Good both through presentation of educational content and through visible lifestyle. From these faithful persons, questions—both explicit and implicit—have most certainly been asked of their students—questions that have caused them to look to Christ for the answers. In other words, the questions have provided Teach-able moments.

Additionally, students-become-friends have formed support systems by which they encourage one another in Christ. They themselves have become the teacher-questioners who point each other to Christ for the truth. This, also, is most certainly good, for it honors God above all else.

Teach-able moments and seeing Christ—both of these WLC has offered to its students. Since this is the goal of Augustinian education, WLC has provided a good educational outcome. But what about the educational process itself?

To represent the means of a potentially good education at WLC, the specific disciplines of Theology, Philosophy, and Psychology are being examined. The
choice of these subjects is a reflection of the author’s three major areas of study and so also her educational experience. Each of these disciplines teaches lexis and methods of thinking, or content and process(-es); both elements must be good for the discipline as a whole to be called good.

The Philosophical Picture

Theoretically speaking, philosophy is mental calisthenics, whereby the mind undergoes rigorous exercise so that it can perform rational feats with agility and precision. This is the use of reason so highly regarded by Plato. As a discipline, philosophy at WLC seeks to offer its students the knowledge necessary to tighten one’s focus while thinking and to create a robust use of words. For the student, the thinking methods entail not only intelligently fielding questions posed to him, but also using questions in motivating others to re-consider their position(s). This is done in light of 1 Corinthians 2:4—

“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”

Learning the appropriate use of questioning—similar to the Socratic method employed by Plato in his writing—is vital to the Augustinian idea of education: This is one reason philosophy may be good.

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9 Here, thinking methods refer to the abilities to understand the relationships between vocabulary terms in a discipline, to theorize within this framework, and to apply these concepts to issues and problems encountered in daily life.
The content includes the study of major philosophical topics, movements, and thinkers. Resultant of this content is a vocabulary fit for engaging in intellectual conversation. The philosophical talk combined with the philosophical walk prepares a student to speak intelligently about Christ with those who wrestle with questions bigger than themselves. So, although the content may not directly point to Christ, it is a vessel whereby Christ can be communicated. Since the study of philosophy at WLC seeks to promote Augustinian education by equipping its students with the syntactical and rational tools to show Christ to others, the discipline appears good.

In summary, then, philosophy has the ability to prepare a person for questioning and answering thoughtfully; it also has the potential to prepare a person for relationships with intellectual peers. The question, though, is: Although philosophy at WLC may be a means to a good end, is it also good unto itself while en route to the aforementioned preparation?

Phi--Q1: Does the element of questioning exist in philosophy at WLC? If so, has the practice of continually questioning mutated into faith-destroying skepticism?

Phi--A1: Questioning is the central high point for most philosophy classes—it does exist. Through this questioning, PHI trains students’ thinking to look to Christ, but it may also lead them to be skeptical.

Questioning man’s role in his eternal life, from a variety of angles, may very well cause one to look to Christ. Answers are not always given before leaving the classroom, but students are prepared to dig into the spiritual matters with God later. The big questions have also serve the purpose of humbling students so that
they have no choice but to look away from themselves and to God. This is a good thing.

Questioning word choice, cogency of arguments, and basic assumptions, however, may also lead to a default position of “caution”: not taking anything for granted. One might also describe this as skepticism. This “caution” may appear healthy and helpful on the outside, but it leads to confusion and turmoil on the inside. When one questions everything—as a reflex, not as insolence—communicating with others becomes suddenly difficult; decisions become suddenly difficult. Others are frustrated by the onslaught of questions, which seems so natural to the inquiring mind.

What ends up happening is that the authority bestowed upon reason subordinates the certainty of revelation. Eventually, a person may be left doubting whether or not he can trust anything; his own perceptions, interpretations, and even his own reasoning can all be dismantled with an argument. The overuse, or ab-use, of questioning leaves the student with essentially nothing. One question can send an entire framework of reality reeling in the outer recesses of reason.

Additionally, issues such as free will, God’s providence, and even one’s own existence may not become as urgent without taking a philosophy class. With the study of PHI, these topics receive more attention, increase exploratory depth, and are addressed in many more ways. As discussed, rationality and its subsequent questioning, taken out of context and given inappropriate rank, can be quite scary. These are weapons to be used carefully.
Phi--Q2: Does the element of relationship exist while yet inside the discipline of philosophy?

Phi--A2: Relationships in philosophy may form between student and student, teacher and student, or author and student. Each course offers these relationships in different proportions.

Out of these varied relationships, some of the most consistent relationships are with student peers, some of the most challenging are with the instructor, and some of the most invigorating are with the authors studied. Through it all, the element that is needed to give these relationships significance is conversation. The degree to which this conversation occurs gives identity to the relationship. Occasionally, all three were scant; but, occasionally all three were present. Most often, there is one poignant conversational relationship at a time, ever-shifting and ever-changing, yet serving the role of relationship. This may be parsed further.

Although students discuss ideas with one another, they do not often carry it to the point of Augustinian education and insight. Students travel together, but side-by-side. Most of the relationship consists of clarifying each other’s statements and, as a group, communicating questions to the instructor (or sometimes to the non-present author).

The student-instructor relationship can be the most helpful, and may often be seen in the long-run. In order to reap the most benefit from the expert-novice interaction, work must be employed toward building a common context in which to exchange thoughts. Learning to appropriately use the philosophic terminology, as well as learning to organize one’s thoughts, takes time and effort. The other factor
that can be critical in discussing the abstract is familiarity. With more conversation occurring between instructor and student comes more ability to fill in thought-gaps. If these bridges can be built, then the door is flung wide open for meaningfully discussing the big questions. Consequently, these questions can be steered toward Christo-centric answers. This relationship has the potential to be a great occasion for the imparting of a good Augustinian education; it is to be used well.

Relationships with the authors of texts are only as dynamic as each individual student is willing to invest in them. A student can get to know the author, but the author cannot get to know the student. Thus, if the two are not operating from the same basic assumptions to begin with, not much else is useful for forming an Augustinian educational relationship.

For example, C.S. Lewis (Abolition of Man; Mere Christianity) may be one author with whom a WLC student especially feels the sense of relationship. Lewis addresses issues that are relevant for the non-philosopher as well as for the titled intellectual, thereby earning respect from a vast audience. While writing, he treats the subjects with respect and speaks to his audience rather than at them. But best of all, Lewis is a convicted Christian who approaches every topic with the Bible in his mind and Christ in his heart. For these reasons, it appears that Lewis and students at WLC are working from the same basic assumptions; therefore, genuine conversation is able to take place, even without his physical presence.
Phi--Q3: Have students become so attracted to elaborate arguments that they are drawn to these “Gomer’s”\(^{10}\) instead of staying steadfast in their faith?

Phi--A3: In learning philosophy skills—disciplined thinking, targeted questioning, and linear reasoning—an appreciation is developed for a beautifully-fabricated argument. If this appreciation turns into an admiration for derived conclusions that are not in keeping with God’s revealed truth, however, a problem emerges.

Many students—and instructors—enjoy clear thinking, as it is easy to digest; so, well-established arguments may be seen as a thing of beauty. However, if an argument is concocted so as to reach a conclusion that disagrees with faith, the Christian may be disturbed. If a flaw cannot be found in its reasoning, one may be more likely to disregard the argument altogether rather than risk hanging his faith on his head. The relationship between the argument and the admirer has become risky—students risk committing themselves to unfaithful questioning and reasoning … not at all Augustinian. “I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments” (Col 2:4).

Phi--Q4: How does the discipline of philosophy at WLC help its students grow?

Phi--A4: While enrolled in several philosophy courses at WLC, one may be able to see a longitudinal change in his thinking.

Over time, students learn how to communicate what is in their heads instead of just speaking nothing with a dumbfounded look on their faces. They may learn how to respectfully challenge material presented to them instead of boiling on the inside because disagreement is not allowed. They may learn how to be humble

\(^{10}\) In the Bible, God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry an unfaithful woman named Gomer to allegorically represent Israel’s unfaithfulness to their God. The term as used here is to be associated with arguments that appear attractive, but do not actually offer communion with the truth—unfaithfulness.
when they are wrong instead of being defensive all the time. As they come to begin building a healthy relationship with questioning and answering, one sees that these are the beginning of lifelong learning objectives.

**The Psychological Picture**

Theoretically speaking, psychology at WLC emphasizes to its students the importance of taking perspective, among other higher-level-thinking skills. Perspective-taking is making the attempt to meet people where they are, in terms of their worldview—realistic, skewed, or otherwise. Unfortunately, for Nietzsche this turned into relativism of the Good, consistent with Paul’s inspired letter to Timothy:

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

If perspective-taking is learned appropriately, though, and well, it empowers a person to find common ground with just about anyone and to communicate with them. This bridge-building is absolutely essential if one hopes to discuss the Good on the same thought-plane.

The content through which perspective-taking is practiced is a sea of humanist—or man-centric—definitions, theories, and explanations. In contrast to directly examining the Good, a very clear picture of man-without-Good is shown. Though not pretty, the portrait of man deprived of the Good is necessary to accentuate the difference(s) between man-without-the-Good and man-with-the-
The Good and Education

Good. For instance, Plato replaced Christian hope with duty, while Nietzsche replaced it with the power of the will. When these differences are taught through the lens of God’s Word, as WLC seeks to do, presenting the man-centric content becomes a way of more fully understanding the effect(s) that rejecting the Good has had on the human race.

Showing the Good to people who operate within these non-Good, and even anti-Good, worldviews requires establishing a common paradigm, consisting of common words and common thought processes. Finding this common ground means attempting to understand the other; and in this case, it may mean studying man-centric explanations for why man is the way he is. Once the mature Christian has developed this vocabulary for speaking with others, he can then introduce the Good. This last point, that of relationship, aligns psychology with an aspect of Augustinian Good, leading to the subsequent questioning aspect, all seeming to classify the discipline as good.

In summary, then, psychology assists its students in learning how to communicate Good to others and snaps them to attention by presenting multiple pictures of man without Good. Again, though, are these merely non-qualified means to a good end, or do students participate in the Good while still in the psychology classroom at WLC?
Psy--Q 1: How does psychology keep the school’s mission to honor Christ in everything?

Psy--A 1: Because the content of psychology does not naturally address Christ, but man, how the mission is fulfilled is really dependent upon the individuals involved.

How the instructor incorporates this Christo-centric mission into his/her course methodology influences whether or not students readily see Christ through the babble. Sometimes Christ is seen clearly; sometimes one may wonder why He is not acknowledged to be in the classroom. Ultimately, though, it is the student who needs to incorporate his faith into everything that he learns and to use Godly discernment in absorbing information.

Before the time when students realize their roles, however, the partnership between Christ and presented content should be consistent from classroom to classroom, so as to instill a clear message from the discipline. Any perceived inconsistency leads to uncertainty about what the relationship really is between Christ and the PSY discipline. If the faculty can support one mission for the discipline, students are more likely to grasp the point and accept their own roles in finding a use for their knowledge as Christians.

Psy--Q 2: Is the study of psychology at WLC only useful once a student leaves for the “real world?”

Psy--A 2: More important than learning the content of psychology alone, one may learn how to apply the content to everyday life, for himself and for others. The learning has the potential to create an effect in its current context.

Students’ purposes for studying psychology fluctuate and evolve quite a bit. Some might want to pursue a career such as grief counseling. In the course of their
education, though, some are led to appreciate the theoretical nature of psychology.\textsuperscript{11} Theories allow students to explore vast and varied approaches to explaining the relationship between man and the Good.

While taking it all in, students may also enjoy garnering the discipline’s vocabulary. Knowing the context of the psychological conversation enables them to ask questions both of their instructors and also of the discipline as a whole. Having a specialized vocabulary at their disposal also allows them to use other people’s concepts and definitions to express themselves in less words and in a shorter amount of time. Students can definitely benefit for the here and now in addition to their years yet to be.

\textbf{Psy--Q 3:} Does anything in psychology lead a student to see Christ by studying mere man’s theory of mere man?

\textbf{Psy--A 3:} In order to rigorously understand something, both “what it is” and “what it is not” must be examined. Rather than providing a clear “what it is,” psychology provides more clearly the “what it is not” picture.

Inside of every human being resides a “God-shaped hole.” One of psychology’s most prevalent and consistent goals has been to find the missing piece that makes man complete. Man, on his own, fails every time.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Col 2:8).

Keeping this caution in mind, these man-centric theories demonstrate what that puzzle piece is not, what Christ is not. This, too, works to sharpen an

\textsuperscript{11} An attempt to get into the science/ non-science debate will not occur—don’t go there!
understanding of Christ; the relationship between mankind and the Teacher is more clearly defined. However, the enlightening work within the study of this discipline using a negative approach—what the Good is not—is not as readily apparent as a positive approach—what the Good is.

Thankfully, many WLC students have grown up having the solution to their “God-shaped holes” in constant view. In fact, it may have been so present that they have not understood what life can possibly be like without Christ there to fill in a person’s soul. Perhaps they have undeveloped concepts of how non-Christians try to fill that void. Perhaps they have little clue as to where these people are coming from. Perhaps they do not even know what questions to ask.

Psychology classes are certainly among those that point out how man tries to handle his sinful human condition without turning to God. Frankly, it is frightening. This is why the discipline needs to be handled so carefully and by Christian instructors who respect the dynamic nature of what they are presenting. Experience has affirmed the importance of exposing students to psychology in an environment where they are free to ask questions about the spiritual implications of ideas discussed in class. Instructors have tried to honor all questions asked in Christian classrooms with a discussion pointed towards Christ and the identity that He gives to mankind.

Psy--Q 4: How does the discipline of psychology at WLC help its students to grow?

Psy--A 4: Perhaps the learned skill most useful is that of perspective-taking. Of even greater value, though, is the bridge-building that follows.
Students of psychology are challenged to view the world in a variety of colored ways. Doing this helps them to pause while they try to understand people right where they are, as well as where they are not. With one of the Christian’s life goals being to let his light shine, being able to meet people in their current context is paramount to communicating the Gospel. In the psychology discipline at WLC, students learn a skill that has far-reaching, and positive, “real world” effects as they are prepared to communicate the Good with others.

The Theological Picture

Theoretically speaking, theology at WLC speaks reverently about God by the very nature of its content. However, myriads of notions about God exist in the human thought-pool. The issue at stake, then, is whether or not this content about God points its students to the Good, Jesus Christ.

At WLC, all theology is Christo-centric, aiming to use God’s Word in demonstrating that Christ is the Answer, the Good. Questions are handled by comparing possible solutions against the standard of the Bible. In addition, the student of theology gains a doctrinal vocabulary for discussing views with inquisitive persons.

While studying theology, students learn how to use their Bibles as resources to address life issues, how to admit when they do not have all the answers, and how to listen to the concerns and views of others. In doing so, the students gain a sense for both handling questions and building relationships. Because studying
Theology at WLC aims to point to Christ as the Good, aims to appropriately instruct students in responding to questions, and aims to model respect for relationship(s), it can be congruent with the Augustinian view of education and can be good.

In summary, then, theology discusses Christ, the Good, and shows Him to be Savior of all and truth-giver to all, so it is good. However, does the theology discipline recognize the potential impact of their work?

**The--Q1:** Does prolonged academic biblical study turn the Bible into just another textbook, thereby trivializing the value of faith?

**The--A1:** Rather than having trivialized the Bible and the value of faith, studying theology has may increase one’s knowledge of and appreciation for the Word.

Through the theology discipline at WLC, biblical study touches on topics and issues not usually covered in sermons and Bible classes, which can be quite enjoyable. The discussion tone is also qualitatively different from most lay Bible studies. Because of college-level expectations, the explored material challenges the mind more and probes deeper into the text. Within this setting, more pointed and poignant questions are able to be broached and investigated. This is often extremely satisfying. For these reasons, students very likely appreciate the class time spent in their Bibles.

There is another edge to this sword, though. By using their Bibles to fill out question sheets or by studying them for tests, there may be a tendency to think of the Book as any other book that has to be consulted for academic purposes. Like a textbook that can be thumbed through for clear, definitive answers to the questions
asked in a given field, the Bible may also be seen, mistakenly, in such a way.

Regarding the Bible as only a textbook is dangerous. When the actual subject under consideration is the life of a Christian, all the answers are not found in the “textbook.” The principles are set, but if students begin to think they can just find all the answers if they look hard enough, they will fail. Thankfully, WLC has professors who are careful to respect these matters, stressing discussion and application, thereby demonstrating that all the answers are not printed in bold print on the page. Then, they put the focus back on the Good — Christ’s revealed truth.

**Q2:** Is theology not respected because students are required to take it, thereby fostering laziness and neglecting the educational relationship?

**A2:** Developing relationships with each student in a theology classroom is difficult, because so many students are consistently present. However, relationship takes two; if the student makes the effort, results are favorable.

The way WLC’s academic program is set up, students are required to take four classes in theology. Some may take eight or more. While undergoing education in this discipline, one may be a student to five different professors; this is a wide enough scope to test out the degree of educational relationship. Of course, each professor connects in a different manner, but the effort is clearly there with them all.

Some students look for a seat in the back half of the classroom, just wanting their grade and their credit. In contrast, some seek relationship in their education. In light of the latter, professors tend to respond favorably. As the instructors begin to see how students’ minds work and how they question, they may begin building a
mutual biblical understanding and insight together. This is an indication of good
Augustinian education.

**The--Q 3:** Do students leave the theology discipline with a stronger faith and
clearer vision of Christ or with a struggling faith and blurry vision of spirituality,
due to the open or closed nature of answers to questions?

**The--A 3:** While the important doctrinal issues are addressed directly in class,
many questions concerning the application of biblical principles are newly
introduced to students. There are not always answers.

If a question about doctrine is broached, the first step in most classes is
opening the Bibles and searching for God’s clear answer. On matters that can make
or break faith, the questions are addressed before leaving the classroom, done in
keeping with 1 Corinthians 8:9, “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your
freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” No instructor has ever
tried to put someone’s spiritual welfare at risk.

On the other hand, there is this lovely little concept called adiophora … there
are no clear answers here. On several occasions, questions are raised that students
may never have pondered before. Some of these can be bothersome. For instance,
the controversy over identifying the author(s?) of Genesis might be new to some. In
the end, one may conclude that no matter how and by whom it was written, God
has preserved the book, and it can be read as His Word.

When seemingly troubling questions are being handled, one could compare
this to a heavy rain that makes visibility less certain. However, like the narrator in
the song, a theology student “can see clearly now the rain has gone.” In other
words, wrestling with the questions may challenge students to more solidly state
their faith. Although many questions cannot be answered directly, and although students sometimes leave the classroom with new questions, their faith is not in danger. Instead, it is being refined by Christ to become more aligned with the truth.

The--Q4: How does the discipline of theology at WLC help its students to grow?

The--A4: Both study and inquiry, through spiritual nurturing and spiritual challenging, can lead students to mature spiritually.

Through study of the Word with confessional Christian teachers, students can develop a fuller understanding of the Bible. Both through contextual study and language study, the insight gained from reading one’s Bible is enhanced. This more robust reading of Scripture has the power to be quite edifying.

With similar effect, questions raised about historical context and application of principles have force students to react. Hashing through such questions may lead students of theology to more firmly define their own faith, to more tightly grasp God’s Word. Raising questions in theology is not easy, but it is very helpful for spiritual development. Through this process, students come to know Christ more fully.
The Interdisciplinary Picture—Reframing the Disciplines

The twist that makes this major so specialized has not yet been addressed. Each area has been examined separately, but the most interesting stories lie in trying to blend the three disciplines’ views together into one harmonious program of study. This is where the moral of the story can be found.

In a recent conversation, a friend asserted that separation is a tool of the devil. She may very well be right. After all, what is sin but separation from God? Separation severed man’s relationship with God, with the Good, and now man’s entire life has become a restless journey to restore this relationship. As demonstrated earlier, the three philosophers under consideration—Plato, Nietzsche, and Augustine—all addressed this restlessness, but all differed in their approach and their reply.

After reflecting upon this assertion some more, one finds that this idea is also closely tied into the interdisciplinary project. In the INT major, the student is trying to creatively weave together three disciplines when, though various and valuable ways, they are all teaching the same thing in the first place: Christ.

Somewhere along the way, they (the disciplines of theology, philosophy, and psychology at WLC) separated. In and of itself, this is not a bad thing. Such a separation may have been necessary, given the growing body of knowledge being passed on from generation to generation. In the pursuit of more detailed knowledge, areas need to be specialized. This specialization creates the possibility
for sharing more with each other than ever before. The potential is here for wonderful things.

How unfortunate, then, that this potential is not being tapped for its edifying benefits. Instead of using the specialization of knowledge to nurture growth amongst the disciplines, too often it has cleaved them apart via egoism and elitism. This degree of separation seems to suggest that the ostracized disciplines—ostracized relative to the situation—are not able to communicate their common bond of Christ anymore. Because this barrier detracts attention from Christ, the separation that originally held such great promise for learning has flirted with becoming a mercenary of Satan. There is an evident need for exercising compassion, wisdom, and respect in remedying this divide.

As seen, philosophy, psychology, and theology are all classified as academic disciplines. Also seen: In spite of this commonality, their different approaches to the same issue isolate them, bringing communication to a standstill. Since they “cannot” understand each other’s language, they stop listening and talk only to themselves. The result is a (familiar?) vicious circle...

Philosophy has disowned PSY because PHI maintains that PSY broke away from PHI and disowned its roots, and thus its credibility; recognizing the separate discipline of PSY would be recognizing a rebel without a cause. In turn, PSY has turned the word “philosophy” into a taboo, as acknowledging this aspect of PSY distracts and detracts from its perpetual battle to be recognized as a science. Psychology has also trivialized THE by categorizing it as the “spirituality” part of a
person, which may be acceptably satisfied in any number of ways. Because of this, THE does not know what to do with PSY. Depending on the day, THE may regard PSY as a tool of ministry used to reach the lost and hurting, or it may regard PSY as a tool of the devil used to manipulate the vulnerable. As much as possible, THE tries to beat PHI into submission, as friendliness might be construed to be holding man’s ideas and words on the same level as God’s. Philosophy will respect THE, but—with the notable exception of “Apologetics”—only if it gets to make it a subdivision of PHI itself. Otherwise, the discipline of THE is too faith-based and “subjective,” not nearly logical and “objective” enough.

In this respect, pulling together these three academic areas for one major seems like a task for a multi-linguist. It ought not be this way. In the very least, when the disciplines at WLC coincide (collide?!), they should joyfully discover that they have the same goal: to communicate Christ. While celebrating the beauty of diversity within the Body of Christ, the message of Christ needs to come through clearly, whether explicitly or implicitly, verbally or by conduct alone. As written by the Apostle Paul:

“But each one should be careful how he builds [on the foundation of faith]. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:10b-11).

Different terms and methods of thinking are learned, yes, but they should all be taught with the aim of communicating Christ through them. The Apostle Paul was inspired to write, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Today, in this time and at this
place, he could just as well be saying, “There is neither theology major nor philosophy major nor psychology major], [undergraduate nor doctorate], male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

As the three philosophers sought to find the Good, so the three disciplines now seek to show Christ. The matter of combining these three areas into an interdisciplinary major is not a new marriage. Instead, it is a reconciliation of an unnecessary divorce. The interdisciplinary major serves to remind each discipline of its unique contribution to the body of human knowledge and the Body of Christ, but it also reminds each discipline where its common roots are and why it exists at WLC. The INT exploration restores the cross-discipline harmony—or at least gets them singing in the same key—and reminds them how they are allies.

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Cor 1:10).

Implications for the Future

Given this innate commonality of the disciplines, the idealist may envision a day when education is, by definition, a growing up and a growing together, not a growing apart. When the academic areas realize that they can talk to each other, a restored relationship will be the result. The newly realized synergy of collaborative resources would produce an Augustinian educational experience to be truly envied—oh, what academia could accomplish if the disciplines were willing to explore the Good together!
The idealist may envision a day when education is a holistic endeavor, seeking cooperation instead of competition. All of the disciplines at WLC share the same Good. With this in mind, even though these disciplines employ different methods in celebrating this Good, they all come to focus on Christ in the end. This envisioned day does not need to be far removed from now!

Christians, including those at WLC, have the opportunity to set an example for the world. They have the opportunity to put their love into action. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). Practicing this trademark love includes seeking good Augustinian education. As the disciplines at WLC learn to love each other for what they are and Who they represent, they can send a powerful message to the world.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom 15:5-7).

Together, they can communicate Christ.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


