



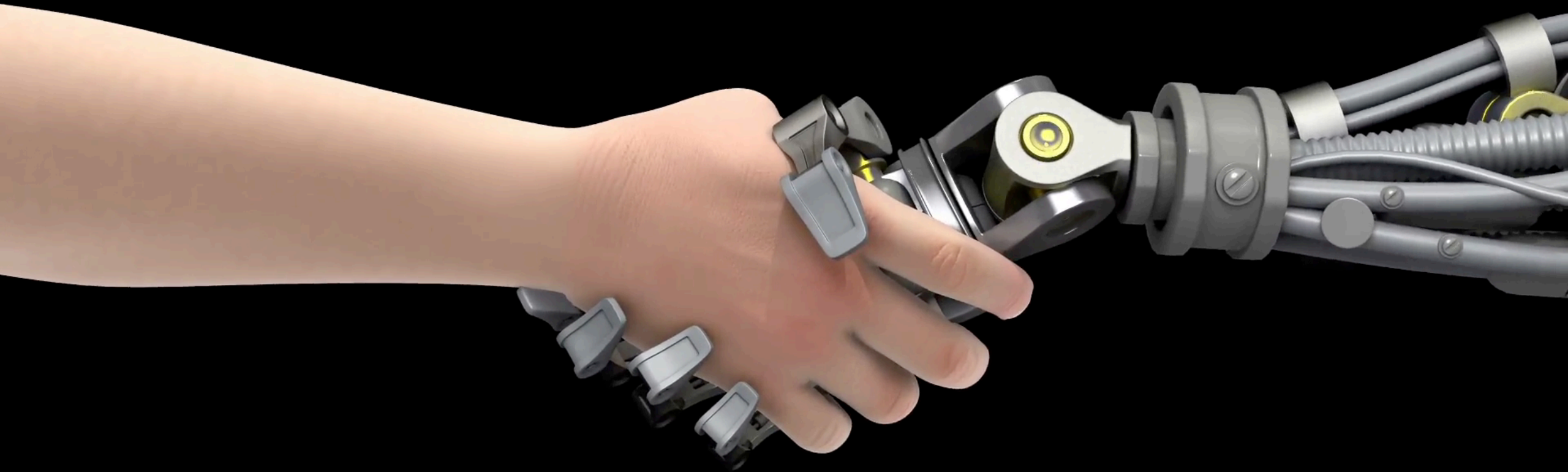
# Habits for Life

Art Middlekauff

[CharlotteMasonPoetry.org](https://CharlotteMasonPoetry.org)

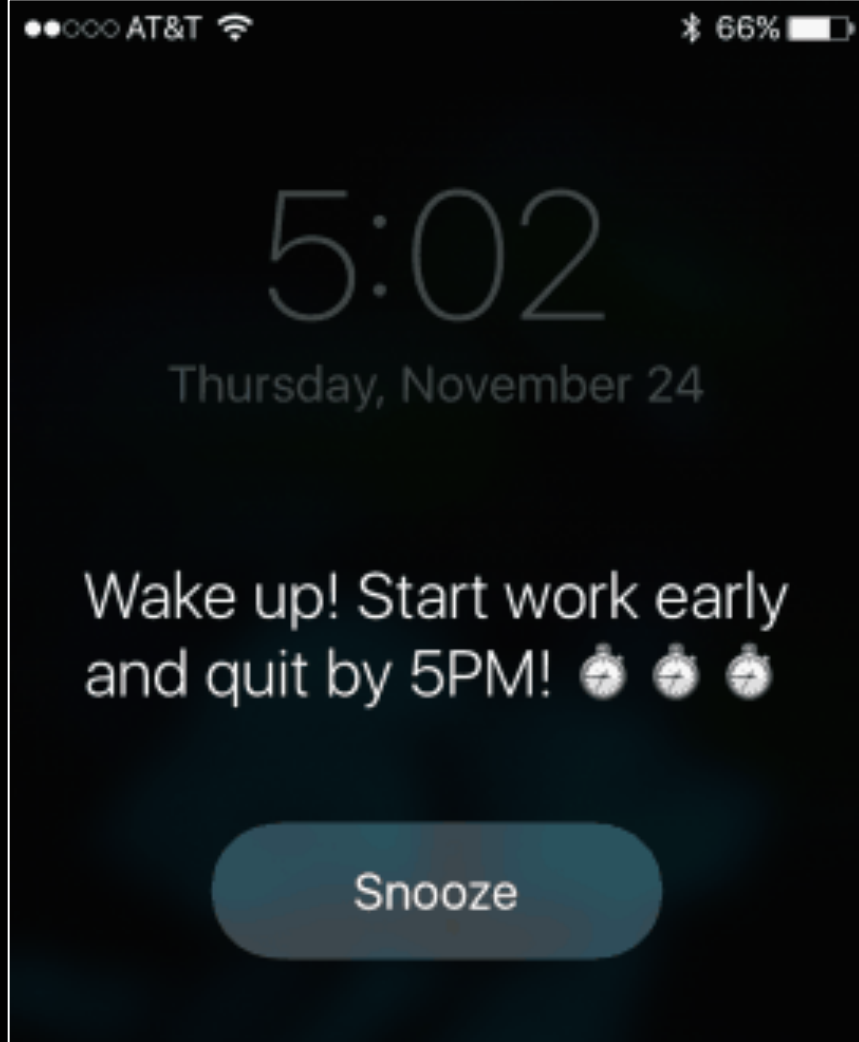


# Meet Your Automatic Self

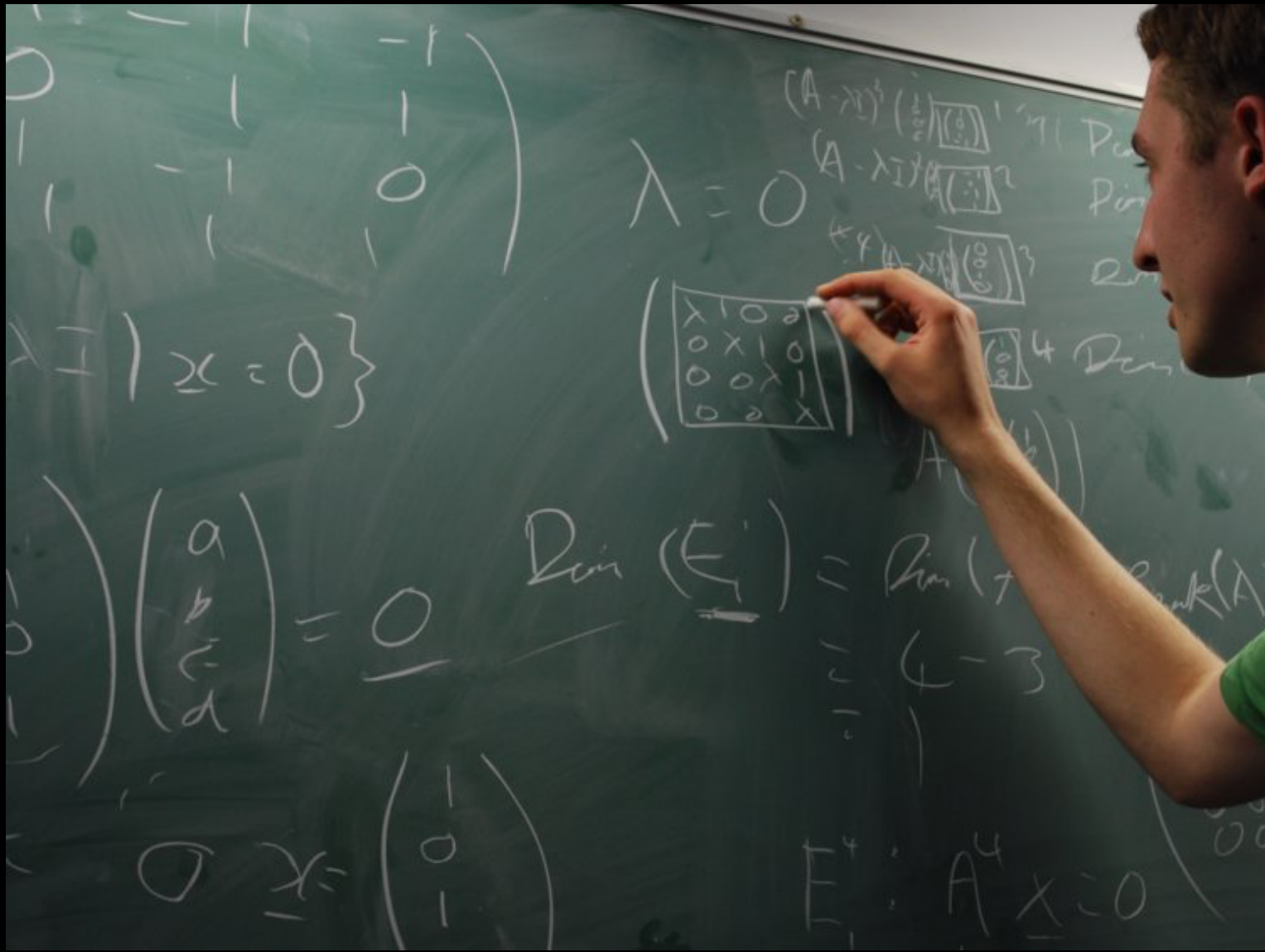
















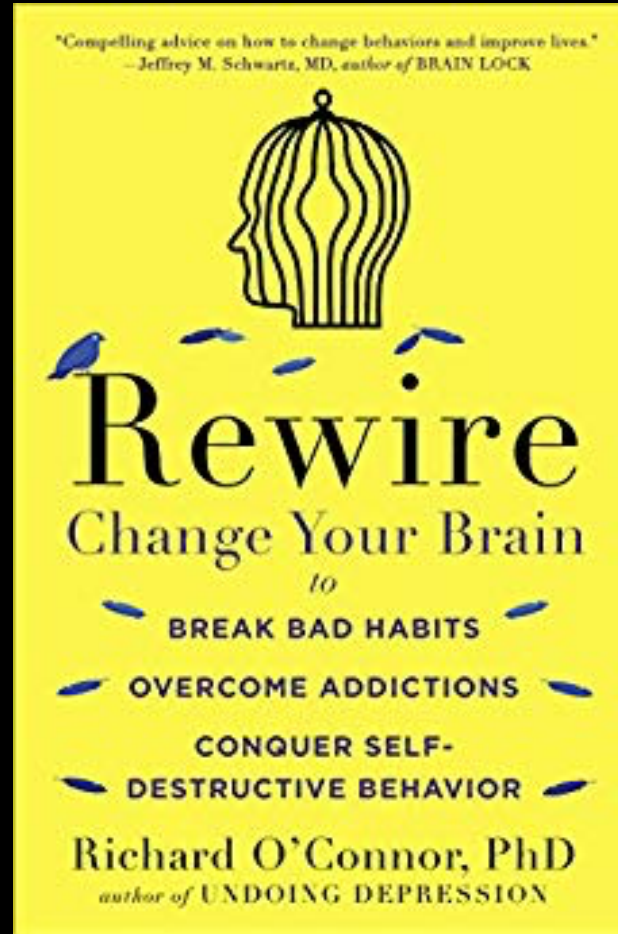




# His Limitations

1. He has no will
2. He is a follower
3. He is very shy

# How do you train him?



2014



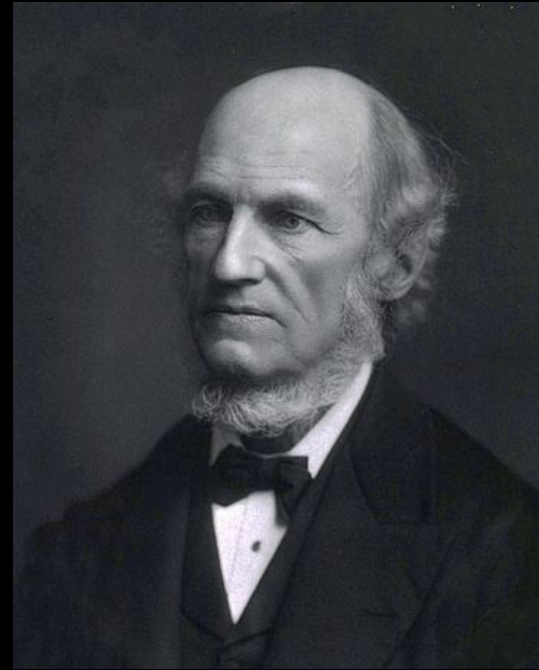
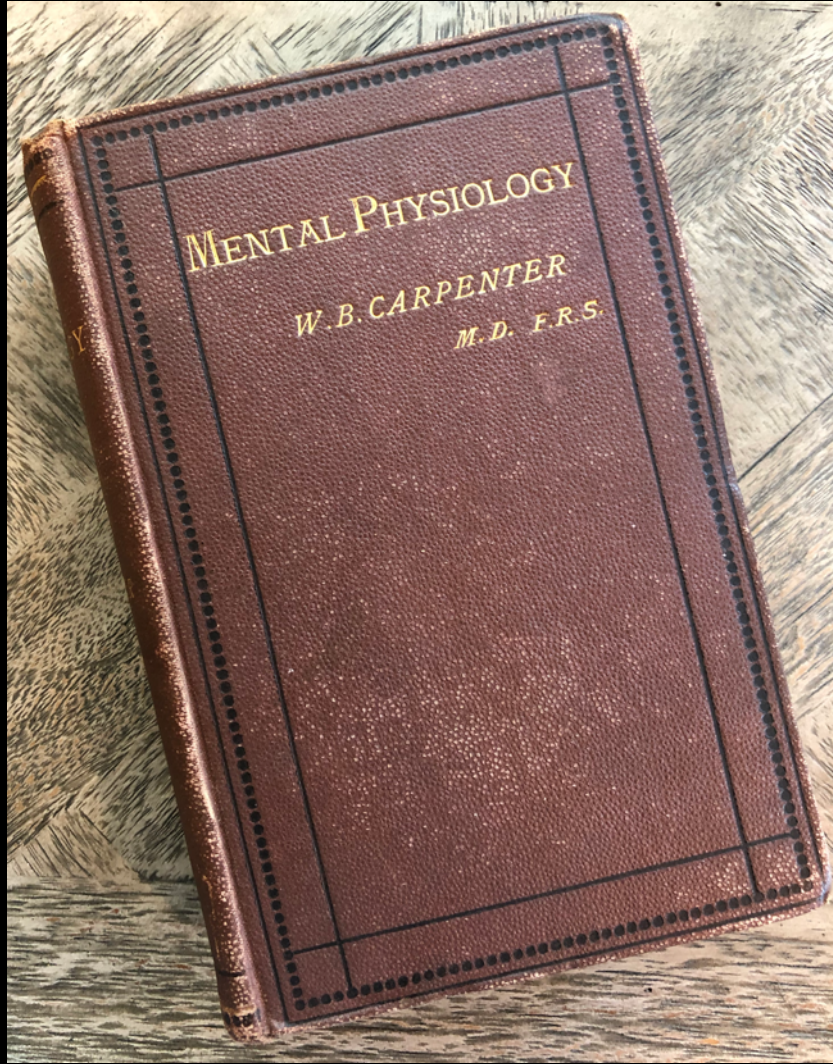
“Put very simply, it seems as if we have a thoughtful, conscious, deliberative self, and an **automatic self** that does most of the work of living without our attention.

Daniel Kahneman... calls this *System 1* thinking and refers to it as lazy because it's habitual and not creative.

Timothy Wilson... refers to the *adaptive unconscious*.

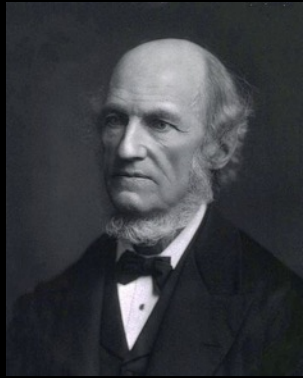
I prefer to call it the **automatic self**...”

“...**repeat** the learning until it's integrated into the **automatic self**.”



1875

“Yet we simply conceive the tone or the syllable we wish to utter, and say to our **automatic Self** ‘Do this:’ and the well-trained Automaton does it.”

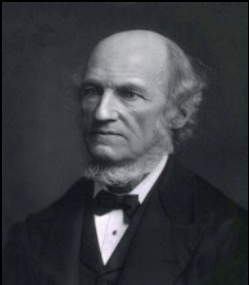


“any sequence of mental action which has been frequently **repeated**, tends to perpetuate itself; so that we find ourselves automatically prompted to *think, feel, or do* what we have been before accustomed to think, feel, or do, under like circumstances”





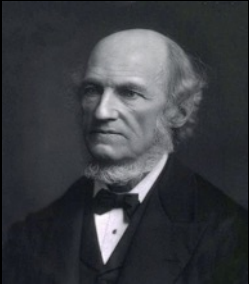
“When you learn something new, it has a physical manifestation in the circuitry of the brain.”



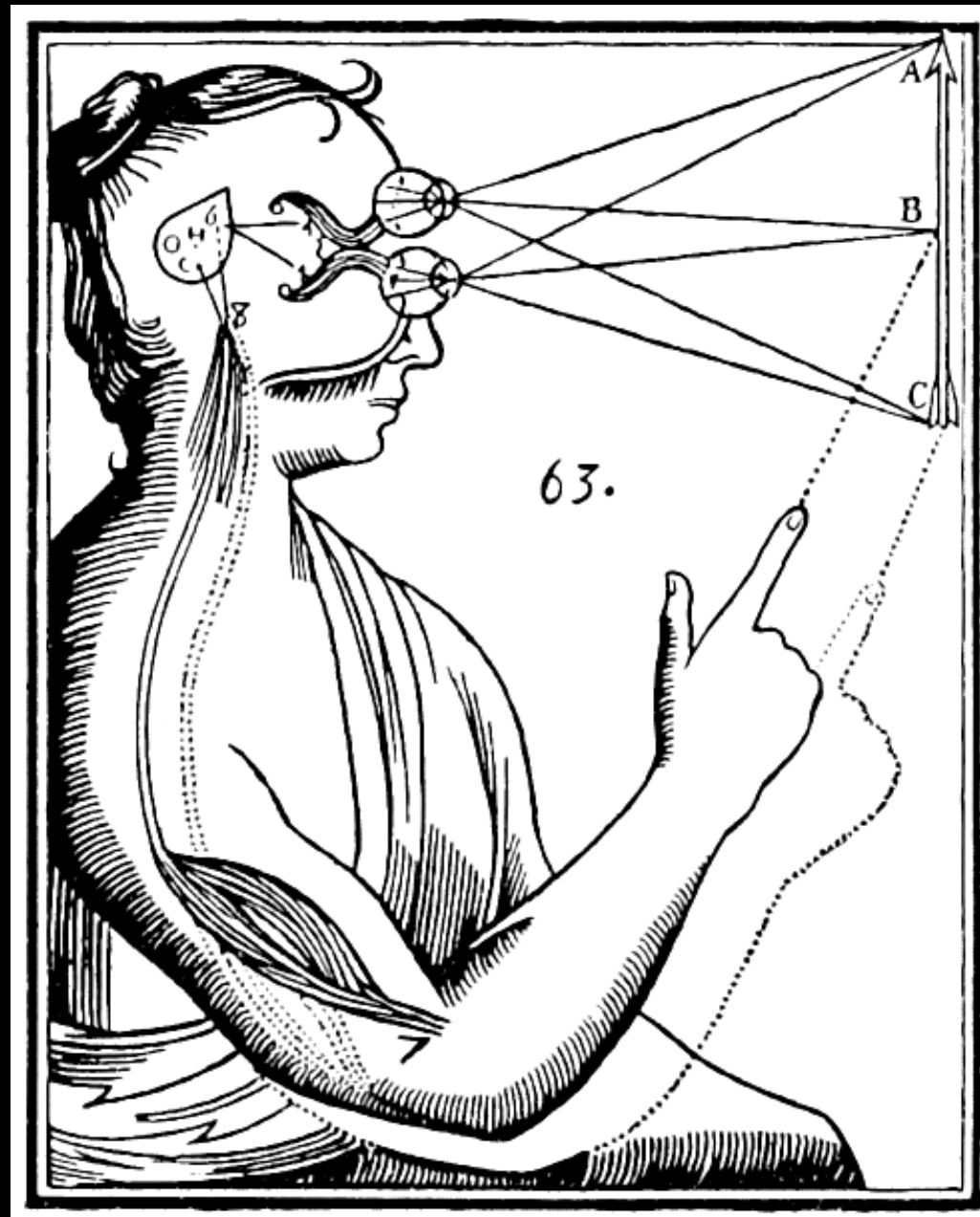
“The Cerebrum of Man grows-to the modes of thought in which it is habitually exercised”



“But there’s also big news in science that is cause for optimism: the idea of the **plastic** (changeable) brain, the recognition that our brains change and grow physically in response to life experience.”



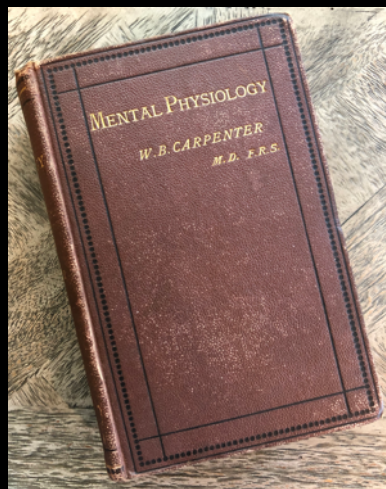
“Whilst, then, every one admits the special strength of those *early impressions* which are received when the Mind is most ‘**plastic**,’—most fitted to receive and retain them, and to embody them (as it were) into its own Constitution...”



# Who gave you your automatic self?

“But we have this vessel, our **body**, and we need this light to direct it, since it has been **given** as an instrument that is supposed to **help** our soul grow in virtue.”

St. Catherine of Siena



“In proposing these lectures, my **original notion** was to popularize and amplify the valuable educational hints contained in some two or three chapters of Dr. Carpenter’s ‘Mental Physiology;’ but the subject is a wide one, and I have found it necessary to cover much ground untouched in that work.”




“If parents could but be got to believe in the omnipotence of habit and in the ease with which a habit is formed, we should live to see a **moral revolution**, a **kingdom of heaven** amongst men.”



“the laws of habit appear to me **precisely** the **only** scientific basis we have for education”

1887



But habit's  
just not that  
big of a deal

1. "Charlotte Mason recanted her belief in habit"
2. "Habit is just another name for virtue"
3. "Habit is simply a tool to solve certain problems"

# “Charlotte Mason recanted her belief in habit”

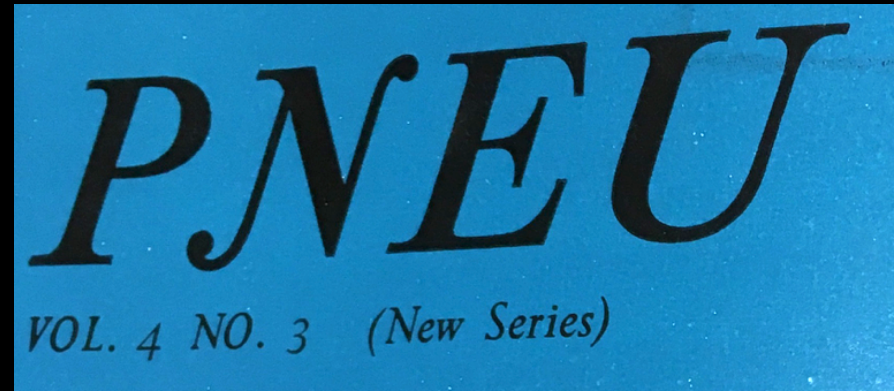
1922.

What a time you had among the Alpine flowers! I know something of the joy of it for many years ago before you were born or thought of, I spent some early spring weeks at the Kaltbad (Rigi) with some friends. After forty years I see and smell and luxuriate - but I did not see the Soldanella .....

# Science has done nothing to confirm the "rut" theory in all these years, and Brother Body seems to me much the inferior partner. I think all that I have written is still true but I would emphasize habit and so on less. Child mind - no, because a child has as much mind as the rest of us.

# Someone forgot to tell the PNEU...

One great thing about the forming of habits is that to some extent it does away with the effort of decision. Our children should be able to rest on a set of good habits and a settled routine and an authority which they can obey. Charlotte Mason says that one of the mind's greatest efforts is that of decision and our children will have plenty to decide about as they get on in life. Let us see that they have an ordered and happy childhood.



1967

# “Habit is just another name for virtue”



“If it be not goodness, the **will** is *virtue*, in the etymological sense of that word; it is manliness.”

“... mothers... lose sight of the fact that a habit, even a good habit, becomes a real pleasure; ... his mother **imagines** that the effort is as great to him as at first, that it is **virtue** in him to go on making this effort.”



# “Habit is just another name for virtue”



“But the failing or the virtue which has become **habitual** to us is **flesh** of our flesh, and must be treated on that basis whether it is to be uprooted or fostered.”

“Now, this kind of obedience is a mere question of nerves and muscles, a habit of the **brain tissue** with which the **moral consciousness** has **nothing to do.**”

Automatic  
actions  
are **not**  
virtuous!

*Formation of Character, p. 59*

*School Education, p. 19*

[CharlotteMasonPoetry.org](http://CharlotteMasonPoetry.org)

©2019 Art Middlekauff

“Habit is simply a tool to solve certain problems”

1. Chores
2. Whining
3. Obedience

## Life

Living Books  
Nature Study

## Atmosphere

Masterly Inactivity  
Home Environment

## Discipline

Order in the Home



“It is parents alone who can give the incessant care necessary for a systematic training in the **habits** of health, of the alert intelligence, of the good life, and of spiritual activity.”

1887

VII.—THE FORMING OF A HABIT—‘ SHUT THE DOOR  
AFTER YOU ’



# Habit Formation



“You tell a child that the Great Duke slept in so narrow a bed that he could not turn over, because, said he, ‘When you want to turn over it's time to get up.’

The boy does not wish to get up in the morning,  
but he does wish to be like the hero of Waterloo.

You stimulate him to act upon this idea day after day for a month or so, until the habit is formed, and it is just as easy as not to get up in good time.”





Habit

Idea



Idea



Habit

Education is a  
Life

Education is a  
Discipline



“To keep a child in this habit of the thought of God – so that to lose it, for even a little while, is like coming home after an absence and finding his mother out – is a very delicate part of a parent's work.”



**Art Middlekauff** <amiddlek@gmail.com>

4/15/07 ☆



to CMSeries, bcc: Barbara ▾

#### C. Establishing the habit of "the thought of God."

For me, the most challenging (even overwhelming) of these is "to keep [my] child in this habit of the thought of God—so that to lose it, for even a little while, is like coming home after an absence and finding his mother out." Charlotte says this "is a very delicate part of a parent's work." Delicate indeed! Charlotte says, "Of the child it should be said that God is in all his thoughts." Oh that it could be said of *me* that God is in all *my* thoughts!

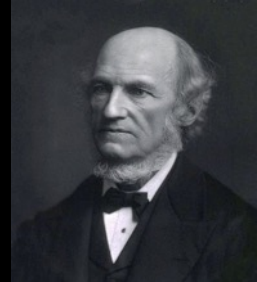
I understand that one instills the habit of Christian practice as one instills the habit of closing the door. But installing the habit of God in all the thoughts? I am inclined to sneak back to chapter 3 to take refuge in "masterly inactivity." This new habit of the soul? I say with Job, "Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not."



**Every thought**  
is either building or  
destroying a habit

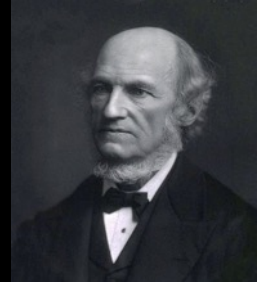
**Every thought**  
is training your automatic  
self

**Whether you intend it or not**



“It has been from the depth of his conviction as a Physiologist and Psychologist, of the inseparable relation between Corporeal and Mental action, that the Writer has been led, during a life of Educational occupation, to what he may call the Scientific study of that relation, as manifested within the range of his own observation.”





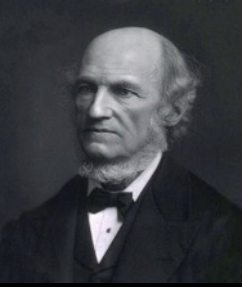
“And the Writer cannot but believe that there are many upon whom the essentiality of Intellectual and Moral *discipline* will be likely to impress itself with greater force, when they are enabled thus to trace out its Physical action, and to see that in the Mental as in the Bodily organism, *the present is the resultant of the past*; so that whatever we *learn, think, or do* in our Youth, will come again in later life either as a *Nemesis* or as an *Angel*'s visit.”

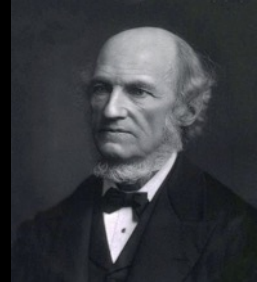


“education is an atmosphere—  
that is, the child **breathes** the  
**atmosphere** emanating from  
his parents”

“Educational experience proves that nothing exerts so great an influence on the *psychical* Organism, as what may be called the *moral atmosphere* which is *breathed* by it, from the very earliest stage of conscious existence, up to the time of its full maturity.

This influence—exerted, on the one hand, through the medium of the body, on the other, through the unconscious action of *example*, in shaping these *habits of Feeling* which give the *tone* to the *character*,—is far more potent than is generally supposed; and commencing in the Nursery, it prolongs itself alike in the Home and in the School, through the whole period of Childhood and Youth, and by no means dies out in Adult age.”





Atmosphere



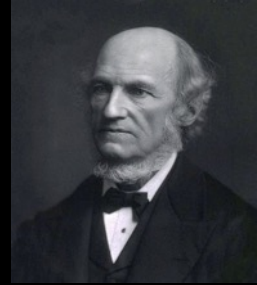
forms

Habit

Education is an  
Atmosphere

Education is a  
Discipline

“the *composition* of that **Atmosphere**...  
which science and experience alike  
recommend”



1. **Order** and **Regularity**
2. The principle of **Duty** and **Obligation**
3. Notions of **Right** and **Justice**
4. **Love** towards others,  
showing itself in habitual **kindness**



Education is an Atmosphere

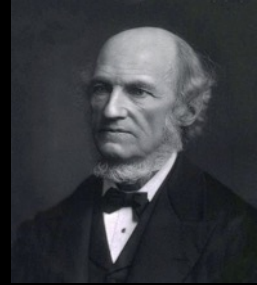


Education is a Discipline



Education is a **LIFESTYLE**

# Which Comes First?



“The child very early comes to feel what it *ought* to do; ... Now the child is *unconsciously* impressed, **long before it distinctly shapes out an idea** of the fact, by the manifestation of this sense of duty on the part of those around it...”

“And respect for the *rights of others* is one of the earliest lessons which the child has to be taught through his **consciousness**. But that lesson is for more effectual, when the **preparation** for it has been made, and the illustration of it afforded, by the habitual **example** of the *elders* of the family...”



“What do parents sow?  
*Ideas.*”

# Habits Plow the Soil



L I F E S T Y L E

# The Habit of the Thought of God

Daily Family  
Devotions

Private Devotions  
(Practiced by Every  
Family Member)

Bible Lessons

Church  
Attendance

Sunday  
Observance

Deuteronomy 6

Sacred Art in the  
Home

Sacred Music in the  
home

The most powerful model of habit formation  
is **rehab** not **surgery**

L I F E S T Y L E



invites



Discipline  
Habit

Life  
Ideas

inspires



Education is a Discipline



Education is a Life



Education is a **LIFESTYLE**



“It is not advisable to answer children categorically when they want to know the why for every command, but wise parents steer a middle course. They are careful to form **habits** upon which the **routine of life** runs easily.”

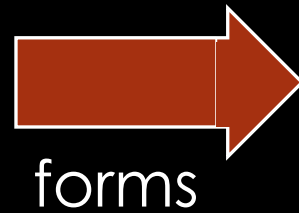
# L I F E S T Y L E

# L I F E S T Y L E

invites



Atmosphere  
Circumstances



forms

Discipline  
Habit

Life  
Ideas

“If parents could but be got to believe in the omnipotence of habit and in the ease with which a habit is formed, we should live to see a **moral revolution**, a **kingdom of heaven** amongst men.”

inspires



# What Automatic Self will you give your child?



“Not mere spurts of occasional punishment, but the incessant watchfulness and endeavour which go to the forming and preserving of the **habits of the good life**, is what we mean by discipline...

There are few parents who would not labour diligently if for every month's labour they were able to endow one of their children with a **large sum of money**.

But, in a month, a parent may begin to form a **habit** in his child of such value that money is a bagatelle by comparison.”

# How Would Habit Answer the Question of Video Games?

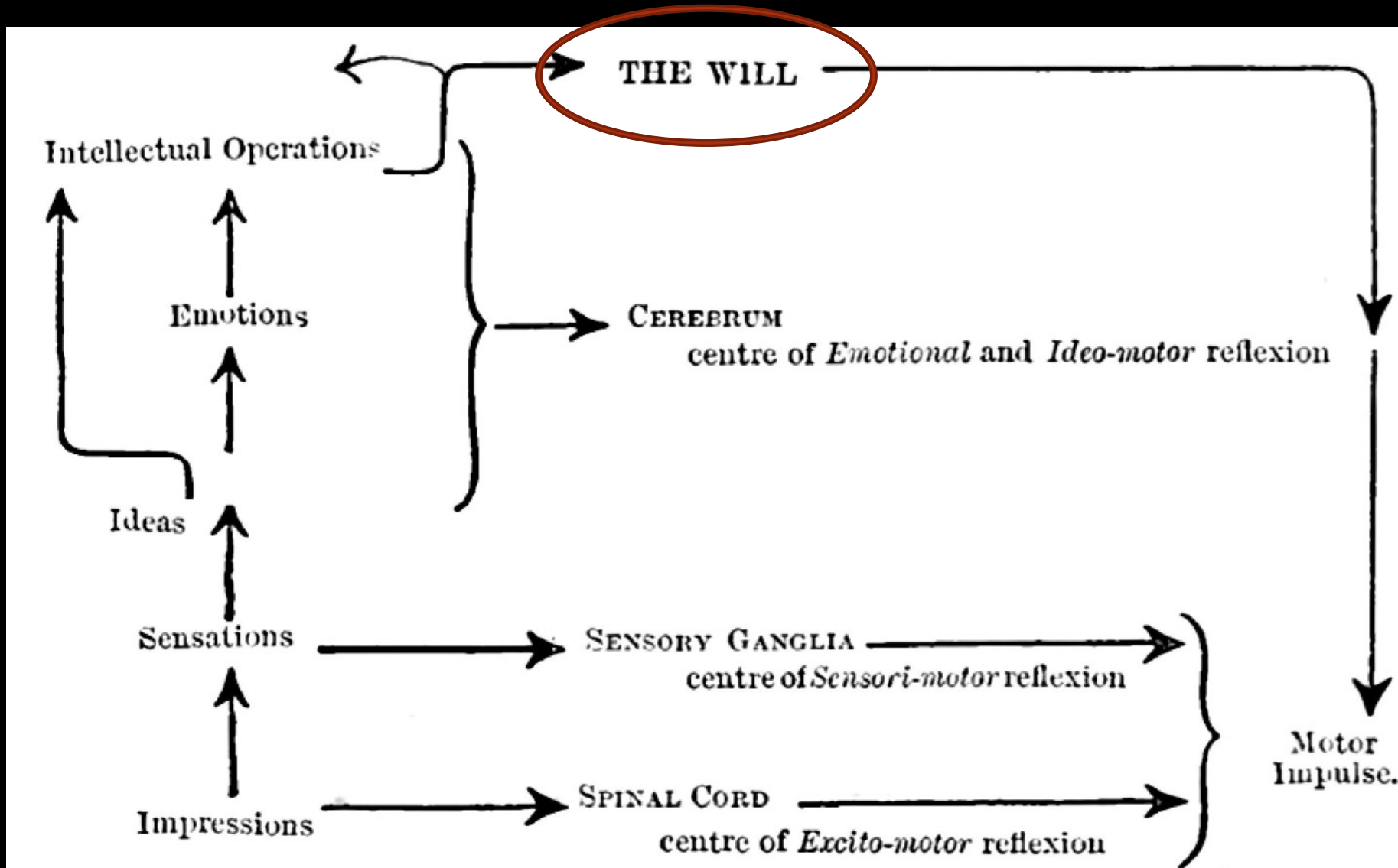
Allow my child to play  
video games from  
time to time so my  
child can learn how  
to manage himself

Completely prohibit  
video games so that  
my child never  
develops a taste for  
video games

L I F E S T Y L E



# Something Greater than Habit



*Principles of Mental Physiology*, p. 376

William Carpenter

“I AM, I OUGHT, I CAN, I WILL,” are ... the only firm foundation-stones on which we can base our attempt to climb into a higher sphere of existence.

The *first* implies that we have a faculty of *Introspection*, which converts a simple state of consciousness into *self*-consciousness...

the *second*, that we have submitted that state of consciousness ... to our *moral judgment*, which has pronounced its verdict upon it

the *third*, that we are conscious of a freedom and a power to act in accordance with that judgment...

and the *fourth*, that we *determinately exercise that power*. Hence we may define *Volition* or *Will*...

*Home Education*, p. 330

Charlotte Mason

‘I am, I ought, I can, I will’—these are the steps of that ladder... whereby we “rise on stepping-stones Of our dead selves to higher things.”

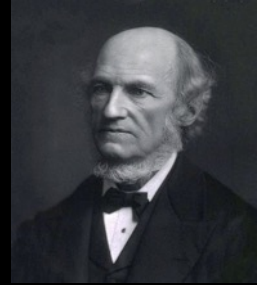
‘I am’—we have the power of knowing ourselves.

‘I ought’—we have within us a *moral judge*, to whom we feel ourselves subject, and who points out and requires of us our duty.

‘I can’—we are conscious of power to do that which we perceive we ought to do.

‘I will’—we determine to exercise that power with a *volition* which is in itself a step in the execution of that which we will.

# Something Greater than Habit



“But, with the advance of years, and the development of the power of *self-control*, the aim should be rather to foster *its* independence by relaxing external coercion, so far as may prove safe, than systematically to restrain the healthy *spontaneity* of the individual within trammels that tend to become formal and mechanical;

the consequence of such prolonged restraint too often being, that when the individual *is* freed from it, he runs altogether wild, through not having been trained in the *habit of self-discipline*.”

# Something Greater than Habit



“But observe, the passions, the desires, the appetites, are there already, and the will gathers force and vigour only as it is **exercised** in the repression and direction of these; for though the will appears to be of purely spiritual nature, yet it behaves like any member of the body in this—that it becomes vigorous and capable in proportion as it is duly nourished and **fitly employed.**”

# The Mystery of Habit

The greatest habit **for life**  
Is to not be controlled by habit



# The Habit of Rising Above Habit



“The trick in overcoming self-destructive behavior is not so much to strengthen the conscious self so we can ‘control’ ourselves better, though that helps sometimes.

Rather, we must train the **automatic self** to do things like make wiser decisions unconsciously, ignore distractions, withstand temptations, see ourselves and the world more clearly, and **interrupt our reflexive responses** before they get us in trouble.”



# What about the Holy Spirit?



“The Parents’ Union exists to advance, with more or less method and with more or less steadfastness, a definite school of educational thought of which the **two** main principles are—

the recognition of the **physical basis** of habit, i.e., of the material side of education;

and of the inspiring and formative power of ideas, i.e., of the immaterial, or **spiritual, side** of education.”



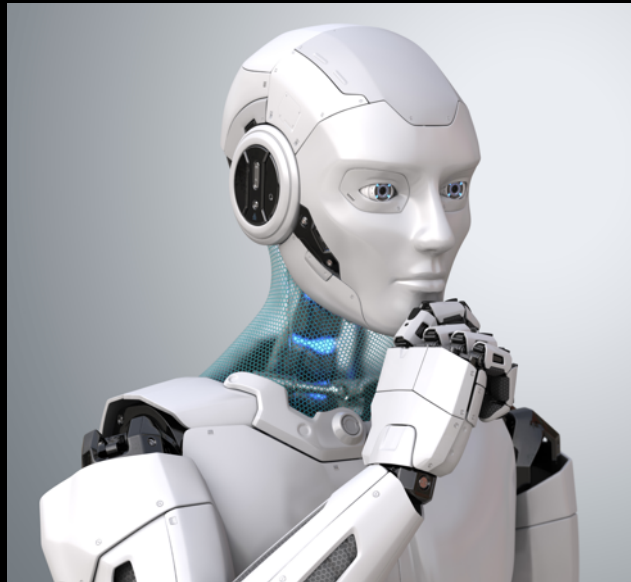
“This is hardly the place to consider them, but think for a moment of the fitness of the ideas which are summed up in the thought of Christ to be presented to the poor degraded soul...

The divine idea once received, the divine life is imparted also, grows, is fostered and cherished by the **Holy Ghost**. The man is a new creature, with other aims, and other thoughts, and a life out of himself. The old things have passed away, and all things have become new—

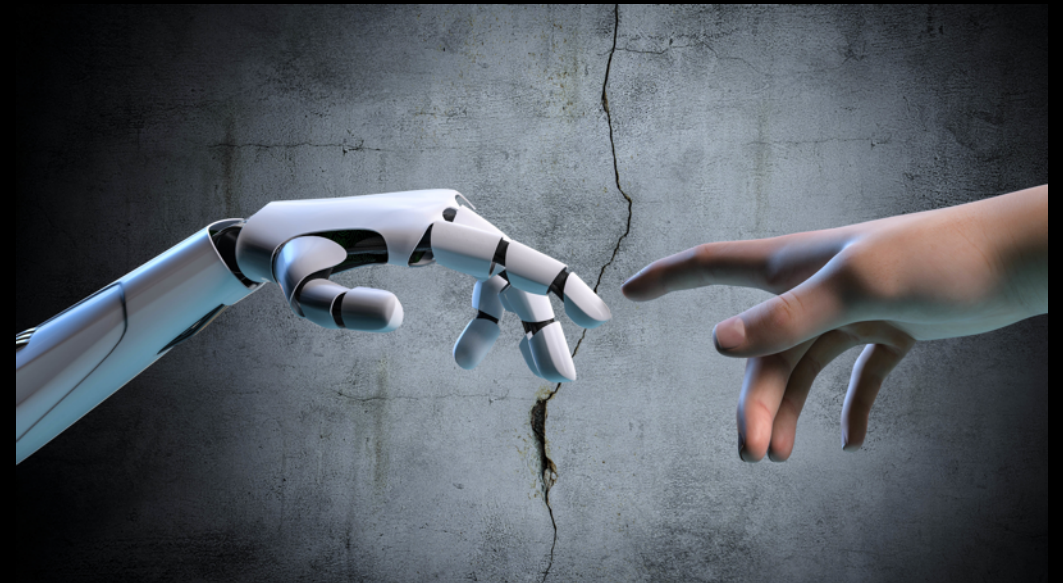
the **physical being** embodying, so to speak, the new life of the spirit.”

# Call to Action

1) Give your children  
the best automatic  
self possible for their  
adult life



2) Teach your children  
to rise above their  
automatic self





# Thank You

Art Middlekauff

[CharlotteMasonPoetry.org](https://CharlotteMasonPoetry.org)

[Art@CharlotteMasonPoetry.org](mailto:Art@CharlotteMasonPoetry.org)