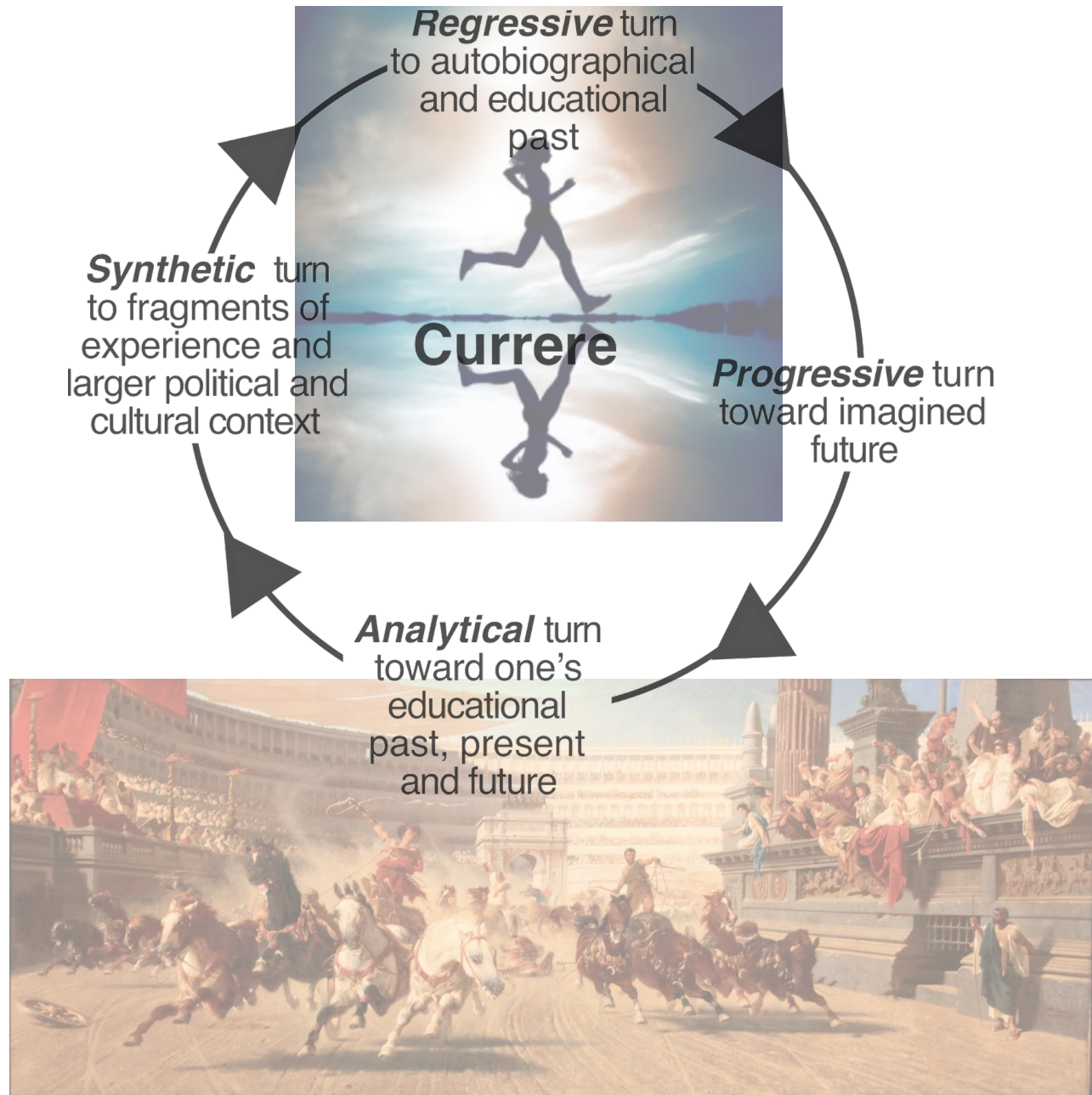


Currere and Methodology: A Minicourse



Currere: The Method

(notes on Bill Pinar's method)

- What is (a) curriculum?
 - *Cur•ric•u•lum*, *n., pl., curriculums* or *curricula*, [l. a race course, career, from *currere*, to run; figurative use.] a specific course of study or, collectively, all the courses of a study in a university, college, or school. From *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (1979).
 - This infinitive, which Bill first explored in the mid 1970s, is extremely important, as it enables us to think of curriculum as method, as process, as journey.
 - Pinar (1975, p. 400): “The study of *currere*, as the Latin infinitive suggests, involves investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage.”
- In many ways, *currere* reiterates Dewey's (1916) analysis of experience in *Democracy and Education*.
 - [I]n its contrast with the ideas both of unfolding of latent powers from within, and of formation from without, whether by physical nature or by the cultural products of the past, the ideal of growth results in the conception that education is a constant reorganizing of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and so far as activity is educative, it reaches that end—the direct transformation of the quality of experience. . . . [education] is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience. (Dewey, 1916, pp. 89-90)
- In other ways, as Bill (1975, p. 424) states, “I borrow heavily from Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*.” Reiterating the debt, Bill (1975) titled the second chapter on *currere* “Search for a Method.” As he states up front in “The Method,” “the debt to Sartre is clear” (1976, p. 51). Sartre's *Search for a Method* provides a near template for the method of *currere*. Sartre had relied quite heavily on Lefebvre's (1953) “Perspectives de la Sociologie,” which he says provides “a very simple method employing auxiliary techniques and comprising several phases” (p. 52). *Search for a Method* extensively explores the analytical and synthetic movements of method and culminates with a chapter on the “progressive-regressive method” (pp. 85-166).
- In “*Currere: A Case Study*,” through an immensely productive encounter with Sartre's *Search for a Method*, Bill elaborates:
 - A definitional note. As you recognize, *currere* is the Latin infinitive from which curriculum is derived, and I use it to suggest a particular focus of curriculum study, a focus on one's lived experience of curricula. Instead of examining only the course of study, or one's intentions in designing the course to be run, in *currere* we focus on the running of the course. The course becomes subsumed in, though not reduced to, the experience of the runner. This runner is the teacher or the student (or whoever comes in contact with curricula). (p. 318)
 - I have worked to create a method through which the interested student (be he professor, elementary-school teacher, high-school student, curriculum specialist) may examine his experience of schools and of particular aspects of schools (a particular teacher, a certain book, a mélange of feelings regarding a particular year). The emphasis is on experience. The aspiration is to cut through the layers of superimposed thought to preconceptual experience, which is the ontological ground of all thought.¹ (pp. 322-323)
- This turn to experience also helped underwrite the reconceptualization of curriculum studies: “questions of design, development, instruction, and evaluation—the perennial foci of the curriculum

¹ Pinar, W. F. (1978). *Currere: A case study*. In G. Willis, (Ed), *Qualitative evaluation: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism* (pp. 316-342). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan. See also Pinar, W. F. (1978). Life history and curriculum theorizing. *Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Science* 3(1), 92-118

- field— are no longer useful or interesting,” Bill wrote forty years ago (Pinar, 1975, p. 397).²
- In *Curriculum Theorizing*, chapters titled "The Analysis of Educational Experience" and "Search for a Method," Bill describes the method of *currere* (pp. 384-395, 415-424).
 - *Currere* was introduced as “a method that will allow us to ‘bracket’ the educational aspects of our taken-for-granted world. That is, we must attend to the contents of consciousness as they appear” (p. 406).
 - “the problem initially is to get under one’s exteriorized horizontal thinking, to begin to sink toward the transcendental place, where the lower-level psychic workings, those psychic realms determined by conditioning and genetic code, are visible” (p. 407).
 - “When sufficient data has accumulated (and the question of when may well be left to the investigator) the analysis begins” (p. 408)
 - “This process of turning inward to examine one’s *currere* will lead to a generalized inner-centeredness and hopefully initiate or further the process of individuation, leading to a gradual formation of the transcendental ego” (p. 410).
 - Pinar (1975, p. 400): I propose yet another meaning of the word, one stemming from its Latin root, *currere*. The distinction is this: current usages of the term appear to me to focus on the observable, the external, the public. The study of *currere*, as the Latin infinitive suggests, involves investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage.
 - (p. 415): As we know, discipline inquiry requires both a subject and a method for inquiry. That this book is subtitled *The Reconceptualists* suggests dissatisfaction with established research methods and, by implication, with that area that is traditionally researched in the field of curriculum.
 - "So finally," he says in 1975, "we can characterize the method. It is (a) regressive, because it involves description and analysis of one's intellectual biography or, if you prefer, educational past; (b) progressive, because it involves a description of one's imagined future; (c) analytic, because it calls for a psychoanalysis of one's phenomenologically described educational present, past, and future; and (d) synthetic, because it totalizes the fragments of educational experience (that is to say the response and context of the subject) and places this integrated understanding of individual experience into the larger political and cultural web, explaining the dialectical relation between the two" (Figure 1) (p. 424).
 - In *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, published with Madeleine Grumet in 1976, Bill simply states that “The Method of *Currere*” “is regressive— progressive— analytical— synthetical.” “It is therefore temporal and conceptual in nature, and it aims for the cultivation of a developmental point of view that is transtemporal and transconceptual. From another perspective, the method is the self-conscious conceptualization of the temporal, and from another, it is the viewing of what is conceptualized through time. So it is that we hope to explore the complex relation between the temporal and the conceptual. In doing so we disclose their relation to the Self in its evolution and education” (p. 51).³
 - The method is brilliantly rendered in one of his fairly recent (2004) books, *What is Curriculum Theory?*
 - The method of *currere*—the infinitive form of curriculum—promises no quick fixes. On the contrary, this autobiographical method asks us to slow down, to remember even re-enter the past, and to meditatively imagine the future. Then, slowly and in one’s own terms, one analyzes one’s experience of the past and fantasies of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one’s submergence in the present. The method of *currere* is not a matter of psychic survival, but one of subjective risk and social

² Pinar, William (Ed.) (1975). *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists*. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

³ Pinar, William F. & Grumet, Madeleine (1976). *Toward a poor curriculum*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

- reconstruction, the achievement of selfhood and society in the age to come (Pinar, 2004, p. 4).
- The method of *currere* is an autobiographical means to study the lived experience of individual participants in curricular conversation. There are four steps or moments in the method of *currere*: the (1) regressive, (2) progressive, (3) analytical, and (4) synthetical.... The consequence of *currere* is an intensified subjective engagement with the world.⁴

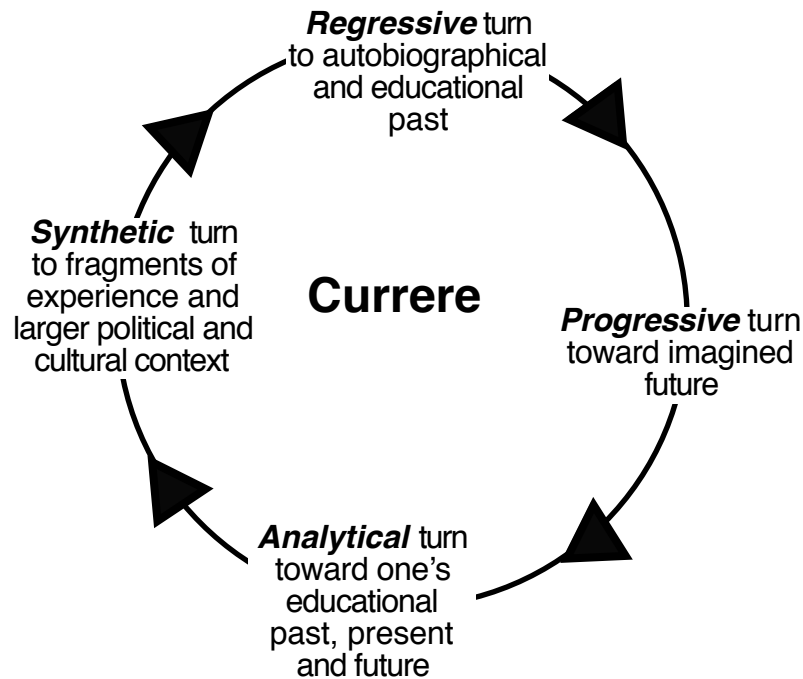


Figure 1. Method of *currere*. Adapted from Pinar, 1975, p. 424.

Minicourse Readings

1. Pinar, W. (Ed.) (1975). *Currere: Toward reconceptualization + search for a method*. In *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists* (pp. 396-424). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
2. Pinar, W. (2010). *Currere*. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (pp. 177-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
3. Grumet, M. R. (1987). The politics of personal knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 17(3), 319-329.

Resources

1. Petrina, S. (2014). *Currere: The method (notes on Bill Pinar's method)* [Course lecture notes]. Vancouver, BC: UBC.
2. Pinar, W. F. (1978). *Currere: A case study*. In G. Willis, (Ed), *Qualitative evaluation: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism* (pp. 316-342). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
3. Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

⁴ Pinar, W. (2010). *Currere*. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (pp. 177-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

On Stereotyping Minicourse

1. **Part I. Lecture: Currere and the History & Metaphysics of Curriculum (30 minutes)**
2. **Part II: Lecture: Methodology (15-20 minutes)**
3. **Part III. Mini-Interview (5-10 min each)**
 - a. With a peer, interview and record each other's commentary and critique of the method of currere. Agree on common questions that will be asked beforehand. The recording will not be public outside of the class unless you and your peer choose to make it public.
4. **Part IV. Microanalysis: (in class, 4-5 minutes each student = 1 hour)**
 - a. Screen (project) the 2-3 minute audio recording (mini-interview) and address any feedback or comments (5 min total).

Notes on History and Metaphysics of Curriculum

1. Compound Theses

- a. Thesis I: What is the Purpose of Curriculum Studies?
 - i. How can we understand curriculum if we don't have an understanding of its history?
 - ii. How can we understand its history if we don't we don't have an understanding of the metaphysics of curriculum?
 - iii. Curriculum Theorists hitherto have only understood curriculum, in various ways; the point is to...
- b. Thesis II: What then is the received understanding of curriculum?
 - i. Loneliness of the long distance runner
 - ii. Haunting music of Chariots of Fire but no chariots and no fire
- c. Thesis III: If we push this question of understanding curriculum we come to history and if we push that enough we're necessarily led, via etymology, to metaphysics
 - i. If history is the 'maintenance of the collective memory' then metaphysics is the 'maintenance of primal truths.'
 - ii. Leads us to Chariots, Wheels, Circuits, *Circum Maximum*, *Maxime Circe*, or the Circus Maximus
 - iii. History and Metaphysics suggest a few additional, profound understandings of curriculum.
- d. Thesis IV: Curriculum, technology and theology co-emerge in time— how can we understand curriculum if we do not understand this co-emergence or the inseparability of the three? ... technotheocurriculum?
 - i. In many ways, curriculum, technology, and theology emerge coincidentally or contemporaneously within Homer, specifically within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The three are somewhat conceptually interrelated in Homer and subsequently Hesiod. In Homer, the concepts, practices and words are given their ancient meanings. Medieval and modern derivatives and meanings are in some ways quite similar and in other ways distinct from ancient Homeric and Platonic uses.
- e. Thesis V: Currere draws a researcher into a primary challenge to "know thyself." This then begs a paradox: How can I know myself until I know someone else or another? How can I know someone else or another until I know myself? Can one really know thyself? Can one really know another? Can one heal thyself? Indeed, the "self" is itself a problem.
 - i. Objectivity and subjectivity are primary problems of research— of cognition and epistemology. To know thyself, must a subject objectify the self?
 - ii. "Know thyself" (γνῶθι σεαυτόν) is a maxim inscribed on the Temple of Apollo.
 1. In the *Charmides* (164d-165a) (399-390 BCE), Critias says to Socrates: For I would almost say that this very thing, self-knowledge, is temperance, and I am at one with him who put up the inscription of those words at Delphi. For

the purpose of that inscription on the temple, as it seems to me, is to serve as the god's salutation to those who enter it, instead of "Hail!"—this is a wrong form of greeting, and they should rather exhort one another with the words, "Be temperate!" And thus the god addresses those who are entering his temple in a mode which differs from that of men; such was the intention of the dedicator of the inscription in putting it up, I believe; and that he says to each man who enters, in reality, "Be temperate!" But he says it in a rather riddling fashion, as a prophet would; for "Know thyself!" [Γνωθι σαυτόν] and "Be temperate!" are the same.

- iii. In *Confessions* (Book 10: 33) (397-400 CE), Augustine concludes: "mihi quaestio factus sum." "I have become a problem to myself."
 - 1. Augustine recognizes or confesses that the self is a problem.
- iv. At the turn of modernity, or just about at the turn, in "Of Experience," Montaigne (1588/1613) confesses, somewhat boastfully: "I study my selfe more than any other subject. It is my supernaturall Metaphisike, it is my naturall Philosophy" (p. 388).

2. Chariot Stories: History, via etymology, leads us to the metaphysics of curriculum.

- i. In Homer, the Greek root of curriculum is *κύκλος* and at places *τροχός*, both referring to a wheel of a chariot or more generally circle, as in the circular or cyclical nature of the shield of Achilles.
- ii. When Plautus translates chariot (*ἄρμα*) from Greek, he chooses the reference to wheel (*κύκλος*) and renders chariot as *currum* and *curriculum* (i.e., *Mercator*, ca. 205 BCE, Act V, Scene 2, 91). Latin forms of *currus*, *curru*, *currum*, and *circum*, as in *Circum Maximum*, *Maxime Circe*, or the Circus Maximus, all reference chariots or conjure up complex technotheological infrastructure.
- iii. Cicero's *For Rabirius* (63 BCE, Chap. 10, sec. 30) captures the sense of curriculum extended to one's course of life (*vitae curriculum*) and spiritually requiring a moral axis.
- iv. Plato
 - i. For Plato, the *mechanê* as chariot (*hárma*) has material, metabolic, metaphoric, and metaphysical existence or meaning. Upon Plato's second return to Syracuse in 366 BCE, after disembarking from the trireme that brought him to shore, his student become emperor Dionysius II greeted him in the royal chariot. As Plato stepped into the chariot, it is said that a bystander quoted from the *Iliad*:
 - 1. The beechen axle groaned beneath the weight
Of that great goddess and that man of might.
 - ii. This was likely heard as an underhanded remark on the heaviness of mind and broadness of frame and name (*platon*) of the philosopher next to the bravery of Dionysius II.¹ Plato explains in the *Timaeus* how Socrates was able to draw out from Kritias truths of unrecorded history and ancient wisdom that escaped the youth of the day, including the type of lesson he wished to draw from Anniceris' display of skill. Kritias reports that an old priest had reminded the elder Solon:
 - 1. There is a story, which even you have preserved, that once upon a time Phaethon, the son of Helios, having yoked the steeds of his father's chariot, because he was not able to drive them in the path of his father, burnt up all that was upon the earth, and was himself destroyed by a thunderbolt [hurled by an angry Zeus].
 - iii. At issue for Plato was whether the chariot driver could or should remain in the familiar, trusted rut or loosen reins for an untrodden path. Ought one follow a controlled life of order and wisdom guided by reason and spirit or an unstable

- life of disorder fueled by appetite and desire? In the *Iliad*, Nestor's advice for his son on chariot driving is reminder that the elder charioteer has stayed the course throughout his life.²
- iv. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato indicates how *hárma* and *harmonia* (harmony) are linked— *mechanê* is in or on the mind (*nous*, *epinoia*) and necessary to mortal rendering of a circuit between the heavens and earth. On the nature of the soul Socrates explains to Phaedrus,
 1. let it be likened to a union of powers in a team of winged steeds and their winged charioteer. Now all the gods' steeds and all their charioteers are good, and of good stock; but with other beings it is not so wholly so. With us men, in the first place, it is a pair of steeds that the charioteer controls; moreover, one of them is noble and good, and of good stock, while the other has the opposite character, and his stock is opposite.
 - v. "This composite structure of soul and body," says Socrates, "is called a living being." Soul and body or vehicle are assemblages, ensembles, or frame-works. Plato recognizes that chance and desire are as much a part of machineries as prediction and determinacy. With inexact correspondence, the charioteer represents reason (*logos* or *nous*), white horse spirit (*thumos* or *êthos*), black horse passion (*pathos*), and the chassis of the chariot the body (*sôma*) and cunning hand (*daidalos*). The horses, spirited and appetitive forces, are not so easily controlled and balanced while the mind and body are not readily dependable; the body can be crafty in undermining the mind, *daidalos* may fool *logos*. The *mechanê* or *hárma* can tie to or release from earthly bondage and human nature (*physis*). For mortals, keeping the chariot on the path of truth (*aletheia*) is difficult against an alternative of a path of seeming (*doxa*). "Hence, the task of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome," submits Socrates. He continues:
 1. Now within the heavens are many spectacles of bliss upon the highways whereon the blessed gods pass to and fro... But at such times as they go to their feasting and banquet, behold they climb the steep ascent even unto the summit of the arch that supports the heavens; and easy is that ascent for the chariots of the gods, for that they are well-balanced and readily guided; but for the others it is hard, by reason of the heaviness of the steed of wickedness, which pulls down his driver with his weight, except that the driver has schooled him well.... Such is the life of gods: of the other souls that which best follows a god and becomes most like thereunto raises her chariot's head unto the outer region, and is carried round with the gods in the revolution, but being confounded by her steeds she has much ado to discern the things that are.³
 - vi. Common interpretations risk defining Plato's analyses of chariots, soul chariot especially, as sheer metaphor or metaphysics by dismissing the material and machinic.
 - vii. Plato, ca. 360 BCE, the *Timaeus*,
 1. There have been, and will be again, many destructions of mankind arising out of many causes; the greatest have been brought about by the agencies of fire and water, and other lesser ones by innumerable other causes. There is a story that even you [Greeks] have preserved, that once upon a time, Phaethon, the son of Helios, having yoked the steeds in his father's chariot, because he was not able to drive them in the path of his father, burnt up all that was upon the earth, and was himself destroyed by a thunderbolt. Now this has the form of a myth, but really signifies a declination of the bodies moving in the heavens around the earth, and a

great conflagration of things upon the earth, which recurs after long intervals.

viii. Callimachus, ca. 260 BCE, *Aetia*, praef. (fr. 1 Pf.)

1. And this too I bid you, to tread where wagons do not trample, not drive your chariot on tracks that others share nor on the broad highway, but on unworn paths, even though the way you drive be rather narrow.

ix. Cicero

1. *pro L. Murena*, 63 BCE, 27:57: respondebo igitur Postumo primum qui nescio quo pacto mihi videtur praetorius candidatus in consularem quasi desultorius in quadrigarum curriculum incurrere. cuius competitores si nihil deliquerunt, dignitati eorum concessit, cum petere destitit; sin autem eorum aliquis largitus est, expetendus amicus est qui alienam potius iniuriam quam suam persequatur.
2. In the first instance then I will reply to Cnaeus Postumius, who, somehow or other, I know not how, while a candidate for the praetorship, appears to me to be a straggler into the course marked out for the candidates for the consulship, as the horse of a vaulter might escape into the course marked out for the chariot races. And if there is no fault whatever to be found with his competitors, then he has made a great concession to their worth in desisting from his canvass. But if any one of them has committed bribery, then he must look for some friend who will be more inclined to prosecute an injury done to another than one done to himself.

a. Horace, *Odes*, 30-27 BCE:

x. Maecenas atavis edite regibus,
et praesidium et dulce decus meum,
sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum
collegisse iuvat metaque fervidis
evitata rotis palmaque nobilis
terrarum dominos evehit ad deos;
hunc, si mobilium turba Quiritium
certat tergemini tollere honoribus;
illum, si proprio condidit horreo
quicquid de Libycis verritur areis....

1. Maecenas, descended from royal ancestors, O both my protection and my darling honor! There are those whom it delights to have collected Olympic dust in the chariot race; and [whom] the goal nicely avoided by the glowing wheels, and the noble palm, exalts, lords of the earth, to the gods.
2. Maecenas descendant from a royal ancestor, O both my protection and sweet glory: there are [those], whom it pleases to collect Olympic dust in a chariot and the post [end] having been avoided with burning wheels and the noble palm raises [them] the masters of the worlds to the gods