Title: Figuring out the Why

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The intelligentsia's case for more than science.

WE SHOULDN'T need a commission of moviemakers and musicians, college presidents, and corporate executives to tell us that it's important to study literature or anthropology. But, then again, maybe we do. In the matrix of costs and benefits attached to education, where do you put poetry, or, for that matter, political science or history, or even economics? The report, called "The Heart of the Matter," is a noble effort to roll back the tide of ignorance in America. And, in a sign of the times, for those who don't have the patience to read it, there's an accompanying seven-minute film: actor John Lithgow, director George Lucas, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and others argue eloquently that it's all well and good to teach science, technology, engineering, and math, the STEM subjects that are the focus of so much funding and interest these days. But to what end? "Sciences are the how," says Lucas, "and the humanities are the why." They are, says Lithgow, the flower that blossoms on top of the "stem." In more practical terms, the written report argues the humanities are vital to equip the United States for "leadership in an interconnected world" where ignorance of other cultures is no longer a luxury Americans can afford.

By Christopher Dickey

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