

**LIBERAL ARTS AND CORE TEXTS IN OUR  
STUDENTS' WORLD**

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**Edited by  
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# Introduction

## Liberal Arts and Core Texts in Our Students' World

Core texts and liberal arts education change lives and have consequences in the world. Education must meet numerous demands presented by various stakeholders; each presents its own aim and calls for shaping education to meet those ends. Individuals, faculty, educational institutions, families, regional and national governments, commercial interests, and other entities support and make demands on education. Education should shape democratic and civic participation, professional development, and social perspectives and contribute to raising and addressing life-long questions and ultimate values and concerns. To which of these stakeholders and aims ought core texts and liberal arts education pay heed? Are the various aims inherently incompatible? Do they compete for limited resources in a manner that favor some aims over others? What changes do we want to see made in the lives of students, and what consequences are anticipated?

Professional and economic expectations for graduates are readily apparent. “What can I do with this degree?” is a common question during advising sessions. The growth of the working adult population is one indicator of the necessity of a degree for career advancement, or even merely maintaining the status quo. The division of labor in the academy into disciplinary fields disadvantages many programs that do not have readily identifiable career tracks. The liberal arts adviser, lacking specific career tracks to offer, may tend to extol the virtues of broad interdisciplinary competence, being articulate and literate, having competence in abstraction, critical thinking, and judgment, and having appreciation for various cultures and perspectives. The adviser in a specialized field tied to a career track can point to the record of students entering particular companies with well-known starting salaries. Core text and liberal arts programs may be pitched as “value-added” on the basic value of landing a good starting position in a career of choice.

First-generation students, perhaps more than other students, rightly raise concerns about the short- and long-term financial and social costs of a core text and liberal arts education that can disrupt their social networks and result in economic burdens beyond their, or their families', ability to repay. A common tension is between who they think themselves to be, or want to become, as a whole person, and the career aspirations that they and their families have that promise to lead to a better life. How should they choose between competing visions of a "better life"? Reduction to an economic animal is not the necessary outcome of recognizing the economic aspects of life that lead many into professional programs. Similarly, liberal arts' cultivation of humanity need not be separated from professional concerns. Careers may, unfortunately, be reduced to "how much money can I make?" This diminishment of professional life has failed to appreciate the manner in which professions seek to address needs and challenges of the world. Complex problems find more complete resolution by the inclusion of interdisciplinary studies that embrace the liberal arts and sciences.

This volume examines five questions about the value of the liberal arts and core texts in our students' world. Part I considers "Why should students read Great Books?" Rather than beginning this volume with reflections on professional life, the contributors in this section examine a broader range of purposes for reading what are often long and difficult works. Many of our students arrive in the classroom without substantial (or any) knowledge of great works that have shaped various cultures. The literary demands of social media are not as great as the perceived social demands. Textbooks can easily drain a wallet but generally do not fill the soul. It is a rare student who would claim that the most memorable, or life-changing, reading from college was a highly structured textbook. If we ask the place of Great Books in the lives of our students, an honest answer would be "almost no place"—unless it is structured into their academic experiences. The authors in this section consider what should be studied and for what purposes, the nature of truth, the role of bawdy literature, coming to appreciate reading hard texts, the importance of the imagination, and Great Books as part of intellectual healing. The expanded horizon of the role of Great Books leads the reader to reflect more deeply on what it means to be a person freed from the limitations of short online rants or encyclopedic introductions to entire fields of study.

Part II returns to the question, "How do we best educate for professions?" Contributions consider professional training, economics, ethics, environment and ecology, developing a capacity to listen deeply and think about listening, and critical thinking. Each of these expands the notion of advantageous preparation for professional life, advantageous not only for the individual, but also for society and the world.

Student interest in public life reaches beyond professional life. Social media may feed the inane or the tendentious, but it also motivates students to be part of larger social and political movements. How can core courses and core texts shape those interests? Part III pursues the question "What lives are worth living together?" Authors in this section wrestle with collisions of rights and challenges to freedom, the nature of the soul and politics, how to teach politics, the puppet

figure, and the obligation to take part in politics.

Student participation in institutional religious structures continues to decline, but does religion, or the spiritual dimension of life, maintain significance? The place of individualized spiritual dimensions is notable alongside the challenges of corporate embodiment. Multireligious contexts are becoming more commonplace, and some students show genuine interest and curiosity about diverse religious practices and beliefs, while others reinforce strict boundaries. Religious knowledge and physical-scientific knowledge continue in an often uncomfortable tension. Religious fervor can be difficult to comprehend when it is displayed by unfamiliar religions and cultures. The distribution component of general education programs introduces students to various disciplinary approaches, but there can be a struggle about how to weave them together, particularly giving adequate voice to the religious aspects. Part IV examines various aspects of including religion in the core, including modes of learning, relationship of religion to the sciences, religious values and revivals, and recognition of the spirit in others.

Part V expands themes from Parts III and IV as it poses the question “Why should we listen to others?” Polarization and intolerance across political and religious spectrums encompasses ethnic and racial relations and are often difficult, if not impossible, to separate. Higher education may present students with the first significant encounters with others from different political, religious, and ethnic/racial backgrounds. Physical and programmatic design for residential life are crucial components in students’ experiences, but careful choice of core texts and well-designed core programs can enhance fruitful interactions. Part V begins with a reflection on minority voices in Shakespeare, then carries that forward in African-American authors. The importance of connecting ancestors to the living community recognizes that racism is multigenerational and that the past ought not to be left behind. Racial experiences are one way to grasp global changes. Comparison of diverse cultural traditions on a topic challenges cultural assumptions and leads to self-awareness and an openness to new possibilities. The section, and the volume, ends with developing a hermeneutic of sympathy that aims to establish productive relationships in the lives of students.

ACTC offers a path for students to engage Great Books through biennial student conferences and through panels during the annual national conference. Students at our university work closely with faculty advisers on the projects, including numerous practice deliveries. They gain a better awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Most, if not all, of the students who have participated have continued their studies in graduate school. A benefit for me as a faculty member is that students working on core texts often develop insights that I weave into my own perspectives. Great Books in the lives of students lead to improved working relationships with faculty.

As editor of these proceedings, I want to extend my gratitude to those who read the manuscripts, provided peer evaluations, and offered their insights. I want to offer a special thanks to my TA, Rachel Cooper, who provided initial editing of the material. The volume would not be possible without the authors of the papers whose creativity and insights lead us to more faithful service to our students. I

want to thank the author-submitters whose papers were not included. The length of the volume was graciously extended by J. Scott Lee, executive director, but eventually limitations made it impossible to include all papers.

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# **Why Read Great Books?**



# **An Apology for the Campus Novel: The Case of Aristophanes' *The Clouds***

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Many students arrive at college and university with very little understanding of what differentiates higher education from high school. Some might suggest that this is because the difference is narrowing, and not because of increased rigor in secondary schools. Whatever the case, it is true that colleges and universities differ very much, or should, from high schools. The faculty at universities are qualified in a different way from those in schools, and there are unique expectations for them and for their students. As a practical matter, it would be very useful to be able to explain this difference to students upon their arrival. But how to do so? The subgenre of the campus novel, while often satirical, can provide insight into the strange world these college students will inhabit for four or more very influential years. That said, the assignment of campus novels, while fun, would not be appropriate. Even a course on twentieth-century literature would have little room for most campus novels. A case could be made for *Brideshead Revisited*, but not because of its realistic portrayal of academic life. If the campus novel has any place in a college education, which I shall argue it does, where would it fit so as to avoid the self-indulgent parodies contained therein? Fortunately for us, Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, the urtext of the genre, allows us to square the circle.

## ***THE CLOUDS TODAY***

Addressing the topic of campus novels is important today for the same reason it was in Socrates' time. It is no secret that the liberal arts are under assault, and at least part of that assault is based on persistent stereotypes of academics and the academy. We are often seen, when we are seen, as being engaged in pointless controversies and

silly areas of study, making the weaker arguments seem stronger. The criticisms remain the same. There is a virtue to learning that these are no new arguments, but also to learning that some of them were and are off-base. But are they accurate? Where they are is particularly instructive. For instance, the first item of study in Socrates' school is the measure of a gnat's leap. This is presented as utter nonsense and a useless endeavor. And yet, here is the title of a recently published article: "A Comparison of Jump Performances of the Dog Flea, *Ctenocephalides canis* (Curtis, 1826) and the Cat Flea, *Ctenocephalides felis felis* (Bouche 1835)" in the journal *Veterinary Parasitology*.<sup>1</sup> I would hate to tell the authors that they have been pre-published.

Here is a story that applies more to our faculty colleagues than to students but is just as appropriate. I happened to raise the topic of Aristophanes' play in the company of several math and science instructors. One was very enthusiastic, having read and enjoyed it. Another had never heard of it. So, thinking he would enjoy one of the first humorous scenes, I told him about the questions being pursued inside of Socrates' school. We know about the first already. The second involved the question of which part of the digestive tract of a gnat makes its distinctive noise. My colleague was swift in concluding that these were exactly the sort of stupid questions asked by people interested in philosophy. I had not the heart at the time to point out that the story was not about philosophy but about natural science. One does not need to go as far as the Ignoble Awards or the Annals of Improbable Research to discover that our scientists today spend a great deal of time answering just such questions.<sup>2</sup> It is, in fact, the contemporary strength of *The Clouds* that Socrates is portrayed there as a natural scientist and absurd. Scientists today are praised and honored for their research even if it often seems as pointless as that described by Socrates' student. That change is one our students should learn about.

To recall, the *Clouds* is the story of a beleaguered father, Strepsiades, who is overwhelmed with his son's debts. In the hope of cheating his creditors, he decides to study with Socrates so that he might convince them of things that are untrue, namely, that he need not pay his debts. The old man, however, proves to be a very poor student, and so he must convince his son, Pheidippides, to go in his place. Of course, the son resists at first and then acquiesces to his father's demands. He undertakes his studies with Socrates so well that we find him both beating his own father and providing an excellent argument for why it should be done. The play ends in chaos with the father burning down Socrates' school. The title comes from the chorus of clouds, the only deities Socrates says he will acknowledge.

The remarkable parallels to Plato's *Apology* of Socrates have been well studied and would reward further consideration. But I want to think of this play and its plot in terms of the modern academy. For however much Strepsiades is an exaggeration, the financial benefits of higher education are first and foremost in the minds of parents and students alike. An undergraduate education might not prepare one to commit fraud—that can wait for law school—but it is supposed to provide financial security. Perhaps the only point of agreement in the entire play between Strepsiades and his son is that education is a technical skill for the purpose of making money. As much as we might wish it were not so, this is probably still true. I, for one, have been to enough college recruitment events to know that it is.

There are other important similarities between the play and our modern predicament. In many cases, Pheidippides and his resistance to education, even his fear of education and its emasculating effect, is not dissimilar to that of our own students. He is afraid that studying with Socrates will make him pale, weak, and effeminate. He will become an object of ridicule for the manly young bucks he normally spends time with. There might not be a direct equivalent for “nerd” or “jock” in classical Greek, but they seem to have had the concept well enough. One last similarity, significant for our purposes, is that Socrates the academic is presented as absurd and ridiculous. This image persists, but I shall return to it when discussing the modern campus novel.

Let me remain for the moment with the figure of Socrates in Aristophanes’ play and contrast that briefly with the Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*. The Socrates of the play is exactly the unjust caricature he says he must dispel in the dialogue. That caricature is of a natural scientist who studies the heavens and what walks upon the earth. He is also a sophist who can twist arguments and abuse logic to make untrue things appear true. The point of the *Apology* is to show that this is not the real Socrates or, to be more precise, not the later Socrates. Socrates might have started out a little like this, but Plato’s Socrates no longer practiced natural science, and he opposed the use of rhetoric for unjust purposes. And yet, just like the characters from a recent novel, Aristophanes’ Socrates is much more funny.

#### THE CAMPUS NOVEL TODAY

As Elaine Showalter explains in her excellent book, *Faculty Towers*, campus novels take one of two forms. C. P. Snow begins the modern tradition in *The Masters* whereby academia is presented as Arcadia, where a few foibles exist within idyllic conditions. By contrast, in *Lucky Jim*, Kingsley Amis presents academic life as a madhouse to be fled. Jim is lucky only because he escapes. *The Masters* is set in 1937, whereas *Lucky Jim* takes place in the postwar expansion of higher education. David Lodge, writing one to two generations later, may be the most iconic author of campus novels. He combines the views of Snow and Amis such that academia is an Arcadian madhouse. (*Nice Work* does tend, however, in the Amis direction.) Another favorite of mine, Howard Jacobson’s *Coming from Behind*, renders a more subtle distinction between Arcadia and madhouse insofar as the author acknowledges the distance from his character’s nightmare at Wrotesley Polytechnic to his salvation at Holy Christ College, Cambridge. The distinction is understood by most of us but is generally not acknowledged openly. As a case in point, students at Moo U<sup>3</sup> are no more eager to admit their place in the pecking order than are the faculty. The living fiction of the academy is the forced egalitarianism that might remind one of *Animal Farm*. The fact is, there is nothing equal about the prospects for the students nor the conditions of the faculty when comparing the top of the academic ladder to even just a few rungs below. And herein lies the humor in so many of the novels: the false hopes of the students and the pretensions of the faculty. We can find this on the very first page of *Lucky Jim* where Amis, with the clarity of Jane Austen, reminds us of the truth that the weakest scholars are always the most insistent that others recognize their qualifications.

Modern campus novels record the changing preoccupations and fads in academia. Indeed, one might even get the idea that academia and faddishness are one and the same. After World War II the novels deal with the sudden expansion of higher education. During the 1960s and 1970s they deal with protest, and in the 1980s, feminism. Political correctness starts to drive the novels by the 1990s, and more recently our campuses have been the setting for witchhunts regarding sexual harassment. Tracing the history of these novels also provides some of the best insight into the academic world. For instance, take what this reader considers to be the most remarkable line by Jim Dixon, the eponymous *Lucky Jim*: "Haven't you noticed how we all specialize in what we hate most?" (33). This is Amis's finest contribution and his most limited. It is limited because it applies to only a subset of academics. Not all fall into this. It is fine because it identifies the very problem with the modern Academy that can be addressed through a study of *The Clouds*.

#### "THIS STRANGELY NEGLECTED TOPIC"

There is no question that the humanities are in crisis and no one familiar with *Lucky Jim* could help but see that Dixon put his finger on the problem. Too many academics hate their specialty, whether it is the English professor who does not teach literature or the historian who cares more for present fancies than about anything that might have happened in the past. Confirming the principle that self-parody is more extreme than fiction, the titles of real courses offered on American campuses would never survive the editing process of any self-respecting novelist. Indeed, it is true that Appalachian State University offers a freshman seminar entitled "What If Harry Potter Is [sic] Real?" And by this time everyone knows that Mr. Jefferson's University (of Virginia) offers a course entitled "GaGa for Gaga: Sex, Gender, and Identity." (This is a moving target. Swathmore is now offering a course entitled "The Sociology of Miley Cyrus.") As Kathleen Parker wisely stated in the *Washington Post* about such courses, they might be fine for a dinner party conversation but not for an academic course of study.<sup>4</sup>

When the academy can parody itself, unintentionally it seems, is it safe to expose students to *The Clouds*? Will they not scorn their studies even more? *The Clouds* as campus novel, as critique of crazy professors, is often precisely what they need. For what students need is to be able to distinguish those who have something worthwhile to offer and those who merely express their outrage. Kingsley Amis, again, gets this right where, in one of the final scenes of the novel, he has Jim say, "Well taught and sensibly taught, history could do people a hell of a lot of good. But in practice it doesn't work out like that. Things get in the way. I don't quite see who's to blame for it. Bad teaching's the main thing" (218).

Aristophanes' *Clouds* is the finest parody of the finest philosopher and teacher. Socrates changed the course of intellectual history, and today's colleges and universities, for all their flaws, owe everything to what he and his students did. But we also harbor a great deal of foolishness that deserves to be laughed at and corrected, and so we owe Aristophanes a debt as well. *The Clouds* allows us to raise directly the question of what should be studied and why. That might not always be comfortable in an age when academic freedom is taken to be license rather than liberty. It is nec-

essary, nonetheless, especially for the students. “Critical thinking” is the dominant buzzword in education today, yet being critical of what someone teaches and why has been set off limits. So let us take the advice of Erasmus, who wrote in *In Praise of Folly* that “the words which would cost a wise man his life are surprisingly enjoyable when uttered by a clown.”<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. M. C. Cadiergues, C. Joubert, and M. Franc, “A Comparison of Jump Performances of the Dog Flea, *Ctenocephalides canis* (Curtis, 1826) and the Cat Flea, *Ctenocephalides felis felis* (Bouche, 1835),” *Veterinary Parasitology* 92, no. 3 (Oct. 1, 2000): 239–41.

2. These are the sources for my examples, so I admit they are not mainstream. However, the similarities are astounding. Here is one other winner of an Ignoble Award: “Beetles on the Bottle: Male Buprestids Mistake Stubbies for Females (Coleoptera),” D. T. Gwynne and D. C. F. Rentz, *Journal of the Australian Entomological Society* 22, no. 1 (1983):79–80.

3. *Moo: A Novel*, by Jane Smiley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

4. Kathleen Parker, “High Tuition, Low Return,” *Washington Post*, 28 Jan. 2014, A21.

5. Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, ed. A.H.T Levi and trans. Betty Radice (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993), 57.



# Questions of Truth in Descartes and Heidegger

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What is the nature of truth in liberal education? In what sense does liberal education aim at truth? Let me try to lay out—as simply and clearly as possible—an answer to these questions.

Liberal education was originally guided by a few basic assumptions about truth. One was that scientific truth was not the only or the highest form of truth. In addition to science, liberal educators distinguished several forms of understanding: opinion, know-how, judgment, and wisdom. Wisdom—broadly conceived as a clear vision of what is essential to a good life—was thought to be the highest form of understanding. So the truth of wisdom was assumed to be the highest form of truth. This is why Seneca put the search for wisdom at the center of liberal education: “There is only one really liberal study—that which gives a man his liberty. It is the study of wisdom” (169).

This assumption was challenged with the emergence of modern science. The challenge did not come from *science* itself but from *scientism*—the belief that modern science is the only genuine form of understanding. This belief was articulated most clearly by Thomas Huxley, who argued in 1880 that “liberal education” should be founded on “an unhesitating faith that the free employment of reason, in accordance with the scientific method, is the sole method of reaching truth” (171). By elevating scientific truth into the only genuine form of truth, scientism delegitimized the search for wisdom as unscientific. In this way, scientism disoriented liberal education by depriving it of its traditional aim and meaning.

I think if we want to retrieve and refine the tradition of liberal education, we

have to do two things. First, we have to offer a critique of modern scientific concepts of truth, that is, to show both the *legitimacy* and the *limits* of scientific truth. Second, we have to work out a concept of truth appropriate to liberal education. Let me try to sketch how we might do both through a reading of Descartes.

Descartes called his most popular work *The Discourse on Method*. The word “method” comes from the Greek word *hodos* (ὁδος), which means a “way,” or “path.” At the start of his book Descartes stressed that a method is a “way” or “path” of thinking.

The diversity of our opinions does not arise because some of us are more reasonable than others, but solely because we direct our thoughts along different paths. . . . I shall be glad, nevertheless, to reveal in this discourse what paths I have followed. . . . My present aim, then, is not to teach the method that everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own. (20–21)

At the end of his book he returned to the figure of method as a “path” of thought: “Intending as I did to devote my life to the pursuit of such indispensable knowledge, I discovered a path which would, I thought, inevitably lead us to it” (47–48).

What does this notion of method imply? If every method is a path of thought, every path opens up a particular approach toward things, every approach comes at things from a certain perspective, and every perspective both opens and delimits a field of vision. To any given perspective, some aspects of things appear clearly, some aspects of things appear only in a distorted way, and some aspects of things do not appear at all. To understand Descartes’s method, we have to ask about both its strengths and its limits. What does his method reveal clearly? What does it let us see only in a distorted way? And what does it not let us see at all?

The first rule of Descartes’s method concerns the meaning of truth. The rule states that we can accept as true only what can be made so clearly and distinctly evident to the mind that it cannot be doubted by any rational person: “The first [rule] was never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgments than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had not occasion to call it into doubt” (29). Descartes here took for granted the traditional concept of truth as a correspondence between thought and reality. But he altered this concept of truth in two ways. First, the test of truth is now certainty: no thought can be considered true unless we can be certain it corresponds to reality. And second, certainty can be established only on the basis of evidence so clear and distinct it is indubitable to any rational mind.

This concept of truth is still the most common concept of truth today. It is taken for granted even by the most skeptical thinkers, who tend to deny truth is attainable precisely because they assume the test of truth is certainty. Skeptics deny that true knowledge is possible, but they uncritically take for granted the understanding of truth whose possibility they deny.

What does this concept of truth let us see clearly? In a sentence: It lets us see clearly everything that can be made perfectly clear and distinct to the mind. Above all, it has let us see clearly the aspects of the physical world objectified by modern

science and harnessed by modern technology. In *The Discourse*, Descartes claimed that we could use his method to “make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature” (47). He was right. We live in a world shaped by this concept of truth and the scientific methods it guides.

What does this concept of truth let us see only in a distorted way? In a sentence: It necessarily distorts whatever cannot be made perfectly clear and distinct to any rational mind. Above all, I think, it distorts our understanding of meaning. If we follow Descartes’s way of thought, for example, it leads us toward two equally implausible views of the meaning of written texts. It seems that we either have to claim that meaning is objective and that every text has a single valid interpretation. Or we have to claim that meaning is subjective and that every interpretation is equally valid. On a broader level, Cartesian thinking is behind the notion that nothing in the world has any objective meaning, that meaning is something humans project onto an objectively meaningless world, that humans are free to invent and reinvent the meanings of things, but because they are invented these meanings are ultimately arbitrary and groundless. Cartesian thinking has made us the “lords and masters” of a world it has emptied of meaning.

What does Descartes’s concept of truth not let us see at all? What does it fail to grasp altogether? The answer is actually simple: Descartes’s concept of truth cannot account for itself. We cannot understand Descartes’s concept of truth in its own terms. This is clear if we critically reread the first rule of his method: “The first [rule] was never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgments than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had not occasion to call it into doubt” (29). This says we cannot accept anything as true unless it is based on clear and distinct evidence. What evidence does Descartes offer to support this concept of truth? Is this concept of truth so self-evident it cannot be doubted by any rational person? Descartes’s concept of truth is actually far from self-evident. If we apply Descartes’s method to his own concept of truth, we have no reason to accept it as true. It is the nonscientific basis of scientific thought.

If we cannot understand Descartes’s concept of truth on its own terms, in what terms can we adequately grasp and conceive the truth of Descartes’s concept of truth?

Here I think we can learn from the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Heidegger argued that Descartes took for granted the traditional concept of truth as a correspondence between thought and reality. And he believed this traditional concept of truth was perfectly adequate *within limits*. But he argued that truth in the traditional sense presupposes truth in a more basic sense. And he argued that an understanding of this more basic sense of truth is already implicit in our language.

Think of the English phrase “the moment of truth.” What does “truth” mean here? For example: when a friend of mine was expecting her first child and did not get an ultrasound of her unborn fetus, no one knew if it was going to be a boy or a girl. So when her water broke and she went to the hospital, her husband called me up and said, “The moment of truth has come.” And I thought, “Yes, but what is the meaning of truth?” We use this phrase—“the moment of truth”—when something

that was hidden is suddenly revealed and apparent to everyone. It is a moment when what was invisible becomes visible, when what was concealed become unconcealed. So the word “truth” in this phrase means something like “unconcealment”—the revelation or illumination that first lets us see things for what they are.

Two points:

First, Heidegger’s concept of truth was not meant to *replace* the common concept of truth as correspondence. He tried to unearth and illuminate a level of thought that precedes and makes possible truth as correspondence. Before we can think or say anything correct or incorrect about a phenomenon, the existence and nature of that phenomenon has to have become clear to us in some way. That “becoming clear” is the more basic level of truth that Heidegger called “unconcealment.”

Second, this unconcealment is never complete, according to Heidegger. Things never stand before us fully revealed. We always understand the world from a certain standpoint, within the limits of a horizon of thought and a particular point of view. Heidegger said this explicitly:

All philosophical discussion, even the most radical attempt to begin all over again, is pervaded by traditional concepts and thus by traditional horizons and traditional angles of approach, which we cannot assume with unquestionable certainty to have arisen originally and genuinely from the domain of Being and the constitution of Being they claim to comprehend. (22)

Notice that Heidegger here spoke the same language of approach and perspective that we already noticed in Descartes. This language already contains an implicit understanding of the kind of truth Heidegger called “unconcealment.” Every way of thought gives us a certain angle of approach to things; every angle of approach both opens and delimits a certain perspective; and every perspective reveals some aspects of things clearly, shows other aspects in a distorted way, and conceals other aspects of things altogether. If we want to understand the truth of Descartes’s method of thought, we have to understand truth in Heideggerian terms as unconcealment. And this means we have to ask of it precisely the questions I asked in this talk: What does Descartes’s way of thought let us see clearly? What does it let us see only in a distorted way? And what does it not let us see at all?

At the start of this paper, I said liberal education was originally oriented by the search for wisdom—the search for a clear vision of what is essential to a good life. And I said the search for wisdom is delegitimized as “unscientific” whenever modern scientific truth is held to be the only genuine form of truth. So to retrieve and refine the traditional aim of liberal education, we have to do two things: first, we have to show both the legitimacy and the limits of modern scientific concepts of truth, such as the concept of truth we find in Descartes; and, second, we have to work out a concept of truth appropriate to the truth of wisdom. I have tried to suggest that wisdom belongs to the more basic level of truth that Heidegger called “unconcealment.” Thinking in liberal education has to aim at truth as unconcealment.

This sounds abstract. But let me just say that on a practical level the implications of this conclusion are very simple. It implies that when we ask about the truth of something, we have to ask two different kinds of questions.

On the one hand, if we are asking about the truth of a *proposition* or a *thesis*, we

have to ask questions that presuppose the traditional concept of truth as correspondence: Is it correct? Does it get things right? Does it correspond to reality? How do we know? What is the evidence for it? Is this evidence sufficiently clear and distinct that it cannot be doubted by any reasonable person? These questions are indispensable, as is the traditional concept of truth.

But on the other hand, if we are asking about the truth of a *way of thought* or a set of *basic concepts*, we have to ask questions that presuppose an understanding of truth as unconcealment: What does this way of thought let us see clearly? What does it let us see only in a distorted way? And what does it not let us see at all?

To retrieve and refine the traditional aims of liberal education, we have to reconceive the meaning of truth. Truth has to be understood not simply as a correspondence between thought and reality, but on a more basic level as the unconcealment that first makes that correspondence possible.

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# Why Read Bawdy Comedy?

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The Western tradition in the liberal arts recommends a core canon of books for liberal education, some of which are more securely installed, and some less. The question sometimes arises among our students why a tradition that seems to take such care to put the highest things before our minds, at the same time recommends reading any texts that contain indelicate elements. The works that often find themselves the target of this sort of question include comic literature with obscene or bawdy episodes, but such episodes are, in fact, found in literature throughout the core texts canon: in Chaucer, Aristophanes, and Shakespeare, of course, but also in Dante, Spenser, and even the Bible. I argue that not only ought we to view these elements of books given to us by the tradition not as a threat to the dignity of the enterprise, but also that it is both particularly humane to read this sort of literature and particularly dignified to include them in programs of serious liberal studies; further, it is a grave error to disregard them.

Scholars and teachers in the liberal arts tradition have a relationship to the minds and souls of their students that is like that of physicians to the bodies of their patients; teachers look after the health of minds, as it were. But every physician is faced in his or her practice with the unsavory elements of bodies: blood, saliva, sores, internal organs. These are necessary parts of bodily existence, but they can sometimes be repulsive. A physician who is squeamish or repulsed when looking upon and touching these things would not get very far in healing bodies. Much less can teachers and others charged with the health of minds be squeamish about unsavory elements of human life. Bawdy comedy serves, in part, to condition them to be able to look upon and face these elements, which conditioning is at the service of the health of minds.

It is important here to frame the treatment of the bawdy as it is found in the

literary genre of comedy. Though in common parlance “comedy” usually refers to the ridiculous, or that which makes us laugh, comedy is more broadly taken as one of the four principal genres of literature named by Aristotle at the beginning of *On the Poetic Art* or the *Poetics*: epic, tragedy, comedy, and lyric poetry. The genre of comedy encompasses a wide range of works, and it includes but extends beyond the mere laughter-inducing. In fact, some works that fall under the broader genre of comedy might not be amusing at all, as laughter is only one of many instruments of comedy. Its wide range makes comedy difficult to define, but we can develop a working understanding of what characterizes the literary works that are widely considered to be comic.

From Aristotle’s treatment in the *Poetics* we have perhaps a more systematic grasp of tragedy than of comedy, and we can use this understanding to see something of the nature of comedy by contrast. Aristotle in fact takes us a step in that direction, suggesting that comic and tragic heroes are opposites: “This difference it is that distinguishes Tragedy and Comedy also; the one would make its personages worse, and the other better, than the men of the present day” (Aristotle 1456). We can take the next step in an effort to characterize comedy by contrasting it to tragedy in other ways as well, especially in what we might call the comic “trajectory.” Aristotle describes tragedy as a work where the fortune of its principal figure moves from happiness to misery, or from order to chaos; a comic figure by contrast will often witness a change in fortune from misery to happiness, or from disorder to order. Further, what is common between tragedy and comedy, among other things, is that the change in fortune, or at least the degree of change in fortune, is unmerited by the hero himself. Usually the outcome of a tragedy is much more wretchedness than the hero could possibly deserve in retribution for his actions—the unspeakably awful fate of Oedipus seems disproportionate to his mistakes. And in a comedy, the outcome is similarly relatively unmerited happiness—in *Much Ado about Nothing*, it is given to the undeserving Claudio in the end to marry the peerless Hero.

Dante reflects as well on the nature of comedy in a letter to his patron Cangrande, which he wrote as a sort of preface to his book on the comedy of heaven, the *Paradiso*. In the letter he is largely in agreement with Aristotle, explaining first a few general principles about comedy, applying them to his own work, the *Commedia*, as a whole before he begins to explain the *Paradiso* in particular. Arguing first from etymology, he explains that while tragedy ends with horrible circumstances after having begun with a relatively “admirable and quiet” ones, comedy, by contrast, begins with “some harsh complication, but brings its matter to a prosperous end.” In applying this to his own *Comedy*, he adds, “And hence it is evident that the title of the present work is *The Comedy*. For if we have respect to its content, at the beginning it is horrible and fetid, for it is hell; and in the end it is prosperous, desirable, and gracious, for it is paradise.” So we can say both from Aristotle and from Dante that the principal marks or characteristics of comic works in this larger genre called comedy are not from the fact that they make audiences laugh, but rather from their trajectory and their manner. Comedies generally move from disorder and ugliness toward resolution in the happiness of the protagonists. Dante’s *Comedy* as a whole fits this description: it is the story of a man, narrated in the vulgar tongue, a man who is of somewhat more humble

fortune than the average man, who through no virtue of his own—in fact, explicitly in the *Comedy* by the grace of God and by the intercession of the saints—rises from “horrible and fetid” beginnings of being lost in the woods and finding himself in hell, to the most “prosperous, desirable, and gracious” end, paradise.

Chaucer’s “Miller’s Tale” exhibits the comic trajectory by first lowering or abasing his characters on several levels before raising them: the idealistic Absalom is expecting to kiss Alison up high on the lips but is presented with the infamous “nether eye” instead; then, at his next effort he requests a vocal requital but receives a flatulent exhalation in its place. Nicholas the clerk tried to mock and prank Absalom, but was rewarded with a burnt bottom himself. And, of course, the irresponsibly naive John the carpenter was literally and figuratively lowered to an unexpected bruising rather receiving his anticipated salvation. All of this brings about a kind of humility in the characters, through which this tale presents the possibility, by the very telling of it, of an awareness of solidarity in lowness among the other pilgrims who are hearing it and, by extension, among Chaucer’s readers. The abasement is not the same as moral badness in the characters and is in fact far from it. It is rather an awareness of the embarrassing, messy, silly condition in which all people find themselves in common.

Although this tale might seem merely a saga of trickery and revenge told in coarse and vulgar language, it presents an image of some of the larger themes in the *Canterbury Tales*, most notably a theme of “balance.” Chaucer has the miller explain that he will “requite” the knight for his tale, and the theme of story-requiting-story occurs throughout the book. Not only are these requitals intended by the tale tellers themselves with their own motives, but Chaucer seems to intend the stories that touch upon the same thematic material to serve to requite one another by working together in balance to paint a complete portrait of some reality. “The Miller’s Tale” here follows immediately upon “The Knight’s Tale,” which is a bombastic love story, showing a knightly but cerebral courtship, abstracted from concrete experiences of love. The tale’s chief conflict arises when cousins Palamon and Arcite spot the lovely Emily at a great distance from high up in the window of their common prison cell. Both fall instantly in love, but Palamon, since he saw her first, rather preposterously lays claim, then rebukes his cousin for daring to express his own amours, saying, “You would treacherously go about / To love my lady, whom I love and serve / And ever shall, till death cut my heart’s nerve” (Chaucer 34). Chaucer uses the earthy and corporeal love affairs of Nicholas, Alison, and Absalom alongside the obscene humor and coarse language in “The Miller’s Tale” to balance the Knight’s; not because the latter is false, but because it is incomplete. The two tales are not extremes between which the mean is to be sought, but each a true but only partial imitation of erotic love.

In introducing “The Miller’s Tale,” Chaucer’s narrator had made a sort of disclaimer to signal the imminence of a bawdy tale, “And so I beg of all who are refined / For God’s love not to think me ill-inclined / Or evil in my purpose. I rehearse / Their tales as told, for better or for worse, / For else I should be false to what occurred” (Chaucer 88). Then later in the same speech, “Consider then and hold me free of blame; / And why be serious about a game?” (ibid.). Chaucer seems preoccupied with how his reader is to take such tales, as he had provided a first such disclaimer

back in the general prologue to the work. The narrator had stepped outside his narrative briefly, speaking directly to the reader to say that he would retell each of the pilgrims' tales from the journey—both high and low—word for word and without apology or shame:

But first I beg of you, in courtesy,  
 Not to condemn me as unmannerly  
 If I speak plainly and with no concealings  
 And give account of all their words and dealings,  
 Using their very phrases as they fell.  
 For certainly, as you all know so well,  
 He who repeats a tale after a man  
 Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,  
 Each single word, if he remembers it,  
 However rudely spoken or unfit,  
 Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,  
 The things pretended and the phrases new.  
 He may not flinch although it were his brother,  
 He may as well say one word as another.  
 And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,  
 Yet there is no scurrility in it,  
 And Plato says, for those with power to read,  
 "The word should be as cousin to the deed." (Chaucer 23)

This is much more than a mere warning about vulgarity, however; it seems that Chaucer has a positive instruction for his reader about tale-telling. He provides a preemptive reply to the obvious objection that it is unfitting for decent and noble Christian people, on pilgrimage no less, to hear these kinds of tales: that to omit or clean up his tales on account of vulgarity in presentation or coarseness of subject matter would be a sort of lie or falsehood. He makes reference to Christ having spoken without apology in rough language in the Gospels; and then again to Plato's aphorism that "The word should be as cousin to the deed." Chaucer's allusion to Plato arguably stands for all of pagan literature, and the allusion to Jesus might stand for all of the revealed truth of Christianity, the two together standing for the whole of storytelling, to say that everywhere, including and perhaps especially in comedy, the most important thing is to tell the truth.

What sort of truth is Chaucer talking about? He seems to mean that there is a world, that is, some aspect of reality that bawdy comedy truly represents as it imitates, a part of Louise Cowan's "terrain of comedy." The truth told by comedy is that of hope; a hope that in the case of the bawdy comes from humility. All of these elements remind us that we humans are in part bodies—muddy, dirty, messy bodies out of control. Phallic jokes and images in comedy remind us that our bodies are not under our control, lest we in our pride pretend that our noble and spiritual nature commands us unresisted by our lower parts. To deny our bodies presents a badly out-of-balance view of the world, what Chaucer calls "untrue," or a lie.

The Western canon is replete with such material. In *The Clouds*, a lizard defecates upon Socrates while he is "studying the course of the moon and its revolutions and was gazing open-mouthed at the heavens," reminding us that despite the impor-

tance of philosophical and celestial reflections, like it or not we live in a world where we have in common with lower animals a gastrointestinal system and all its ugly emissions. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* exhibits the balance that I mentioned between "The Knight's Tale" and "The Miller's Tale," but in this case between the two heroes themselves—the knight Don Quixote, working to be noble at least in mind and intention, and his squire Sancho Panza, an earthy man ruled by his bodily desires, giving rise to untold numbers of indelicate episodes. The *Inferno*, Dante's book on the comedy of hell, which is perhaps as low as we ever get in literature, features all sorts of humiliating messiness that the pilgrim must encounter, including the vulgar detail of a farting demon that reverses the expectations not of the characters themselves (who can't really go any lower than hell), but rather of Dante the pilgrim (and as a consequence, the reader who follows him on the pilgrimage). In Dante's Christian universe, even the devils must do God's bidding, and in showing them as having digestive similarities to the lowest parts of human nature, Dante reveals a hope where even the objectively lowest parts all work to move God's people upward toward him.

Even a cursory glance at the stories of the patriarchs in Genesis reveals more than enough comic situations to argue that the Bible is not "above" episodes of this sort. In an excellent paper entitled "The Bible as Genesis of Comedy," Daniel Russ enumerates several: God breathes into mud to form a strange creature in his image, Adam and Eve make an absurd attempt hide their nakedness from God, Jacob in his craftiness dresses in goatskins to deceive his father, and he wrestles bodily with God, taking from that bizarre episode the name, Israel, that will define his people forever. Bawdy elements abound as well, with a pervasive and almost farcical treatment of fallen sexuality. Abraham and Sarah and Hagar haggle through their curious love triangle, Jacob is deceived into marrying Leah instead of Rachel his love, Rachel hid the household gods from her father in the saddle of the camel, and having sat upon them, she told him, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me" (Gen. 31:35). Russ summarizes these comic elements thus, "While Genesis does not diminish the effects of sin and death on this God-breathed/God-sexed dust, the darkness never overwhelms the wit and humor" (47).

Bodily and vulgar elements in comic literature serve especially to humble us, to keep us from becoming proud, and they do so by balancing our liberal tendency to try raise ourselves up to a higher plane while ignoring the reality of our baser natures. To correct one extreme, Socrates takes up with certain sensual interlocutors in his efforts to show that the philosophic life is a remedy for a life addicted to sense pleasures. But at the other extreme and just as excessive, philosophic man can become addicted to purely spiritual remedies, which usually lead to pride. We are not spirits working to free ourselves from our bodies; the body is part of what we are, and bodily comedy provides a sort of proper reflection. The flatulence in Dante and in Chaucer, the defecating in Aristophanes, and the sexual escapades in Chaucer remind us of our state; they force us to face the reality that we are humans and not angels, without which admission we will never rise to full realization. One cannot be healed who does not admit that he is sick; one cannot come to know who does not admit ignorance; one cannot be saved who does not admit he is lost. The bawdy elements in comedy remind us that the first movement upward is sometimes downward.

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# Reading Hard Texts: Aristotle’s “Munificence”

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How do we help students—or ourselves, for that matter—read, and perhaps even enjoy, hard texts? Hard texts may occur as whole texts—Gilgamesh comes to mind, or Proust’s works—or they may be a part of a text that itself is rather accessible. I would like to consider one of the latter kind: the section on “Munificence” in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE 1122a18–1123a33). That “Munificence” is a hard text may be corroborated by the fact that there are no books dedicated solely to munificence, and only a very few scholarly articles, although there are many of both devoted to liberality, magnanimity, justice, and friendship. In teaching the *Nicomachean Ethics*, too, professors seem to rush from the rewarding section on liberality to the blockbuster pronouncements of magnanimity—bookends to munificence, which overshadow the “book” they surround.

But I believe there is more to the discussion of munificence than is generally appreciated and that a consideration of the meaning of this section might indicate how to bring students to the enjoyment of a hard-core text.

What, for Aristotle, is munificence? Literally, it is the virtue of great and conspicuously splendid spending—yes, spending money. (The Greek word is *megalo-prepeia*.)<sup>1</sup> The one who possesses this virtue is able to expend great sums of money on great projects that are fitting and noble or beautiful.

Now, since people often benefit by an enumeration when learning something difficult, I have developed *5 Rules for Teaching Hard Texts*, which I shall illustrate through “Munificence.” I invite you to test them on your favorite difficult core text.

1. *Start where the student is*, or, as has fortuitously been said, get the student to

find himself/herself in the text or the work of art.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike liberality, which is concerned with giving and taking of one's substance, whether money or property, munificence is only about spending (1122a20–22). Already, perhaps, the students are involved. After all, "great spending" must be a surprise to them: You mean shopping is a virtue? But they are quickly brought up short by the text itself. Munificence is about spending great amounts of money, requiring great wealth, and also about spending it in a fitting and splendid manner.

You can imagine for yourselves what the students are thinking now: a Lamborghini, a multitude of designer houses in places like Long Island, the Bahamas, and the Seychelles. . . .

But they are also thinking—because they know we are reading about the virtues in the Nicomachean Ethics—or I will ask them: Would spending great amounts of money, even splendidly, actually be a virtue? This can arouse a good deal of discussion. My students are not so happy about the great wealth they read about and see around them every day. There is much that is conspicuous about today's spending, but not much that is either splendid or noble. What is so virtuous about spending?

Why is wealthy expenditure a virtue for Aristotle? Of course, this would be a topic for discussion in the class. For this paper, a preliminary answer: munificence is a special type of spending—public spending in great amounts, spending for the common good—and it is an opportunity for the wealthy to perform noble actions that can be seen by all the citizens. The wealthy can serve as educators and as examples.

This answer leads to our Second Rule:

2. *Use examples.* Fortunately, Aristotle gives us a few examples to go on.

At 1122a24–25, Aristotle says the munificent person may outfit a trireme<sup>3</sup>—Athens' largest ship of war—or fund a sacred embassy.<sup>4</sup> What would these expenditures suggest? War and the gods—the core public concerns of the polis.

With the example of the trireme, one could go back to where the student is and inform the students that an aircraft carrier goes for \$13 billion (RT), and presidential protection at a G8 summit is estimated between \$100 million and \$200 million—although this latter sum may include tractors purchased for the Secret Service during the G8 meeting in rural Ireland in 2013 (Tinney). (The Secret Service were supposed to look like Irish farmers, driving their tractors in the fields surrounding the summit venue.)

Should we make our billionaires—some could even afford an aircraft carrier—virtuous by requiring their munificence? Yet, some of our wealthy citizens have spent for the public good without coercion. The names Carnegie and Rockefeller are still familiar to our students, and not for their commercial deeds. Today, the students know about Gates's health foundation, Oprah's educational charities, and Buffett's invitation to his fellow wealthies to join in on charitable works. From a discussion of these examples, perhaps an assignment to find other expenditures of this nature, and from Aristotle's exposition, students might see how the question of the wealthy even in our society encompasses more than the one-sided catchword "1%" connotes.

At 1122b19–25, in a new set of examples, Aristotle speaks of honorable (*timia*) expenditures, which are those for the gods—"votive offerings, [sacred] buildings and sacrifices"—in fact for the entire divine realm [*daimonion*]. Ambitious expenditures,

on the other hand, are those for the community—a chorus for a theatrical presentation, a trireme, a public meal. (Aristotle goes on to speak of munificent spending in the private realm and also on small items [NE 1123a1–19]. Throughout his actions, the spender shows munificence, because it is his virtue, and therefore his habit.)

These examples are an expanded version of those given above at 1122a24–25, but mirrored, or in reverse order: the divine realm and the secular concerns of the city. Postponing a discussion about the divine realm for the moment, if the secular concerns are those over which the citizens have control, eliciting political deliberation about the common good, we see that the examples follow Aristotle’s dictum in the *Politics* (1252b29–30) that a polis comes into being for the sake of life (the trireme; we might call “life” self-preservation), but its being is for the sake of the good life (drama and public meals).<sup>5</sup>

The connection between these three secular examples and the common good of the polis leads to Rule 3.

3. *Use history.* This is especially good when one is going farther back in history than students remember.

I usually wish to avoid using history so I won’t be accused of historicism—the view that a writer is understandable and relevant only for that particular time in history—and as a result I often use too little history. But it really is helpful to refer to the historical facts surrounding the text, and one can do this without relegating the facts to a causal history.

A historical fact about munificent expenditures is that these expenditures were expected of wealthy citizens in the polis (Bartlett and Collins, 72n10). Interestingly, they were called *leitourgiai*—liturgies. But the fact of this historical fact is that during the times of spirited democracy in Athens, these liturgies were extorted from the wealthy: do something for us with your money, or lose it.<sup>6</sup>

You will not find this mentioned by Aristotle (except indirectly, in the *Politics* 1309a13–21).

Why not? Because munificence is not a virtue unless it is done for the sake of the noble, with pleasure and without stinting (NE 1122b6).

History will also tell us that, due to the triremes, Athens rose to be the greatest naval power of its time. Whether expenditures on triremes by the wealthy were due to demotic threat or to the desire for honor and to do a noble deed, the rise of Athens was the rise of its naval power. This might tell us how dependent Athens was on munificent, splendid, and fitting expenditures.<sup>7</sup>

Of course: Rule 4.

4. *Turn the tables.* See what is behind the scenes in Aristotle’s discussion.

Because munificence is a virtue that benefits the city, the munificent are dependent on the city to the highest degree in their virtuous actions. “The munificent person,” Aristotle says, “resembles a knower, since he is able to contemplate what is fitting and to spend great amounts in a suitable way” (NE 1122a35–36). Thus, the munificent must know what is fitting to his particular city, whether it concern the city’s basic needs or the city’s gods. He must enlist the help of others—priests, poets, or pilots—to produce his splendid works. Since the practice of his virtue results in an external, splendid work, there must be spectators to wonder at his work and to honor

it. He needs the city itself and its harbors as a locus for the fulfillment of his ambition.

The munificent person must know a number of other things, particularly politics and economics—for example, that his wealth depends on the stability of the regime and relative harmony among the citizens. The munificent person must know the laws that provide for and guard inheritance and, more important, be aware that the value of his money is a function of the city's continued repayment of its debts (*Politics* 1276a8–14) and of the full faith and credit of its currency (NE 1133a28–32).

The objects of the munificent person's public benefactions also underline the fact that the interest of the regime is the same as that of the munificent. In Athens, when the munificent led or outfitted a trireme or a sacred embassy or supported splendid entertainment for the whole city, he provided what the city needed for its continued and excellent existence. These deeds also resulted in virtue and honor for the munificent. The rise of the Athenian navy gave even more importance to the contributions of the wealthy. At the same time, in a compelling way, the Athenian navy made the wealthy even more dependent on the demos, the majority of the citizens. Aristotle's discussion of munificence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* downplays the continual strife in Athens between the wealthy and the demos—which reached a peak when the Athenian navy flourished, and its triremes, though funded and commanded by the wealthy, achieved their successes through the demos (and metics and slaves) who powered them. This necessity led to the predominance of democracy in the Athenian polis, despite its occasional turn to oligarchy.<sup>8</sup>

The reciprocal relation between the city and the munificent reminds us of Aristotle's discussion of reciprocity and justice in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (see especially 1132b32–1133a5). Aristotle in fact implicates the munificent in reciprocity.

If one does not seek to do good to others in return for their good deeds, there is no mutual exchange (*metadosis*) that comes about—and people stay together through mutual exchange. Hence, too, people place a Shrine to the Graces along the roadway to foster reciprocal giving, for this belongs to gratitude: one ought to serve in return someone who has been gracious, and ought oneself, the next time, to take the lead in being gracious (NE 1133a2–5).

The Shrine to the Graces might be the very type of sacred monument for which the city needed the expenditure of the munificent. The munificent himself needed the people to be conscious of his benefactions to them, in order that they feel gratitude to, rather than envy of, him. Finally, the example of this shrine points to the importance of the munificent regarding the gods, or the divine protection of Providence needed by the city.

As we are conscious of this aspect of munificence, we are led to Rule 5.

5. *Go beyond the text.* Don't just go behind, go outside of the limits that the text seems to set.

To illustrate this rule, we may now look more closely at the other kind of munificent expenditure mentioned in Rule 2, the realm of the divine. The first example Aristotle gave of the munificent's expenditures having to do with the gods was the votive offering (NE 1122b20). I don't think it's a chance matter that he repeats this term at 1123a5–7: "For the [munificent] person is lavish not on himself but on the

common affairs, and his gifts have a certain resemblance to votive offerings.” Even in funding theater productions, the munificent person introduced the people to the poets’ beliefs on how and what the gods were—perhaps the most influential public source of knowledge of the gods’ nature at the height of the Athenian regime.<sup>9</sup>

Aristotle thus points to an issue outside munificence that is always important to countries—the question of the role of religion in politics—even though this question might be voiced in the insistence on the separation of religion and state. Though some citizens may dispute that Providence plays a role in human affairs, others see religion as having vital importance in the course of the country’s history and to the country’s moral fiber. But whatever the two contending sides may believe, they do not know. (This is one reason why the secular age has not succeeded completely in silencing the sectarian.)

Our students are so familiar with the notion of the separation of church and state that they seldom question the separation, much less seek the foundation for this right. Studying “Munificence” provides an occasion for them to do so.

For, to declare a part of the life of human beings off limits for politics does not mean, still less prove, that this part is not important—even for politics. Discussing munificence allows the student in the classroom to bring this problem up, to consider it in all its aspects, to raise the question whether this issue has indeed been laid to rest. Is the good life, living well, possible for citizens without their considering what might be higher than the human? What are the consequences of their believing that they are the highest thing in the universe? Has the munificent person any role to play in these questions in relation to our community? If so, what would that role be?

What a development this is: it might be possible to ascend from the 1% to the heavens! One might delve into a difficult text on munificence and come up with the most primary opposition in the search for knowledge and therefore for the best way of life: the quarrel between reason and revelation. And this by knowing the 5 Rules, not the 5 People.

The much neglected virtue of munificence just might be more important than it seems, and just might appeal to the students’ desire to think more about their own time and more about the good for human beings in general. In Aristotle—always and everywhere—and I would assert in all great books, great art, and great thought, the authors, the makers, and the thinkers take us far beyond where we ourselves have started.

## Notes

1. Although many translators use the word “magnificence” to convey the meaning of *megalo-prepeia* (e.g., Bartlett and Collins), I use “munificence” because I believe it emphasizes the centrality of spending, of economic wealth, in Aristotle’s discussion. *Prepeia* has two meanings, splendid and fitting, and is thus a fitting word for the munificent. “Spending” is not in the word, but Aristotle makes clear that it is the focus of his discussion of the “greatly splendid.”

2. Alden Smith, in private discussion with the author about his paper at the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC) Conference, April 11, 2014.

3. It is well known that the primary source of funds for the Athenian triremes was the Attic Laurium silver mines. These mines were owned by the Athenian people, “but the actual invest-

ment and operations were privatized” (Hale 8).

4. Sacred embassies were “sacred missions to distant sanctuaries and religious festivals” (Hale 127) or to oracles. The person who funded the sacred embassy was likely also to be its leader. The same is true of the provider of a trireme.

5. The trireme is, in fact, the central “common good” example, which may signal that without provision for “living,” the city cannot live well.

6. There are a number of references to these coercive liturgies in Aristophanes—for example, in his *Wasps*. For the liturgies from the point of view of the wealthy, Meier 421; from the point of view of the demos, Meier 424.

7. Hale discusses the embellishments of the trireme. The entire ship resembled, and its parts were named for, animals. Fine white marble “eyes” were for discerning a safe passage during the voyage. The trireme was topped by a gold-helmeted figurehead of Athena, indicating her guidance over the building and the deployment of the triremes (27–28). The splendid and the beautiful were foremost in the minds of the munificent, and all truly aristocratic minds (Meier 399).

8. Cf. Hale 95–97. One might ask why naval developments in other countries at the time did not lead to similar strife or to a democratic turn.

9. One might even see the munificent person as a stand-in for the poet, as the magnanimous person has been seen as a stand-in for the philosopher. Unlike the magnanimous person, the poet needs the city as much as the city needs him: for an audience, to judge dramatic competitions, to accept his view of the city and its gods. The poet also expresses more things about human beings, for example, feelings, or a sense of the sacred, than the philosopher. The poet is a maker: of myths about the whole, and of the city’s relation to the whole (cf. *Birds*, *Frogs*). He envisions his work as truer about the whole than that which the philosopher sees. The poet is splendid because he reveals that which he believes humans need most: the divine.

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# Dante's Imagination

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It is easy to think of the imagination as something that leaves us in a private world or which replaces the intelligibility of the objective world with our manufacture of deceptive images. And in the context of the illiberal necessities of the job market, the poetic imagination often looks to some students more like an escape from reality than a part of an education. In contrast to all this, Dante, as a poet and a lover of Beatrice, emphasizes the role of the imagination in the ascent to the highest and clearest vision of reality, without ever suggesting that the imagination is merely subjective. For him, as I will suggest, the imagination does not necessarily separate us from truth. Rather, the imagination is the place where we nourish all our loves, and hence it is essential to any and all desires, good or bad. Surprisingly, when students encounter Dante in Great Books programs, they are usually inspired by the different perspective that he offers. They find the high reach he discovers in his ambitions and desires to reflect their own. Somehow his account of the imagination can successfully break through the more mundane orientation that students bring with them to college. I will try to reflect on what makes Dante's imagination so inspiring for our students, even when their world remains so distant from his.

Dante's account of the imagination is Platonic. Let me begin with a comparison with the imagination described in Plato's *Phaedrus* in order to shed light on Dante's conception. In Socrates' second speech in which he praises love, he describes the development of love as a form of idolatry. By the flash of beauty in the face of the beloved, the lover is reminded of the vision of the forms he had before his fall into a body. But in this moment the lover by no means recognizes objective beauty that is simply visible to all. Instead, in order to see the god in the beloved, the lover must

put in a lot of pious, imaginative work. The lover literally must fetishize the beloved, making him into a statue of the god:

Each [lover] honors and imitates the god as much as he is able. . . . Each [lover], then, chooses his beloved from among the beautiful ones after his own taste, and fashions and adorns the beloved like a statue of the god for him to honor and to worship. (252d-e)

The worship of the beloved lets the lover put in an effort that leads to higher things. Later on, the beloved will in turn look back into the eyes of the lover and see himself there. But now the beloved sees a much greater image of himself, now that he has been made an image of the god by the lover. When the beloved looks at himself in the eyes of the lover, he sees the god, just as the lover saw the god in him. Some readers like Seth Benardete have pointed out problematic elements in Socrates' praise of love here, specifically the presence of idolatry and perhaps narcissism (Benardete 147). But as another reader, Charles Griswold, argued in *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, the lover's willful imagining of the beloved as the god is evidence of an effort that the soul makes to ascend and to see beyond itself (Griswold 78 ff.). Both readers are in different senses perfectly right, because the beloved is not the final vision of the Form, but merely a reminder that might begin a path to it; while at the same time, as Griswold suggests, the work of the imagination, the self-motion of the soul, is an essential part of the ascent. I wish to recognize both sides of this issue, but to emphasize the latter, positive role for the imagination. It is through imagination that we participate in the ascent and are not merely passive. Seeing things as mere images that point toward higher forms requires our attentiveness. We must be, as it were, awake to the rhetorical upward pull that the beautiful beloved offers us. Our "idolatry" implies using the imagination to develop this power of will to pursue vision. The *Phaedrus* does something like this by using Phaedrus's imagination to bring him forward. The second speech is a rhetorical hook for him. In that sense, it is an example of how Socrates' attention to Phaedrus's imagination could be part of his ascent and not an obstacle to it.

Let me now turn to Dante's case. Dante the lover treats Beatrice the beloved as an image of God. Was this a form of idolatry? Some say yes. In 1576, the first printed edition of the *Vita Nuova* appeared. The publisher, Bartolomeo Sermartelli, decided that Dante's Beatrice was idolatrous in a very negative sense and needed to be censored. So he made reforms of the text that he published, eliminating from the book all the theological attributes that Dante had given Beatrice. For example, when Dante says that he experienced blessedness whenever he met Beatrice, the word "blessedness" is replaced with "happiness" (*beatitudine* is replaced with *felicita*), and when Dante uses the Italian word *salute* for her greeting, which can also mean "salvation," we find only the Italian *saluto*, which means only greeting and nothing more. Dante had also written a long chapter where Beatrice is compared to Christ preceded by John the Baptist (ch. XXIV). This chapter is completely cut from the 1576 edition. Such theological squeamishness becomes utterly absurd when one realizes that even Beatrice's very name would need to be changed were we to make the text perfectly theologically correct.<sup>1</sup> A very slippery slope!

Of course, one might respond to such a program of censorship with any number

of medieval Christian defenses. Beatrice is not idolatrous, since in Christian theology, the reformed soul is an image of God. Saints were understood to be images of God; Beatrice could be like one of these. Further, one might argue against the concern about orthodoxy that there is an account of the Incarnation that justifies the use of certain images of God against iconoclastic attacks. And the Trinity implies that there is an image within God himself, the Son in the Father, as John of Damascus pointed out during the Byzantine controversy over iconoclasm. Dante would have subscribed to all of these traditional defenses of images. But I wish to claim something further, because this is not simply an issue about Christian theology. As we see from the Platonic context with which we began, at stake in Dante is a general controversy about the significance of the imagination as such.

I suggest that what lies behind the self-censorship of the counterreformation edition of the *Vita Nuova* is a justifiable but misplaced fear, similar to the fear that makes readers rightly careful about how we understand idolatry in the *Phaedrus*. The worry is that if our imagination shapes the object we encounter, that means it cannot offer us access to God. Justly, we do not want to look through our distorting glass that determines how the divine appears to us. But we need to permit the imagination to direct our feet on the path that leads toward the vision of the forms or of God without polluting its clarity. We must manage the rhetoric we use with ourselves, even if we cannot let the rhetoric of the imagination obscure a final vision.

Dante offers a suggestion about how our imagination guides our feet on the path in the *Purgatorio*. In canto 18, Virgil tells Dante that it is our “collecting and winnowing” of our loves that make us good or evil, though these loves all come from without us (18.64–66). Because of our deliberation about them, we have full responsibility for these loves (61–63). We sense or think objects in the world and express them within ourselves such that they make the soul turn to them (22–27). When the soul inclines to them it is love, Virgil says.<sup>2</sup> How do we have responsibility for our loves if our loves come from without? This is the core of what Virgil wants to explain. Dante says to Virgil: “If love is from the outside offered to us, and if the soul advances on no other foot than that, then it is not its merit that it goes straight or crooked” (43–45). Virgil’s answer was that our counsel determines which desires are allowed to pass through the “threshold of assent” (61–66). But this answer becomes puzzling, because in that same canto, Dante and Virgil encounter the souls of the lukewarm, whose punishment is to be “ridden by justice” like horses, and who are described as running about like mad bacchants (91–96). On the face of it, they are hardly an image of carefully guarding the will’s threshold. In fact, the image suggests that too much caution is exactly what held back the lukewarm in their lives. They should have let more love pass through the threshold than they did. A fuller answer comes in the next canto, 19, in which Dante dreams of a Siren. The dream is an allegory very precisely calibrated to Virgil’s account in 18, and it shows us what guarding the threshold means. In the dream, with the help of Virgil and an unnamed woman who represents philosophy or reason, Dante will fight off the Siren, who represents an obsession with temporal goods. His dream clarifies Virgil’s more abstract speech from the previous canto. Dante’s imagination, while misrepresenting a true being to his soul, creates the Siren of excessive desire for temporal goods. Once he

his imagination has created her, she attempts to overpower the threshold of his will. As readers have emphasized, it is Dante's gaze that makes her seem beautiful, colors her features, and turns her stutter into a hypnotic song (see Mazzotta 140–41). He beautifies her as one would an idol. So, guarding the threshold from a sinful desire can be the end result of a two-step process. First, the imagination may distort the true object and create a desire that tries to get in. Second, we can perhaps resist what our imagination has shaped with the help of reason and philosophy. Hence we are doubly responsible for our loves. We may stop them or not stop them from entering the threshold of our will, but we are also responsible in that our imagination builds them up in the first place.

Beatrice will claim later on in the *Purgatorio* that Dante made a similar mistake in his life after she died. She tells Dante that when her body died, he should have found her to be only more beautiful (30.127–29). And it should have revealed to him the deception of earthly things that have a merely mortal beauty, no matter how impressive (31.49–54). In this sense, there is no idolatry, no gussying up of a statue of Beatrice's flesh for Dante. The death of Beatrice's beautiful flesh should have led him to see that all other earthly things, which were all less beautiful than she was, would be only less worth pursuing. Beatrice says, "When from flesh to spirit I had risen, and beauty and virtue had grown in me, I was to him less dear and less welcome; and he turned his steps to the untrue way, following false images of good, that render no promise entire" (30.127–32). While Dante should have seen how other earthly things never make good on their promise, instead he made them seem more beautiful than they really were. In the following canto he confesses: "Present things with their false pleasure turned my steps such that your face was hidden" (31.34–7). Note that the very same phrase about turning his "feet" is used in the two passages just cited from both cantos 30 and 31. The same image was used in the passage cited earlier in canto 18 (lines 43–45). It is his decision to turn his feet that is at stake in his imaginative work. The "promise" of earthly things is only the future reference that his mind gives to them, not something they have on their own. His imagination in these cases was to be suppressed. But at the same time, whatever strength Beatrice ever has in his mind comes through the force that his imagination gave her. After her death she prays to God to send Dante visions and dreams. The imagination that we just saw as his responsibility in canto 19 is also God's. But even if God sends visions down through Beatrice, these visions are ineffective without his own imaginative effort. This is the same case as the Siren, but in reverse. While the Siren represents the imagination making the terrestrial excessively beautiful, the trouble Dante has after Beatrice's death also makes the divine vision insufficiently beautiful. For years, the prayers that Beatrice obtains for Dante are all in vain. And in the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice is always given her power by Dante's imagination (VN I.1). While some readers have argued that our feet in these passages are the will and the intelligence, they are guided by our imagination and may in fact be better understood as representing the faculties described by Virgil in canto 18. The imagination is our feet taking us up the straight way or down some crooked way. Such inspiration of love through the imagination is never really passive, nor does our involvement in it necessarily separate us from God but must be part of the ascent.

But now we must to some extent contradict what we have just said. For Dante the imagination can lead toward God, but only in a very particular sense. The imagination must ultimately take us beyond all earthly things, and then it must fail. We must use our imagination to get to the eternal things for which there is no imagination. We must also ultimately leave Beatrice behind. There is no ambiguity of idolatry in the final vision of God in *Paradiso* 33. The imagination is explicitly absent, because the final vision is a moment of knowledge wholly without representation. In the end, the only image of God in *Paradiso* 33 is the reformed soul of Dante himself. Dante's desire and will are described as like a wheel that moves "equally" (33.144), just as the circling Holy Spirit appears to reflect the circling of the Father in the Son "equally" (120). Hence Dante himself finally "measures" the circle (134) in the closing lines of the poem.

## Notes

1. Beatrice literally means "she who makes blessed."
2. The doctrine on counsel and consent that Dante is following here is that of *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 14–15. Aquinas in turn takes it from Augustine's account of the imagination in *On the Trinity* books XI–XII.

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# Education as Intellectual Healing: Pedagogical Dimensions of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*

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“The soul never thinks without an image.” So says Aristotle in his *De anima* (431a16–17 [trans. Sachs]; cf. 432a8–9). And even if one might raise doubts regarding this claim, it would be hard to maintain that images do not at least aid or enhance human thought. When it comes to thinking about education, therefore, it is unsurprising that philosophers construct images for us to contemplate so that we may gain insight into the nature of human education. Indeed, the two images of education constructed by Plato in the middle books of the *Republic* are quite familiar to us: his geometrical image, that is, the divided line, which is a seemingly static image that comes to life in his more famous image, the image of the cave. “See human beings as though they were in an underground cavelike dwelling,” Socrates invites us. “They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds, so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them” (VII, 514a [trans. Bloom]). Such is the condition of these “prisoners,” as Socrates calls them. Glaucon, to whom Socrates is speaking, remarks, “It is a strange image . . . and strange prisoners you’re telling of,” to which Socrates replies, somewhat hauntingly, “They are like us” (514b). Driven by the Delphic imperative—“Know thyself”—philosophers are drawn to construct images of education, for such images in turn reflect the human soul.

Now, jump forward from Plato’s pagan Athens to sixth-century Christian Italy. Imagine a man there alone in a prison cell. His name is Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius—known to us now as simply “Boethius.” He is a Christian of immense

learning. As a young man his dream, perhaps hubristic, was to translate the complete works of Plato and Aristotle into Latin and comment on them as well, with a view to keeping Greek wisdom alive beyond the lifespan of a dying Roman empire. In later years he set aside this scholarly dream in order to enter political service. Soon he discovered, however, that Plato's philosopher-king may in fact reside only in a city in speech, a city constructed in the heavens. Boethius's uprightness in the political sphere made enemies for him, enemies whose underhandedness led to his imprisonment and a death sentence.

While awaiting his death, this depressed prisoner decides to escape, in a manner of speaking, by returning to the love of his youth, *Philosophia*, who appears to him in his cell in the form of a great lady. Boethius records this imaginative encounter in his work called *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in which author Boethius depicts his re-education in and by *Philosophia* as he awaits his execution.

The imagery in the *Consolation*, however, does not involve "an underground cavelike dwelling" out of which a prisoner climbs toward sunlight. No, Boethius, wounded in soul, constructs for us a different image of education; namely, education as a process of healing and *Philosophia* as both physician and nurse. In fact, when the prisoner Boethius finally recognizes the face of *Philosophia*, he sees it as the face of his *medicans*, his healer or doctor, as well as of his *nutrix*, his nurse or nourisher (I, 3.1–4). This medical motif is first introduced in the *Consolation* by *Philosophia* herself. For prior to Boethius's recognition of her, she dismisses the poetic Muses who are inspiring Boethius to write self-pitying dirges. "It is time for medicine," she says, "rather than complaint" (I, 2.1). Within the confines of his cell, then, Boethius's education is imaged as a process of intellectual healing and recovery.

Once Boethius acknowledges *Philosophia* as his physician, she gets right to work, encouraging him to share his pain with her so that she can carry out the first step of her medical art: diagnosis. Following doctor's orders, Boethius uncovers his wound by recounting the history of injustices he has suffered. After listening to his spirited narrative, *Philosophia* probes more aggressively, interrogating Boethius about the nature of man, God, and the purpose of things. In the midst of this exchange, Boethius asserts that he is a "rational, mortal animal, and nothing more" (I, 6.34–35), and in this assertion *Philosophia* discovers the key to her final diagnosis. "I now know . . . the greatest cause of your sickness," she says. "You have ceased to recognize what you yourself are" (I, 6.36–38).

Forgetfulness of one's true self is no trivial illness; hence a quick cure is not immediately available. Instead, *Philosophia* will treat Boethius in stages, much as a physician treats a patient with a deep wound. These stages of treatment allow us to demarcate the pedagogical dimensions of the *Consolation*. Indeed, *Philosophia* herself alerts the reader to her gradated approach to Boethius's healing when she says this to him:

Because a great tumult of emotions broods over you and because pain, anger, and grief draw you apart in diverse ways, you are now of such a mind that stronger remedies do not yet touch you. And so we will use gentler remedies for a short while, so that those things that have become hardened into a tumor while these troubles were affecting you may by a more coaxing touch become softened to receive the power of

sharper medicine. (I, 5.36–39; cf. I, 6.53–59)

From hints in the text provided by Boethius the author, it becomes evident that *Philosophia* delays her use of “stronger remedies” or “sharper medicine” until Book III, when she leads Boethius to see what he really is, namely, *not merely* a rational, mortal animal and nothing more, *but also*—and more profoundly—a being who is potentially divine by participation. At that point, moreover, these sharper medicines begin to heal Boethius to such an extent that in the later books he is capable of listening to complicated philosophical discourses concerning true happiness, fate, providence, the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and free will, and the nature of God himself. By the end of the work, therefore, Boethius the prisoner appears to have attained a clean bill of intellectual health—and, from the Christian perspective in which Boethius shared, one might say that, his nature now having been restored, grace is able to presuppose and perfect it.

For those who read the *Consolation* with students, therefore, it is illuminating to attend closely to the medical imagery that peppers and structures the work. Attention to such imagery allows a reader to see not only how Boethius the prisoner progresses philosophically, but also how education, conceived of as a process of healing, can be customized to one’s own intellectual woundedness. In other words, when picking up the *Consolation*, a reader may find himself or herself within the work at this or that stage and, therefore, in need of this or that medicine. Subsequent readings of the *Consolation*, moreover, may reveal that the reader has progressed or digressed in this or that way. By seeing the image of healing that permeates Boethius’s work, therefore, the *Consolation* can become a salve for a variety of readers or for a single reader at different points of his or her life; for by encountering *Philosophia* with Boethius, readers are enabled to diagnose the condition of their intellectual well-being and profit from the medicine that *Philosophia* prescribes.

As noted above, *Philosophia* administers her sharper medicines beginning in Book III of the *Consolation*. Prior to this, therefore, especially in Book II, she applies what she calls “gentler remedies.” This stage of *Philosophia*’s treatment of Boethius is often overlooked; for, in comparison to the more profound philosophical matters discussed in the later books, these earlier discussions may appear superficial. But, as the physician *Philosophia* indicates in the passage just read, Boethius has to be disposed by such gentler remedies before receiving sharper medicine—as do all of us at many points in our lives, not to mention students who often read this book during their college years. What, then, are these gentler remedies? In medical terms, they amount to anesthesia; for in Book II *Philosophia* numbs Boethius to the apparent goods and evils of fortune, the goods and evils that the world offers, so that thereafter she can penetrate his soul more deeply and remove the cause of its infection. In philosophical terms, these gentler remedies amount to persuading Boethius toward a form of Stoicism, that is, the limited worldview that arises within the horizon of understanding the human being as “a rational, mortal animal and nothing more.” Indeed, despite acknowledging the ultimate inadequacy of Stoicism earlier in Book I (3.20–25), *Philosophia* nonetheless employs a mitigated form of it as a stage in her treatment of Boethius, because thereby he can be anesthetized for her more invasive surgery.

In what does this education toward a Stoic worldview in Book II consist? In

Book II, *Philosophia* deals with Boethius primarily on the level of the imagination rather than reason or intellect. In other words, *Philosophia* sees the need to educate Boethius with regard to those objects of fortune, those worldly goods and evils, that appear to Boethius and that he *imagines* to be genuine goods and evils, things that can make him truly happy or unhappy. *Philosophia* coaxes Boethius to become Stoical with regard to such objects of fortune, and the subsequent books of the *Consolation* suggest that Boethius's new, neutralized stance toward the things of fortune primes him for a deeper philosophical education. Thereby Boethius the author suggests to the reader that it is only after being anesthetized to worldly goods and evils, after becoming numb to their attractions and distractions, that education—and philosophical education in particular—can take place. What is required, in other words, is a purification of the imagination, one effected, broadly speaking, by an ascetic attitude toward what the world has to offer—a Lent, as it were, of the imagination—which allows our intelligence to be struck more deeply by the otherness and objectivity of the persons and things that surround us.

To be sure, passing through such a stage is not pleasant; in fact, it may be downright painful. It is painful to relinquish the illusions of worldly success or failure that we may hold on to so dearly as our own and even as what defines us. For to relinquish such illusions often amounts to experiencing a broken heart. And the very pain of broken-heartedness may cause us to doubt whether what Boethius suggests in the *Consolation* is true; namely, that we must take up a Stoical outlook, that we must experience broken-heartedness with respect to worldly goods and evils, as a necessary stage in our overall education—that is, intellectual healing—as human beings. Personally, I am inclined to think that Boethius is right on this score. He is right, I would argue, because it is only after we are anesthetized to the things of fortune, to worldly goods and evils, that we can achieve an intellectual apprehension of the diffusive goodness of being, the gift of reality—the sort of apprehension that stimulates wonder appropriately and initiates genuine philosophical inquiry. If nothing else, then, perhaps one should learn from Boethius's *Consolation* just how difficult it is to initiate genuine philosophical inquiry, in ourselves as well as in students. This is because it is difficult to be struck with wonder at what is objectively other, given how wrapped up we tend to be in ourselves and the imagined value we grant to the things of fortune.

More would have to be said here to show just how artfully and prudently *Philosophia* administers the gentler remedies of Stoicism to Boethius in such a way as to keep him from remaining there—because, as *Philosophia* sees it, Stoicism as a philosophical outlook is by no means desirable as an ultimate end, but only as a means, even if a necessary one. In the *Consolation*, therefore, *Philosophia*'s use of Stoicism in Boethius's path to recovery suggests that broken-heartedness in relation to the world is a precondition for experiencing genuine wonder. And certainly in the case of the imprisoned Boethius, this seems true. Moreover, if as a Christian believer Boethius also held firmly that the Lord does not spurn the brokenhearted, as he was told by the psalmist, then apparently he learned as well that neither does *Philosophia*.

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# **How Do We Best Educate for Professions?**



# Plato's *Laches* and the Purposes of Professional Education

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Plato's *Laches* raises the question: "How best to educate the youth for leadership?" The question was not asked in the abstract; it was a response to a growing crisis in Athenian democracy. Athenian imperialism against formerly autonomous allies, pandering populism under Pericles and subsequently by the demagogue Cleon, and the religious and ethical skepticism of Sophists like Protagoras had exacerbated the opportunistic individualism (*polypragmosyne*) that was an Athenian hallmark. By 431 BCE and the Spartan-led revolt against the Athenian Empire, the civic virtues that had made the Athenians the saviors of Greece at Marathon in 490 BCE were much decayed. Jacob Howland describes the political atmosphere as "post-traditional" and notes that "Athenians' commitment to traditional conceptions of virtue had eroded markedly by the late fifth century" (55). As Socrates puts it to Protagoras (in the Platonic dialogue of that name), "the wisest and best of our countrymen are unable to hand on to others the virtue which they possess. Pericles, for instance, the father of these two boys, gave them the best education in everything that depends on teaching, but in his own special kind of wisdom he neither trains them himself nor hands them over to any other instructor; they simply browse around on their own like sacred cattle, on the chance of picking up virtue automatically" (319e–320a).

Set dramatically sometime around 420 BCE, the *Laches* opens on a scene of instruction. Two fathers and their two adolescent sons have just witnessed the demonstration of a new-fangled training in *hoplomachia*, a kind of manual-at-arms or "shadow boxing" for hoplites (the citizen-soldiers affluent enough to purchase armor, who made up the famous phalanx formation that had defeated the much more

numerous Persians at Marathon). They have been accompanied to this promotional display by two politically influential Athenian generals, Laches and Nicias, and they now ask these military experts for advice. They explain that they themselves have not played the significant civic roles their own fathers had played—and they are worried that their sons will grow up as inconsequential as they have. Someone had recommended that they should train their sons in *hoplomachia*, this art of fighting in armor. Will this or some other pursuit be most improving for them?

Laches, an old-style infantry man, urges that they include Socrates in the discussion. He is familiar with Socrates from the battlefield. They were companions on foot in the retreat from Delium, a few years before. Laches praises Socrates, a hoplite; if others had been like him, there would have been no defeat, he says. Nicias, more sophisticated intellectually and familiar with Socrates' confounding question and answer rhetoric, concurs. Socrates has recently recommended Damon, the great confidant and advisor to Pericles, as a teacher for Nicias's son. Lysimachus, too, is pleased; once introduced, he recognizes Socrates as the son of an old friend of his. The stage is set for a revealing exchange between worthy men on the topic of "courage." We have something important to learn from the *Laches*, not least Plato's proleptic allusion to Nicias' badly mistaken courage in the rout at Syracuse in 413.

We are to imagine Socrates in this dialogue as perhaps fifty years old. He has practiced his prophetic cross-examination of men's souls for more than a decade at this point, becoming well known as an intellectual provocateur. Aristophanes' comic satire of him as a Sophist, *The Clouds*, was produced in 423. Socrates' calling—in the early 430s—to this Apollonian/Delphic mission of cross-examination roughly coincides with the political fall from grace and subsequent death of Pericles in the great plague of the first year of the Peloponnesian War. Athens' Golden Age had come to a disastrous end. Socrates thinks he knows why: ethical ignorance and moral hubris. Is *hoplomachia*—or training in any other art, craft, or profession—a remedy for this loss of character? In a moment, we will raise an analogous question for contemporary professional education in law, medicine, accounting, engineering, architecture, and the professions in general.

The generals disagree in their answers to Lysimachus. Laches notes that the Spartans, the best hand-to-hand fighters in Greece, have no interest in this training. He warns that overconfidence in these skills may tempt a warrior who is less than brave to take risks that will reveal his defect. Nicias, on the other hand, thinks it is good exercise and its possessor will have "a more impressive appearance at the right time" (182c). Lysimachus appeals to Socrates to break the tie. Instead, Socrates proposes that they examine the virtue that this training would be supposed to develop: "courage."

The first point—and it's huge—is that the conversation should be about ends rather than means. In the jargon of our own time, it should be about outcomes, not inputs. Contemporary professional education tends toward *hoplomachia*, a wisdom about means, not ends. It is a telling mark that medical ethics is the most despised course taken by medical students (as being "useless"). It is a telling mark that law students' disappointed cynicism is a product of their first-year courses and the insistence on taking either of opposing sides. It is telling that engineers' judgments

of safety will be routinely subordinate to bottom-line values, whether bureaucratic, economic, or political. As I argue below, we are facing our own crises of character in the professions and, consequently, in our conception of the proper education for the professions. We are sophisticated about means and diffident about ends.

Predictably in the dialogue, Laches characterizes the virtue of courage as “remain[ing] at your post and fight[ing] against the enemy” (190e). Socrates soon has him agreeing that the desired end of any instruction cannot simply be a repertoire of behaviors. There is courage in facing pain (and pleasure) or sickness or poverty. Laches says that their common character is “a kind of endurance of the soul” (192c). This is what Aristotle will call a *hexis* or an active taking hold of our feelings and dispositions, in this case of the feelings of fear and the disposition to fight or flee. Courage is a deliberately chosen and worked-at virtue of character. It cannot be inculcated passively. The desire to find it, pursue it, and form oneself for it is primary. A great deal of Plato's *Republic* explores the early experiences that can arouse this desire for excellence and the civic good.

This desire to seek the good has become attenuated in the professions in our own day. Contemporary critics of professional education, such as William Sullivan, former Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, point out that moving the preparation for the professions into the academy at the turn of the twentieth century gave needed emphasis to the cognitive dimension of professional practice (what Sullivan calls the “apprenticeship of the head”). At the same time, this positivist turn (and the shift to intellectual status within the academy) demoted the clinical aspects of professional learning, where the practical skills (“apprenticeship of the hand”) and the civic values of the profession (“apprenticeship of the heart”) were modeled and encouraged. While the importance of clinical practice has been partially rehabilitated in professional education over the past three decades, the same cannot be said for motivating the intrinsic civic goods that are the justification of the professions and their privileged economic status. Sullivan, for one, argues that adequate professional preparation must “mean the capacity to think as a citizen, to judge from the standpoint of social justice and the public welfare. Without this ability, even good intentions may not prevent a slide into dereliction of duty, as accounting's problems demonstrate. This means that professional judgment has to be open to the expanding horizon typically associated with education in the liberal arts” (113; see also Sullivan, *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America*). Without this liberalizing motivation, market forces and bureaucratic rules will increasingly reduce professionals to technicians for hire. We face our own deep crisis of character—and the universities' disinterested pursuit of truth and their monopoly on professional education are a significant part of the problem. As William May observes, “In effect, the fashionable objectivism of the modern positivist university prepared for an energetic, but morally uncriticized, careerism on the part of students” (118; see also May, *Beleaguered Rulers: The Public Obligation of the Professional*).

But the *Laches* takes this argument one step further, a step beyond Sullivan or May, a step that may remain a humbling ideal for us. Socrates suggests that not all endurance is courage, only *wise* endurance. Yet “wisdom” as expertise replaces cour-

age with confidence. The seasoned infantryman with his comrades at arms calculates his advantages and faces battle with confidence. Laches agrees that the citizen soldier who, without this expertise, stays at his post is more courageous—we are meant to think of Socrates at Delium. Doesn't this make courage a kind of foolish endurance? Laches is confounded. Nicias undertakes to distinguish the kind of wisdom meant by Socrates, the kind of wisdom we would hope for in our leaders in law, medicine, engineering, accounting—and politics.

The wisdom of a doctor as doctor, as medical expert, extends only to the dangers of disease. But whether health or illness is more terrible to a man? "Might not many a man better never get up from a sickbed?" asks Nicias (195d). The wisdom required by true courage is to know what is rightly to be feared, death or life, disgrace or death? The *hexis* that is courage must become philosophical in its examination of its leading values. The point has a concrete reference. Nicias, commander against his will of the Sicilian Expedition in 413, suffered disaster almost immediately. He could still have escaped by ship with most of his army. But, as Plutarch tells us, he was unwilling to retreat and face political disgrace in Athens and preferred a battlefield death and loss of his men, conventional martial courage that masked political cowardice and self-betrayal. It is the inverse of Socrates' death, where disgrace was irrelevant and honoring the patronymic laws paramount, even at the risk of Socrates and his friends being charged with cowardice for allowing this miscarriage of justice to go forward.

In the dialogue, however, Nicias and Socrates reach a typical Socratic *aporia* or impasse. The wisdom that makes for the endurance that is courage seems as if it is the wisdom required by the whole of virtue, a knowing of all that is truly good and truly evil—but courage, they had agreed, is only part of virtue! Laches, unafraid to admit that he does not know what he should know, recommends that the fathers take Socrates as their adviser. Socrates agrees: "Let us then, regardless of what may be said of us, concern ourselves both with our own education and that of the youths, together" (201b). They will start tomorrow at dawn, displaying the motivation for excellence that must be part of acquiring virtue. *And, thus, mere instruction becomes dialectical inquiry.*

Must the professions become genuinely philosophical? (See Brown, "Architectural Education in the University: Crises of Purpose" for a concrete sketch of what this might mean for architectural education.) In times of rapid political, social, and intellectual change, self-examination becomes our only assurance of personal and professional integrity. For visionary leadership in difficult times, we need not only philosopher kings, but also philosophical doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects, and engineers who seek to know themselves in relation to the civic goods they serve. As Howland argues, "Perhaps it is not too misleading to say that in the post-traditional [post-modern?] situation, the health of the polis seems to depend on the possibility of philosophic education" (55). The professions in our day are still protected precincts from within which this ideal of wisdom can at least be glimpsed. Idealism and pragmatism both urge an increased liberalization of professional education. Training in *hoplomachia* is not enough!

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# Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and Training for Life

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The 2014 ACTC Conference theme challenged participants to consider the value of the liberal arts. The theme raised questions of considerable importance for the lives of our students. Indeed, these inquiries also provoked painstaking reflection by the conference participants. Excerpts from the ACTC Conference announcement included the following:

Do we know when and where being articulate, being literate, being competently conversant . . . made a difference in personal, corporate, or public decisions? We tend to think that financial corporations and their investors would be better off if they had a course in ethics, but do we have a sense of when liberal arts education, its ideas, and the core texts drawn from a range of disciplines—not only ethics—have or could impact economic and financial decisions? A humanistic, liberal arts education will enhance careers in any area, we say. But do we have personal stories or data that show these enhancements? . . . Can we imagine or articulate whether a core text education is in fact of benefit in that arena? What, in short, do we hope to accomplish for our students in whatever career choices they make? (*ACTC Twentieth Annual Conference Bulletin 1*)

One answer is a resounding “Yes” to the myriad questions posed in this conference announcement. But my answer, with the help of Xenophon, is that while these remain significant questions, there may be others of equal or greater value. In an age when workers from warehouses to factories to coffeehouses to universities are increasingly asked to produce more with less—and many people feel robbed of their humanity by their jobs—perhaps the inquiry ought to be: Of what use are the liberal

arts if they have not, at minimum, prepared me to live? If the liberal arts have utility only insofar as they make me a better *homo economicus*, then why ought I to study them at all? Why not acquire sufficient *techne* and move on to a career? Since the conference theme promotes discussion surrounding the value of a liberal arts education, it might prove salutary to inquire what the liberal arts contribute to our lives as both human and economic beings.

The specific panel on which I participated investigated distinctions between leisure and greed. There are several intertwined questions to ask, but perhaps none as important as this: Is there a point at which a compulsion to work—even with good intentions—so interferes with our living that we become useless? Can we rob ourselves of our humanity in the process of making it better? This paper enlists the help of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* as an answer. At one level the text demonstrates how to be a competent *homo economicus*. At another level, the text questions our attachment to the fruits of our labor as self-defining and fulfilling of our humanity. It furnishes two examples of ways to live.

In terms of suggesting how to be a competent *homo economicus*, the last two-thirds of the *Oeconomicus* find Ischomachus discussing with Socrates the principles of estate management. The details from the Ischomachean perspective read as if they were lifted from a textbook of modern management. In this sense the liberal arts contribute vital insights into the conference themes.

Ischomachus's advice included inter alia: (1) maintaining good organizational order [8.10–17, 9.2–5]; (2) sustaining a lean supply chain [9.15–17, 11.16–18, 14.2, 17.10–12, 20.20–29]; (3) managing employees with reward systems built in as incentives for desired outcomes [9.11–13, 12.6–16, 13.6–12, 14.4–10]; (4) careful inventory and arrangement of work-related and household tools and utensils [8.18–23, 9.6–10]; (5) scrupulous attention to training employees/slaves [12.4–14] and even his wife [7.5–10.13]; (6) concern for employee fitness and health, including his own [7.32, 10.9–11, 11.12–18]; (7) scrutiny of the business environment, which in the case of Ischomachus meant studying the surrounding fields to understand what agricultural products would grow most easily [16.1–5]; (8) paying attention to business cycles, which meant agricultural seasons [16.10–17.15]; (9) maintenance of the means of productivity [8.10–23, 9.7–10, 9.17]; and (10) learning all related activities to operate one's business [Xenophon 17–21]. All of these skills to varying degrees implied a philosophical mind. One must learn, for example, to categorize, and this in turn requires learning to what category each thing belongs. In this sense, Xenophon—like Plato—remained far more optimistic about the ability of women than did many of their contemporaries. A philosophical mind draws upon the liberal arts, and people (in ancient Greece and the modern world alike) required a philosophical mind for the activities of estate management.

At another level, a discordant note quickly surfaces within the text. I maintain that the discordant note is the real theme of the book. It might help to recall that the text begins with Socrates and Kritoboulos discussing *oikonomia*, or “estate management.” Xenophon's Socrates elicits from Kritoboulos the following: that what is profitable is wealth and what is harmful is the opposite (1.7–9). For him, wealth and happiness remain nearly synonymous (Strauss 98). Kritoboulos further observed that

there are some people whose energy is sapped by bad things and that some people desire to work but exhaust their estates and encounter difficulties (1.21). Socrates demurred, pointing out that these free men are actually slaves serving demanding masters: "Some are in bondage to gluttony, some to lecherous desires, some to drink, and some to foolish and costly ambitions" (1.22). Socrates exhorted his interlocutor: "We must fight for our freedom against these tyrants of desire as persistently as if they were armed men trying to enslave us. . . . Such mistresses as these never cease to plague humans in body and soul" (1.22–23).

Kritoboulos rejects what we might call a "blame the victim" mentality. He has worked diligently, but it seemed to him as if he has not profited. "I have examined such passions as these," he protests, "and . . . I think I have them fairly under control" (2.1). He thereby returns the challenge to Socrates. Kritoboulos sounds remarkably modern!

Socrates responds not with defensiveness but with a genuine rebuke. Socrates insists that he possesses virtually no property, yet his resources sustain him. Kritoboulos' property might fetch 100 times the value of Socrates' possessions, yet Kritoboulos remains in far greater danger of poverty (2.4). The latter's expenses are so vast as to lead Socrates to pity him. Socrates clinches the argument by pointing out that should he encounter hard times, his friends would need to contribute little to bail him out. Kritoboulos' friends, on the other hand, look to Kritoboulos for bailouts (2.7–9). Kritoboulos reluctantly and sadly agrees, but he wants to know why some people seem to succeed and others do not (6.11). In order to respond to this challenge and inquiry, Xenophon relates a conversation Socrates held with a true gentleman, Ischomachus. For the reasons given above, Ischomachus seems to have truly mastered the modern liberal arts as well as modern management techniques. Xenophon exhibited wisdom in using Ischomachus as an interlocutor because the latter clearly demonstrated in contrast to Kritoboulos that the mind has a role in transforming what is known. Unlike Kritoboulos, Ischomachus has at least thought about estate management. This alone is a gentle corrective because it suggests, in the words of Gabriel Danzig, that the "*Oeconomicus* is really an ethical dialogue disguised as an economic treatise" (61).

Socrates' encounter with Ischomachus introduces a theme so clever that it is easy to overlook. Socrates registers his surprise at seeing the "gentleman" (κάλος καγαθος), Ischomachus, sitting still because Socrates never sees him at idle leisure (7. 1–2). Ischomachus agrees, noting that he was waiting for someone who had not yet appeared. No idle squanderer of time, Ischomachus begins to respond to Socrates' inquiries regarding estate management. Through a series of questions and answers, Socrates argues that neither money nor its absence makes one a good or bad person. A prize horse, for example, owns nothing, and yet it is a superior exemplar of the virtues pertaining to horses (11.4). In fact, Socrates seems the anti-gentleman and an odd choice to conduct a dialogue on *oekonomia*. But that would be missing the point. Xenophon's point was precisely that Socrates was the most successful householder in Athens. Why? Certainly not because of what he owned but precisely because one genuine gauge of wealth is not the amount of property one owns, but rather the surplus of one's income as opposed to expenses over time (Danzig 64).

The most significant moment in the dialogue arrives at the text's midpoint. It is easily missed, and in fact no commentator that I have read has mentioned that this elenchus carried extra importance by its position in the text. Socrates asked Ischomachus to recount his daily vicissitudes. Perhaps ever the perfect gentleman or perhaps taunting Socrates, Ischomachus consented but asked Socrates to correct him if he saw anything amiss in his conduct. Socrates' response both heightened and illustrated the point: "How could I presume to correct a perfect gentleman (*kaloskagathos*) when . . . I am called the most senseless of taunts—a poor beggar?" (11.3). Socrates later requested that Ischomachus assume he was capable of being a "good" man so that he might follow Ischomachus's example and enter a course of virtue, *arête* (11.6). At this, Ischomachus recognized Socrates was joking—or perhaps in Platonic terms being "ironic"—but he proceeded anyway. His program involved wealth by honest means such as hard work, diligence (*Epimeleia* and its derivatives in Greek surface over fifty times in the work), and the sorts of activities established at the start of this paper (Danzig 70–71).

Socrates registered surprise at Ischomachus's desire for wealth: "Do you really want to be rich and to have much along with considerable trouble to take care of it?" (11.9). The reply consisted of the same justifications that I—or any other American citizen—might give for playing the lottery: because I/we could honor the gods, take care of our friends, invest in our community, and engage in other well-intended altruisms. Wealth might enable us to do all kinds of positive things. Socrates calls these intentions "noble," but he also begins hinting at the hidden cost of wealth (11.10).

In contrast to others, Socrates remains truly free. Ischomachus is a slave to his responsibilities, all of which require wealth. He is in constant danger of the litigation troubles that wealthy citizens faced in Athens. Ischomachus recognized this fact (11.21–25). Moreover, Ischomachus must constantly supervise a retinue of workers. There are hints of sporadic problems among his workers, but he scrupulously avoids discussing these. He is so engaged in his pursuits that he has no time for living, let alone leisure. As Danzig observed, "There is something admirable about Ischomachus' devotion to duty, but his lack of leisure was a serious matter. Leisure was not only a valued feature of anyone's life in Athens, it had a particularly high status" (68). In fact, in *poleis* such as Athens, participation in the polis and its democracy demanded leisure. It was the *sine qua non* of responsible civic participation. Socrates possessed it, and Ischomachus did not. By many measures, this made Socrates a better citizen than Ischomachus.

According to Leo Strauss, the distinction between Socrates and Ischomachus can be summed up like so: the perfect gentleman in Socrates' conceptualization is the one who knows through thinking what is pious, impious, noble, base, just and unjust (175). These things take time to explore, I might add. The perfect gentleman as articulated by Ischomachus must be naturally ambitious, but this does not necessarily entail a good nature (176).

Through the help of Xenophon, I have tried to briefly contrast two approaches to life. Ischomachus was not necessarily a bad man, but he was a sad man. Moreover, the readers of Xenophon's work knew that his life ended far less successfully than he had anticipated. His pursuit of wealth, his concern with reputation, his scrupulous

measures to manage his *oikos*, and his willingness to devote nearly his entire life to pursuing these proved less reliable than he had anticipated. He is paradoxically the epitome of what the liberal arts have to offer and simultaneously its antithesis. And, his life's story proved that even something as certain as carefully managed wealth can prove fickle and unreliable. Socrates, who seemingly enjoyed almost every day of his life, had the leisure to ask the right questions and to follow their implications to where they might lead. If the liberal arts cannot help us to ask the right questions, then it seems they might help us pursue unreliable guarantees of security. In the end, these very guarantees might be the things most responsible for stealing our humanity from us.

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# Receiving Inheritance in the *Republic* of Plato and the Book of Job

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Why does Leo Strauss open *Natural Right and History* with two quotations from the Bible, the second of which explains why Jezebel framed Naboth, causing him to be stoned to death and thereby getting his land (which was his inheritance) for her husband, Ahab? Strauss quotes Naboth saying to Ahab (1 Kings 21:3), “The Lord forbid it to me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee” (Strauss x). Had Naboth given up his inheritance, his descendants would have been deprived of it forever.

Two equally cryptic references to inheritance grace Plato’s *Republic* and the Book of Job. At the beginning of the *Republic*, Socrates has come to Polemarchus’s house. Polemarchus’s father, Cephalus, converses with Socrates about old age and justice. Cephalus then has to leave the conversation to conduct a private religious ceremony. He and either Socrates or Polemarchus make a little joke about Polemarchus’s inheriting the conversation. Similarly, the book of Job, in the third sentence from the end, notes that Job divided his inheritance equally among his sons and daughters. It is the only time that inheritance is directly mentioned in that book.<sup>1</sup> What can we learn from these small details?

The beginning of the Book of Job carefully and repeatedly describes a situation that implies that Job, prior to his tribulations, had given his inheritance only to his sons. The implication comes from three statements that Job’s daughters went to their brothers’ houses for dinner. The first such statement is: “His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each on his day; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them” (Job 1:4; all translations here and below are from

*The Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*). The two other statements report that it is during one such feast that all of Job's children are killed when the house they are in collapses (Job 1:13 and 1:18–19). The text implies that only the sons have houses to eat in and therefore that Job has not given the daughters any inheritance.

At the end of the book, Job has ten more children (seven boys and three girls). It seems that Job concludes after his tribulations, after debating his friends and after God speaks with him, that providing an equal inheritance for his sons and daughters would be better than giving it to his sons alone. Therefore the text reports that Job gave his daughters the same inheritance as their brothers: "And in all the land there were no women so fair as Job's daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers. And *after this* Job lived a hundred and forty years" (Job 42:15–16) We also learn from the words "after this" that inheritances were provided by Job well before his death, thereby supporting the implication at the beginning of the book that feasting in only the sons' houses means that only they had received inheritances. Whether or not we can draw the implication that there is a change in Job's method of distributing his estate from the beginning of the book to the end, it does seem clear that the author wants the reader to think about Job's particularly egalitarian approach to inheritance.

Job's estate distribution seems to contradict the implied law of Moses that only sons inherit, a law that Job seemed to be following at the beginning of the book. Job introduces equal treatment of sons and daughters. **<AQ: To whom does Job introduce this equal treatment? The society? Also, assuming readers look at note 1, is the first sentence somewhat superfluous?>** Job may have learned a lesson in equal treatment of children's inheritances from the death of his male and female children followed by the callous remarks of his friends that his children deserved to die (Job 5:4, 8:4, 20:10, 21:19). But Job had already learned about equality before the law prior to his suffering and his conversation with God. We know this because he says at 31:13–15 in explaining why he had treated his servants fairly: "Did not he who made me in the womb make him?" Job's statement is his central reason for equal treatment. It is the same reason as in the American Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal."

Job's reason for equality before the law—that God made everyone—is linked to a reason for equal distribution of his estate: his parentage of the children. He gives only to his children and gives to each of them equally. Perhaps, by having to argue against his friends that there is such a thing as innocent human suffering and more particularly that he was innocent in part because he had treated his servants fairly, Job has reminded himself of reasons he had forgotten. Job argues his view of God's creation of human beings against the view of his friends, who say several times that human beings are vile, especially because they are born from women. One friend says, for example: "How can he who is born of woman be clean? Behold, even the moon is not bright and the stars are not clean in his sight; how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!" (Job 25:4–6, similarly 4:17–19 and 15:14–16). Maybe it is the misogynistic character of this denigration of human life that sparks Job's new estate distribution. In response to his friends' argument, Job responds with details of God's creation of humans; it is a very physical creation but

also includes a spiritual endowment, which is the grant of life, love, and continuing care of the soul.

Didst thou not pour me out like milk  
 and curdle me like cheese?  
 Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh,  
 and knit me together with bones and sinews.  
 Thou has granted me life and steadfast love;  
 and thy care has preserved my spirit. (Job 10:10–12)

In other words, everyone is equal before the law because everyone is created by God and endowed by their creator with life, love and spirit. While Job's friends argue that everyone should be presumed guilty, Job argues the presumption of innocence because of the extraordinary nature of God's creation of each of us.

Just as God's creation of human beings implies equality before the law, Job has seen that parents' making, loving, and caring of their children should be reflected in the inheritance they give them. But just as Job painfully questions the inequality of his suffering, so children require equality in their inheritances as an indication of the equality of their parents' love for them. *The Republic* draws out this implication of inheritance. It is at the heart of the little joke about inheritance.

Socrates has gone to Polemarchus' house at his request. Apparently Cephalus, like Job, had already given some of his property to Polemarchus, which is why he was living at Polemarchus's house. Two of Polemarchus' brothers, **<AQ: Are there other brothers?>** Lysias and Euthydemus, are listening to the conversation when Socrates raises the issue of inheritance by asking Cephalus, "Did you inherit, or did you earn most of what you possess?" (Plato, *Republic* 6:330a). Cephalus answers in detail, saying that inheritance goes from father to son and implying that the inheritance has not yet been fully transmitted. Socrates replies that it seems to him that Cephalus had obtained his wealth through inheritance because he was not overly concerned with money, compared to people who have to earn it. "For just as poets are fond of their poems and fathers of their children, so money-makers too are serious about money—as their own product" (6:330c). Without conceding that he had not worked for his money, Cephalus agrees with Socrates' generalization, implicitly telling his three sons that he loves them.

But then, as Cephalus is leaving to perform his sacrifices, either Polemarchus or Socrates **<AQ: Is it not clear which?>** says something that implies that Polemarchus is the sole inheritor of Cephalus' estate, as well as the conversation with Socrates:

"Well, then," said Cephalus, "I hand down the argument to you, for it's already time for me to look after the sacrifices."

"Am I not the heir of what belongs to you?" said Polemarchus. (7:331d)

Cephalus agrees and laughs. There is a good deal of ambiguity in the exchange, as there is in most humor. It seems odd to regard a conversation about justice as an inheritance. That conversation, as it turns out, evolves into the book we call *The Republic*. Plato has self-consciously labeled his book as an inheritance. But Polemarchus' brothers are not laughing. They have been reminded of another part of the ambiguity: that they have not gotten any of the inheritance that Polemarchus has.

Polemarchus enthusiastically delves into his additional inheritance, the dialogue that emerges as *The Republic*. Many of the others present participate in the subsequent conversation, but Polemarchus' brothers do not. They are uninterested in Socrates' attempt to discover what justice is and whether the best life is the just life. They sit silently and, one imagines, sullenly throughout the rest of the conversation about justice. In the wake of their reminder about not receiving any of their inheritance, they may feel unjustly treated and hence unloved. This reaction seems likely for the following additional reason.

Plato's *Phaedrus* examines a speech by Lysias contending that it is better not to be loved than to be loved and better not to love than to love. Lysias's cynicism about love, Socrates argues, has blinded him to what love entails: the appreciation of beauty, love of truth and, implicitly, care for the poor (249d–250d, 249b, and 233d–e). Socrates therefore prays for Lysias to “turn him toward the love of wisdom, even as his brother Polemarchus has been turned” (502; 257b). This contrast of the brothers implies that Plato has very deliberately depicted Lysias' silence in *The Republic*. He offers an explanation for Lysias' character in the *Phaedrus* with the story in *The Republic*. But by contrasting Polemarchus and Lysias, he has directed us to the *Phaedrus*. There we find an argument for love as well as an explanation about what Plato took into consideration when he wrote.

The remainder of *The Republic* occurs under the cloud of an injustice that has been blithely accepted by everyone who is talking about justice. Lysias is silent. Polemarchus, on the other hand, is clearly engaged in the conversation even when it becomes dominated by Glaucon and Adeimantus. We know this because at the beginning of Book 5, he grabs Adeimantus and says they need to talk more about Socrates' suggestion that the family be destroyed for the sake of equality. The family was the vehicle through which Polemarchus had received his inheritance.

Socrates and Glaucon designed a city that erased inequality with respect to both sons and daughters as well as between all the children of the guardians. Socrates underlined the radical equality of men and women in the proposed city after it had been designed (Plato, *Republic* 7.540.c and 8.543.a–b). The city's design also contained an unspoken but powerful source of equality in inheritance. Because the guardians were to be taken from their mothers at birth and raised so that the parents had no knowledge of who their children were, and because all the guardians lived a non-luxurious life without a way to accumulate wealth, none of the guardians—male or female—would receive any inheritance. In this respect also, they will be equal.

Socrates and Glaucon thus reach a conclusion similar to Job's about the equality of sons and daughters. But the exercise of that conclusion as between the two books is different. Job provides equal and sumptuous inheritance. Socrates and Glaucon deprive everyone of an inheritance. Their solution mimics the situation of Lysias. Perhaps it would have the same cynical result in the character of the guardians. On the other hand, Plato has given his book, the conversation inherited by Polemarchus, as an inheritance to everyone in the world. He has adopted a solution of giving to everyone, rather than the solution of Socrates and Glaucon, which was to deprive everyone.

## Note

1. The law given through Moses describes inheritance law per se at Numbers 27–36, while the allotment of inheritances in the land of Israel is described at Joshua 13–22, and the permanent giving or selling of these inheritances in land is prohibited in Leviticus 25:23–28. Numbers 27:8 and 36 describe a specific problem that assumes that daughters do not inherit (an assumption shared by Deuteronomy 21:16). Job's estate distribution at the end of the book is contrary to this law because he has sons.

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# Leopold's Third Step: A Framework for Teaching His Ethical Consideration of Land Use

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Each spring term when I teach Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and *Essays from Round River*, I frequently hear my students ask questions like "Why should I live a sustainable lifestyle if my roommates don't even bother to recycle their Red Bull cans?" These students conceptualize Leopold's land ethic as a worthwhile moral standard only if most of the populace is also implementing it. Part of the challenge for them may be that they see this author as an outlier from the other course writers, who focus on human-based ethical relationships. Indeed, Columbia University's required-readings syllabus for its core course, Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West, contains no text focused on ethics for land or water or nonhuman living things (Leopold appears on this syllabus as an officially "recommended" reading). Perhaps because Leopold is the only author they read who sets forth the idea that ethics should apply to nonhumans, they apply contingencies to his land ethic that they do not require of human-only ethical frameworks. However, I want students to consider Leopold's conventions in the same way as they might for human-based moral structures.

Regarding his land ethic, I do not think they should be more concerned about what peers are doing about it, since they do not apply the same expectation when analyzing other authors' work about human-centered consciousness. Thus, this paper proposes a pedagogical approach conceptualizing Leopold's land ethic within the context of a single human-centered moral approach, in this case, Kant's duty and

intentionality-oriented framework. Here, I postulate that such an integration might offer students a clearer opportunity to consider living more sustainably regardless of what their peers might be doing.

To make the case for such a theoretical framework, this paper outlines three concepts and their interactive potential. First, it analyzes the significance of the final part of Leopold's three-step approach to ethics. Second, this paper briefly acknowledges current research on students' ambivalence about environmental issues and potential links to the conditional willingness my students exhibited toward Leopold's land ethic. Third, I outline Kant's idea of acting according to duty and intention. Here, I propose a framework that situates Leopold's land ethic as a Kantian duty. Perhaps this connection can challenge students to consider acting according to what they believe ought to happen instead of seeking to create a moral structure based on what their peers are doing.

Leopold defines his land ethic as a new third step in a progression of moral frameworks. He notes that ethical conceptions first developed among individuals and later evolved to include the interactions between an individual and society. Leopold describes this third step of ethical considerations as "dealing with man's relation to land and the animals and plants which grow upon it" (Leopold 238). He refers to this relationship as a "land ethic" and notes it "simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land" (239). Here, his third ethical step expands society's membership. It now includes all living things as well as the things that support life, like water and soil.

Leopold describes this new association through a confluence of citizenship and self-limitation. He says "a land ethic changes the role of *Homo Sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It also implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such" (240). With this explanation, the author lays out two points. First, he attempts to break down the false dichotomy between humans and all other living (and nonliving) things. Here, all living things and their supporting resources are part of one biotic society. Second, he suggests that humans have a civic obligation to interact with the world in this way.

He explains this citizenship dimension as a communal obligation to curtail one's consumption habits. He articulates this duty as "a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence" (238). Thus, adopting a land ethic includes voluntarily capping actions resulting from an unfettered self-interest. Such actions might include purchasing local foods or not automatically buying the latest technological gadget. However, my students' conditionally willing mentality ("I would take action only if other people were taking action") seems a significant impediment to implementing Leopold's land ethic.

Indeed, young people's interest in adopting a land ethic is waning. Longitudinal studies reveal that young Americans' interest in "wanting to take action to help the environment" is dropping at a "steep" rate (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman 12). These studies reveal that current college-age youth's interest in environmental issues is in fact at the lowest recorded levels since the 1940s. While my paper does not attempt to explain such a decline (nor does it argue that attitudinal adjustments could be achieved through the mere proposal of a theoretical framework), it does recom-

mend the potential benefits of teaching Leopold's land ethic as a moral concept unreliant on outcomes and more focused on intentionality. Consider the role of Immanuel Kant's philosophy in this recommended pedagogical framework.

In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant emphasizes that acting by duty may be of the highest worth, regardless of the action's outcome. He writes, "An action from duty has its moral worth *not in the purpose* to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon, and therefore does not depend upon the realization of the object of the action but merely upon the *principle of volition*" (Kant 4:400). Here, Kant suggests that the universality of maxims constructing a sense of duty is the highest worth; the actual fulfillment of the objective is not required.

However, Kant argues that humans never completely act out of a passionless duty-orientation. He says, "We like to flatter ourselves by falsely attributing to ourselves a nobler motive" (Kant 4:407). He asserts that try as we might, we are always acting out of duty to some sort of personal incentive—perhaps as simple as feeling good about adhering to an obligatory code of living. And within such a code may be a way to link Kantian thinking and Leopold's land ethic to form a more functional pedagogical strategy.

After all, adopting a land ethic might seem more palatable to students if it were contextualized as an ethical stance to be adopted for "inner principles of actions" (Kant 4:407), and not as a concept driven by the faulty (and hopeless) requirement that morals are worth adopting only if everyone else is adhering to them. Such an approach to teaching a land ethic might allow students to consider living sustainably as simply a part of their moral code that brings self-satisfaction via the intent of the action itself.

This pedagogical strategy may have significance for instructors who are seeking to teach Leopold (or other environmental authors) grounded more clearly within the context of human-centered moral structures. This approach may provide an opportunity for instructors to challenge students who attach contingencies to his land ethic but do not make similar exceptions for the course's other moral frameworks. Instructors may encourage students to analyze Leopold's ideas as they would the rest of a syllabus dominated by human-centered ethics—as a matter of inner duty and not one reliant on what others are doing.

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# Walden, Nature, Literature, Ecology, and Spirituality

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*Walden: or, Life in the Woods*, a collection of sixteen essays by Henry David Thoreau, is considered a classic. Thoreau lived in Walden from July 1845 to September 1847, writing about Walden's many ecological features in its lakes and woods. The question is, can students of ecology use *Walden* as a study to discover principles of ecology? Ecology is the study of the physical, chemical, and biological environmental factors of a geographical locality. Several factors are measured methodically as they relate to the life of the occupants—in Thoreau's case, the aquatic environment. Most essayists—for that matter, poets and artists—are not given to writing about the environment while keeping ecological concepts in mind. Thoreau's *Walden* is no different. However, *Walden* has a distinction in that it cites references that a student of ecology should come to appreciate coming from a non-ecologist. On the other hand, a non-ecologist can truly discern when an essayist such as Thoreau has an eye for ecological concerns. But Thoreau's writing not only reveals ecological principles; it also leads us to a feeling of the spiritual in nature.

*Ecology* by Cain, Bowman, and Hacker (2014) may be compared with Thoreau's *Walden*. The book describes ecological concepts that an undergraduate student must chew on to get a basic understanding of the environment. Could it be that humanity possesses a spiritual instinct that, if carefully nurtured, will reveal the divine? Although this concept is not explicitly referred to in their text, Cain et al. have a similar purpose in introducing ecology to students. In the study of ecology, the authors recognize earthly matters that are of great concern to humanity. The subtitle of their first chapter, "Deformity and Decline in Amphibian Populations: A Case Study," shows

the impact that humans have on nature, while interconnectedness and the “ethical imperative to protect natural systems” that they point to also pervade Thoreau’s writing in *Walden*. The relevance of ecology to humans is deeply embedded in both Cain et al. and *Walden*.

Thoreau’s *Walden* vividly portrays the physical, chemical, and biological aspects of an environment made up of a lake and its surrounding wooded area. Thoreau’s description of Walden and its beauty, capturing the soul of nature and his thoughts on transcendence, leads one to consider its spiritual dimensions. Thoreau’s thesis was that Walden points beyond the physical to portray the spiritual depths of nature, comparing the inherent quality in human beings that reaches beyond the physical toward the spiritual.

Thoreau gives detailed measurements of Walden Pond, which is, in fact, a lake: “half a mile long, three-fourths of a mile in circumference,” it is 61.5 acres in area. The depth is 40 feet, and the water is so transparent that one can see down to 25 or 30 feet. If a modern-day ecology student were to use a Secchi disc, s/he would say the transparency of the water was 25 to 30 feet. The water is green, but the color also depends on the light. It could appear blue in clear weather and dark slate in stormy weather. Thoreau puts the temperature of the pond at 42°F in the winter, although it is iced over four months of the year. He says that Walden never became warm in the summer on account of its depth, even though it was exposed to the sun. Such details leave the student of ecology asking, “Why?” Of course, one knows that once water is heated up, it releases its energy very slowly. This may have been the case at Walden. The pond must be in a thermocline, it was actually a lake and all one had to do was take the temperature of water at every foot down to the bottom to prove it. Thoreau calls the pond a “perennial spring,” a body of water that flows continuously and is not an intermittent or periodic spring. The lake was not fed with water from any rivers or rivulets. Hence, the resident population of plant and animal life must be landlocked with an ecology their own.

Identifying animals and plants is a significant aspect of ecology. Of the animals in the pond and in the woodland, Thoreau names not a few, which would be the envy of many long-term ecology students today because they would have to be either caught or observed by going on a field trip to be identified—red-spotted newt, American toad, green frog tadpoles, dragonfly, damselfly larvae, winged cat, loon, bay hound, turtle dove, woodchuck . . . The fish he names are perch, shiners, horned pout, roach (even using its scientific name, *Leuciscuspulchellus*), breams, eels, pickerel. Obviously, Thoreau must have caught the fish over the years he spent on this lake. His observation that the “this pond is not very fertile in fish” is astute. Bulrush, lily, and *Potamogetons* are some of the plants mentioned in his account. Day after day, year after year, he searched for the first blooms of more than three hundred plant species. Thoreau observed that when the water was at its height, alders, willows, and maples set down their fibrous roots. These are meticulous details that one cannot help but marvel at.

Thoreau originally considered living in Walden an experiment and ultimately would celebrate it as an experience. *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* is an account of that experience. Walden was his gift of life. The question that arises from it is: Does

mankind possess an inner spiritual instinct that, if carefully nurtured, will reveal the Divine? Cain et al. refer to human activities and their impact on the environment as an experience that should enable us to realize both our responsibilities and that there is a spiritual connection.

The idea that God is in both humanity and nature was very much alive in Thoreau's essays. He felt that if there was something spiritual in both, then Walden appeared to display the connection and thus pointed to the soul of nature. The pond was a mirror of man's soul, as Richard Ruland (1968) put it. **<AQ: Can you use Ruland's exact words here in quotes, or simply quote the opening clause in the sentence if it is a direct quote?>** It is mystical. Understanding and appreciating not only the diversity and complexity in nature but also the great laws and rules that regulate life and the great beauty in nature, albeit put in scientific language, is for the ecologist and non-ecologist alike.

Although Cain et al. (2014) do not speak of spirituality directly, their references to humanity's impact on planet Earth awaken the human conscience. The last chapter of *Ecology*, "Global Ecology," shows how increases in carbon emissions, nitrogen, phosphorous, and sulfur levels resulting from anthropogenic activity affect our natural world. Cain et al. want ecologists to reach into the soul of the environment by the examples they cite.

The account of seasonal activity in *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* describes periods of awakening of natural life, of renewal, of purification, which are reflections of spiritual virtue. In Thoreau's description of Walden water, one can feel the pulse of spiritual forces that link humans to their Maker. Thoreau makes a point to compare the spiritual value of his Walden with nearby Flint Pond, which is worshipped under the \$ sign and defiles the purity of the surroundings. Is this not what Cain et al. want us to appreciate when they take us on field trips to demonstrate, for example, what pesticides do to the tadpoles? Do Cain et al. want man to reach into the soul of the environment—or his own—by the examples that they cite? **<AQ: Not clear what you mean by this sentence. Reach into the soul in a good way or a bad way?>**

Thoreau creates an animal cosmos that dramatizes his transcendental vision of the divinity of nature. By observing nature closely and using methodologies that are used in science, it is possible to see beyond the obvious. Ecology also goes beyond studying set principles and looks at the soul of nature. In writing *Ecology*, authors Michael Cain, William Bowman, and Sally Hacker lead us into that thought. They write about their subject to project fundamental principles, to show concern, and to bring an awareness about the environment that Henry David Thoreau vividly described in *Walden: or, Life in the Woods*. In pointing to man's economic activities in sites around the pond, Thoreau gives us an idea of the desecration that could take place. However, in terms of magnitude, the threat pales in comparison to some of mankind's present-day proclivities.

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# Listening in and to Time with Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness*

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Opening the elegant world of traditional Japanese *gagaku* court music and dance and the *shakuhachi* Zen flute repertoire for students in a Traditions in World Music class presents challenges. Offered at the freshman level, the class fulfills three of the core liberal arts course-hour requirements at my university and introduces non-music majors to non-Western music and cultural traditions. In addition, the class must introduce aspects of music common to all cultures, providing cultural contexts of music-making traditions around the world. To accomplish these goals, I introduce my students to modes of thinking and listening not primarily their own. Because our popular music culture tends to discourage contemplation, deep listening, attentiveness, and thoughtful responses to beauty, my approach to the course gives students opportunities to develop their capacities to listen deeply and, even more importantly, to think about listening.

*Listening* means being able to not only to hear, but to attend, contemplate, analyze, and respond intellectually and emotionally. Certainly, presenting strategies for students to develop listening skills by means of listening assignments that require them to respond to recorded or live performances is imperative and is to be expected. However, by assigning a classic Japanese literary text in a course that is primarily intended to address auditory skills appears to be counterintuitive; by assigning students to read Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness*, I have found that listening assignments designed to encourage the hearing of layers and moments in music are supported and underscored. By assigning the reading of Kenkō's essays, I help students develop their capacities to listen well by challenging them to contemplate traditional Japanese

notions of impermanence at the same time that they are asked to regard the musical moment and to listen in the musical moment. To listen well is an act of attention and mindfulness. Challenging students to attend to details in Kenkō's essays in the same way that they are challenged to attend to momentary details in traditional Japanese music is a strategy for "slowing time," if you will, in order to experience more fully its passing. By challenging students to begin to respond to Kenkō's own distant, beautiful responses to his experience of the passing of time, I help students not only to think about listening well, but also to begin to attend to the development of their capacities to listen well.

The "classical" Japanese music of the *shakuhachi* bamboo flute and the *gagaku* court orchestra is spare, stylized, and ritualistic. Flourishing since the eighth century CE, *gagaku* (elegant) is the oldest unbroken orchestral tradition in the world. It consists of an ensemble of drums, flutes, double reeds, and plucked string instruments whose music evokes stasis and nobility, often by means of the flexibly paced "breathing rhythm" of the wind players rather than by the pulse of western music (Malm 227–34). *Shakuhachi*, the bamboo end-blown flute whose name itself denotes the length of the instrument (1.8 *shaku* [30.3 cm]), offers a meditative solo repertoire originally composed by *komusō* ("emptiness" monks) of the *Fuke* sect of Zen Buddhism during the Tokugawa (1598–1868) period, who used the instrument as a tool of enlightenment. This "enlightenment through one tone" (or "blowing Zen") features phrase lengths of music determined by the performer's breath control or "breathing rhythm" (Wade 49–55).

The origins of each these genres of classical music grew out of and exemplify Zen Buddhist thought, particularly those of impermanence (*mujo*, the changeless law of change: change is constant and eternal) and the aesthetic quality of *yugen* ("depth" or "mystery": the quality of inexpressible and profound beauty, even sorrow, in response to transience). *Mujo* is one of the three marks or truths of existence or reality in Buddhist thought. It is the notion that humans (in terms of bodily decay, death, and personal loss), nature, and the cosmos are in a state of constant flux (Chance 21, 189–211; Lewis 58–70). *Yugen* is a Chinese philosophical concept that influenced the suggestive *waka* poetry of twelfth-century Japan and was later codified by the great Noh playwright Seami (1363–1443) to describe the aesthetics of that style of performance expression (Seami 258–62). Now if music is a timely art—if it is based in time and it is *about* time, or the organization of sound in time—then what is the sound of music that was created in a cultural era that assumed impermanence as a mark of existence but also assumed that beauty and mystery may be created through impermanence and by an intense, even sorrowful awareness of impermanence? In other words, we may well ask: how, then, is time structured (or perceived to be structured) in classical Japanese music?

As we listen to examples of the traditional Japanese *shakuhachi* repertoire, we note that there is a feeling of the momentary—a feeling of musical moments arising, existing briefly, and passing (Miyata). There is no sense of expectation, forward motion, development, climax, and denouement that we experience in the Western classical composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms. Classical *shakuhachi* repertoire creates the sense of the momentary by subtle musical means, and its first

repertoire was created by a special class of Buddhist monks (or masterless samurai warriors) as a literal tool of meditation or mindfulness practice. First, this sense of the momentary is created by a limited number of pitches, by a limited range of pitches, by a limited texture (monophonic). Second, it is created by slow, melodic motion and gesture (duration of individual pitches). Third, it is created by the use of silence. In the repertoires of *gagaku* and the *shakuhachi*, silence, pauses, and the taking of breath act in the service of musical "construction." Phrase lines, delimited by the breath, are determined by the length of the player or players' breath control (Wade track 8). Japanese classical music accepts the limitations of the body, just as music of the classical Western canon tends to strive for virtuosity and effect beyond the limitations of the body. Ethnomusicologist William P. Malm describes this restrained sound and aesthetic of classical Japanese music as offering "maximum effect from a deliberately restricted amount of material" (234), for its subtle and frugal use of materials allows listeners time to experience, even savor, the physical moments of audition. In turn, musical moments are controlled not only by the sounds of the music, but also by the breath of the performers and most especially by the spaces in between the sounds (Wade 159–60). What have these subtle, gestural, spare, and elusive sounds have to do with our text, the fourteenth-century "essays" of Buddhist monk Kenkō (1283–1352)?

Let us turn now to Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness*.<sup>1</sup> Kenkō's work consists of 243 brief essays prefaced by the famous, whimsical sentence: "What a strange, demented feeling it gives me when I realize I have spent whole days before this inkstone, with nothing better to do, jotting down random whatever nonsensical thoughts have entered my head" (Kenkō 3). Kenkō's essays are as short as a few sentences or pages, each reflecting the Buddhism of his priestly vows and culture.<sup>2</sup>

A central part of all Buddhist systems of practice is the cultivation of the sense of attentiveness called "mindfulness" and the cultivation of the ability to denote precisely where the mind is directed at any given moment (Blum 82–83). Kenkō's essays offer not only descriptions of contemplative engagement or mindfulness from the point of the author, they become models of such for readers. The ability to be mindful of the moment and to respond to the beauty of the sorrowful passing, or loss, of the moment is the essence of *yugen*. Whether it is the implicit or explicit subject of the text, the passing of time and a conscious ability to savor one's apprehension of time's passing suffuses a vast number of Kenkō's essays. While Kenkō offers many authorial approaches to a variety of subjects such as court etiquette, morality, frugality, love, death, horsemanship, penmanship, men, women, conversation, friendship, elegance, and time, I concentrate here on the essays that are *yugen*-drenched and have to do with *mujo* or impermanence or change and the passing of time. Kenkō's essays often feature an experiential or even photographic or cinematic quality whereby the author's description of a random encounter is inexpressibly affecting. For example, an arrangement of flowers and leaves (in Essay 11, Kenkō 11),<sup>3</sup> the sight of a handsome young man reading a book at a desk (in Essay 43, Kenkō 39),<sup>4</sup> and the overheard conversation between a man and woman (in Essay 105, Kenkō 88) may be seen as literary snapshots. However, Kenkō's literary glimpses of these phenomena are not simple scene descriptions. They offer us a variety of approaches to the

Buddhist notion of *mujo*, or the “inconstant disposition of the cosmos.” It is Kenkō’s favorite subject, and he offers it up to us from a variety of angles, “in both human and natural spheres” (Chance 192). These essays enact the momentary: maximal effect drawn from minimal materials. In addition, the level of detail unfolding in these brief, static scenes as we read them offers us models of mindfulness, attention, and observation; models of sensory experience; models of the kind of sight or seeing in the service of listening and hearing that I invite my students to cultivate.

Let’s turn to Essay 105:

The unmelted snow lying in the shade north of the house was frozen hard, and even the shafts of a carriage drawn up there glittered with frost. The dawn moon shone clear, but its light was not penetrating. In the corridor of a deserted temple a man of obvious distinction sat beside a woman on a doorsill, chatting. Whatever it was they were discussing, there seemed no danger they would run out of things to say. The woman had a charming manner of tilting her head towards the man, and I caught an occasional, enchanting whiff of some exquisite perfume. The scraps of their conversation reaching me made me long to hear the rest. (88)

Here, it is not only the barely overheard “scraps of conversation” between a “man of obvious distinction” and a woman who has a “charming manner of tilting her head” that is at stake, but Kenkō’s setting “in the corridor of a deserted temple” in the light of a “dawn moon” shining “clear,” but “without penetration,” in a time of “unmelted snow lying in shade north of the house,” “frozen hard,” that makes the “enchanting whiff of some exquisite perfume” so tantalizing to the author. Each detail is carefully, if mysteriously, arranged in Kenkō’s “essays” so that what tantalizes the author certainly tantalizes us and invites us in to experience a powerful, if fleeting, literary moment.<sup>5</sup>

Other essays that explicitly muse on the subject of the passing of time and the cosmic state of impermanence might focus on the deterioration of landmarks and practices from the past; on personal loss (Essay 29, Kenkō 29–30); on changes in personal relationships (Essay 37, Kenkō 34); and especially on the changes in nature. Offering a delightful treatment of the topic of the changing of seasons, the vibrant prose of Essay 19, only a portion of which I offer below, is one of the lengthier of the essays:

The changing of the seasons is deeply moving in its every manifestation. People seem to agree that autumn is the best season to appreciate the beauty of things. That may well be true, but the sights of spring are even more exhilarating. The cries of the birds gradually take on a peculiarly springlike quality, and in the gentle sunlight the bushes begin to sprout along the fences. Then, as spring deepens, mists spread over the landscape and the cherry blossoms seem ready to open, only for steady rains and winds to cause them to scatter precipitously. The heart is subject to incessant pangs of emotion as the young leaves are growing out.

Orange blossoms are famous for evoking memories, but the fragrance of plum blossoms above all makes us return to the past and remember nostalgically long-ago events. Nor can we overlook the clean loveliness of the *yamabuki* [yellow kerria roses] or the uncertain beauty of wisteria, and so many other compelling sights. (18–21)

On the other hand, some of the essays offer “severe exhortations” regarding the

brevity of life and even stern laments on its impermanence, as in the “relentless” example in *Essay 74* (Chance 192). This one rings familiar to those who have read the book of Ecclesiastes.

They flock together like ants, hurry east and west, run north and south. Some are mighty, some humble. Some are aged, some young. They have places to go, houses to return to. At night they sleep, in the morning get up. But what does all this activity mean? There is no ending to their greed for long life, their grasping for profit. What expectations have they that they take such good care of themselves? All that awaits them in the end is old age and death, whose coming is swift and does not falter for one instant. What joy can there be while waiting for this end? The man who is deluded by fame and profit does not fear the approach of old age and death because he is so intoxicated by worldly cravings that he never stops to consider how near he is to his destination. The foolish man, for his part, grieves because he desires everlasting life and is ignorant of the law of universal change. (66)

If impermanence is the explicit or implicit subject of a majority of Kenkō's *Essays*, certainly his response to it in a number of them is the melancholic beauty that is the mark of the *yugen* aesthetic. *Essay 26* (27–28) is a good example of a lament on impermanence and a poetic response to it that offers students a rich opportunity to consider classical Japanese aesthetics. The brevity of the essay, the poem contained therein, and the tone of controlled, elegant, even beautiful sorrow in the face of the loss of love and the increasing distance from the beloved make this essay an exceptionally clear example of the expression of *yugen*. In asking my students to consider why a man should grieve over the loss of the thread's own whiteness and lament the inevitable forks in a road, I hope to open a greater awareness of the ephemeral to them.

#### SAMPLE STUDENT ASSIGNMENT

### Read *Essay 26* from Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness* below.

When I recall the months and years I spent as the intimate of someone whose affections have now faded like cherry blossoms scattering even before a wind blew, I still remember every word of hers that once so moved me; and when I realize that she, as happens in such cases, is steadily slipping away from my world, I feel a sadness greater even than that of separation from the dead. That is why, I am sure, a man once grieved that white thread should be dyed in different colors, and why another lamented that roads inevitably fork. Among the hundred verses presented to the Retired Emperor Horikawa, one runs:

The fence round her house,  
The woman I loved long ago,  
Is ravaged and fallen;  
Only violets remain  
Mingled with the spring weeds.

What a lonely picture—the poem must describe something that really occurred.

Now consider the sentence from the above passage: “That is why, I am sure, a

man once grieved that white thread should be dyed in different colors, and why another lamented that roads inevitably fork.” Explain how it demonstrates the aesthetic ideal of *yugen*.

With their subtle, spare, elusive treatment of a variety of topics, Kenkō’s meditations on time (perceptual, personal, historical), on beauty (impermanence) and its paradoxes (the consistency of that which is inconstant), and on the past’s location in the present (ritual) allow all of us opportunities to think about the momentary as we experience it in the reading of Kenkō and in listening to the sorrowful, and sometimes beautiful, music of life.

## Notes

1. My discussion of the *Essays in Idleness* is based on Donald Keene’s classic translation and edition (*Kenkō*).

2. Born Urabe no Kaneyoshi into a family of court officials during a politically unstable time, Kenkō served as chamberlain to a succession of emperors and under the Ashikaga shogunate. After taking Buddhist orders (1313), becoming a recluse, changing his name to Kenkō, and finally returning to Kyoto (1322), he later lived as poet and expert on court custom. The exact dates of the composition of *Essays in Idleness* is disputed, but the consensus dates are 1331–31 (Chance 197–201).

3. “About the tenth month I had the occasion to visit a village beyond the place called Kuro-suno [a village east of Kyoto]. I made my way far down a moss-covered path until I reached a lonely-looking hut. Not a sound could be heard, except for the dripping of a water pipe buried in fallen leaves. Sprays of chrysanthemum and red maple leaves had been carelessly arranged on the holy-water shelf. Evidently somebody was living here. Moved, I was thinking, ‘One can live even in such a place,’ when I noticed in the garden beyond a great tangerine tree, its branches bent with fruit, that had been enclosed by a forbidding fence. Rather disillusioned, I thought now, ‘If only the tree had not been there!’” (Essay 11, Kenkō 11).

4. “Toward the end of spring, on a lovely mild day, I strolled by a stately looking mansion set on a large property with ancient trees. A cherry tree was shedding blossoms in the garden. It was impossible to pass without stopping, and I went in. The shutters on the south side were all lowered and the place looked deserted, but I could see then, through an opening in the bamboo blinds over double doors that faced east and had been left attractively ajar, a handsome young man of about twenty, at his ease but maintaining an elegant composure. He was reading a book he held open before him on a desk. I wonder who he was. I should like to visit him and ask” (Essay 43, Kenkō 39).

5. Chance’s discussion of Essay 105 emphasizes its relationship to earlier Japanese sources (148–49).

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# “When You Read Their Writings”: Teaching Critical Thinking with the *Frankenstein* Manuscripts

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Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel *Frankenstein* makes regular appearances on syllabi in a variety of courses and disciplines—and for good reason. Shelley’s iconic account of a hubristic scientist and his creation derives much of its power—and, indeed, its status as a core text—from its capacity to get students thinking about issues of ongoing ethical and philosophical relevance. But as with so many humanities core texts, one of the greatest challenges of teaching *Frankenstein* is helping students use class discussions of such issues to cultivate the critical thinking skills they will need in other contexts. Students can certainly be led to recognize and capably discuss the novel’s depiction of (for instance) the consequences of educational neglect. Yet, for a host of reasons, there’s no guarantee that students will be able to extrapolate complex analytical skills from such conversations, skills that will allow them to think critically about texts in other classes, not to mention about political ads or the framing of the evening news. How, then, can we best use the work of the authors we assign in our classes to enable students to acquire a critical habit of mind? Or, to slightly recast the *Frankenstein* passage I’m using for the title of this essay, what can (or should) happen “when you read their writings” (Shelley 93)?

In answering this latter question, we might well focus on the way core texts like *Frankenstein* cultivate critical thinking skills by beneficially unsettling their readers’ existing beliefs or assumptions. However, I’d like to suggest that similar work may be accomplished by attending to the material origins of such a text—those traces of

composition, editing, and revision that remain in manuscript materials. And while classroom manuscript study is often seen as a means of achieving a specific pedagogical goal (such as demonstrating the importance of careful revision when writing),<sup>1</sup> I wish to emphasize how working with these kinds of materials can productively defamiliarize and disturb the scene of reading itself. For in disrupting the very act of *parsing* what has been written, manuscript materials compel an awkward—and interpretively rich—style of reading. And though hardly the only work amenable to such an approach, *Frankenstein* offers an excellent case study for instructors who might wish to integrate manuscript study into their teaching, particularly in light of the novel's complex compositional history.

In some ways, it's an approach that seems called for by the novel itself, given its explicit emphasis on acts of both writing and reading. Not only is *Frankenstein* composed of a variety of letters and other documents, but its central plot point—the creation of a new life form—is closely linked to the work of authorship. For instance, the creature describes Victor Frankenstein as “the author . . . of my existence” (Shelley 218), while, in her introduction to the novel's 1831 edition, Shelley herself characterizes her work as “my hideous progeny” (351). Here, authorship and textuality are rhetorically embodied: Frankenstein's creation is an authored text, in much the same way Shelley's implicit reference to children (her “progeny”) is in fact a book. Indeed, as Charles E. Robinson, the foremost scholar of the original *Frankenstein* manuscripts, remarks, “Victor's assembling of disparate body parts into his monster is not that different from Walton's assembling his discrete notes about Victor into a narrative; and both these creative acts may be compared to Mary Shelley's” own act of writing the text (91).

At the same time, the novel depicts an ever-expanding circle of readers for the many texts, both literal and figurative, of which it is itself composed. There are, of course, the various readers associated with the letters and documents that make up the story; but, perhaps more crucially, the novel's characters are themselves readers of one another—and poor ones, at that. Anne K. Mellor discusses how Shelley would have been familiar with the nineteenth-century pseudo-science of phrenology, in which the body and skull are “read” as external signifiers of moral character. However, such readings of the creature are presented in the novel as, at best, suspect: “The creature's unfamiliar physiognomy is consistently interpreted by the characters in the novel as monstrous, threatening, or evil,” she notes (Mellor 128), even when his conduct belies these interpretations. And, in fact, such problematic acts of reading recur throughout the novel, a pattern that emphasizes the importance of *good* reading, construed as entailing a careful assessment and responsible interpretation of evidence.

This thematic concern with acts of writing and reading is reproduced—in arguably more concrete ways—by the novel's textual history. A relatively novice writer when composing *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley solicited feedback on her working draft from her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and eventually adopted many of his suggestions.<sup>2</sup> As such, the composition of the novel is perhaps best understood as a succession of interlinked acts of writing and reading, with the extant manuscript materials bearing the physical traces of each writer's interpretive and compositional contributions. Reading Mary Shelley's writings, we might then say, really becomes a

matter of reading “their writings.” But as we’ll see, reading “their writings” together in the manuscript not only necessitates the kind of careful reading implicitly advocated in the novel but also reveals a collaborative process of thinking through how language creates meaning—a matter of crucial concern in the literature classroom.

Close reading—the process of textual analysis that focuses on details of diction, syntax, and other elements of a passage—is one of the key ways the field of literary studies fosters strong critical-thinking skills in students. And yet, it is arguably the most difficult thing for instructors of literature to teach. Close reading is slow. It demands sustained, prolonged attention to a small object of study—just a few sentences or lines, perhaps less. It requires a commitment to process rather than outcome, and it obligates its practitioners to read in light of the text’s own distinctive features and idiosyncrasies, not those of the reader. But such an approach is far from instinctive for our students, who often have difficulty distinguishing between textually supportable interpretation and eccentric impressionism. Moreover, speed and efficiency are typically the name of the game for students—not analytical languor and comfort with ambiguity. How, then, do we disrupt such impediments to the practice of careful, engaged reading?

It’s a question that returns us to the problem of the creature’s physiognomy in the novel: too quickly and too comfortably read as a sign of threat and evil. In many ways, *Frankenstein* is about both problems and failures of close reading, making it an ideal text for talking about how and why we work with texts. But turning to the manuscripts offers us a more profound kind of intervention, precisely insofar as these materials disrupt the act of reading with their crossings-out, marginalia, and sometimes illegible handwriting. Faced with this textual untidiness, readers are slowed to a crawl, proceeding word by word, left with no choice but to work deliberately through the various additions and deletions—many of which are confusingly presented—in order to determine which Shelley was responsible for particular wordings in the text. In turn, the force of the contrast between the accepted and rejected language of the manuscript clarifies the meaningfully distinct resonances and connotations of different words.<sup>3</sup> Such work also redefines close reading as a mode of critical response not simply justified but actually necessitated by the acts of writing from which the text originally emerged.

I wish to illustrate how this kind of reading works, as well as how it can offer productive insight into *Frankenstein*, by focusing on the heavily revised account of the young Victor Frankenstein’s unsuccessful experience attending a science lecture (Shelley 70):<sup>4</sup>

My father expressed a wish that I  
 should attend a course of lectures upon  
 cheerfully  
 natural philosophy, to which I ^ consented ~~and~~  
~~one evening~~ that I spent in town at the  
 house of Clerval’s father I ~~heard that~~  
~~Mr~~—was left at met M.ØP a proficient  
 in Chemistry who left the company at  
 an early hour to h give his lecture upon  
 thant science enquiring as he went out

Some accident prevented my attending the *series* of these lectures  
 if any one would [go with?] him I went but  
 until they were nearly over they it was nearly finished. The  
 this lecture was unfortunately nearly the  
 lecture which I attended being thus *the* almost the last in his  
 last in his course—the professor talked  
 ^ was entirely incomprehensible to me  
 with the greatest fluency of potassium &  
 Boron zinc bismuth—of sulphats and oxids  
 terms  
 and displayed so many words to which  
 no  
 I could not affix any idea: that I was  
 disgusted with the appearance of a science  
 that appeared to me to contain only words.

Even in a transcribed form that eases the difficulties posed by ink blots, fading, and unclear penmanship, this passage resists a reader's efforts to move through it swiftly and efficiently. Interruptions abound in the manuscript as rejected readings compete with retained wordings, insertions, and even other deletions for the reader's attention. Indeed, a reader might initially see little difference in the handwriting of the Shelleys, rendering the project of distinguishing each writer's contributions seemingly impossible. But as the pace of reading slows, key identifying details start to emerge from the manuscript: the weight of pen strokes, ink color, differences in how letters are shaped. An attentive reader will learn to recognize, for instance, that Mary typically writes in gray ink and forms the letter *d* very differently from Percy, who uses black ink. Such insights can, in turn, be usefully supplemented by the work of scholars like Robinson, whose painstaking analysis of the *Frankenstein* manuscripts has revealed, for instance, that each Shelley canceled words and sections very differently. As it turns out, the vertical zigzag lines in the passage above are consistent with Percy's practice when deleting material.<sup>5</sup>

What emerges after some labor is an intriguing glimpse into the compositional history of this moment in the novel. Mary Shelley's original draft of this passage reads as follows:

My father expressed a wish that I  
 should attend a course of lectures upon  
 natural philosophy, to which I consented and  
 one evening that I spent in town at the  
 house of Clerval's father I  
 met M.—a proficient  
 in Chemistry who left the company at  
 an early hour to give his lecture upon  
 that science enquiring as he went out  
 if any one would [go with?] him[.] I went but  
 this lecture was unfortunately nearly the  
 last in his course—the professor talked  
 with the greatest fluency of potassium &  
 Boron zinc bismuth—of sulphats and oxids

and displayed so many words to which  
I could not affix any idea: that I was  
disgusted with the appearance of a science  
that appeared to me to contain only words.

But once Percy Shelley provides his input, this passage is transformed in important ways:

My father expressed a wish that I should  
attend a course of lectures upon  
natural philosophy, to which I cheerfully consented.  
Some accident prevented my attending these lectures  
until it [sic] was nearly finished. The  
lecture which I attended being thus almost the last  
in his course was entirely incomprehensible to me—the professor talked  
with the greatest fluency of potassium &  
Boron—of sulphats and oxids[,]  
terms to which  
I could affix no idea: I was  
disgusted with a science  
that appeared to me to contain only words.

In Mary Shelley's initial version, Victor complies with his father's wishes but does so without much apparent enthusiasm. His subsequent participation in the course is tellingly neither planned nor sought out: "one night" Victor just happens to meet the professor, who, "as he went out," casually invites any interested parties to his lecture. The lecture's status as "unfortunately nearly the last in his course" is thus entirely accidental and results in Victor's inability to "affix any idea" to the professor's "display" of scientific jargon. Victor nonetheless characterizes this lecture as a "display" of "so many words," suggesting that he sees the professor as engaged in a self-aggrandizing performance. In turn, this view leads him to become "disgusted with the appearance of [the] science," which he regards as little more than a set of signs divorced from any meaningful referents. Victor's response is problematic, but it's also clearly presented as the consequence of a series of unfortunate chance events, none of which are his fault.

Percy Shelley's revision of the passage eliminates the complicated back story about Victor's encounter with the professor at the home of Clerval's father and, in so doing, crucially reframes Victor's relationship to the professor's course. While the reference to his "cheerful consent" suggests enthusiastic acquiescence to his father's proposal, the next line subtly undermines this reading, as Victor turns out not to have attended the lectures until they were "nearly finished" due to "some [unspecified] accident." Given the high level of detail that characterizes the rest of Victor's story, this moment figures as an act of deliberate narrative withholding. He appears to gloss over this detail, as if unwilling to divulge the reasons for his nonattendance. As such, Victor's disgust with the "appearance" of the science he sees is explained in crucially different terms. Although this sequence of events is still framed—at least superficially—as the result of "accident," or chance, a more careful reading of this revised passage ominously suggests that Victor himself is responsible for creating

the conditions that lead to his disgust. In other words, the passage now hints that, in some sense, he sets himself up for failure—a failure that sets the stage for his own unconventional and irresponsible approach to scientific discovery.<sup>6</sup>

To arrive at this point requires time, energy, and focus; but, crucially, this intellectual labor renders the work of close reading and critical thinking visible in valuable ways. And my own experiences of teaching *Frankenstein* in conjunction with the novel's manuscripts have reinforced my sense that students benefit from this kind of approach. In spring 2013 and again in spring 2014, I taught the novel in Introduction to Literary Analysis, a methods course for English Language and Literature majors and Writing and Publishing majors. After we finished reading and discussing the novel, I divided the class into small groups and made the members of each group responsible for becoming “experts” on a brief section of the manuscript.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of multiple class sessions, students accessed high-quality scans of the manuscript available on the “Shelley's Ghost” website and used a set of questions I provided to guide their exploration of their assigned section.<sup>8</sup> These questions included the following:

- What words/phrases does Percy Shelley delete in his editing of Mary Shelley's original language? Conversely, what words/phrases does Percy Shelley add to the manuscript?
- Based on comparison with the 1818 edition, does Mary Shelley adopt all of Percy's suggestions?
- Given what you've seen in the manuscript materials, how would you characterize the nature of the textual relationship between Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley? Is Percy best thought of as an editor? A collaborator? A coauthor?

My students wholeheartedly embraced the project, diving into such minutiae as how each Shelley formed the letter “r” and, in so doing, making themselves conversant with the intricacies of the handwriting they were navigating. More important for my purposes, though, they developed close readings of the text that evinced a greater focus and sophistication than anything they had done up to that point in the class. It's an experience that has left with me the conviction that we may best foster critical thinking skills in our students by exposing them to the delays, disorientations, and disruptions to which unpolished texts like the *Frankenstein* manuscript give rise.

## Notes

I am grateful to the Association for Core Texts and Courses and the Oxford Study Abroad Program for their substantial support of the research I undertook for this project.

1. Matthew D. Klauza's account of discussing Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in conjunction with manuscript facsimiles treats the use of these materials as just such an aid in composition pedagogy. Similarly, Annette Debo presents her use of manuscripts in teaching the poetry of Emily Dickinson as a means by which to eliminate editorial and typographical interventions that obscure “the authenticity and complexity” of Dickinson's poems (132). While Debo does note that “students exposed to the facsimiles became better poetry readers

who considered the minute details in their close reading of other poets also" (135), she frames this outcome as a beneficial side effect of, rather than a primary motivation for, incorporating manuscripts into her teaching.

2. Percy's feedback ranges from macro- to micro-level concerns, addressing matters of structure and organization, plotting, and, perhaps most controversially for recent critics, style. Robinson reveals that Percy contributed "no fewer than 4,000 words in this 72,000-word novel" (92).

3. Ron Fortune comments that "Typically, students learn to perceive the text more precisely than they generally do because manuscripts . . . concentrate their attention on the details of the text as text" (133).

4. See MS Abinger c.56, folio 3 recto and verso, at the "Shelley's Ghost" website or in *The Frankenstein Notebooks*, ed. Charles E. Robinson (32-35; shelfmarks given as Dep. c. 477/1).

5. See Robinson, *The Frankenstein Notebooks*, xxix.

6. David Ketterer also points out that "[a]s a result of Percy Shelley's zigzag cancellation, the lecture that Frankenstein attended was on natural philosophy rather than chemistry," a change that foregrounds Frankenstein's problematic interest in both the physical sciences and pseudo-sciences like alchemy. As Ketterer notes, "'natural philosophy' is a term which covers both categories" (65). Though unlikely to be detected by students on their own, this nuance offers instructors a valuable opening for extending class discussion of this passage.

7. Students were assigned the following passages: the creation scene (Shelley 83-85), Victor's sighting of the creature outside Geneva (Shelley 98-99), Victor's argument with the creature (Shelley 118-20), the account of the creature's education (Shelley 143-44), the creature's rescue of a drowning girl (Shelley 153-54), and a portion of "Walton, in continuation" (Shelley 209-11).

8. Finding a source of clear manuscript images is the most difficult aspect of undertaking a classroom project like the one I describe here. The "Shelley's Ghost" website (<http://shelleysghost.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>) provides high-quality images of the *Frankenstein* manuscript and does not include accompanying transcriptions, which is useful for the kind of classroom work that I am proposing. The manuscript can also now be viewed at the Shelley-Godwin Archive (<http://shelleygodwinarchive.org/contents/frankenstein>). This site offers similar functionality but includes transcriptions of the manuscript; as such, it is not an ideal resource for instructors who wish to have their students grapple with the manuscript on their own. An excellent print facsimile edition of the manuscript, *The Frankenstein Notebooks* edited by Robinson, is also available, though its reliance on what would now be considered low-quality photo facsimiles, as well as its size and scarcity, make it impractical for classroom use.

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# **What Lives Are Worth Living Together?**



## **Right Collides with Right: Conflict in the *Oresteia***

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When I teach *The Oresteia*, students tend to be skeptical about its relevance to their lives. We live in a multicultural society riven by deep ethical differences. Aeschylus is just about the deadest and whitest of the Dead White European males. What could they possibly learn from him?

I try to get them to see that the *Oresteia* trilogy of plays speaks directly to their own situation and their own concerns and that it is actually most relevant to students who are *bicultural*, who are caught between the Old World ethos of their parents and the New World ethos of their peers. And this is because *The Oresteia* dramatizes the situation of a young person caught in a conflict between two different ethea and who is torn between two different but equally compelling ethical imperatives.<sup>1</sup>

You remember the story:

The back story started before the Trojan War, when Agamemnon was caught in an impossible dilemma: Zeus required him to lead an army to Troy, but Artemis would not let the army sail for Troy unless Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia. Both choices were bad, but he had to choose one. Agamemnon chose to kill his daughter, much to the outrage of his wife, Clytemnestra. In the first play of the trilogy, Clytemnestra herself was caught in an impossible dilemma: she could either honor her wedding vow and be faithful to Agamemnon, or she could get revenge for her daughter by killing her husband and king. Clytemnestra chose to kill her husband, much to the outrage of their son, Orestes. In the second play of the trilogy, Orestes was caught in an impossible dilemma: he could honor his mother, or he could kill her in order to get revenge for his father and punish the killer of his king. Orestes

chose to kill his mother and then fled to Athens, much to the outrage of the Furies, the ancient gods of blood vengeance. In the third play of the trilogy, the people of Athens themselves were caught in an impossible dilemma when Athena put Orestes on trial. The Furies demanded that Orestes be punished for matricide; Apollo demanded that Orestes be acquitted for justly punishing a regicide. Athena cast the deciding vote to acquit Orestes of matricide, yet managed to persuade the Furies to accept an honored place in Athens as spirits of vengeance against anyone who attacks Athens herself.

In sum, the trilogy dramatizes a series of impossible dilemmas. Each member of the family is torn between conflicting imperatives and forced to choose between two claims to justice. These collisions of right against right are distilled by a line in the second play, where Orestes himself says, "Bloodlust will collide with Bloodlust, Right with Right" (*Libation Bearers*, l. 461).<sup>2</sup>

It's quite a story. As I tell my students: You think your family has problems? The family of Orestes had problems like you wouldn't believe.

There is a common interpretation of *The Oresteia*, which goes back to Hegel. He interpreted *The Oresteia* as dramatizing a key moment in human history—the moment when humans made the transition from an archaic ethos of kinship to a more advanced ethos of citizenship—from an ethos of family, blood, and honor to an ethos of polity, contract, and law. Initially the two ethes are opposed to each other as thesis and antithesis; in the final play that opposition is resolved, and the two terms of the opposition are canceled, preserved, and elevated at the same time.<sup>3</sup>

This interpretation is easy to teach. If you put the traits of the Furies on one side of a blackboard, and the traits of Apollo on the other side, it seems as though they are simply opposed. The Furies are old, female, ugly, emotional, irrational, and dark and live below the earth. Apollo is young, male, beautiful, dispassionate, rational, and light and lives on Mount Olympus. The Furies stand for blood revenge according to a code of honor; Apollo stands for just retribution according to a code of law. The Furies stand for kinship bonds among family members; the Olympians stand for political bonds among citizens. The Furies care about the duties we owe to blood kin; the Olympians care about the duties we owe to guests and strangers. The old gods and the new gods are starkly opposed. But in the final play the two sides of the conflict are supposed to be permanently resolved.

There are two problems with this interpretation.

The first problem is that it makes the play an unrealistic model of conflict and resolution. The depiction of *conflict* is unrealistic because it presents the gods as simply opposed without any overlapping interests or common ground. The depiction of the *resolution* is unrealistic because it ends in complete harmony and reconciliation.

The second problem with this interpretation is that it turns the play into a historical artefact. If we read the play this way, its meaning is *historical* in the shallowest sense of the word. The play is about something that happened a long time ago and belongs to a stage in our history that we have gone through and left behind. It is of little relevance to our students' lives except as an interesting object of historical knowledge.

But a close reading of the play shows that the play is a much more subtle and realistic depiction of ethical conflict.

Rather than presenting ethical conflict as a matter of simple oppositions that can be definitively resolved, it depicts ethical conflicts as a tangle of overlapping and conflicting imperatives that can be mitigated but never fully resolved. And precisely because it so clearly illuminates the nature of ethical conflict, the play not only has a historical significance. It has a contemporary significance as well, in that it speaks directly to the kinds of ethical conflicts we have to deal with today, and especially the ethical dilemmas faced by students caught between different cultures.

This is clear if we go back and read carefully through the play.

The Furies and the Olympians are not simply opposed to each other. Instead, the concerns of the Olympians overlap with the concerns of the Furies in three ways.

First, it is too simple to say that the Furies stand for revenge and the Olympians stand for just retribution. In fact, the Olympians also care about revenge: In *Agamemnon* the Chorus speaks of how “Zeus who oversees guests” sends a “Fury” upon those who transgress the laws of hospitality by driving Agamemnon and Menelaus to take revenge on Alexander (ll 59–62). Similarly, the Chorus describes Helen as a “Fury” sent by Zeus to exact vengeance on Troy: “Zeus, god of hospitality, sent her, a Fury bewailed by brides” (ll 748–49). In *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes appeals to Zeus for revenge: “Oh, Zeus, grant that I avenge the fate of my father, and become a willing ally to me” (ll 18–19). And Apollo directly charges Orestes to cut down his mother in like-minded revenge: “Surely the prophecy of almighty Loxias will not give me up, ordering me to go through with this danger, crying aloud many things, and spelling out icy ravages to my warm heart, if I do not avenge those guilty of my father’s death in the same way, telling me to kill them in return” (ll 269–74). So the Olympian gods not only stand for the impartial laws of the city but also care about blood revenge.

It is also too simple to say that the Furies stand for blood bonds among family and the Olympians gods stand for the political bonds among citizens. In fact, the very ethos of citizenship defended by Apollo was understood by the Athenians on the model of kinship. The myth of the origin of Athens had the Athenians emerging from the earth of Attica and bound by blood ties. This understanding was formalized by the Periclean Law of citizenship of 451–450, which limited Athenian citizenship only to the natural children of two natural-born Athenian parents (Loraux 36). So the transformation of the Furies in *The Eumenides* was made possible precisely because the Athenians understood citizenship in terms of blood ties.

In addition, it is too simple to say that the Furies only care about blood kin, while Zeus cares about guests and strangers. The Furies also care about hospitality, and they argue that vengeance will come to those who do not take care of their parents and properly welcome guests: “Let there be someone who well-prefers the reverence of parents and reveres guests” (*Eumenides*, ll 545–49). At the end of the play, after the Furies have been transformed into the Kindly Ones (the Eumenides) and allowed themselves to be persuaded by Athena, they see themselves as “settlers” in Athens deserving of respect: “Rejoice, rejoice again and again, all you throughout the city, both gods and mortal men. Dwelling in the city of Pallas, and revering my settlement, you will not find fault with life” (ll 1014–20). In the end, they include all the townspeople of Athens as part of their final promise to bring peace to the city: “So

Fate and all-seeing Zeus came to the aid of the townspeople of Athens” (ll 1045–46).

So the Furies and the Olympians are not simply opposed to each other. The conflict between them is instead a tangle of conflicting and overlapping imperatives. In this way it is a more realistic model of conflict than the schematic opposition of the most common interpretation.

*The Oresteia* also presents a more realistic model of *conflict resolution* than is usually thought of it. The ending is commonly interpreted as a model of complete and lasting reconciliation. But the play itself hints that the conflict is not completely and definitively resolved.

Aeschylus does show the reconciliation being effected by the goddess of persuasion, Peitho. Athena says the Furies may stay in Athens as long as they honor the divine power of Persuasion. But earlier in the trilogy Aeschylus suggests that Peitho herself is the daughter of Ruin or Delusion (*Ate*), and that persuasion apart from Athena can be ruinous and deadly. The Chorus in *Agamemnon* describes Peitho as “wretched,” as having no choice but to take action against those who would go against Justice, since she is the “insufferable daughter of forward-thinking Delusion” (ll 385–86). Even though she may be in the service of Justice, Peitho on her own is as apt to bring Delusion as she is Peace.

Moreover, the status that the Eumenides ultimately assume in Athena’s city is peculiarly and narrowly prescribed. They are not accorded the same divine status as Zeus or Apollo; they are to reside not on Olympus but under the earth. In fact, the term that Athena uses to describe the Eumenides’ new status (*metoikoi*) was regarded in Athens as a specific *political* category, that of the foreign or non-Athenian permanent resident. Distinct from citizens (*polites*) and guests (*xenoi*), such residents were allowed to live and work in Athens and paid taxes but were not allowed to own property or participate in politics. Scholars agree that such *metoikoi* were politically powerless: “There was never any doubt of the inferiority of metic status as such” (Joint Association of Classical Teachers 188). As foreign residents, the Eumenides are to be honored as long as they stay out of politics and recognize the divine power of Persuasion. The Eumenides are demoted to the status of noncitizens, and the meaning of this demotion is clear—it implies that the political realm itself is supposed to be constituted by the sublimation of kinship codes of honor and vengeance; the fury of the Eumenides is to be directed at the external enemies of Athens. But this sublimation is a fragile achievement rather than a stable fact. One wonders if the Eumenides will always be content with their second-class status; there is no guarantee that they will not surreptitiously reassert their power within the political realm itself, since it would always be possible for citizens to cast political opponents as “enemies” of the state and so to unleash within the polity the spirits of vengeance and violence that were supposed to have been contained.

Lastly, the resolution offered in *The Eumenides* never manages to figure out what to do with the destructive force of a peculiarly feminine Eros mentioned by the Chorus of elder women in *The Libation Bearers*: “The female-driven loveless love perverts the yoked-together lives of beasts and mortal men” (ll 599–601). By the end of the trilogy, this Eros is simply dropped as a subject. If its destructive power is as great as the Chorus says, it seems foolhardy for the Athenians not to also make a

place for it alongside the Furies.

Seen in this light, the end of *The Oresteia* is more like a fragile alliance than a definitive end of all strife.

This interpretation of the ending—that it represents a fragile alliance rather than a permanent elimination of conflict—is also advanced by Martha Nussbaum. She contends that the *Oresteia*'s depiction of conflict is not meant to propose a solution to the conflicts posed in it so much as it is meant to illustrate “the richness and depth of the problem itself. . . if we recognize what he has put before us, we must recognize, too, that the ‘solutions’ do not really solve the problem” (49). The trilogy doesn't “resolve” the conflict but dramatizes it.

How then does *The Oresteia* illuminate ethical conflicts today?

In *The Oresteia* Aeschylus described just the kinds of ethical conflicts we face today: not simple conflicts between good and evil, nor simple collisions between two opposing claims to right, but instead differences that are a tangle of conflicting and overlapping imperatives. I think that especially our bicultural or multicultural students are in the same situation as Orestes. They are situated at the point of impact between the legitimate claims of very different ethe—the old world ethos of their parents against the new world ethos of their peers.

Let me take a specific example. Many of our Asian-American students are caught between two ethe. On the one hand, they have been raised with the ethos of honor and shame in which their professional success or failure reflects well or poorly on their families. On the other hand, they are drawn to an individualistic ethos that values work that is personally meaningful. Should they study to achieve professional success that will bring honor and financial security to their families? Or should they follow their hearts and try to make a living doing what they love?

These students are torn, not between good and evil, but between two equally compelling ethe. The conflict between them is as deep as the conflict between the old gods and the new gods in *The Oresteia*. In certain situations they will be simply opposed, as the Furies and Apollo were opposed at the trial of Orestes. But there is also some overlap between them—they share certain values in common: hard work, grit, and excellence of a sort. These areas of overlap may allow a tentative reconciliation in certain cases. But this reconciliation will always be a fragile and tentative resolution of an underlying tension that will never be definitively resolved.

If we read *The Oresteia* carefully, it becomes clear that the play has not only a historical significance; it has a contemporary significance in the sense that it illuminates the kinds of deep ethical conflicts that we and our students have to negotiate in our own lives. And Aeschylus is relevant to our lives not *despite* the fact that we live in a multicultural society, but precisely *because* we live in a multicultural society—a society riven by clashes of right against right.

## Notes

1. My remarks are indebted to Martha Nussbaum (25).
2. All translations are my own, working from Alan H. Sommerstein's translations.
3. This was the way Hegel interpreted the play in *The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law* (105–6). It is also the way contemporary philosophers Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dor-

rance Kelly, for whom the play unites and harmonizes the new and the old gods, interpret it: "Athena transforms both the old and the new gods and unites them in an ideal city-state of which all Athenians can be proud" (98).

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# **Cosmopolitan Conscience of the World: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

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I'd like to propose the inclusion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a core text for the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> It is a “real world” text that has played a decisive role in creating the international moral and legal framework in which reflection and action on behalf of human rights have been pursued for over sixty-five years now. During that period the UDHR has functioned as what I call the “cosmopolitan conscience of the world.” How the Declaration came to be written and ratified is a complex and improbable story. I want simply to touch on a few highlights regarding its origins, content, and influence and the controversies it has generated, to suggest why I believe it's an important text for all of us to be familiar with, and specifically for generations of students whom I assume we're trying to prepare to be citizens of the world—genuinely cosmopolitan in their knowledge and outlook.<sup>2</sup>

In 1947 the Human Rights Commission of the infant United Nations was constituted, and its first charge was to draft an “international bill of rights.” The members of the new commission elected as chair Eleanor Roosevelt, a member of the U.S. delegation to the UN. Under her gracious but persistent leadership, and through prolonged and often contentious debate, the commission hammered out the document they called a Universal Declaration of Human Rights and presented it to the General Assembly. The Assembly adopted the UDHR on December 10, 1948 (since observed annually as International Human Rights Day), with forty-eight votes in favor, none opposed, and eight abstentions (all the Soviet bloc states, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia).

The structure of the Declaration was formulated by René Cassin, a UN delegate from France and one of the chief framers of the document, working from an initial draft written by John Peters Humphrey of Canada. Cassin compared the Declaration to the portico of a Greek temple, with a foundation, steps, four columns, and a pediment. Articles 1 and 2, articulating basic principles of human dignity, liberty, equality, and community, form the foundation of the whole structure. The seven paragraphs of the Preamble, the “whereases” stating the reasons for the Declaration, are the temple steps. The main body of the Declaration consists of the four columns. The first column, Articles 3–11, affirms rights of the individual, such as the right to life, liberty, and security, equality before the law, and the prohibition of torture and slavery. The second column, Articles 12–17, enunciates civil rights of individuals as members of society; for example, freedom of movement, the right to a nationality, freedom to marry and equality in marriage, and property rights. Articles 18–21, represented by the third column, deal with the individual’s spiritual and political freedoms, among them freedom of religion, thought and expression, and peaceable assembly. Social, economic, and cultural rights are spelled out in the fourth column, Articles 22–27, such as the right to free choice of employment, equal pay for equal work, an adequate standard of living to ensure individual and family well-being, and education. The last three articles, 28–30, provide the pediment that holds the structure together: the individual’s right to a just and peaceful international order, but also the individual’s duties to his or her community, which entail limitations on individual rights that arise from “due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others.”<sup>3</sup>

Charles Malik of Lebanon, one of the main architects of and chief spokesmen for the Declaration, spoke to the UN General Assembly on the evening of December 9, 1948. Responding to a criticism of the UDHR of which the drafters themselves had been keenly aware throughout their deliberations—that it imposes “Western,” and specifically Anglo-American, human rights traditions on the rest of the world—he argued, “Thousands of minds and hands have helped in its formation.” He went on to describe the Declaration as a “composite synthesis” of all existing rights traditions, which he noted had never been done before. Mary Ann Glendon summarizes Malik’s remarks to the delegates: “Malik pointed each country to places in the Declaration where it could either find its own contribution or the influence of the culture to which it belonged” (165). The Latin American countries, China, Greece, the Soviet Union, and France all emphasized that rights entail duties. The UK and the United States shared their long experience with basic rights and liberties of the individual. Many countries contributed on issues such as the freedom of religion and the family as a foundational structure of human community. “Due to the immense variety of its sources,” Malik said, “the Declaration had been constructed on a ‘firm international basis wherein no regional philosophy or way of life was permitted to prevail’” (165).

It was certainly the case that the original membership of the UN, as represented in the 1948 vote on the UDHR, was relatively small. Large parts of Africa and some Asian countries remained under colonial rule, and the defeated Axis powers—Germany, Italy, Japan, and their allies—were excluded. But among the most influential members of the Human Rights Commission were Malik from Lebanon, P. C. Chang representing China, Carlos Romulo of the Philippines, Hansa Mehta of India, and

Hernán Santa Cruz of Chile. The commission could not go directly to the General Assembly with its draft Declaration, but first had to submit it to the UN's Economic and Social Council, where it was reviewed by a much larger group called the Third Committee on Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs. The Third Committee, which discussed every line of the document over two months in the fall of 1948, included six members from Asia (three from predominantly Buddhist countries), nine Islamic countries, a large contingent from Latin America, and six European members from the Communist bloc. By the time the two-year process of drafting and discussion had ended, hundreds of delegates from many backgrounds—cultural, legal, and political—had participated. As Glendon also observes, “The ‘traditional’ political and civil rights—the ones now most often labeled ‘Western’—were the least controversial of all” (226). And as P. C. Chang told the Assembly just before the final vote, the biggest battles had resulted from the political polarization resulting from the emerging cold war. Glendon writes that the Declaration

was far more influenced by the modern dignitarian rights tradition of continental Europe and Latin America than by the more individualistic documents of Anglo-American lineage. . . . The Declaration's “Everyone” is an individual who is constituted, in important ways, by and through relationships with others. “Everyone” is envisioned as uniquely valuable in himself . . . , but “Everyone” is expected to act toward others “in a spirit of brotherhood.” “Everyone” is depicted as situated in a variety of specifically named, real-life relationships of mutual dependency: families, communities, religious groups, workplaces, associations, societies, cultures, nations, and an emerging international order. (227)

As Glendon puts it, the UDHR is a “Declaration of Interdependence.” She goes on to criticize the common and compromising practice of “reading its integrated articles as a string of essentially separate guarantees. Nations and interest groups continue to use selected provisions as weapons or shields, wrenching them out of context and ignoring the rest” (239). Glendon elegantly sums up the global influence of the Declaration through the decades since its promulgation:

The Universal Declaration would become an instrument, as well as the most prominent symbol, of changes that would amplify the voices of the weak in the corridors of power. It challenged the long-standing view that a sovereign state's treatment of its own citizens was the nation's business and no one else's. It gave expression to diffuse, deep-seated longings and lent wings to movements that would soon bring down colonial empires. Its thirty concise articles inspired or influenced scores of postwar and postcolonial constitutions and treaties, including the new constitutions of Germany, Japan, and Italy. It became the polestar of an army of international human rights activists, who pressure governments to live up to their pledges and train the searchlight of publicity on abuses that would have remained hidden in former times. . . . the Declaration provided a rallying point for the freedom movements that spurred the collapse of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the demise of apartheid. It is the parent document, the primary inspiration, for most rights instruments in the world today. (xvi)

Although calling itself only a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations,” not claiming the status of international law, the Universal Decla-

ration, together with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in 1966, constitute the International Bill of Human Rights. Since 1976, when the covenants were ratified by a sufficient number of UN member nations, the bill has had the force of international law. And of course the Declaration has been the foundation of the various international conventions of the past forty-five years, as, for example, the 1969 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Glendon observes, however, that the main legal force of the UDHR has been the incorporation of its principles into the legal systems of nations—and she reminds the reader that “international institutions can never provide first-line protection for victims of rights violations,” but only national governments (237).

In this paper I've dwelt on the origins and influence of the Universal Declaration and one of the many important and lasting issues it provoked, and contented myself with only a brief summary of its contents. Let me just conclude by saying that the text itself can and will stimulate keen interest, questioning, and controversy in the classroom. This is a living document that has had a wide range of consequences in the history of the world since the end of World War II. Students can fruitfully examine the prescriptive language itself and “compare and contrast” with historic rights documents with which they're more familiar. And there are many very contemporary issues one might explore with students, such as the ongoing struggle of girls and women in the developing world for the right to education and to freedom with regard to marriage.

Fascinating to me is the ideological issue in the context of the history of American involvement. The UDHR is a decidedly “liberal” and “maximalist” statement of human rights, born out of an era of hopeful and progressive politics after the horrors of World War II. The United States was a key player, of course, in both the creation of the UN and, through Eleanor Roosevelt, in the drafting and ratification of the Declaration. And yet over the decades the U.S. Senate has refused to ratify a number of treaties and conventions that have grown squarely out of the Declaration, on the basis of the doctrine of American Exceptionalism—and I think it's safe to say that the Declaration itself would never have been ratified by today's Senate.

## Notes

1. See . . . *And Justice for All: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 50*, which includes the text together with historic statements on rights and comment by distinguished scholars.

2. I'm deeply indebted to writings by experts: above all, Mary Ann Glendon's *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which is one of the best and the most readable general accounts of both the history and the contents of the UDHR; Louis Henkin's “The Human Rights Idea,” containing a clear explanation of the idea of rights and the Declaration by a distinguished authority on international law; and Michael Ignatieff's *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, a provocatively critical defense of the UDHR within the context of the post-World War II “rights revolution” by a former director of Harvard's Carr

Center for Human Rights Policy.

3. On defining human rights as an individual's "claims upon society," see Henkin (10). For an emphasis on the individual side of the individual-in-community language of the Declaration, see Ignatieff (66–67).

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# The Missing Wings of Eros: How More's *Utopia* Can Enlighten Students on Freedom

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Both Plato's *Phaedrus* and Thomas More's *Utopia* open with references to altars on which sacrifices are made to a god or God who is said to have once espoused a young woman. Socrates describes the location of one in the outskirts of Athens dedicated to Boreas, the North Wind god who supposedly carried off Oreithuia,<sup>1</sup> and More, the character and narrator of *Utopia*, exits from Mass celebrated at Notre Dame, a church in Antwerp dedicated to the Virgin Mary.<sup>2</sup> However, the protagonists of these dialogues, Phaedrus and Raphael respectively, advocate communal life by appealing not to love but to honor and equity. Phaedrus's reading of Lysias's speech about the freedom of the nonlover and Raphael's description of the liberality of Utopian life or, literally, of the life of the "non-placers" (Utopia is derived from the Greek prefix "ou" meaning "not," rather than "eu" meaning "good," and "topos" meaning "place") actually belie their claims against private interest. Authors Plato and More thereby reveal that humans mutually depend upon each other not only for the general rationing of goods to satisfy material needs, but also for the personal fulfillment of the innate quest for transcendental completion. Ostensibly, More employs Socrates' myth of the soul as a basis for paralleling what Raphael projects as Utopian family bonds with the bonds proposed by Lysias' nonlover, thereby showing that a hidden but untamed appetite for personal pleasure results in the treatment of others as a means to this end rather than as ends in themselves. By contrasting Raphael's apparently honorable relations with those of the narrator, More the author shows that—although no action is wholly disinterested, at least initially—when moderation guides rather than conceals the search for fruition in others, Eros orients one toward

selfless union with them.

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates refutes Lysias's concept of love by describing the soul as a charioteer of reason led by two horses: a white one that seeks honor by avoiding shame, listening to opinions of others, and exercising moderation (253d), and a black one that stubbornly attempts to indulge the senses by ignoring what others advise (254a). The charioteer longs to be transported to the perfection of heavenly Forms that he had witnessed before being embodied, but to do so, he must break in the wild horse so that it leads him and the gentle horse to human beauty without abducting the person. To do so, the charioteer shouts while collaborating with the moderate horse in pulling back with enough distance from the individual to gaze and gradually recognize in him the reflection of eternal beauty (254d–e), an experience through which the horses acquire wings. Although this process requires repeated and radical resistance against the tugs of the spirited horse, it eventually humbles the animal into reverence and even awe at the sight (255a). The charioteer through memory soon makes contact with the god Eros, who draws the soul to an ecstatic veneration of the divine in the beloved (253a–b), eliciting the soul's complete submission and desire for servitude (252a–b) and liberating the most select ones for the ultimate mastery of a harmonious life of wisdom (256b). If the charioteer fails to soften the character of the dark horse, wings never form and the soul remains grounded in the pursuit of mere physical pleasure (251a). The same consequences follow if the white horse overshadows rather than educates the wily appetites of the black: "It begets . . . a slavish economizing which most people praise as a virtue but will cause your soul to roam for 9,000 years around the earth and beneath it mindlessly" (256e–257a). Lysias' nonlover and Raphael's Utopians reflect the debased nature of these latter types of souls.

As Socrates intimates (237b–c), Lysias' nonlover is a disguised lover: although he claims to be led by respect and temperance, he discloses the ruthless desire for pleasure driving his self-love. "[N]ever ha[ving] a change of heart" (231a), "possessing a measure of self-control" (232a), and offering "life-long friend[ship]" (234b) as one in the "best position" for "return[ing] the favor" (234a), the nonlover claims to be more rational and agreeable than the emotionally fluctuating lover. However, he cares not about the partner but about his own benefits: friendly conversation and virtue become his bargaining power for the present and future sensual favors he requests (232b, d, e; 233a, c). By opposing nonlove with unbridled wantonness rather than with Eros, Lysias highlights the constancy of the nonlover but by the end reveals that what appears to be fidelity is precisely the nonlover's own self-interest, which perpetuates his utilitarian ties (234a–c) with the most available from the "general pool" (231e).

The commonwealth of Utopia, according to Raphael's account, likewise appeals to honor and shame to externally restrain but not internally tame the voracious appetites of its citizens. Their professed beliefs regarding relations with God and others disclose this gap. By proclaiming the immortality of the soul, reward for virtue and punishment for sins in the afterlife, and God's creation of human "existence and . . . capacity for happiness" (67), the commonwealth appears to be founded upon upright principles ensuring the moral education of its citizens. However, their reputable for-

mulas fail to ensure anything other than self-love because of the concepts permitted and concealed by the labels “virtue” and “happiness.” “They define virtue as living according to nature . . . [which] prescribes that we should lead a life as free of anxiety and as full of joy as possible, and that we should help all others . . . toward that end” (67).

But if you are allowed, indeed obliged, to help others to such a life, why not first of all yourself, to whom you owe no less favour than to anyone else? For when nature prompts you to be kind to your neighbours, she does not mean that you should be cruel and merciless to yourself. (68)

After conflating virtue with nature and a joyful life, Raphael, like Lysias’s speaker, projects on the commonwealth a rationale for selfish justification through the polarization of two extremes. Happiness, too, is emptied of meaning. Considering it open-ended, since God is the origin of man’s “capacity for” but not the consummation of “happiness” (67), they equate happiness with “good and honest pleasure” (67), “the goal of all our actions” (68). However, upon adding a provisional condition for those whom reason does not lead to an acceptance of the commonwealth’s religious principles, they dismiss the intrinsic value of discipline, such as that undergone by the dark horse of Socrates’ mythical soul, demanded by the quest for any virtue:

[I]f these beliefs were rejected, no one would be so stupid as not to feel that he should seek pleasure, regardless of right and wrong. His only care would be . . . to avoid pleasures that are inevitably followed by pain. They think you would have to be actually crazy to pursue harsh and painful virtue, give up the pleasures of life, and suffer pain from which you can expect no advantage. For if there is no reward after death, you have no compensation for having passed your entire existence without pleasure, that is, miserably. (67)

Identifying “reward” with pleasurable benefits of an action or external incentives spurring it on, Utopians, as Raphael portrays them, do not view the culmination of virtue as valuable in and of itself. This distinction is particularly exemplified by Raphael’s explanation of their marriage laws and family customs.

Although, from Raphael’s perspective, Utopia reinforces marital relations by legally appealing to shame, in doing so the commonwealth actually reduces matrimony to an outlet for promiscuity rather than reserving it for the consummation of genuine self-giving. Here again, metaphorically, the noble steed attentive to reputation obscures and thus facilitates the unbridled sensuality of the darker steed. Raphael claims that public disgrace upon parents of those committing the crime of fornication, as well as the imposed abstinence from future marriage for the offenders, become incentives for earlier marriage since few people would otherwise join in this bond without such restraints (79). Thus love becomes equated with mutual self-satisfaction. Furthermore, the appeal to honor in what Raphael presents as the justification for naked spousal selection, ensuring that spouses be “legally protected from deception” as are buyers who inspect colts upon purchase (79–80), likewise permits rather than purifies lust in the prospective partners. Similarly, other alleged legal protections of the nuptial bond are also corrupt. The requirement for an adulterer’s wife who “continues to love such an undeserving spouse” to heroically accompany her husband into slavery diminishes rather than increases the probability of a continued

marriage, not to mention the laws easing divorce for incompatibility. The “slavish economizing” of these laws, to borrow the descriptive phrase with which Socrates decries the nonlover (257e), deprives the soul of the education of appetite necessary for the recognition of Eros and the consequent self-transcendence of the lover.

In accounting for Utopia’s customs that, like the marriage laws, separate family members, Raphael asserts that the commonwealth founds them upon the honorable principle of equity, but his description actually shows that the pursuit of personal comfort underlies this treatment of persons as replaceable commodities. For example, although Utopia officially declares a distribution of households by blood, it encourages inhabitants to avoid allowing inequalities to enfeeble the cities and thus sets quotas as the determining condition of location. Once more than sixteen adults abide in a household, or more than 6,000 houses hold residents in a city (54), or when pestilence depletes cities, or the two-year slot for farming has expired, redistribution occurs, separating relatives (54–55). Assessing the value of persons in terms of the space they occupy or the resources they expend, Utopia not only drives out or wages war on neighboring natives who resist Utopian expansion on and cultivation of the natives’ land, but it also obliges priests and officials to arbitrate what they consider a convenient time for their own incurable sick to die (78). Raphael recounts how Utopia’s compassionate care of the sick, *magno cum adfectu*,<sup>3</sup> entails pressuring terminally ill patients to measure their enjoyment of life against the burden they cause their caretakers. They are lured to euthanasia by the disgrace of becoming “unequal to any of life’s duties” (78) as well as by the pride of undergoing an “honorable death” (79). Such treatments of the sick and adoptive mothers shift from due focus on care for the needy to inordinate attention to the comfort and passions of the caretaker.

Through Utopian dining traditions, More further illustrates how selfish emphases on satisfying material needs diverts citizens from recognizing and cherishing unique beauty in other persons, even in their own children. When describing customs for eating (57–58), Raphael emphasizes once again how the system respects all: thirty families meet in each hall “to take their meals in common” (57). Food is “equally” distributed, but only to the adults, regardless of need, age and size. As husband and wife sit with other households, they occupy themselves largely with their own food since they must pass what they choose not to eat to the children, who are denied any food of their own (57). The assignment of duties enables only the adults to eat in peace and prohibits spontaneous exchange or growth in mutual understanding (57–58): older children serve the table or stand behind in silence while younger ones sit under the supervision of the older. Dining begins with the reading of a book on morality and continues with an obligatory “conversation” during which the elders examine the ideas of the youths (58). Although the community allows people to take food home to eat, Utopia shuns such arrangements as “not thought proper” and even an infringement on one’s appetite for comfort since one would “work at preparing a worse meal at home” (56). While Utopia’s orderly table customs appear dignified, the sensual delights of the food, incense, music, and perfume facilitate the adults’ preoccupation with their own hunger (58). Utopia’s systems for dining, housing, health care and child care promote the view of its citizens as dispensable and limit dealings between them to superficial exchanges of benefits until, as illustrated in the

of the sick, the conflict between a person's existence and the pleasure of others calls for his elimination.

More contrasts this cold indifference among Utopians with the narrator's own struggle to extend a warm welcome to those he encounters. For his family and patria, the narrator More exhibits the deep yearning that Socrates attributes to those under the power of Eros physically separated from their beloved (252a, b): he admits at the beginning of the book that he felt "the ardent desire . . . to see again my native country, my home, my wife and my children" (9) since they have been four months apart. Unlike the afflicted love that Lysias sets up in contrast to the calculation of his nonlover though, More's passion does not dispose him to "read[ily] . . . gratify loved ones in word and deed, being hateful to everyone else" (231d). Instead, More's love prompts his openness to others. The delightful graces and great virtues he sees in Peter Giles which he associates with his own family draw More to Giles in a close friendship (9); likewise, his affection for his country and for Cardinal Morton, whom Raphael mentions, fuels More's patience in listening to Raphael's windy argument against counseling kings (27). More's initial diffidence upon meeting Raphael (9, 11) ultimately develops into an all-embracing devotion as More's narrator selflessly shares more abundantly of his goods than what Socrates considers the greatest benefit of Eros, the mutual exchange of the "love of wisdom" (256b–c): More parts with his entire day and lends his full attention, his hospitality in serving both lunch and dinner (40, 107), and his sensitivity to Raphael's weariness despite his own desire to speak, abandoning any immediate attempt to persuade Raphael of his opposing views (107). More exemplifies the love of *Agape* which he communicated at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that morning at Notre Dame: a Power which, unlike that of Boreas, does not simply transport another to an invisible world of Platonic forms but physically encounters and abides with the other, fully respecting personal freedom in order to gradually transform the other in truth and love by transmitting not just ideas but the very substance of His own life.

## Notes

1. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229 b, c, d. All further references to Plato's *Phaedrus* come from this translation.
2. Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. George Logan and Robert Adams, 9. All further references to More's *Utopia* are taken from the English translation unless otherwise noted.
3. Thomas More, *The Complete Works of Thomas More: Utopia*, Vol. 4. 184/30, 186/1.

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# How to Read *Don Quijote* as a Great Book about the Soul and Politics: First Read Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* and Plato's *The Republic*

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One Cervantes scholar, whose name I cannot recall, recently observed that “*Don Quijote* is about everything.” While there is some self-serving glee in this affirmation, it also expresses a disheartening rejection of comprehensive interpretations of Cervantes’s magnum opus. Similarly, and expressing even more resignation, although not without his own dose of self-interest, the great Shakespearean scholar Harold Bloom once noted that *Don Quijote* represents the writing of radical nihilism and anarchy.

In a very real sense, *Don Quijote* overwhelms its readers by being so intricately chaotic on such a massive scale. This should come as no surprise. Between the publication of his pastoral novel *La Galatea* in 1585 and the publication of parts 1 and 2 of *Don Quijote* in 1605 and 1615, Cervantes dedicated nearly thirty years of his life to composing, revising, rearranging, and glossing his masterpiece. And at well over 1,000 pages—roughly equivalent to Shakespeare’s history plays—the novel’s size and complexity are serious problems, problems compounded by the seeming randomness of its episodic form and by the maddeningly surreal moments that punctuate it. Indeed, *Don Quijote* was designed to be huge and to disorient its readers at every turn. And for a first-time reader in particular, the novel can come off as an overly long series of mismatched adventures that will repeatedly test her patience;

it combines the disarray of a bustling marketplace, the weirdness of a carnival or a circus, and oftentimes the sheer otherworldliness of a dreamscape where illogicality intervenes and recedes for no apparent reason. What is perhaps most irritating, these absurd intrusions and breaks typically occur right when narrative coherence seems to be finally winning out. Cervantes loves to take us up to the brink of order only to jerk us back from it or else push us over its cliff.

Of course, in its defense, *Don Quijote's* density and its all-inclusiveness also indicate its advantages in pedagogical as well as cultural and political terms. I would add that the novel is also overtly feminist, antiracialism, indeed antislavery, market-oriented, and very much in favor of religious freedom, which probably goes some way toward explaining why so many critics from the cultural left continue to produce such twisted interpretations to the contrary. I will go further, however. Although excellent arguments can be made for various works by Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Augustine, Dante, Montaigne, Shakespeare, or Poe, I would argue that *Don Quijote* ought to be the preeminent, or as Cervantes would say, the "core core" text of any self-respecting liberal arts program in the United States or Latin America. I have many reasons for this claim, but I will try to reduce them to four: (1) The demographic and linguistic reality of contemporary America means that, more than any other text, *Don Quijote* can foster productive and relevant dialogues about today's cultural, political, and ethnic conflicts in classrooms from Buenos Aires to Vancouver. (2) Historically speaking, *Don Quijote* is a uniquely dense nexus for the classical knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome, that of the Italian and Islamic Renaissances, and that of humanism and scholasticism, and it also responds to the discovery and conquest of the New World as well as the impending fall of the Spanish Empire. (3) Great philosophers like Hobbes and Ortega y Gasset, great novelists like Twain and García Márquez, and many of modernity's most foundational and ambivalent figures, such as Jefferson and Freud, were all directly influenced by *Don Quijote*. And finally, (4) the book is indeed as sad and tragic as the German Romantics thought it was, but it is also split-your-sides and pee-in-your-pants funny, both as classic slapstick and as self-mocking irony.

But all this scope and weight only prompts the question once again of how today's readers of *Don Quijote* might avoid interpretive paralysis, not to mention existential panic as soon as the first few pages of the prologue. In my view, which I suspect is more optimistic than that of most Cervantes scholars as well as that of critics from other fields like Bloom, reading the first modern novel is a wondrous experience, akin to strolling through a giant, sublime architectural structure, a Gothic cathedral, a Renaissance palace, or a modern museum of art. The chapters read like so many niches, sequenced according to a series of biblical, classical, and early modern themes. But for those made uncomfortable by the surreal, Hieronymus Bosch-like aspects of the novel, I would argue that Cervantes's text also evinces the organized rigor of an aircraft carrier. It may indeed have endless slots dedicated to symbolic themes or individual geniuses, but it also operates according to an organized layout, with clear command centers or "bridges," helpful ceremonial signposts, and very specific purposes built into the details of its overarching design.

The best way to perceive this design is to proceed comparatively. Think of it

this way: around 1605, after decades of relative mediocrity, having not yet produced a sufficiently original work, Cervantes was wrestling with the idea of releasing his next project. Finally, innovation and invention overcame his anxiety of tradition and example, and he gathered up the courage to publish his best seller. But the trick to not being overwhelmed by the spectacle of Cervantes's fabulous achievement is to look past its seemingly wayward originality. As Dalí once said, "Los que no quieren imitar nada, no producen nada" (Those who refuse to imitate anything produce nothing). I maintain that while writing *Don Quijote*, Cervantes focused on two classical texts that motivated and somehow justified the major aspects of his program: Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* for part 1 and Plato's *The Republic* for part 2. I am by no means arguing that Cervantes was slavishly imitating his classical precursors; to the contrary, he was reworking their themes and details nearly every step of the way. Nevertheless, if we and our fellow readers can simply agree to do our homework and actually ponder *The Golden Ass* and *The Republic* before we turn to the respective parts of *Don Quijote*, then we will find that discussing Cervantes's masterpiece can be a surprisingly coherent and creative experience. I would add that this approach can also take place in an interpretive atmosphere relatively unencumbered by the vast majority of the novel's greatest critics, who, for various and mostly nationalistic reasons, have by and large ignored the fundamental importance that these two texts had for Cervantes.

How do we know that Cervantes turned initially to Apuleius's late classical picaresque? The most obvious evidence is historical and philological. First, it is important to recognize that around 1600 a kind of writerly arms race broke out in Spain in the quest for the next great novel. This can be seen in the plethora of picaresque texts that all more or less coincide with *Don Quijote* part 1. Just to name the three most important: Alemán publishes part 1 of *El Guzmán de Alfarache* in 1599 and part 2 in 1604; Quevedo pens *El buscón* in 1605; and *La pícaro Justina*, attributed to López de Úbeda, is published that same year. Second, Cervantes cites Apuleius explicitly in another of his picaresque novels, *El coloquio de los perros*, which was also written around 1605, and he alludes overtly to the wineskins episode of *The Golden Ass* in chapter 35 of *Don Quijote* part 1. The remainder of the evidence involves a long list of structural, thematic, and technical parallels between the two texts. Above all, Cervantes deploys the basic trajectory of Apuleius, which is the "bildungsroman" of late classical antiquity: a series of adventures revolving around a central interpolated tale, all ending in the moral metamorphosis of the hero and his final ritualized worship of an idealized, cosmic woman. Whereas Apuleius moves his protagonist from a sexual fantasy triggered by the goddess Diana toward his metaphysical initiation into the cult of the goddess Isis, Cervantes moves his hero from a chivalric fantasy centered on Dulcinea toward the modern-day counterexample of the Captive's Tale, in which Captain Ruy Pérez de Viedma commits to his personal savior, the Algerian woman Zoraida-María. Whereas in the middle of his novel Apuleius inserts the allegory of Eros and Psyche, which represents the vice of lustful desire or carnal curiosity (*curiositas*) transformed into a quest for intellectual and spiritual knowledge, Cervantes inserts the *Novela del curioso impertinente*, which organizes the love stories of the Sierra Morena according to the same basic lesson: let go of the fantasy of physical conquest and embrace the responsibility of thoughtful communion.

Against the backdrop of this basic parallel between the programs of Apuleius and Cervantes, the most incoherent details of *Don Quijote* come alive. Most importantly, it is impossible to ignore the fact that *Don Quijote* part 1 is all about enigmatic steeds, pieces of gold, and the consequences of desire. As for steeds, Don Quijote returns from his first sally battered and draped over an ass. After Rocinante's lusty misadventure with the Galician mares, Don Quijote lies beaten once again, and Sancho places him on his ass and leads him to the second inn. Then we have the gruesome discovery of Cardenio's dead mule in the Sierra Morena, the triumphant arrival of Zoraida-María, who rides a donkey, and Sancho's frightfully offensive jab at his own wife: "No es la miel para la boca del asno" (Honey is not for the mouth of an ass). But above all else, we have the strange "on-again-off-again" status of Sancho's ass. What today's greatest Cervantes scholars take as an authorial lapse or a printer's error requires far more thoughtful consideration in the context of *The Golden Ass*. Similarly, it should not be so easy to overlook the constant exchange, theft, and display of gold throughout Cervantes's novel. These include the mad knight's self-serving golden age speech, the either golden or brass helmet or urinal worn by either Mambrino or the second barber, depending on one's perspective, and most importantly, Cardenio's "escudos, que pasaban de ciento" (gold coins, which amounted to more than one hundred)—which Sancho Panza quietly tucks away in his mysterious saddlebags, and yet which somehow refuse to disappear even when his ass begins to flicker in and out of view. And, of course, in *Don Quijote* there are all varieties of desire: the liberally instinctual desire of Ovid, the singularly devotional desire of Petrarch, the mimetic triangular desire of Girard, the always somehow incestuous desire of Freud, and the impossibly erotic and yet also metaphysical desires of mystics like Santa Teresa de Ávila and San Juan de la Cruz. Apuleius's novel helps us to understand that in the end, these are all subordinated to the Captive's desire for Zoraida-María or, better still, her desire for him.

What is going on here? There is a range of possible responses: On the one hand, the thematic weight of asses, gold, and desire is Cervantes's way of signaling the informed reader that he is performing a Christian transformation of Apuleius. Cervantes outwits his rival writers by returning to the true classical origins of the form. More generally, Spanish realism remains so quirky in Cervantes because although he acknowledges Aristotelian precepts, he still refuses to relinquish the novel's deep roots in Neoplatonic philosophy. An ingenious way to maintain both verisimilitude and surreal magic is to turn "error" into a new way of forcing the reader to ponder important symbols and events. In any case, as the matter of Sancho's radically intermittent ass indicates, Cervantes's use of Apuleius in *Don Quijote* is complex, and we must consider that the author adds references to biblical asses, Buridan's ass, Euclid's "pons asinorum," as well as the concluding ass in *El Lazarillo de Tormes*, which boldly embodies the neoscholastics' interest in economic exchange as the best way to overcome ethnic and religious strife in southern Spain. But the fact remains that without a proper grasp of Apuleius, the meaning of the picaresque, and hence Cervantes's masterpiece, can be painfully elusive.

And how do we know that Cervantes turned to Plato for *Don Quijote* part 2? Again, the historical and philological evidence is compelling. At the beginning of the

seventeenth century, just as the picaresque approached the zenith of its influence on Spanish novelists, the Platonic genre of princely advice manuals reached a feverishly anti-Machiavellian pitch all across Europe. Botero's *Della ragion di stato* (Venice, 1589) is the archetype, but there were multiple examples of the same in Spain, such as Felipe de la Torre's deeply Erasmian *Institución de un reychristiano* of 1556, Rivadeneira's *Tratado de la religión* of 1595, the two editions of Juan de Mariana's infamous *De rege et regis institutione* published in 1599 and 1605, and Quevedo's climactic *Política de Dios*, published in 1617, just two years after *Don Quijote* part 2. In addition, Cervantes's literary career was decidedly political. It begins with a moderate princely advice play, *La Numancia* (c. 1582), which is essentially a meditation on De la Torre's work, and it approaches its rebellious climax in an obscenely irreverent sonnet written on, and apparently performed before, the catafalque of the dead king Philip II in 1598, this sonnet being the text of which Cervantes claimed to have been most proud. Finally, within the 1615 continuation of *Don Quijote*, Cervantes clearly signals a political program in its very first chapter, where he portrays the mad knight, the priest, and the barber locked in a heated discussion along the lines of Botero's "reason of state," and eventually, in chapter 38, the Countess of Trifaldi directly cites the classical origin of all Western political treatises, observing that "from good and harmonious republics poets ought to be banished, as Plato advised."

Reading Plato helps us to see that the major point of *Don Quijote* part 2 is the impossibility of escaping illusions. Don Quijote's elaborate visions in the Cave of Montesinos followed closely by his violent reaction to Maese Pedro's puppet show are the novel's most important references to the two operative metaphors for false consciousness found in the allegory at the beginning of book seven of *The Republic*. Again, we have every right to ask our fellow readers, "What is going on here?" The short answer is that *Don Quijote* part 2 advances a cynical and fatalistic view of politics. Although Cervantes was roundly respectful of Plato's psychology, the 1615 novel is an all-out attack on *The Republic's* utopian dream. It is antimonarchical in the extreme, lamenting both Philip II's savage repression of freedom in Aragon in 1591 and Philip III's misguided expulsion of the Moriscos of southern Spain in 1609–14. The ultimate point of Sancho's failed reign on the utopian island of Barataria is a mockery of the small-mindedness of Spain's increasingly absolutist monarchs who, like the rest of Europe's monarchs, filled their courts with Platonic sycophants.

Now I will be the first to admit that my strict division of *Don Quijote* parts 1 and 2 as meditations first on Apuleius and then on Plato is overly simplistic. Of course, there is much overlapping of the two programs. In part 1, Plato's curriculum issue is clearly present in the burning-of-the-books episode of chapter 6, and Don Quijote himself is already represented as a helpless puppet against a textual back wall, so to speak, in the notoriously invisible chapter 43. And in part 2, Apuleius shows up again in what I like to call "the mounting problem of the mounts." In chapter 10, the mesmerizing parade of *asnos, bestias, burros, burras, borricos, borricas, jumentos, jumentas, mulas, pollinas, rucios, caballos, cananeas, yeguas*, and even a *cebra* is surely Cervantes's way of mocking those who did not get the point of Sancho's mysteriously missing ass in part 1. Similar nods to Apuleius in part 2 include the hilarious braying episode in chapter 27; Clavileño, the exploding wooden horse in chapter 41;

and in what is perhaps the clearest overlapping of Cervantes's Apuleian and Platonic programs, when Sancho Panza melodramatically embraces his ass at the end of his reign in Barataria in chapter 53 (see Gustave Doré's famous rendering), only to then fall into yet another symbolic cave with that same ass in chapter 55. Cervantes then sums up his Christianized version of the picaresque novel in part 2, chapter 58, when Don Quijote reviews the four mounted saints—George, Martin, James, and Paul—with the moral metamorphosis of Paul as the ultimate ideal. And by the way, the wise German satirist G. C. Lichtenberg once remarked: "A book is a mirror: if an ass peers into it, do not expect an apostle to peer out."

To conclude, and admittedly out of pure self-interest—in case you have forgotten, I maintain that *Don Quijote* should be *the* core text *sine qua non* in a U.S. liberal arts program—I nevertheless hope to have made my fellow readers' and their fellow readers' explorations of the first modern novel more enjoyable and more plausible, on the one hand by making this insanely difficult text less intimidating, and on the other hand by demonstrating its heavy reliance on what I am now forced to argue are the two most important core texts of classical antiquity. Finally, ponder this: the core text that is *Don Quijote* refers to the core text that is *The Golden Ass*, which for its part refers to that single and rather unruly democratic ass in book eight of the core text that is *The Republic*. I would urge every student of the liberal arts to ponder that passage from Plato and then turn to part 2, chapter 61, of Cervantes's novel and read about what happens to an insane knight from La Mancha and his silly squire when they are received by the traditionally republican city of Barcelona.

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# The Political Animal? Teaching Aristotle's *Politics* to Today's Students

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A goal of a liberal education is to familiarize students with fundamental questions of perennial significance. Thus, students should be exposed to alternative understandings of justice, or equality, or groundings for morals, and they should be encouraged to take these alternatives *seriously*. That is, students should not just be presented with a smattering of alternatives so they can simply list off the alternative theories of, say, justice. Rather, students should be presented with a strong defense of alternatives and encouraged to entertain the notion that these alternatives may be correct. In this paper, I will try to sketch out how one might go about getting students to take seriously Aristotle's very famous claim that human beings are by nature political animals. Accordingly, this paper will discuss teaching the opening chapters of Aristotle's *Politics*, as well as offer interpretations of these passages. I intend to show how these chapters lay bare the fundamental alternatives regarding humankind's political nature.

Students may already be dimly aware of the fundamental alternatives regarding humankind's political nature. Indeed, the dimness of their awareness is often evinced in their holding opinions on the matter that are in some tension with each other. On the one hand, students in the United States, and probably the West generally, tend to believe strongly in the justice of liberal regimes but are often unaware that the regime to which they are attached rests fundamentally on a denial of the claim that humankind is naturally political. On the other hand, these same students also sense that something in them draws them toward their fellow human beings, that humans are somehow driven to live together in some sort of association, or, at the very least,

to couple or to form friendships or families. By exploring this tension and trying to lay bare the contradictory opinions that may lie behind them, one can encourage students to grapple with these fundamental alternatives more clear-sightedly. That is, by appealing to something in the students' soul, by appealing to their own deeply held opinions and longings, one can attempt to get them to take seriously this question regarding human nature.

First, what did Aristotle mean when he so famously declared the city to be natural and humans to be naturally political? When trying to advance Aristotle's view on the matter, it is useful to dispel the first likely misunderstanding, a misunderstanding perpetuated, in my view, by social contract theorists and, above all, by Thomas Hobbes. Aristotle did not mean, of course, that humans were originally in cities; this can be gleaned from even a cursory reading of book 1, chapter 2 of the *Politics*, which more or less traces a genealogy of the city. Students can be brought to see this most clearly when Aristotle says that the one who first established a city "is responsible for the greatest of goods" (1253a, 30–31). So cities, or political associations generally, are established by human beings, but the impulse to do so is in us. Once one sees that Aristotle agrees with social contract theorists that humans were not originally in cities, once one sees that ascribing this view to Aristotle is a kind of sleight of hand, one can begin to be open to the possibility that Aristotle's view is a serious one.

Hobbes accomplished this sleight of hand by changing the focus of what it means for something to be "natural," and Hobbes's view of nature has carried the day. For Hobbes, as for us, I believe, to be natural means to be in a being's original state. To find the nature of something, one looks, so to speak, backward. Hobbes has not necessarily refuted Aristotle's conception of nature; he has rather changed the meaning of the term. While Aristotle considers the origin and spontaneous nature of a thing important for understanding a thing's nature, one must also or above all look *forward*, so to speak, to its end or goal. One must look at its matter, form, and efficient cause, but a thing's nature is principally what it will be at its peak or at its greatest.

And humans, at their best, would live in cities. While there is a natural impulse in humans to couple and to form families, this impulse only reaches its fulfillment in cities. It is rather easy to show college-age students that the family is insufficient or not conducive to human flourishing by reference to their own erotic desires. It is perhaps a little more difficult to convince them that village life is also insufficient, since many of them have idyllic fantasies about the decency of primitive or tribal cultures. One can, however, lead them to see that the greater part of their day would still be consumed with work, despite the fact that, as Aristotle says, the village is the first association not devoted simply to daily needs.

The city is the first association big enough to allow for leisure, which means that the city is the first association that allows for higher pursuits in the arts and sciences. But it is still small enough that everyone knows everyone, or at least is familiar with someone who might know another. Accordingly, there can be a kind of moral supervision of the community. While it is usually quite easy to show students that there is a minimum size for an association to conduce to human happiness, it is a more difficult task to show that there is a maximum size.

So humans can only reach their full potential, they can only become perfect or complete—to the degree, at any rate, that mortals can achieve perfection—by living in common in a city. The city is natural insofar as it allows or rather enables human beings to arrive at their highest natural perfection.

Aristotle alludes to two views contrary to the view that the city is natural—views that I will call the poetic and the sophistic views of the city. The poetic view, the view that adorns the city and therefore embellishes, is that the city is divine. For Aristotle, the city is not divine, though he is rather circumspect in disagreeing with this view. Consider his discussion of kingship in this context at 1252b, 22 and consider that the founders of Athens, Minos, and Sparta were the legendary divine or semidivine kings. Aristotle cautiously rejects this view. The view that the city is not divine is not very difficult, let us say, to get students to agree with.

The second view to which Aristotle alludes, the view that I am calling the sophistic view, is that the city rests on force. This, or something like it, is the view advanced by the Thrasymachus and Callicles types, as well as Protagoras. Under this view, the city is not natural but merely conventional. And unlike the view that the city is divine, it resonates with our students, and for very good reason. It is very similar to the views expressed by many social contract theorists like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. I will limit my discussion mostly to Hobbes, for many reasons, but above all because he most explicitly rejects Aristotle's view that the city is natural.

Hobbes denies outright that man is political. In *De Cive*, where Hobbes is franker than in his later work, *Leviathan*, he says, “The greatest part of those men who have written aught concerning commonwealths, either suppose, or require us or beg of us to believe, that man is a creature born fit for society. The Greeks called him *zoon politikon*” (*De Cive* I.2). This view is wrong, according to Hobbes, and it can be useful to point out to students precisely how apolitical we are in his view. Many students are well aware of how violent humans are or how dreadful the state of nature is in his view, but few are familiar with how far reaching he believes our unsociability to be.

Later, Hobbes says: “*all free congress ariseth either from mutual poverty, or from vain glory*” (*De Cive* I.2, emphasis added). There is thus no room in Hobbes's political thought for friendship, including or especially the friendship or love (or *philia*) between a man and a woman, i.e., the familial love. Here is where I believe teachers of Aristotle can get students to take his argument seriously. Few students think that all association with their fellow human beings is a result of poverty or vainglory. One need only think of how social today's students are, with philanthropic organizations, political ones, fraternities and sororities, Facebook. And at least at my rural state university, although with so-called helicopter parents perhaps mine is not a unique experience, one thinks of how important family is. Family and friendship seem to be consistent problems for social contract theorists—as is love more generally.

In other words, I think Aristotle speaks more to the experience of love, of friendship, and of the family than Hobbes does, and this has some pull with students. We humans do seem to ourselves to be political, or at least we do seem to long to be with one another. As Aristotle says in book eight of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in the context of speaking of friendship (*philia*, love): “For a human being is by nature more a coupling being than a political one” (1162a, 17–18). The family is one form of association (*koinonia*), and the earliest. And humans are not alone in being inclined

toward associating with others of the same species. One sees other animals, admittedly to various degrees, caring for their young, as well as even sometimes for their semblances. Now, for Aristotle, the variation one sees is because animals vary in degree of gregariousness.

The human being is the most political animal because of his capacity for speech or reason—one should recall that the word is the same in Greek. Hobbes turns this on its head—but again only by hook or by crook. Hobbes divides *logos* into two: speech and reason. Speech, for Hobbes, leads us to conflict. The tongue of man, he says, is a trumpet for sedition. While Aristotle does say that our ability to speak about the painful and pleasant, the advantageous and the disadvantageous, and the just and the unjust is what makes us more political than other animals, Aristotle is not overly sanguine about our sociability. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he makes clear that it is precisely over these very same things that human beings dispute (1094b, 15–17).

Nonetheless, on the whole, reason associates us, it makes us more political than other animals. And this is true for both Aristotle and Hobbes, our representative of social contract theorists. Hobbes's natural laws, recall, are nothing but the dictates of right reason, and reason commands us to seek peace, which leads us, ultimately, to form society. So the goal for both Hobbes and Aristotle—though Hobbes would certainly guffaw at my use of the term *goal*—is the same! Namely, society. Moreover, it is precisely *reason* that leads us there for Hobbes. Once Hobbes's sleights of hand are exposed, we see the caricature of Aristotle for what it is. And to repeat, the two main sleights of hand are changing the focus of the term *nature* and dividing *logos* into two. On some points, we see that Hobbes and Aristotle are not very far apart. Both agree that humans lived in some sort of pre-political manner originally and that humans are led by reason and nature to live in society.

To conclude, many of the papers at the annual meeting of the Association for Core Texts and Courses persistently raise the same question: how does one get students to take Great Books seriously? I have tried to offer one way, which is to show students that they do not know something that they previously thought that they knew, or to show them that they hold simultaneously conflicting views on a subject. Regarding humankind's political nature, I do not believe that the students immediately realize how much they have at stake in the answer to that question. It does not elicit the same kind of blowback one might get in pressing them on contradictory views that they may have on justice or God. But they can be shown. I have tried to show how to get students to take seriously Aristotle's view that human beings are by nature political, a view, I believe, that ought to be taken seriously.

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# The Dangling Knight: Don Quixote, Puppet

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As a man, Don Quixote does not stand up well, and that is because he is not a man; he is, rather, a puppet, and at that he is exceedingly good. In his *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*, Sam Tillis offers a detailed taxonomy of the defining features of a puppet, and Don Quixote meets all four. For one, he is a designed figure; in the first chapters of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes describes his flimsy construction, which nonetheless serves Alonso Quijano's purpose well and also lends the figure a certain charm. To form his puppet and give him the spurious existence that distinguishes all puppets, Quijano uses the sign systems of knights errant: the helmet, the sword, the armor, for example, along with other characteristics such as antiquated Spanish, an intrepid character, and unwavering valor. Don Quixote's status as a construction (Tillis's feature one) is plain to see, and that he both moves (feature two) and speaks (feature three) are equally clear. Tillis explains how these three features relate to the ontological paradox shared by all puppets, which is that spectators must simultaneously both regard a puppet as living and also recognize that the puppet is dependent on a human for its animation. Thus, the puppet is fundamentally a theatrical, inanimate construction moved by human effort, given human speech, and under human control. In the case of Don Quixote, we might think of him as a "humanotte" (as against a hand-manipulated marionette), which is a puppet embodied entirely by a walking and speaking human, such as the figure of Big Bird. Finally, Tillis's fourth feature states that the audience must know the puppet to be an instrument of fiction yet nonetheless participate in the theatrical illusion it creates. In this essay I explore this theatrical idea of Don Quixote as a puppet specifically to illuminate the two scenes in which Don Quixote is presented literally as a puppet on a string, a dangling knight.

Twice in the novel *Don Quixote*, our knight is hung from on high. The first instance occurs in I:32 when Don Quixote and Sancho return to an inn they had once before left in an uproar. This time, Maritornes, a maid at the inn, decides to pull a prank on Don Quixote, whose ways she knows well. The innkeeper's daughter pretends to be a besotted princess who wishes only to caress Don Quixote's hand, and Maritornes and the daughter convince Don Quixote to sneak out at night, climb onto his horse Rocinante, stand, and insert his hand into the opening of the hayloft where the princess awaits him. Maritornes swiftly and snugly ties Don Quixote's proffered hand with a long cord, which she then affixes inside the hayloft. With Don Quixote thus immobilized, Maritornes and the innkeeper's daughter steal off amid great laughter. Don Quixote hangs there in the dark all night and without moving or speaking for fear of stirring Rocinante, for he must try to stand on Rocinante's back to keep from hanging with all his weight. Don Quixote spends the entire night in a spell, he says, convinced that he has been bewitched and fearful that his horrific plight of complete immobility, which is how he frames it, will last into eternity. The next morning Rocinante is distracted by a horse sniffing his hind quarters and moves, and down goes Don Quixote. His desperate shouts finally wake the people at the inn, and Maritornes creeps into the hayloft and cuts him down. Some travelers arriving at the inn ask what is wrong with him, and his reaction is to mount Rocinante, take up his shield, ready his lance, and ride forth, challenging to combat anyone who dare say that he was justly treated that night. He is uncharacteristically bursting with rage, anger, and fury.

The second instance occurs in II: 22 at the Cave of Montesinos. In this section of the novel Don Quixote and Sancho meet a scholar from Salamanca who identifies himself as a humanist and who agrees to serve as their guide to the famous cave. Its entrance is an opening in the ground, and the only way in is straight down. Don Quixote wants to see its depths, even, he says, if the cave reaches to the pit of hell, so they buy a long rope and tie Don Quixote up firmly. After he prays to God and petitions Dulcinea for protection, they lower him bit by bit. The humanist remains at the mouth, first telling Don Quixote to keep his eyes sharp for anything worth publishing in his latest book and then feeding out the rope while Don Quixote dangles, spinning slowly in the dark. At some point, Don Quixote, who says he was "weary and sad at finding himself hanging and dangling by the rope and journeying through that obscure region on no assured or chartered road" (614), makes his way onto an outcrop, gathers up the remaining length of the rope, makes a comfortable spot there, and drifts off. When the humanist and Sancho pull him up an hour later, he is initially catatonic and then awakens to tell three days' worth of ludicrous adventures that he has pulled from dreams. He is delirious and ranting to such an extreme that Sancho calls him out, saying,

[O]n a bitter day did your worship descend to the other world dear master. . . . Before, you were all right up here with your wits whole, as God gave them to you uttering judgments and offering counsel at every step, and not, as you are now, talking the greatest nonsense imaginable. (622)<EXT>Why is Don Quixote dangled in these two well-known scenes? The parallel images beg for interpretation. Why is he immobile? Why in the dark? What does it mean to the text that Don Quixote is

depicted as a lifeless and speechless puppet here? And why is Don Quixote so frustrated when, as a rule, he brushes off most trials as all in a day's work for a knight errant?

One answer may lie in the parody written into the novel; knights errant traditionally have two strong pulls on them, as depicted in Raphael's painting *The Vision of the Knight*, where the two core principles of chivalry are embodied in two human figures. The figure on the left represents wisdom accompanied by prudence, and the figure on the right beauty and pleasure accompanied by virtue. These ideals of chivalry do not compete against each other but, rather, equally compel the knight and serve to guide his actions. What happens when, conversely, the knight's world is overtaken by/confronted with perversions of the two principles? That is what we see in these two scenes of the novel *Don Quixote*.

The person at the center of the first episode of our dangling and immobile knight is the maid named Maritornes. Maritornes personifies all that is *not* virtuous, beautiful, and lovely in the form of a woman, and, furthermore, she and Don Quixote have a history. On Don Quixote's first visit to the inn, Maritornes ends up in Don Quixote's bed erroneously (she's being surreptitious, it's dark, and she has a bad eye) while she is looking for her male friend for the night, a cowboy-type who is sleeping nearby. Don Quixote imagines that he is at a castle and that the king's daughter is in love with him, and he mistakes Maritornes for the princess, hugging her tightly and managing not to notice her coarse features, deformed body, and foul breath, which smells of old salami. While she fights to get away, Don Quixote tries with no effect to explain why he won't submit to her charms. The cowboy busts Don Quixote's lip and tramples on him until the bed breaks, and this is followed by a melee in the dark with Don Quixote, the cowboy, Maritornes, Sancho, and the innkeeper. Maritornes personifies neither virtue nor beauty; rather, she is associated with brute pleasure and linked to lust.

A scholar, more particularly a humanist, is the person at the center of the second episode of our dangling knight, but the humanist who takes Don Quixote to the Cave of Montesinos personifies all that is *not* wisdom. He writes books that are profitable for the press and entertaining to the commonwealth, and he dedicates them to princes, i.e., benefactors. In other words, his material is popular, and he is financed by vanity. He mainly compiles lists of irrelevant facts and garbled minutiae, all ostensibly inspired in classical learning such as Ovid and Virgil but entirely risible; in one book, for example, he tells who the first man in the world was to have a cold. Sancho likes that, and they talk about other "first men"—the first to scratch his head, and the first to tumble. When Sancho comments that the humanist is all about stupid questions and stupid answers, Don Quixote responds, "Sancho, there are some who tire themselves out learning and proving things which, once learned and proved, do not concern either the understanding or memory a jot" (610). This humanist holds no hope for showing Don Quixote the mysteries of the cave.

We see then that in these two scenes, Don Quixote is confronted by the antitheses of the two principles that animate him; rather than someone showing prudent wisdom, he meets a fool; rather than a virtuous beauty, a whore—*puta*, as the innkeeper calls her. How do we expect Don Quixote to react when he is quite literally

put into their hands? As we would expect, he goes limp. Lifeless. He dangles. He is as a puppet with no animation in the hands of absent or deficient manipulators; they have no pull on him.

In sum, Don Quixote is Alonso Quijano's embodiment of the chivalric in puppet form. In fact, Don Quixote may be viewed as what has been called an übermarionette in that he is always true to the principles of his construction. Don Quixote always acts and speaks predictably and according to his guiding principles and his role, if not to reality, to which puppets are not bound, after all. Everything he does he does in accordance with these two animating principles. Thus, Don Quixote does not act or speak when the whore or the fool are holding onto his strings; they are incapable of handling him or animating him, and they violate his purpose. He dangles silently in the dark.

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# Thoreau and the Anti-Politics of Resistance

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Seventy-five years ago, as Britain was about to declare war on Nazi Germany, the English political theorist Michael Oakeshott addressed what he regarded as a troubling commonplace: that everyone has a moral and political obligation to take an active and extended part in politics. For Oakeshott, it was a “gross delusion” that every “sensitive and intelligent person” should resist. For “political action,” he argued, “involves mental vulgarity, not merely because it entails the concurrence and support of those who are mentally vulgar, but because of the false simplification of human life implied in even the best of its purposes” (91, 93). What was a commonplace three-quarters of a century ago is arguably a gross delusion today, and what was shocking then—for Oakeshott intended to unsettle his readers—is now a commonplace. For the rise in digital media has allowed public discourse to devolve into the sort of exchange in which highly partisan political actors voice increasingly radicalized versions of their positions to audiences who already agree with them. In addition, the influence of money in elections, and the rise of more plebiscitary forms of democratic decision-making, leave young people increasingly alienated from the major institutions of American society (Garsten 4).

In this chapter I intend to treat Henry David Thoreau’s “Resistance to Civil Government”—one of the most celebrated and influential accounts of principled action in modern American letters—as a core text that shares Oakeshott’s contempt for the rhetoric of democratic politics. In place of “what is called politics” (“Life Without Principle” 177)—the phrase is Thoreau’s—he offered a celebration of “action from principle” that has inspired a diverse range of figures and organizations (“Resistance” 72). The action—his refusal to pay his poll tax, for which he was arrested

and briefly jailed—embodied his principled refusal to recognize the authority of a government that did not just sanction slavery but supported it. That Thoreau's essay is itself a rhetorical tour de force does not undermine the seriousness of his purpose. For he took care to adopt rhetorical forms designed to frustrate passive readers and to compel them to engage in the struggle to discern the truth in all its complexity. He reveled in paradoxes and contradictions, rewrote popular slogans so that they acquired entirely new meanings—all in an effort to create a productive uncertainty in his audience. As he wrote in his journal, “Yes and No are lies—A true answer will not aim to establish anything, but rather to set all well afloat” (qtd. in Golemba 7).

Thoreau placed more faith in action than in words, which is why he used his incarceration as the touchstone of his principle of resistance. But actions do not always speak for themselves, at least not in the way we would hope. According to a well-known, though apocryphal, anecdote, Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Thoreau in jail. “Henry, why are you here?” Emerson is said to have asked his young friend. “Waldo, why are you *not* here?” came the reply (Jones 15). While the story is often repeated to dramatize their mutual disapproval, it also illustrates the difficulty Thoreau would face in convincing his fellow townsmen that “action from principle,” even if it entailed breaking the laws of an unjust state and accepting the consequences, is an obligation that they all should recognize. As to the utility of a night spent in jail, Thoreau admonished those who, like Emerson, believed his action to be pointless and ineffective: “[T]hey do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person” (“Resistance” 87, 88).

Throughout his career, Thoreau was dedicated to the ideal of self-culture or self-reform that inspired Emerson and his Transcendentalist followers. For Thoreau it entailed withdrawing from the dulling comfort of mass society to cultivate his intellectual and moral faculties and to find his vocation by turning to unmediated nature. The woods surrounding Walden Pond offered Thoreau just such an opportunity, and it was there, in the spring of 1845, that he built a small cabin to get away from society and from the power that popular language had to deceive and to co-opt the unwary. Hardly a recluse, Thoreau continued the practice of public speaking he had begun in the preceding year, when he lectured on the subject of reform in 1844 before a group of radical reformers gathered at Boston's Amory Hall. Not one to curry favor with his audience, Thoreau told them they would be better off reforming themselves than seeking to reform others. He also denounced the utopian communities that were springing up in Massachusetts in the 1830s and 1840s. “As for these communities,” Thoreau wrote in his journal, “I think I had rather keep a bachelor's [*sic*] hall in hell than go to board in heaven” (I:277). He believed that associations such as Fruitlands or Brook Farm were self-defeating, for he regarded dissent as the proper expression of self-reform, and popular approval, even within a small association, its death.

While the young Thoreau urged his listeners to obey their individual callings, rather than adhere to the expectations or desires of their “neighbors and kind friends and patrons,” he would find it increasingly difficult to disparage organized efforts at reform, especially the abolition movement, as the country became more embroiled over the problem of slavery (“Reform and Reformers” 188). His opposition to slav-

ery initially took the form of passive resistance. Following the lead of abolitionists in Massachusetts, Thoreau refused to pay his poll tax—a fee levied on all males between the ages of twenty and seventy. He had refused to pay it for six years before he was finally arrested. He did not publicize his refusal because he did not care who knew or did not know. He just was not going to pay it, and he did not care what the result would be. But over the course of the 1840s his perspective changed. In 1845 Texas had entered the Union as a slave state. In May of the following year, Mexico, which had never accepted Texas's independence, declared war on the United States. For Thoreau, opposition to the war meant opposition to public opinion and a politics that tolerated slavery, militarism, and imperial expansion.

By the time he published "Resistance," in 1849, Thoreau recognized that social reform could not depend on individual acts of self-reform alone. Rather, he had come to believe that justice demanded active resistance to the government. Passive and private resistance would not suffice. Instead, just resistance called for a public and, if need be, violent response to the state's shedding of innocent blood. It is not difficult to understand Thoreau's contempt for "what is called politics," as he put it. The growing equality of condition that for Alexis de Tocqueville marked the triumph of democracy in Jacksonian America had allowed majorities to exercise a despotic and insidious control over the formation and expression of ideas. "The same equality," wrote Tocqueville, "which makes [a person] dependent of each separate citizen leaves him isolated and defenseless in the face of the majority. So in democracies public opinion has a strange power of which aristocratic nations can form no conception. It uses no persuasion to forward its beliefs, but by some mighty pressure of the mind of all upon the intelligence of each it imposes its ideas and makes them penetrate men's very souls" (435). It was in this context that Thoreau declared that "the mass of men serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, *posse comitatus*, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense" ("Resistance" 66). In these circumstances, given the climate of opinion in the country, being "political," that is, involving oneself in the affairs or institutions of government, entailed the implicit legitimization of slaveholding and imperial expansion. Moreover, for Thoreau it was no longer enough to be a law-abiding citizen, for one's presence in the majority only served to legitimize immoral laws and practices; one now had a duty to be a dissident.

The rise of equality during the first half of the nineteenth century also meant the decline of hierarchical and paternalistic groups and classes that had characterized American society in earlier times. People were increasingly faced with the task of creating identities for themselves and others in a marketplace dominated by public opinion. Then, as now, politicians soon learned that it was easy to produce and exchange false or misleading images and statements in such an environment (Pocock 538). Not surprisingly, Thoreau rejected what is *called* politics on grounds that politics had become a superficial and coarsening affair, whose essential falsity follows from the nature of what could be achieved politically ("Life Without Principle" 177). It was from this standpoint that he declared government to be "at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all government are sometimes, inexpe-

dient." This is especially so in time of war, which tends to destroy political liberty ("Resistance" 63).

Thoreau's response to this state of affairs was to deny the efficacy of electoral politics. He asked, "Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing the rights of man?" (89). For Thoreau, the problem with democracy "as we know it" inheres in the electoral principle of majority rule. Voting is a feeble expression of an individual's conscience, for one's capacity for vital action is submerged in the will of the majority. Although democracy invites individuals to "cast [their] whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but [their] whole influence," in fact "the mass of men" are more interested in earning a living than they are with seemingly abstract and far-off concerns, "and are not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico." Indeed, in such circumstances justice is not likely to be done by encouraging more people to vote. Even those "who are *in opinion* opposed to slavery and to the war" will be unlikely to commit themselves to acting on what is right when the majority is disposed to continue the status quo (76, 68, 69).

What is needed, Thoreau argued, is for the conscientious individual in the minority to give up what is called politics in favor of action from principle, which, in the face of injustice, requires the transgression of unjust laws. He did not argue that the individual is morally obliged to contribute to the public good, by "devot[ing] himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him." Thoreau denied that conscientious individuals have a moral obligation to devote themselves wholly to public service; indeed, he was rarely more caustic than when musing about "doing-good." "If I were to preach at all in this strain," he wrote in *Walden*, "I should say rather, Set about being good. . . . If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious intention of doing me good, I should run for my life." This does not imply that Thoreau was careless or oblivious of the common good; rather, he understood that nothing a person does is unconnected with the life of a society. For a person serves society, not by devoting himself to a cause, but by pursuing his calling wherever it leads. What Thoreau said, ironically, of the do-gooder—"I would not stand between any man and his genius"—applies without irony to everyone (73–74).

In *Walden* he likened himself to "chanticler in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up" (84); in "Resistance" the image of Socrates' gadfly is more apt. Like Socrates, he sought to persuade and reproach his neighbors and fellow citizens for failing to live up to their own ideals. His voice could be strident, and his expectations unrealistic, but his message was underwritten with the authority of his own action. As he proclaimed in "Resistance," "it is not so important that many should be as good as you, as that there be some absolute goodness somewhere; for that will leaven the whole lump" (69). Thoreau was not claiming the mantle of "absolute goodness," but rather bearing witness to its existence in the higher law and urging his listeners and readers to undertake the project of self-reform upon which he believed all genuine social reform rests.

Thoreau's doctrine and his example have spread far beyond its intended audience. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both claimed him as the inspira-

tion for their practice of passive or nonviolent resistance, though Thoreau himself was quite willing to endorse violence in opposition to chattel slavery, as he did when he praised John Brown's failed raid on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, (now West) Virginia. The dramatic and far-reaching changes brought about by the efforts of Gandhi and King, manifest as they are in the mass movements and, eventually, through the democratic political institutions of their respective societies, are apt to draw our attention away from where Thoreau would have us place the emphasis. He would have us maintain a certain intellectual distance from "what is called politics" in modern democratic societies, the better to see through the empty talk and corrupting practices that we tend to take for granted. Instead, he would have us focus our energies on self-reform, on becoming self-reliant individuals who are willing and able to engage in the political action and resistance upon which social reform depends. Such action takes courage, and a determination to resist the comforting illusion that public opinion is the measure of all value.

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## **Is Religion Still Significant?**



# On Modes of Learning and J. H. Newman's Oxford University Sermons

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This essay concerns learning's impediments, modes, and motivations in the world of our students, with special attention to mathematics. Its text is *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford Between A.D. 1826 and 1843* by that great master of prose style and illustration, John Henry Newman (1801–90). Also informing this essay are reflections, aided by Newman, on the author's two decades of concurrent work in universities and technical companies, learning and applying mathematics with students and colleagues. Connecting sermons with mathematics deserves some justification. As for the sermons: these are of a high intellectual and literary order, treating vital and perennial issues. Moreover, Newman draws striking illustrations from and about mathematics; and his heart for helping homeless modern minds find refuge, roots, and right aspirations commends him to those who lead learners.

As for mathematics: human work, wonder, wisdom, and worship across five millennia involved its learning, making, and use; five of the seven classic liberal arts intersect it strongly. Now, prestigious authority is assumed for mathematics amid the fantastic flourishing of modern natural and political sciences, making it the ideal for all human knowing. The great mathematician David Hilbert (1862–1943) reflected: "The goal of my theory is to establish once and for all the certitude of mathematical methods" which, "instead of pertaining just to the sphere of specialized scientific interests, is needed for *the dignity of the human intellect* itself" (135–36). But such prestige can impede liberal learning by encouraging unreal expectations and demands, or fatalistic and stupefying views on human nature, action, and learning. Mathematics will not bear being lionized as an icon of "certainty, clarity and co-

herence” for all learning. Humankind’s modes of learning, *even in mathematics*, as argued below, are much more, and aspire to much more, than such false ideals allow. Education must engender love—of learning, of other minds, of ventures in the world for the true and good. It forms the habits and resources for rigorous reading across fields that gives refreshment, resourcefulness, companionship, and hope. The liberal arts, including mathematics, help equip learners for wise actions. Critical consideration of real mathematical experience, then, is a key to facing the challenges to learning and action in our students’ world.

In his fifth Oxford sermon, Newman asks about the apostles as teachers: “How was it that, in spite of all these impediments to their success, they still succeeded? How did they find that lodgment in the world, enabling them to perpetuate principles distasteful to the majority, even of those who profess to receive them” (*Fifteen Sermons* 91–92)? A math teacher can relate! Let’s face it: learning math seems lame to many, making true teaching tedious. For learning to happen, extraordinary claims must be sold to students, by the curriculum, the text, the teacher, about what they can expect to learn and do in a number of weeks, about their background, time, and stamina. Such claims go far beyond the known and depend upon what Newman names “presumptions” and “antecedent probabilities” (201–2, 192). Direct evidence formally sufficient to such claims cannot typically be had by teacher or student. For a few impediments connected with mathematics, take the skeptic (always doubting the program), the spectator (who only watches others act), and the dilettante (dabbles but will not dig deep). Such stances of resistance sometimes rise up in learners. Quoting Newman: “Scepticism, which shows itself in dissatisfaction with evidence of whatever kind, is often called by the name of Reason. . . . In like manner, when mathematics are said to incline the mind towards doubt, . . . this arises . . . from its indisposing us for arguments drawn from mere probabilities” (187). In demanding a so-called mathematical certainty in all learning, “Man is no longer what he really is, he is made the logarithm of his true self, and in that shape is worked with the ease and satisfaction of logarithms” (*Essay 27*).

Newman countered such logarithmic optics by describing the real modes by which humans learn and act in their world, observing: “According as objects are great, the mode of attaining them is extraordinary; and again, according as it is extraordinary, so is the merit of the action” (*Fifteen Sermons* 215). Real learning requires of students a substantial anticipation of great things, and the will and way to risk a venture for them. This Newman calls *faith*, a word much maligned by strawman misdefinition. A right and loving heart and will, he observes, guard faith from superstition and guard reason from skepticism (223–30). By contrast, the popular dismissal “Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence” sloganizes a despairing of great things and would restrict learning to trivialities.

How else do learners find that “lodgment in the world” that overcomes impediments? Newman examines many modes of knowing as observed in those who learn and act in the world: various workings of the senses, memory, testimony, faith, and reason. Learners are responsible for their use, and with them must make their way. Space allows illustration of only two, memory and reason. In a colloquium discussion of truth, I was asked rhetorically what other sources of knowing there could pos-

sibly be besides science. When I mentioned memory, a student attacked this based on a study on the fallibility of memory she had once read. So, it might aid clearer thinking about learning to ask how we typically know, and to distinguish “mathematical certainty” from knowledge of truth. How does a scientist know her science? How much is by memory or habit or testimony of implicitly trusted texts or teachers? How much by reasoning from presumptions, preferences, and antecedent probabilities?

Newman distinguishes explicit reason, implicit reason, and faith. Faith, a principle of action “sole and elementary and complete in itself,” Newman says, “admits but does not require what is commonly understood by reason” (Fifteen Sermons 201, 244). Implicit reason is not an art but “a living and spontaneous energy within us” (246). This common type of reasoning admits but does not require explicit reason: the arguments, analyses, formulas, and rules that come by a secondary act of ordering and simplifying acts of implicit reason. A quote on implicit reason and faith acting in mathematics will focus the argument:

The most remarkable victories of genius, remarkable both in their originality and the confidence with which they have been pursued, have been gained, as though by invisible weapons, by ways of thought so recondite and intricate that the mass of people are obliged to take them on trust till the event or other evidence confirms them. Such are the methods that penetrating intellects have invented in mathematical science and that look like sophisms till they issue in truths. Here, even in the severest of disciplines and in absolutely demonstrative processes, the instrument of discovery is so subtle that technical expressions and formulæ are of necessity substituted for it, to thread the labyrinth withal, by way of tempering its difficulties to the grosser reason of the many. (213)

Our dispensed formulas do not give coherent or complete comprehension of all the ways by which genius delivered these distilled discoveries, let alone the world or its making. Take, for example, the theory of real numbers, so long in gestation, still in development, and underlying much science and engineering. This theory aims to unify number and measure, counting and the continuous, as the ancients dared not to do, and deliver insight and power in practice. But there are difficulties that look like sophisms and that prompted Hilbert’s great battle cry in his 1925 Munster Congress address: “No one shall expel us out of the paradise which Cantor has created for us” (141). The theory is still fraught with paradox and contestation. These real “numbers” account for all points on a line of measurement, forming a set itself demonstrably uncountable—a fact that bends past breaking the notion of number. The “Reals” include the rational numbers and their roots and all other computable numbers, yet a computable number has probability zero of appearing in a random pick from the real line. Almost all the reals are inaccessible—in principle! One more of many proven paradoxes must suffice. Stephan Banach and Alfred Tarski’s paper of 1924 seems like a *reductio ad absurdum* to many, since it proves that a solid ball in three-dimensional space can be mathematically “cut” into some pieces (five will do) that can be rigidly moved and reassembled into two identical and nonoverlapping solid balls, resulting in twice the volume (Stromberg 1979).

Why stay with such a theory? Because we love it! We delight, even, and especially in the deep and surprising adventures and mysteries it supplies, in its fruitful-

ness and promise, its practicality and unifying generality. In mathematical experience, love of mystery and play with ambiguity and equivocity are rife; clarity is an ideal whose pursuit often starts and wanders long in a fog, following the “smell” of something sweet; proximate payoffs are partial, but often open more questions and wonders even as they inform—a boon for the brotherhood.

Learning finds lodgment in our students' world through the real human modes of knowing and action, including motivations, attractions, prior expectations on what is possible and probable, and deep desire for better and greater things. Consider, for instance, how both beauty and applications can help concentrate relevant antecedent probabilities and desires by which students connect their learning to their world. It is common today to try to motivate through perceived relevance to personal and professional life. Put baldly as dollars, jobs, and lifestyles, these can misdirect students; they can be crass or even false. To go bigger is better; but how? In his book *School and City in Late Antiquity*, Edward Watts has a lovely line on how Greco-Roman Paideia, which Christians also took up, found lodgment in the world: “It ultimately engendered a love of classical language and literature among educated men, and men who loved this literature seldom objected to living by the rules it laid out” (14). Soren Kierkegaard argued that *indirect appeal* is often more respectful and effective (Kierkegaard 255–57). Stories, discussions, asides, appreciation, and questions can stimulate students to imagine ways to participate more intently in a great destiny of doing and becoming and passing it on, as part of great families, projects, institutions, and communities. For example, the liberal arts contribute to my own work as an applied mathematician in industry by aiding these actions: identifying and articulating assumptions and their implications, knowing and appreciating other minds, anticipating the difficulties and delights of acquiring and interpreting knowledge, finding ways out of interpretive and verbal disputes by literacy, scholarship and generosity, consulting the contexts and cultures of knowledge for correction and orientation, redirecting thought and action when resources are short, putting failures in personal and historical proportion with humility and hope, and sustaining a nurturing vision of moral and intellectual greatness through literature and music.

The conference theme rightly calls for learning that frees the liberal arts to find lodgment in our students' world. Liberated liberal arts can connect students to both roots and sky for growth—growth into actions and being for and with others, toward big, good, worthy ventures, virtues, and ends. Amid the need to retool teaching as generations change, Newman issues that higher call to the risking, venturing, sacrificing, and self-transcending Love of the Good at the heart of true teaching and learning.

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# Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Curious Intersection Between the Theological and Physical Sciences

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Early in the *Summa Theologica* Thomas Aquinas proves in five ways the existence of God. These proofs depend not on the content of Sacred Scripture, but on Aquinas's interpretation of what one might have then been called the latest discoveries—or perhaps rediscoveries—in natural philosophy or the physical sciences.

In this modern era when we hear so much about a conflict between “science” and “religion,” it is enlightening to examine a case in which it seems that—at least for its time—this conflict was resolved. But perhaps more important, the reintegration of Aristotelian thought into the Western world is an example of how the Western intellectual tradition has, properly understood and in its better moments, been open to novel sources of enlightenment and wisdom. To put this another way, Aquinas's reading of Aristotle is a sort of case study in the expansion of the core.

As a matter of historical context, the thirteenth century was a period of increasing interest in the natural world. The most dominant figure, Albert Magnus, was Aquinas's mentor and colleague and is still respected for his keen observations of flora and fauna. Contemporaneously, Roger Bacon was engaged in research into optics and other arts in his native England. This is not to suggest that late medieval science was much like what we would recognize today, either in its practice or in the subjects of its investigation, but that there was an appreciation for the knowledge one could obtain from nature, a nascent desire to make use of this knowledge for the improvement of the human condition, and a sense of optimism that more could and

would be learned. Aquinas himself had his own interests, but if for no other reason than having studied under Magnus, he recognized the value and importance of natural philosophy.

The puzzle I hope to address here is how it can be that, while it is readily apparent to Aquinas that the natural science of Aristotle provides clear and unambiguous proofs of the existence of the Christian God, the philosopher was, of this, unaware.

Now, I approach this puzzle with some degree of trepidation—when, as an undergraduate, I first met Aquinas's proofs of God, I found them deeply unsatisfying. It seemed possible to me that Aquinas was playing some sort of joke on us, his readers. Why, for example, would five proofs be necessary when one ought to be sufficient? And this is to say nothing of the fact that the world does not operate according to the principles laid out in Aristotle's *Physics*. But one thing I have learned in my years as a student and teacher is the importance of asking good questions. And Aquinas knows this, too.

The question on the existence of God consists of three articles. The first is whether or not the existence of God is self-evident. Aquinas's response may be summarized as follows: the existence of God—the proposition “God exists”—is self-evident to those who understand that “God is his own existence” (*ST I*, Q. 2, A. 1, co., Introduction 22), but as we humans do not fully grasp the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us. As a sort of example, Aquinas points out that the statement “Man is an animal” is only self-evident to those who know, as he says, that “animal is contained in the essence of man” (*ST I*, Q. 2 A. 1, co., 21).

In the second article he addresses the proposition “Can It Be Demonstrated That God Exists?” He replies in the affirmative, arguing that a cause (in general) can be demonstrated by its effects and that this is the mode of demonstration one should employ when effects are known better to us than causes. At the same time, he explains that while the existence of God may be taken as a matter of faith, properly understood it is a conclusion that can be drawn from demonstration—the same sort of language one might apply to a mathematical proposition. Aquinas is claiming that the existence of God can be proved without recourse to sacred scripture or some other source of divine revelation.

Aquinas explains that according to Scripture, “[T]he existence of God [can] be demonstrated through the things that are made” (*ST I*, Q. 2, A. 2, s.c., 23)—the created world of matter in motion. This happens to be the subject of natural philosophy—a field of inquiry distinct in Thomas' mind from both mathematics and the divine science of metaphysics. In his commentary on Boethius's *On the Trinity*, Aquinas establishes the independence of natural philosophy, writing, “There must be some speculative science dealing with what is in matter and motion, for otherwise the teaching of philosophy, which is knowledge of being, would be incomplete” (*Exp. De Trin.*, Q. 5, A. 2, s.c., *Division 20*).

In the first of his five proofs, Aquinas identifies the “first mover”—described by Aristotle at the conclusion of the *Physics*—with God. Aristotle reasons, by using a sort of mathematical argument—an eternal motion carried out during an infinite time—that this first mover is undivided and indivisible and without magnitude. A plain reading of this passage might suggest that the first mover is somewhat dull—

a featureless unmoving and unmovable nonentity almost but not quite entirely removed from the world. Aquinas, however, in his commentary on the *Physics*, focuses on the infinite power of this being and its lack of physical magnitude and points out that these are among the attributes of a nonmaterial and eternally existing God. The precise claim is that the demonstrable attributes of the first mover are commensurate with attributes of the Aquinas God.

In the second proof Aquinas has us consider another Aristotelian idea—a chain of efficient causes. This section picks up his argument that effects more familiar to us lead to conclusions about their causes. Each effect is the result of a cause, as each cause is the effect of some prior cause, and so on to the “first efficient cause.” Thomas raises and then dismisses the notion that this chain of causes could extend to infinity, so that the initial or primal cause that leads to all others must be God. In this context Aquinas denies the existence of a circular set of causes and effects, as this would be a misunderstanding of the nature of an efficient cause. For example, one might consider, as Aristotle does, the water cycle. Water evaporates (or is rarefied) when heated, is drawn up into the clouds, cools, condenses, and falls again as rain. While the final result—a pool of water—is the same as the initial state, the entire cycle is (efficiently) caused by the heat of the sun.

The third proof, the proof from “necessity,” is often regarded as a variant of the proof from efficient causes, but something more subtle is going on here. The difference is that the efficient-cause argument applies to those parts of the world that appear to be incorruptible; for example, the spheres of the heavens that carry the stars and planets and the behavior of inanimate objects such as stones in a landslide. In the argument from necessity, Aquinas considers corruptible beings. A corruptible being will at some time not be, and so must once have not been, which is to say that it must have been created or generated. Now, in the natural science of Aristotle, terms such as *corruptible* and *generation* are especially—but not exclusively—applied to living things, and it is likely, but not critical to my argument, that this is what Aquinas intends. For example, it is necessary that a chicken comes from an egg that came from a chicken, or an acorn comes from an oak tree that came from an acorn and so on. This is not to deny Aristotle’s understanding of efficient cause in the context of biology; rather the existence of a child necessitates the existence of its parents. We can now begin to discern the structure of this set of proofs—their subjects correspond to increasing participation in the fullness of being—proceeding from inanimate to animate matter, and, as we shall soon see, through human concerns and finally to God.

The fourth argument is from gradation or degree. Aquinas draws here on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, leading us to his conclusion that just as fire—“the maximum of heat”—is “the cause of all hot things,” the maximum of goodness and perfection and Being Itself is God (*ST I, Q. 2, A. 3, co., Introduction 27*).

The fifth and final argument Aquinas takes “from the governance of the world.” This may be called the argument from “final causes” or the “teleological” argument. It is not an argument from design, rather an acknowledgment that all beings act for some end, whether they be living things acting so as to propagate their species or inanimate objects seeking their own “natural place” as a consequence of their material nature. Thomas points out that even unintelligent beings seem to act as if for an

end—or at least always in the same way, and given their lack of intelligence they must be directed by, as he writes, “some being endowed with intelligence—just as the arrow is directed by the archer” (*ST I*, Q. 2, A. 3, co., 27). This intelligence, according to Aquinas, is God. This fifth proof describes a God that governs the natural world by subjecting it to a rational order—an order we may come to understand through our knowledge of natural philosophy.

So why are these five proofs necessary? Whether or not these proofs are truly convincing, they show us how Aquinas’s God operates with respect to the natural world. His God, like the first mover, is a power that extends throughout the cosmos in both space and time without being a part of the cosmos. The God of Aquinas is the source of being for both the inanimate and animate worlds and the standard of perfection against which all things may be compared. In addition, this God is the source and the reason for the rational order of the universe—the cause, if you will, of the effect that the natural world is comprehensible to humans at all.

But a puzzle yet remains. If the existence of God is so crystal clear to those who understand Aristotelian physics, why doesn’t Aristotle see it himself? One possibility is that the answer lies in the problem of the creation of the world. At the end of Book I of the *Physics*, Aristotle closes his discussion of the principles of nature by explaining that primary matter—taken as potentiality—“is necessarily outside the sphere of becoming and ceasing to be” (*Commentary* 192a). Aquinas, in his commentary on this passage, agrees, but only in part. Thomas says, “It is impossible for primary matter to be generated and corrupted. But by this we do not deny that it comes into existence through creation” (*Commentary* 192a). He elaborates on this point at some length later in the *Summa*. In Question 46—“On the Beginning of the Duration of Creatures,” Aquinas claims that Aristotle never demonstrated that the world has always existed, rather he makes only “relative” arguments intended to persuade readers of a probable conclusion (*ST I*, Q.46, A. 1, co., *Introduction* 249). On the other hand, Thomas says, “That the world did not always exist we hold by faith alone: it cannot be proved demonstratively; which is what was said above of the mystery of the Trinity. The reason for this is that the newness of the world cannot be demonstrated from the world itself” (*ST I*, Q.46, A. 3, co., Article 2, 254). The creation of the world, thus, is a question outside the scope of natural philosophy.

If this is so, how can the “fact” of creation be evidence for the existence of God in a demonstration based upon the natural world? This is not what Aquinas advertised a while back. The answer I propose is that Aquinas believes that something is missing from Aristotle’s understanding of nature. In article ii of question 44, “Whether Primary Matter Is Created by God,” Aquinas writes, “The ancient philosophers gradually, and as it were step by step, advanced in the knowledge of truth” (*ST I*, Q.44, A. 2, co., 236). He then summarizes the history of the “science of Being” given by Aristotle in book I of the *Metaphysics* and acknowledges Aristotle’s contribution to a proper understanding of the difference between form and matter. But Aquinas goes on, “Then others advanced further and raised themselves to the consideration of being as being, and who assigned a cause to things, not only according as they are these and such, but according as they are beings” (*ST I*, Q.44, A. 2, co., 237). It is this consideration of being itself—which is, to Aquinas, the essence

of God—that allows him to progress beyond the physics of Aristotle and to answer a question that Aristotle was unable to answer in a “scientific” way about the existence of a God independent of and prior to the material world.

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# On the Purposes of Scientific Exploration

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In *Science and Method*, Henri Poincaré suggests that scientists achieved scientific breakthroughs not because of their ability to do analytical and logical derivations, but rather, to a certain extent very similarly to artists, because of their vivid sense of beauty and harmonious orders. The driving force for scientists and artists to devote themselves to long and painful labors is the satisfaction they would find in this beauty and the harmonious orders rather than a valuable patent or an artistic work per se. Thus, it is, albeit arguably, in accordance with Schrödinger's idea that monotonous jobs can cause fatuity of the human mind. The coherence between their ideas might open up for students a novel attitudinal dimension toward their ways of life.

*Science and Method* is one of the selected core-text readings for the course "In Dialogue with Nature," which, together with another course, "In Dialogue with Humanity," composes the General Education Foundation Program at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The foundation program is compulsory for all undergraduates of the university. Below is an excerpt from the course outline of "In Dialogue with Nature":

This course invites students to explore how humankind investigated, understood and changed Nature, to study and compare the development of science in Western and Chinese cultures, and to reflect on the humans' place in Nature. Students will be required to read, discuss, and write about a wide range of texts in philosophy, science, and its history. Reading materials will be selected from influential literatures. Emphasis will be placed on students' capacity to respond critically to these texts in written as well as oral presentations.

One of the selected influential literatures is *Science and Method*. The author,

Henri Poincaré, was one of the greatest mathematicians of his age. In his late years he turned to the philosophy of science, publishing two celebrated volumes, *Science and Hypothesis* and *Science and Method*. In the latter book, Poincaré deals with a variety of issues on scientific and mathematical methodologies such as the selection of facts for study, the calculation of errors, and the use of statistical methods to compensate for errors arising from prominent scientific innovations in fields like logic, optics, mechanics, and astronomy.

In this selected text, students are required to read chapter 1, “The Selection of Facts,” and chapter 3, “Mathematical Discovery.” In the tutorial, some core questions are discussed, including the topic of this paper: “What are the purposes of scientific exploration?” It aims at helping students reflect on the values of science and as well as the aims and the purposes of scientific exploration.

One very common immediate response from students to this question is that they would put their attention to the application of science. I call it a utilitarian stance. It is beyond doubt that the transformation of scientific discoveries to technologies, used not only in daily life but also in industry and engineering, is of high importance to modern society. It is therefore natural for students to see the applications of science aiming to improve the conditions of human society as very important. I do not say it is wrong, but it is definitely not a complete story. Students will soon suggest some counterexamples against this stance. In the first place, some scientific researches were initiated for military purposes; for example, nuclear power is a very promising energy resource that might solve energy crises in the foreseeable future. Yet, while the breakthroughs in the investigation of nuclear fission were made in the 1930s, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada collaborated during World War II to counter the suspected German Nazi atomic bomb project. On the other hand, academic study or research in some impractical fields such as astrophysics and cosmology or in the history of music, archaeology, and prehistory seems to carry no immediately practical value in that no discovery would lead to immediate improvement in our living conditions. Another paradoxical example is that in the 1950s some academics forecast that by the year 2000 we could have a twenty-hour workweek. However, it turned out that American workers worked 160 hours longer in 1990 than they had twenty years earlier (Lightman 200). Is there any uncontroversial answer to the question of the purpose of scientific exploration? Poincaré has given us an answer with much enlightenment.

The scientist does not study nature because it is useful to do so. He studies it because he takes pleasure in it, and he takes pleasure in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing, and life would not be worth living. (22)

Poincaré suggests that we are eager to explore nature not because of the scientific usefulness, but because we feel delighted. He further argues that if nature were not beautiful, it would even not be worth knowing. In the rest of this article, I will share how I facilitate the tutorial discussion to let students understand and reflect on these statements by asking them some leading questions: “How do scientists do science?” “What is the driving force of scientific exploration?” and “What if we lose this initiative?”

Poincaré contends that in both the mathematical and physical sciences, merely accumulating facts (observations, experimental data, etc.) does not lead to discoveries; a scientist must make a selection of those facts that are likely to reward further investigation. Such fruitful facts are generalizable or can be linked to previously separate areas of study. In other words, the selection of facts is necessary and inevitable for scientific exploration. The more general a scientific law is, the greater its value (Poincaré 15–17). Next, Poincaré showed us how selections should be made. In the first place, the most interesting facts are those that can be used several times and thus have a chance of recurring. Facts that occur frequently appear to us to be simple just because we are accustomed to them. In other words, simple facts are useful facts. Poincaré further argued:

Intellectual beauty, on the contrary, is self-sufficing, and it is for it, more perhaps than for the future good of humanity, that the scientist condemns himself to long and painful labours. (22)

Scientists take pleasure in studying nature because the nature is beautiful. What does Poincaré mean by beauty? The beauty, according to Poincaré, comes from the harmonious order of the world that our intelligence can grasp. The search for this intellectual beauty, or the harmony of the world, helps us to select the facts that lead us to the selection of useful facts. Therefore this sense of beauty has a practical advantage for scientific discovery. Poincaré further argues that intellectual beauty gives strength to human intelligence, and the people who acquire this strength would probably become dominant over others, even exterminating them and taking their place. Following this line of thought, we can see that contemporary civilization acquiring this beauty was simply a consequence of evolution and natural selection (Poincaré 23–24).

Scientific exploration provides scientists tremendous satisfaction in finding in this beauty the harmonious order of nature. Like a child playing with jigsaw puzzles, a scientist sometimes agonizes not over the data he has but over those he does not have yet; sometimes the scientist is enthusiastic about the search for the missing part that completes a theory, and at other times he/she feels despair about or even abandons the search. More importantly, the scientist enjoys more satisfaction from an illumination that sets a new fragment into place to form a coherent picture than from a valuable patent on an invention. Renowned scientists Erwin Schrödinger and Salvadore Luria also claimed that scientific exploration satisfies the aesthetic sense of the scientists (Schrödinger, *Nature* 108–9; Luria 159).

Poincaré argues that no mechanical rules could replace the aesthetic sense. How does this sense of beauty emerge? This experience is in fact familiar to all intellectuals: a long period of puzzlement suddenly gives way to a moment of illumination. What is going on here? It seems there is a great deal of mental activity below the level of consciousness or simply the unconscious. Poincaré suggests that the unconscious blindly generates many combinations of ideas, but only a small proportion emerge into consciousness. The crucial factor in determining which new ideas enter our awareness may be, he suggests, the aesthetic sense of the scientist. In other words, scientists achieve scientific breakthroughs because of their aesthetic sense,

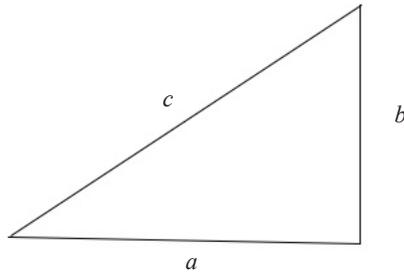


Figure 1

rather than solely their ability to do analytical and logical derivations.

Consider a right-angle triangle as an example (Figure 1). If you have no idea about the Pythagorean theorem, you could suggest as many combinations of the relationship among the lengths  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  as you desire. Poincaré argues it is not possible to verify every combination because in principle there is an infinite number of combinations possible. But after a long period of fruitless calculations, a moment of illumination suddenly emerges with a strong aesthetic attraction to a specific combination. Poincaré suggests that the unconscious mind itself is not engaged in mathematical calculations because it would not have a complete proof at such a moment. The conscious mind participates to figure out and verify whether this sudden idea is correct.

The experience of a moment of illumination is familiar to all intellectuals. This kind of pursuit of beauty, to a certain extent very similar to artistic creation, is closely related to imagination and creativity. Luria has given an insightful comparison of creativity in scientific discoveries and in artistic works:

Except for psychology, science [deals with experience] does not deal with emotions, although it grows out of a process permeated with emotions. Art in turn can convey emotions because its language grows out of the world of ordinary experience. (162–63)

This enjoyable moment of illumination provides a great initiative to work. What would it be if our impulse to work loses this initiative? Schrödinger provides the following theory. He first argues that any succession of events in which we take part with sensations, perceptions, and possibly actions gradually drops out of the domain of consciousness when the same sequence of events repeats itself in the same way very often (*What Is Life?* 95). Meanwhile, learning is a process of acquiring new, or modifying and reinforcing existing, knowledge and thus is associated with consciousness. Therefore, monotonous jobs offer nothing to learn and can probably cause fatuity of the human mind. Schrödinger further argues that it causes dangers to intellectual evolution.

Now I believe that the increasing mechanization and “stupidization” of most manufacturing processes involve the serious danger of a general degeneration of our organ of intelligence. (*What Is Life?* 115)

It might be a common belief that humans would evolve and become more intelligent because intelligent man would probably survive in a competitive environment. However, this is not the complete story. In the first place, Schrödinger believes how humans evolve largely depends on us and our actions, rather than on inevitable destiny. The increase in mechanization tends to promote boring work on the assembly line and thus the spread of unresponsive workers, but, meanwhile repressing handicrafts, sharp eyes, clever hands, as well as good brains. Paradoxically, it is well known that one advantage of the division of labor is to facilitate and abridge labor work by the application of proper machinery (Smith 426). However, increasing mechanization allows sluggards to naturally find it easier to live and settle down because a good brain becomes superfluous. This results in a degeneration of our organ of intelligence and in the long run a negative selection of talents and gifts.

As a conclusion, I give students some take-home questions. The first question is for them to reflect on their experience in science education. Has high school science education ever provided enjoyment of the beauty or the satisfaction? Most students in Hong Kong answered the question in the negative. High school science education is always examination-oriented—the curriculums of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) emphasize students' preparation for written examinations; but there is rather insufficient student guidance for investigations. For example, among the 250 hours allocated to cover the HKDSE Integrated Science curriculum, only 14 hours are used for scientific investigation; the remaining are for classroom teaching to prepare students for the examination.<sup>1</sup> Another question for students to ponder is their personal choice of life. What life would a student prefer? It could be either an easy and monotonous life or a challenging but fruitful life, or would there be the third way? Students could always make a choice!

## Notes

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# Seeking Religious Value in Core Texts

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We ask, we need, we tell our students to value the enterprise we find ourselves sharing with them of carefully consuming and critiquing “core texts.” Beyond conveying that we ourselves prize the study of Great Books, we glimpse moments of the students’ own pleasure in interacting with the texts or with each other over the texts. In what ways do students presently—or will they, over time, come to—appreciate the content of our curriculum and the act of parsing it together? How might such worth or value be categorized? And how does that categorization relate to the frequently religious language that surrounds the discussion of academic Great Book pursuits?<sup>1</sup> Here I would call your attention to the references to the students’ souls in the call for papers for this conference. Like scriptural texts, these works of historic esteem are passed down from generation to generation. In addition to being sources of pride and sites of contested interpretation, classic philosophical, historical, and literary texts are identity shaping—caught up to varying degrees with the cultivation of our students’ interiority and their fundamental values, their ways of seeing and being in the world. They may be regarded as sources of consolation and existential meaning, which seems to be what Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly suggest in their book *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*. Furthermore, communities come together around such canonical works, binding individuals together in strands of traditions (e.g., utilitarian, Marxist, or Platonist). Here, one might recall the similarly magnetizing force of the Torah, the Christian Bible, and the Qur’an to form groups of people synchronically and diachronically. And, like religious artifacts and acts, core texts and performances tend to be approached—or defended—as intrinsically valuable: the majestic, edify-

ing passages, paintings, and musical pieces that make up the heart of the liberal arts are taken to merit our attention. In their (supposed) transcendence, they may influence our actions even as they stand above instrumental value.

In what follows, I wish to give consideration to the religious framing of the value of the study of the humanities, and I would like to enter into this topic by turning to a post-Enlightenment text from Columbia's Contemporary Civilization syllabus, John Stuart Mill's 1859 text *On Liberty*. I have selected it chiefly on the basis of the students' responsiveness to it and for how it in particular seems to capture the commitment of this generation of students to three values (or beliefs?): those of individualism, diversity, and tolerance. I would like to go further, however, in raising the claims that our current students—in general—have rather surface-level commitments to individuality, diversity, and tolerance, and that, insofar as they have inherited Millian values without critically choosing them, the students are at odds with the very convictions expressed in *On Liberty*. Such values would have rather ironically turned into received opinions and dead dogma, like the then-religious values that Mill was contesting and subverting.<sup>2</sup>

But such a project, even in miniature conference-panel form, raises a number of outsized, vexing questions. It behooves me to acknowledge them, at least, at the outset. So I will ask, What does it mean for values to be religious values? Are we meant to interpret the adjective here as generically religious or in a thoroughly ecumenical vein? How can we ask this without succumbing to the tendency to substitute subconsciously "Jewish" or "Christian" for "religious"? What comes to mind as examples of religious values, anyway? Are these the monkish traits of self-denial decried by Hume? Do they have to stem from traditionally recognized "faith" traditions or religions? In our contemporary, secular society, are values that arise from the study of the humanities meant to be replacement values—core convictions that supplant once spiritually grounded truths—and, if so, do they successfully escape being religious? How do religious values differ from, say, political, economic, moral, aesthetic, biological, or humanist values? And what happens when values merely *resemble* or share similarities with religious values—does that make them "religious"? I have noticed that even in some of the discussions in this conference, ethical and religious values in particular have been elided or treated synonymously. But is not such conflation problematic and uncritical, or problematically uncritical?

One way to consider religious values is to view them as fundamental values. Such a move is similar to what allows scholars of religion to read seemingly a-religious experiences that evoke fervent devotion, such as soccer games, as religious events. And it is akin to the tack that the twentieth-century Protestant theologian Paul Tillich takes in the *Dynamics of Faith*, where he defines religion as what is of ultimate concern to a person. That connection between ultimate concern and the religious will serve as a very hypothetical, thoroughly couched working description for "religion" in what follows. I am careful and indeed intent on underscoring that I am not overly committed to Tillich's reading of "religion." I recognize that it is probably a poor move to turn to a Protestant to supply a definition of religion as such. We are on slightly stronger ground for using this sense, however, insofar as it echoes the definition of religion (which is "godless") in Mill's *Auguste Comte and Positivism*:

“What, in truth, are the conditions necessary to constitute a religion? There must be a creed, or conviction, claiming authority over the whole of human life; a belief, or set of beliefs, deliberately adopted, respecting human destiny and duty, to which the believer inwardly acknowledges that all his actions ought to be subordinate” (133; quoted in Capaldi 366). Let us look at “religion as ultimate concern” or as that set of beliefs to which a person subordinates all her actions, as a launching point. We should circle back in future conversations to gesture toward what it would mean to classify and call life-orienting values something besides ‘religious.’ Something important is at stake in that difference, between “religious” and “fundamentally life-shaping,” although even what that is can be hard to specify.

To reiterate, then, I will ask whether values (whether they be all values, a few values, or select values) *belonging to* and *arising from* the study of the humanities may be properly characterized as *religious*. And I will broach this large, knotty topic by way of the ideas of individualism, diversity, and tolerance as they are expounded in John Stuart Mill’s 1859 text *On Liberty*.

After what has been I hope a sufficient amount of throat clearing, I would like to turn to Mill’s text, situate it within my Contemporary Civilization syllabus, and share some of the experiments in teaching I have tried with it. Mill comes in the second semester of the year-long course and falls between Mary Wollstonecraft and Karl Marx, although I take it that other instructors have slightly different orderings of reading. *On Liberty* is the only work of Mill’s that I assign. I do not teach *Utilitarianism* or *The Subjection of Women* but I do ask that the students read all five chapters of *On Liberty*. This year I split the reading and discussion over one-and-a-half classes and had the students turn in reading logs for the first session—a strategy that helps the students to do the reading. Our seminars are not quite two hours long.

My goals for covering this material in the first class were to introduce Mill’s chief claims on individual freedom and the harm principle mainly by working through key passages. Then I relate Mill’s views on diversity of opinion and the “collision of error” to the notion of dialectic, which we had encountered in Hegel’s *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* and the lordship and bondage section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I left some time for an open discussion at the end. In the following session, I wanted the students to see the arc of Mill’s argument, noting how there are successive levels of freedom of thought, expression, and action. In that second session, I allotted about fifty minutes for the material on governmental regulation and intervention, which we considered in light of contemporary policy questions, before moving on to Marx. Here, I will focus on my teaching strategies for the first class, which was devoted to the first two chapters of *On Liberty* (“Introductory” and “On Liberty of Thought and Discussion”).

As for each author, I began the first session on Mill with a few minutes of biographical and historical remarks. This is where I provided a gloss on utilitarianism, a system familiar to a number of students and one that we had anticipated in earlier discussions on Aristotle, Hume, and Kant. I set aside the next block of time, about twenty to thirty minutes, for students to comment on one line, which was written on the board. It was one of the more famous quotations from *On Liberty* and a correlate of important statements on harm and experiments in living. The sentence reads: “The

only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it" (17). We noted Mill's word choice in the phrase "*our own good*"; not only does he employ the plural pronoun *our*; he refrains from using the language of happiness. That is, the sentence does *not* read, "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing *one's own happiness* in one's own way." One of my sharpest students, a young English woman, questioned whether this doubly restricted freedom actually deserves the name.

As class progressed, the students showed good initiative in our discussion of truth-seeking as a dynamic process of collisions of error. We moved from going over the point of diversity of opinions into an open discussion on the idea of "deep tolerance," which one of my more precocious students raised. As he asked, do—or can—liberal democracies accommodate or tolerate intolerance? Several students were ready to vocalize the lack of socioeconomic diversity on campus, which led to the observation that people are often reluctant to disclose aspects of themselves that are embarrassing or controversial. How can there be a rigorous defense of values when we are unaware of the deep ways in which we differ? This, in turn, opened a small floodgate of sensitive confessions, which I found meaningful and special, and not at all trite. I suppose you could say that six and a half months into our time together, we finally had "a moment," and Mill's philosophy facilitated that.

This leads me toward what I wish to treat as my concluding idea, which I very much hope opens up a discussion. My impression is that autonomous individualism, diversity, and tolerance are among the background values of many of my students. Even given the difference in their upbringings (I am reminded now of the global constellation of my students' hometowns, which includes Baltimore, LA, and rural Maine as well as London, Dubai, and Hong Kong), these students have not (at least not evidently) had to pause and consider what life under a radically different set of values would entail. These and other reigning ideals are probably held unconsciously. Reading Mill may help the students to illuminate or disclose them. But my Columbia Contemporary Civilization students are still, I take it, far from scrutinizing these liberal values or imagining that they could be inferior to the goods of other worldviews. Values that mark earlier times and foreign places, or that mark our contemporary moment in nondominant ways, do not seem to be "alive" to the students. *To the extent that this is an accurate description*, the students may be said to hold Millian values in an un-Millian way (see, e.g., *On Liberty*, 40). They are uncritically liberal, individualistic, and tolerant. On the face of it, their lives do not seem to display a tendency toward freely chosen and subjectively meaningful projects. Their life "choices" to date seem to fall within an extremely narrow set of experiments of living that inevitably includes attending college and with some probability will lead to careers in finance. Furthermore, in many cases, their shallow commitment to diversity is left unchallenged by external similarities and the stifling or silencing of minority views. It may turn out that there is not *enough* liberty of thought or expression at Columbia and that our classrooms are precisely the places where intellectual and "existential" honesty are discouraged.

A final reflection: While trying to sort through this issue, I have realized, firstly,

that students may not yet be able to articulate what their values are. Secondly, to the extent that students are able to describe their values, they may be unlikely to characterize the values as “religious.” Thirdly, this nevertheless does not mean that they do not have religious values or that they do not hold their values “religiously” (i.e., ultimately), which would be entirely consistent with the complexity of what it means to have a value system.

## Notes

1. The 2013–14 ACTC Call for Papers states: “Yet, an education for its own sake is also one for the sake of a student’s soul. A soul is part of this world and, unless we can articulate specifically how that is changed, it will be hard for future students and parents to see why a liberal arts education in core texts is so valuable.”

2. On this point, Mill seems oddly consonant with Søren Kierkegaard.

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# **“What’s This, You Laggard Spirits?” Engaging Students in Dante’s Use of Revivalist Imagery in *Purgatorio* II**

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In the world of some contemporary students, religious revivals are still a fact of life. From Korean Americans in the Baptist tradition to Catholics experienced with Palm Sunday processions during Lent, many have either directly experienced or heard tales of religious convocations aimed at renewal. In discussing Canto II of Dante’s *Purgatorio* in a Great Books seminar, I have found it helpful to ask my students to consider the “laggard spirits” (*De Monarchia*)—those who have recently arrived by boat on the shores of Mount Purgatory—as Christians attending a religious revival. On this reading Cato (the venerable old man who serves as the guardian of the mountain) is the preacher who spurs them on to repentance. I became interested in this project after finding myself wondering about the interactions of Cato with Dante and the other souls who arrive on the shores of Mount Purgatory. Dante’s choice of Cato seems odd, since he was not only a pagan but also a traitor to Caesar and a suicide. In *De Monarchia* 2.5, Dante states that Cato sacrificed himself to bear witness to liberty, for when Caesar took Africa he resolved to die rather than succumb to Caesar’s rule.<sup>1</sup> Following a night spent reading Plato’s *Phaedo*, Cato committed suicide. In Canto I of *Purgatorio*, Dante alludes to Cato’s “deliverance” from Hell (I: 90), suggesting the poet believed Christ harrowed Cato along with the faithful Hebrews. As one inspired through grace to believe in Christ and the absolution of sin, Cato’s salvation in Christ would make him a fitting guardian of Purgatory. While many commentators focus on what Cato stands *for*; however, few have attempted to interpret the ico-

nography of his interactions with Dante and the penitents. Throughout the *Purgatorio*, Dante invokes the particulars of medieval Christian pilgrimage, from setting his Holy Week journey in 1300, the Jubilee Year promulgated by Pope Boniface VIII, to his use of liturgical songs and rituals to highlight the process of renewal undertaken by souls in the afterlife. Indeed, recent work by historians of medieval lived religion has revealed the distinctive structure of the revivalist movements in which Christian pilgrimage was embedded, and Cato's engagement of Dante, Virgil, and the penitents is of a piece with the behavioral iconography of these movements. In what follows, I will draw on this recent research in order to suggest that collective revivalist movements served as a setting and inspiration for several scenes in Canto II of the *Purgatorio*, including the seemingly miraculous arrival of a company of penitents, "more than one hundred souls" (II: 45); the heightened sense of euphoria and bewilderment that permeates the text; and finally, the prophetic role of Cato as a revivalist preacher. Exploring the revivalist context of Canto II with students can lead to a much richer engagement with the beginning of the *Purgatorio*, as it enables them to connect both the action and the moral urgency of Cato and the penitents to Christian expressions of repentance and renewal in the contemporary world.

In "Medieval Revivalism," an essay in *A People's History of Christianity: The Lived Religion of Christians in the First Two Centuries*, Gary Dickson suggests that at ground level, medieval revivals like the Holy Week pilgrimage to Rome of 1300, which serves as the temporal setting for Dante's pilgrimage in the *Commedia*, were characterized by a distinctive three-part structure. First of all, the conversions experienced in religious revivals were both collective and public. Secondly, pilgrims were both disoriented and exhilarated by the sense of the miraculous that permeated the revivals—an atmosphere that precipitated numerous acts of conversion. Finally, Dickson points out that the language and ideas of the prophets had a strong influence on the character of the revivals. As we explore Canto II of the *Purgatorio*, we will find a setting drenched with motifs that Dante the poet has drawn from the same three-part structure of lived medieval revivalism described by Dickson.

A reader who has emerged from the depths of Dante's *Inferno* is struck by two characteristics of Purgatory. Unlike the sinners in Hell, whom Dante encounters one by one, the penitents who arrive in Purgatory do so as a collective body. Dante refers to them in the plural as a crowd or throng (II: 52) and as a company (II: 130), one that seems both disoriented and alive with the risk of discovery: "strange to the place/ gazing about like those encountering new things" (II: 53–54). In addition, the souls are singing Psalm 133 [114], "When Israel went out of Egypt," *ad una voce*. For Dante, the work of purgation is clearly communal in nature. Nevertheless, the company seems listless and easily distracted. Bewildered by the presence of one still alive, they stare in disbelief at Dante's face, "forgetting to make themselves beautiful" (II: 75). Such lingering is clearly dangerous and leads to a kind of spiritual backsliding, as one member of the company soon leaves the group and speaks to Dante in his own voice. He is Casella, a dear friend of Dante's from earthly life, and he agrees to Dante's request to sing a love song Dante had previously written to Lady Philosophy in his *Convivio*. The singing of this song pulls the whole company off course, tempting them to languish in contentment, their minds "untouched by any-

thing else” (II: 117). In discussing this passage, students often comment on how well Dante captures the myriad ways in which a pilgrim—even a modern one—might become distracted from the road to forgiveness and renewal. In arriving at a church or a revival tent, one might well feel bewildered and unsure of what is required, at once wanting to participate but fearing the change inherent in the act of spiritual renewal. The sight of an old friend like Casella, whom one recognizes from a more secular context, could easily distract one into a discussion of old times and shared “songs” or experiences.

Dante’s use of what Dickson refers to as “pictorial iconography” to describe the arrival of the penitent souls at the beginning of Canto II adds to the sense of disorientation and wonder. Dante the poet describes the pilgrim’s astonishment at the unfolding scene:

there appeared to me—may I see it once more!  
a light advancing over the sea so swiftly that  
no flight can equal its motion. (II: 16–18)

As for the light, the poet refers to it as “something white, I knew not what” (II: 23), which gradually takes on the appearance of an angel, his wings so bright that Dante’s eyes “could not sustain him” (II: 39). In these lines, even modern readers can smell the scent of the miraculous. Upon closer inspection, readers may also notice three emblems of revivalism embedded in the arrival of the boat and its angelic pilot. The blaze of light that strikes Dante’s eyes is reminiscent of the torches carried by a corps of canons beginning the procession from the Sancta Sanctorum to the Lateran Basilica during the Jubilee procession in Rome. As for the whiteness that gradually takes on “the shape of wings,” Virgil admonishes Dante to

See how he holds them straight toward heaven  
Fanning the air with his eternal plumes,  
Which do not change like mortal hair. (II: 34–36)

Why is Dante at pains to describe the wings of the angel as the first sight he has of the arriving penitents as sail-like, white, immense in proportion, and “fanning the air”? In his discussion of the pictorial iconography of medieval revivalism, Dickson calls attention to the awesome banners, often made of white parchment or linen, held aloft by pilgrims during processions through the towns of Italy. He cites one medieval chronicle describing an Italian revival that took place in 1310. A group of pilgrims, known as *disciplinati* because of their fervent practice of self-flagellation, are said to have marched while gazing at a banner at the head of their procession surmounted by a cross, representing the flagellation of Christ. The wings of Dante’s angel, fanning the air without seemingly moving, resemble such a banner, and the angel’s final act is to bless the pilgrims “with the sign of the cross” (II: 49), the same cross chosen by the flagellants to top their processional banner and remind them of the call to penance. Contemporary students are well acquainted with the processional crosses and large liturgical banners still in use to define the church seasons. When they are encouraged to view them in the context of the iconography of medieval revivalism, the symbols of white wings and the cross take on a specific cultural and historical legibility, one that is embedded in an atmosphere of the extraordinary and miraculous.

So far we have seen that Dante's depiction of religious revivalism is paradigmatic of the structures Dickson has discovered in the lived and chronicled experience of ordinary medieval Italian pilgrims. The third structural feature of medieval revivalism that helps students to understand the first two cantos of the *Purgatorio* concerns the prophetic ideals that underscore the *anno santo*, or Holy Year of 1300, during which the *Commedia* is set. According to Dickson, the dawning of a new century raised a number of prophetic expectations among the faithful, and Dante's description of Cato encourages the reader to picture him as an Old Testament prophet. Some scholars have suggested that Dante meant to compare Cato to Moses:

I saw beside me an old man, alone,  
by his looks so worthy of respect  
no father claims more from a son.  
Long was his beard and flecked with white,  
as was his hair, which he wore  
in double strands upon his breast. (I: 31–36)

When he first sees Dante and Virgil on the shores of Mount Purgatory, Cato admonishes them:

Who are you that against the blind stream  
have fled the eternal prison, he said,  
shaking those venerable plumes. (I: 40–42)

In the context of medieval revivalism, however, it is not only the shaking of his august locks, but his behavior—his galvanizing effect on the crowd—that marks Cato as a conversionary preacher. According to Dickson, before revivals reached their mature itinerant phase, the mixed crowd had to acquire the actual *momentum* of a revival if it was to transmute itself into a religious movement. In other words, the crowd had to be aroused by a preacher. Dickson uses the example of Pope Urban's powerful speech at Clermont, which summoned the first Crusade in 1090, but Dominican and Franciscan mendicant preachers, as well as laymen, served a similar function during the Holy Week pilgrimage to Rome in 1300. As the crowd loiters in the presence of Casella's song, Cato rebukes them in a voice laden with prophetic urgency:

What is this, you laggard spirits?  
What carelessness, what lingering is this?  
Hurry to the mount to strip the slough  
That lets not God be manifest to you. (II: 120–23)

It takes the moral probity of one who knows what the penitential path holds in store to rouse this company to action. Dante describes the crowd as suddenly "assailed by greater care" following Cato's rebuke, as they "hasten toward the mountain / like those who go but do not know where" (II: 131–32). Cato is thus responsible for moving the pilgrims from their initial state as a mere crowd to the itinerant stage of a genuine penitential movement. In our discussion of this scene, one student said Cato reminded her of the evangelical preacher she once encountered in a small Oklahoma town. He had set up his tent in the Walmart parking lot, complete with loudspeakers. As she was heading into the store, the student was accosted by the preacher's call to

sinners to repent and renew their relationship to Jesus.

Reading the scene in a revivalist context can also help students to understand Dante’s surprising depiction of Cato, who should either be in Limbo (as a virtuous pagan) or Hell (either for his suicide or for the same act of treason that condemned Brutus and Cassius). Indeed, Dante’s suggestion that divine grace has made Cato fit to become the moral guardian of the entire mountain *is itself a kind of revival*. In his transformation at Dante’s hand, Cato becomes a symbol of the boundless mercy implied in the Jubilee Year pilgrimage, a mercy that is not limited by the human distinction between the pagan and Christian eras.

In this brief study of Cantos I and II of the *Purgatorio*, I have tried to suggest the ways the revivalist experience of medieval pilgrims can shed new insight into the poet’s use of pictorial and behavioral iconography in setting the scene for the pilgrim’s journey of purgation and renewal. Dante’s visual imagination is on brilliant display in these cantos, and guiding students to connect the revivalist behavior, ideals, and symbols he employs with their own lived religious experience provides them with important tools of explication as they continue to explore the terraces of Mount Purgatory.

## Note

1. All translations of Dante’s *Purgatorio* are by the author, based on the following text: *Dante Alighieri: La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgate: Vol. III*. Ed. Giorgio Petrocchi. Florence: Le Lettere, 1994 (1966–67).

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तत्त्वम्असि

## ***Tat Tvam Asi: Asceticism in the Ramayana and Purgatorio***

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Tat Tvam Asi—Thou Art That. Its meaning? Simply this: the Self in its original, pure, primordial state is identifiable with *Ultimate Reality*—the ground of all phenomena. The knowledge that this is so characterizes the experience of liberation and salvation. Dante refers to this primordial state as *Primal Love* in each canticle of *The Divine Comedy*. Moreover, it is the state that Rama and Sita encounter at the conclusion of their fourteen-year ascetic exiles and their victory over the evil Ravana in the Ramayana. Where does this notion originate? It is first voiced in the Chandogya Upanishad—as a conversation between Svetaketu and his son.

In the beginning was only Being,  
One without a second.  
Out of himself he brought forth the cosmos  
And entered into everything in it.  
There is nothing that does not come from him.  
Of everything he is the inmost Self.  
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.  
You are that, dear one; you are that.  
When a person is absorbed in dreamless sleep  
He is one with the Self, though he knows it not.  
We say he sleeps, but he sleeps in the Self.  
As a tethered bird grows tired of flying

About in vain to find a place of rest  
 And settles down at last on its own perch,  
 So the mind, tired of wandering about  
 Hither and thither, settles down at last  
 In the Self, dear one, to whom it is bound.  
 All creatures, dear one, have their source in him.  
 He is their home; he is their strength.  
 There is nothing that does not come from him.  
 Of everything he is the inmost Self.  
 He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.  
 You are that, dear one; you are that

(Upanishads, 117–118)

Asceticism is the preamble to this divinity. It is the path, the way, the Tao, the one and only means. It is my path, your path, *the* path to God. True asceticism, in the language of Thomas Keating (47–48), is

not rejection of the world, but the acceptance of everything that is good, beautiful, and true. It is learning how to use our faculties and the good things of this world as God's gifts rather than expressions of selfishness. The basic asceticism is the appreciation of all that is good on each level of our developing humanity and the integration of the genuine values of each level into the next one. Integration is the unification of experience.

This allows the false self to die and the true self to emerge as we finally surrender to our participation in the divine life manifesting in our uniqueness.

When we arrive, we understand, again, that we have become divine because of God's divinity, and accordingly we comprehend the reality that God *is* in us, that the essence of God is within. We experience the *ouroboros* moment as we see that we have encountered our own selves in and through God. We have eaten our own tail. We are not God, of course, but we find that God is in us and has been all along. Our true self, our reality within the ultimate reality, has been revealed. We are the *that* inside of God. Tat Tvam Asi.

Easy? Apparently not. Why is it so hard to understand or believe that we are *that*? Why do many of us never get it or simply take such a long time to awaken to this transcendent truth? Even as you read or hear these words, there is probably some critical thinking *bot* inside of you that says, "Crazy. Not true. Can't be. What's he talking about?" We spend much of our lives *not* believing this or at least not understanding it, which is essentially the same issue. We believe other realities, other ways. We believe the ways of the body and the mind. We believe in dualism. We believe in our other self, our false *imago*. To answer this question, we examine two stories: *The Divine Comedy* and *The Ramayana*.

Dante, the poet, explores the mind as its own kind of hell (shades of Milton!) in the *Inferno*, showing us what our own self-possession creates—no hope. Only despair and endless contrapasso. The *divine* of our own making has turned into sin so that the sinner wants nothing else but their very sin and they *get just that*. No sacred Tat Tvam Asi here. Quite the opposite.

Once he has seen how badly things can turn out, in life and in endless death, he then leaves a trail of breadcrumbs for us to follow. These crumbs form Purgatory

mountain. Dante shows us that it is simply critical, essential, and mandatory to climb that mountain in order to see heaven. To participate in the heaven within us, we must first learn to reshape our desire through the ascetic exercise of learning to unhook sin in our minds and bodies. We must first tame our body, ascetically, for in so doing we calm and discipline the mind—aha!—this is the key. This is the root of asceticism, the kernel: unless we tame the body we *cannot* tame the mind. Body, disciplined by renouncing itself, then mind, ready for Tat Tvam Asi. Unless we redirect desire, we cannot let go of self. We cannot release it and forget it. By reining in our bodies, we replace desire for sin with desire for God. Dante demonstrates this by doing the climb himself—showing us that there is no other way than to ascend, allow the angels to remove the peccata from our forehead, and then pass through Lethe and Eunoe, arriving at the Garden of Eden (we are back!), on our way to the entrance to the gateless Paradise. Thus, the fascinating ascetic bridle/whip journey up the mount brings about the ultimate preparation for heaven.

Once Dante passes through the Garden of Eden, guided by Beatrice's blinding beauty and unbearable lightness, he is surely ready, finally, for Tat Tvam Asi, albeit after he ascends through to the *primum mobile* and says, at last, in Canto XXXIII:

But my own wings could not take me so high  
 Then a great flash of understanding struck  
 My mind, and suddenly its wish was granted.  
 At this point power failed high fantasy  
 But, like a wheel in perfect balance turning,  
 I felt my will and my desire impelled  
 By the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

(*Paradiso*, XXXIII: 139–45)

In Paradise, he understands by experience Tat Tvam Asi because he is back in the heavenly garden, standing under the Tree of Life—perhaps represented by the Celestial Rose.

Until that purgatorial ascent—and asceticism is a kind of ascent—we are simply blind, asleep, and, let's face it, dead. This is what Dante is telling us through his *Comedy*. This is what took him 13,000 lines of poetry, as he walked up a small hill, down seemingly endless spiraling caverns, and then up an even larger mountain, crossing through two rivers and beyond, before he finally, literally, saw the lights of paradise, lights shining, at last, inside his own soul. Ironically, this light, this divinity was there, inside of him at the beginning, the Tat Tvam Asi—Thou Art That—was lying dormant as a kind of seedling in his soul from the beginning. He just didn't know.

What about the Hindu side of this paper? We turn to Rama and his journey to divinity as a means of understanding his affirmation of the incantation of the Upanishads. The story of Rama is a popular one in India. The Ramayana—Romance of Rama—has been made into a TV series and is so popular that the cancellation of the show in the eighties resulted in a strike by sanitation workers in North India, demanding that the government fund more episodes, and it has reemerged as extraordinarily popular, with some 120 million viewers tuning into every weekly episode. *The Ramayana* narrates the tale of Rama, who was the eldest of the four sons of Dasharath, the king of Ayodhya. Rama was to become the ruler of Ayodhya

after his father's retirement, but his stepmother, Kaikeyi, wanted her son Bharata to become the king. Rama concedes and accepts his stepmother's fourteen-year exile to allow his brother free rein, and to learn a life of asceticism, wisdom, and the ways of spiritual and physical strength.

Rama had to endure his own kind of purgatorial mountain—extending over fourteen years of exile—a kind of exile that Dante, too, experienced. Rama voluntarily moved into a deep forest, far away from people, thus experiencing an ascetic kind of solitude. He needed separation in order to learn how to control his mind through meditation, a process that would not have been possible if he had been exiled in an urban setting. Because of his self-discipline, he never lost sight of his ultimate purpose—to destroy the asuras, the fiends who caused suffering and hardship for all good souls. In a sense, he was called to expunge evil and to destroy Ravana, the leader of the asuras. This meant that he had to overcome temptations of the flesh, including Ravana's evil sister, who encountered him in order to seduce and destroy him. Rama had acquired enough wisdom to see through her trickery and avoid wasting himself on her vain beauty. Thus, he was able to overcome this “wilderness” temptation and rise above the appeals of power and flesh. His ascetic training served him well.

Ultimately, Rama, his fiance Sita, and Rama's brother Lakshman wander the forests, combating evil wherever they find it and gaining the blessings of wise men and sages along the way. Many years later, Ravana, the evil king of Lanka, abducts Sita. Rama and Lakshman engage Ravana in battle and rescue Sita, then the three return home so that Rama & Sita can be crowned king and queen. Brahma comes forward to address Rama, saying:

Of the trinity, I am the Creator, Shiva the Destroyer, and Vishnu the Protector. All three of us derive our existence from the Supreme God and we are subject to dissolution and rebirth. But, the Supreme God who creates us is without beginning or an end. There is neither birth nor growth nor death for the Supreme God. He is the origin of everything and in him everything is assimilated at the end. That God is yourself, and Sita at your side now is a part of that Divinity. This is your real identity. (*Ramayana*, 150–51)

Dante would say—this is your *imago dei*. This is *Tat Tvam Asi*. East meets West in the spirit inside each one of us. So, what is the payoff of all of this? What do we gain when we reach this realization? Only God. Only divinity. Only having all that we wish for about God inside of us, especially LOVE! God's love is inside of us. It is simply a matter of becoming aware, getting in touch with this internal seed. What more would we want? Is this important? Nothing else really is!

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## **Why Should We Listen to Others?**



# Constructing Alternatives: Core Texts and Minority Voices for the Twenty-First-Century Student

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I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much.

—Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

Currently almost all colleges and universities employ some rhetoric of diversity when delineating their institution's mission. In the twenty-first century, diversity is a key component of the world in which our students live, work, and learn. As embracing differences publicly is now commonplace with regard to the curriculum our students encounter and the faculty that teach our students, it is important to reconsider also the role that diversity plays in core texts. In literary terms, core texts are another way of referring to a literary canon. Experts in respective fields attempt to identify the most influential and exceptional works written in their respective areas. What has become historically undeniable is that such canon formations tend to be homogenous—and this is particularly true in the United States. In reality, something like a Western canon is produced and reproduced; and that is precisely where contemporary scholars and students must intervene to challenge conventional notions of which voices and what experiences should be present(ed). In the US, this Western canon dominates the way students learn and access information from elementary school and even, unfortunately, into their university experiences. Therefore this paper highlights the urgent need to continually diversify core curricula by incorporating nuanced perspectives on core texts and by simply including

works that focus on contemporary diversity issues that affect our students' world.

A core text for many, William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), introduces centuries of literature students to the character of Caliban. At the mere mention of Caliban's name, characters such as Miranda, Ariel, and Prospero use terms associated with wickedness, impurity, savagery, and evil—all to describe Caliban as a socially and racially inferior character. Readers learn that Caliban is Prospero's slave, the son of a deceased witch named Sycorax, and that he was born on the remote island that is the play's setting. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for scholars of Postcolonial Studies and Latino Studies, readers learn that Prospero teaches Caliban to speak English. Caliban says to Prospero, "You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language" (1.2.362–364)! Additionally, curses are among Caliban's first lines in the play as he curses Prospero with "blisters." Thus in the play, Caliban symbolizes wildness and rebelliousness, all with a sense of comic relief and irony. He is aware of his lower social position, but he is not a docile character. In fact, he demonstrates a high level of agency through his use of language. Feminist scholar Irene Lara notes that "Caliban learns language from his oppressors and in turn uses it to curse them" (86). Caliban manipulates language in a way that empowers his identity to be not only a voice that defies expectations but also one that will not remain silent simply because of his social standing on that remote island. Caliban acquires the English language from Prospero; however, he is not afraid to use what he learns to protect himself, present his points of view, and, when necessary, curse, trick, or fight back against his oppressors. Caliban thus becomes an iconic figure for many minority voices that could not or would not speak up and speak out against oppression.

From his coloring to his language, Shakespeare presents Caliban as different and other.

Caliban as a main character in Shakespeare's narrative of discovery, difference, and colonialism inspires postcolonial critics, along with scholars of the Caribbean and Latino studies, to pay significant attention to him as a symbol of the New World. However, these specialized approaches to Caliban do not necessarily represent his place in the Western literary canon. Further, it is essential to consider how Shakespeare represents the other here (as savage, dirty, evil, and debased). Thus, although there is so much potential in Shakespeare's inclusion of Caliban as a principal character, the reality is that without critics like Roberto Fernández Retamar, Silvio Torres-Saillant, José David Saldívar, Félix Valdés García, and Adriana María Urrea Restrepo challenging facile notions of race, ethnicity, identity, and colonialism, Caliban could have simply become just another stereotypical rendering of a low-class, dark-skinned native, orientalized by Shakespeare and subsequently centuries of scholars.

The aim of this paper is not so much to attack Shakespeare or scholars who engage with *The Tempest* without acknowledging Caliban's important and ambivalent role as an oppressed yet empowered subject, but rather to demonstrate how even with the undeniable presence of difference in core texts historically, such identities are still undervalued and, oftentimes, overlooked. Therefore, I offer Caliban, and the way contemporary scholars have reinterpreted his identity, as a reminder of the potential in the inclusion of minority voices and minority characters in core texts.

Further, I reference Caliban in order to show how standard core texts and additional, more contemporary works, also provide scholars and our students with new ways of rethinking what core texts were, are, and can be.

To be clear, I am much less interested in finding a way for everyone to agree upon a set list of which materials must be included in all curriculum standards and much more interested in raising awareness about the missing pieces in our students' liberal arts education. David Chura, author, teacher, and at-risk-teenager advocate, wrote a compelling op-ed piece in the Huffington Post titled "What Common Core Curriculum Misses." When discussing the alternative schools in which he had taught (ranging from urban schools to county prison settings), students consistently expressed a concern with finding themselves, their lives and experiences, represented in the school's curriculum. That is to say, the reality is that his students had "very little interest in school because the traditional school setting has had very little interest in them." He later goes on to provide an example of how books saved the lives of at-risk students, particularly when the "book reflected [said student's] own troubled life but also did something else." This "something else" was showing how a person in a similar situation chose a different path and how this path led to success. What is intriguing here is not simply the romantic notion that books can (and do) save people's lives. Rather, the troubling part of Chura's findings is that traditional schools appear to have little interest in students whose identities and lived experiences do not fit some preconceived mold. We are unable to know for sure if a school has an interest in certain students. Most of these comments would be opinions. If the school were a private institution or religiously affiliated, then we could possibly speculate on the student body and other elements that unite them. However, I argue that at public institutions, the university curriculum and its core texts are the material examples of what and who the institutions value historically and currently. Said another way, curricula and core texts therefore come to define the mission of these institutions. Therefore, if diversity is a central component of a university's stated mission, then its institutional curricula should include diverse perspectives and voices.

It is central, then, to think critically about the patterns that reflect the inclusion and exclusion of the stories, voices, and characters our students come to know through university curriculum and through core texts. In regard to promoting inclusivity and exclusivity, what one finds is a consistent pattern throughout much of history: the heroes tend to be white, Western men, the relationships tend to be heterosexually oriented, and minority voices are either part of the comic relief, absent, sexualized, debased, or disregarded. For example, in this country the idea of a text written in a language other than English seems absurd to some to include as a core text. It is commonplace to see official, translated versions of iconic texts appear on various core lists. But what happens if a text is written mostly in English but also has a portion of its words written in a foreign language? Usually that text is deemed experimental, unprofessional, and perhaps even incomprehensible. I believe strongly that we should reconsider how a text that crosses linguistic boundaries can prepare students at all levels for the multicultural world in which they live. Additionally, using a text that code-switches reinforces important research methodology skills that are central to students' being successful in college.

Referred to as “one of the founding experiments in liberal higher education in the US” by Columbia College on its webpage, the core curriculum has evolved tremendously since the early twentieth century. Though in many instances a Western focus still dominates the core curriculum, as early as the late 1940s and early 1950s educators realized the need to expand and diversify. Recall that the main goal of this work is to continually diversify standard and future core texts and core curricula. Therefore I offer two not-so-conventional texts—Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory* (1983)—that, unlike Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (or even Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*, which provides the epigraph above), do not quite as easily receive the designation “core text.” The underlying hope is that the works of Anzaldúa and Rodriguez, and texts like these, will start to appear more frequently as foundational texts on core lists. Even if we all agree that core curricula and core texts possess intrinsic pedagogical value, they should still be scrutinized, and then criticized all with the intent of improving the breadth of material included at various educational levels. Prioritizing certain types of knowledge and certain experiences based on a majority rule has been a flawed system for centuries in the United States. In order to make the core of liberal arts education more inclusive, we must constructively critique how the academy establishes such cores and which voices the core legitimizes; and fundamentally, we must question the literary and sociopolitical value of these specific sources over other, less conventional ones.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* is a text that blurs lines between genres and plays with languages in such a way that readers must be active to unmask the work’s subtexts. *Borderlands/La Frontera* includes poetry, narrative essay, history, personal reflection, feminist methodology, philosophy and critical race, gender, and queer theory. Anzaldúa writes:

At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly “crossing over,” this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollinization, an “alien” consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*.<sup>1</sup> It is a consciousness of the Borderlands. (99)

Even if one ignores the provocative intellectualism that Anzaldúa offers here, we can still, just by superficially viewing the text, see what a unique experience this passage offers to students. In our technologically advanced society, it is not some impossible task to ask students to use a computer application or even a hard copy of a printed dictionary to search for unknown words. Whether a term is unknown because of its language of origin or because of its level of difficulty in a known language, it is common practice to encourage students to search for the definition of an unknown term to better fully understand the meaning of a passage. The truth is that in the above quote, depending upon in which part of the US students live, the word “progeny” may cause more difficulties than one of the words in Spanish. However, the methods students use to learn the meaning of any unknown word is generally the same. If one takes this simple act of seeking out an unknown word just a little further, what we find is that we, as teachers, instill the basics of research methodology. As

a cultural theorist, I also find the content of the above quote compelling; it offers a valuable message to learners because it says directly to students that heterogeneity is an important part of humanity that enriches lives on genetic and social levels.

Diversity in content and an ability to teach research methodology to our students also unite in Richard Rodriguez's text, *Hunger of Memory*. Keeping in mind that analysis is a critical thinking and reasoning skill that educators at all levels must promote to help students achieve success in college and as global citizens, I offer *Hunger of Memory* as a text for educators to consider when teaching diversity and when teaching the literary methodology of close reading. In his narrative essay/autobiography, Rodriguez writes of his conflicted emotions as he grew up in the US, dark-skinned and the son of Mexican immigrants. He painfully recollects:

One night when I was eleven or twelve years old, I locked myself in the bathroom and carefully regarded my reflection in the mirror over the sink . . . with a bar of soap, I fashioned a thick ball of lather. I began soaping my arms. I took my father's straight razor out of the medicine cabinet. Slowly, with steady deliberateness, I put the blade against my flesh, pressed it as close as I could without cutting, and moved it up and down across my skin to see if I could get out, somehow lessen the dark. All I succeeded in doing, however, was in shaving my arms bare of their hair. For as I noted with disappointment, the dark would not come out. It remained. Trapped. Deep in the cells of my skin. (133–34)

This scene uses recognizable images, a razor blade, soap, and a young boy's reflection in the mirror, to convey a specific message about feeling different and inferior. We can direct students' attention to key concepts, like putting the blade to his flesh without cutting it and moving it over the skin. We can ask our students to interpret the symbolic meaning here and how it relates to contemporary social issues pertaining to skin color and identity. Further, we can define this act of shaving as a metaphor for his longing to be colorless (note Rodriguez's disappointment with not being able to remove the darkness from his skin) in a highly racialized society. Moreover, by investigating the length of the last three sentences, questions arise about the tone and emphasis of having this potential one sentence ("It remained trapped deep in the cells of my skin.") divided into three shorter sentences ("It remained. Trapped. Deep in the cells of my skin."). Teachers can direct students to think critically about what it means to have the sentences divided up like this as opposed to what it would have meant were it all one longer sentence. Rodriguez's text at times can be challenging; however, this is a relatively simple scene that offers readers various ways to critically engage with the surface-level meaning and the subtexts. All the while, Rodriguez tackles major sociopolitical issues surrounding race, ethnicity, immigration, assimilation, and normality in the US.

All three texts—Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*—when viewed through a lens of diversity, expose students to the past, present, and future of contemporary Western society. At the University of Southern Indiana, the Humanities program recently expanded its curriculum to reduce the explicit focus on the Western tradition; in essence, our program has "gone global," and now all courses in the Humanities program must include representative works throughout the ages that present diverse global contribu-

tions. These less conventional texts make visible to students the same foundational, pedagogical elements that traditional canons and core texts hope to promote. However, they go one step further and present students with alternative voices that reflect global culture and that do not privilege Western history alone. Caliban started out, at best, as a controversial, racialized figure in Shakespeare's mind, but now there is an entire scholarly journal named after him.

By not only presenting difference but also including a focus on difference in core texts, and by offering innovative ways to use such texts to introduce students to both diversity and the important methodological skills they need to succeed, I firmly believe that core texts and liberal arts education can simultaneously revitalize and update their own image. Moreover, by using texts that reflect the world in which our students live, liberal arts programs can preemptively answer the common student question related to why they need to know certain information. Finally, if core texts and liberal arts programs more closely resemble the world in which our students live, these very books can, as Chura's findings suggest above, not just save the lives of our students but also save the academic life of core programs founded on humanistic values.

## Note

1. For Anzaldúa "mestiza" means a mixture of races, cultures, and contradicting past and present ideologies. Therefore I translate the phrase as: a new "mestiza" (read hybrid, often ambiguous identity) with a woman's consciousness.

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# **Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois: Strategies of Race in Post-Reconstruction America**

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In John McCain's concession speech to Barack Obama after the 2008 presidential election, he connected the president-elect's victory to the great changes that have occurred since Booker T. Washington's invitation to the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt more than a century ago. He explained that

a century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt's invitation of Booker T. Washington to visit—to dine at the White House—was taken as an outrage in many quarters. America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time. There is no better evidence of this than the election of an African-American to the presidency of the United States. Let there be no reason now for any American to fail to cherish their citizenship in this, the greatest nation on earth. (McCain)

I take the time to quote at length from McCain's speech because it helps to serve as a bridge to the time and the people with which this paper is concerned. As the old adage goes, "We must remember where we have been to know where we are going." Unfortunately, when I mention the names of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois to my students—despite their importance to American history for not only African-Americans but for anyone interested in such areas as the civil rights movement, the Progressive Era, the "Deep South" after Reconstruction, the history of education, and so many other areas—I get mostly blank stares or very brief notices of possible recognition. Because Washington and Du Bois can serve as such great gateways into American history, I want my students to understand what we can learn

from these two men, not merely in terms of historical context, but in terms of how they can “speak” to us through their writings, and how their ideas still—very importantly, *still*—have relevance for our lives and our times.

This is not an easy task. When I cover these two men and selections from their work, I do so in an American history survey course that covers from the end of the Civil War to the present. Considering how much material the course has to cover, we do not have a lot of time to devote to their writings. In addition, it is a course taken mostly by freshmen or sophomores as a social science elective, a part of their general education requirements. History majors are required to take this course, but we do not have many history majors at my institution, MacMurray College. MacMurray is a small, private liberal arts college with about 550 students, many of whom are first-generation students. Many of our students are not accustomed to reading much for their courses, let alone digesting a primary source and then be asked to interpret that source and to engage (hopefully) meaningfully with that author’s ideas and the perspective that author brings to his or her writing. So, my challenge is in part to find key sources that I expect students to read that they will be able to digest and will not balk too much in doing.

To get to Du Bois and Washington, I spend one day lecturing about Reconstruction and its aftermath in the Deep South, hitting on the usual topics—Jim Crow, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, notions of the “lost cause.” Then, because I set this course up as a hybrid course, I have a day where the students have to read Washington’s “Atlanta Exposition Address” and an excerpt from Du Bois’s sorrow songs section in *The Souls of Black Folk*. After reading these pieces, each student is required to respond through a Moodle forum post to specific questions I ask about the readings in a short thought piece of several paragraphs. When I meet with the class again, I have their responses read and in hand to use for our class discussion. That entire class period is devoted to discussion of the assigned readings.

I try to start our class discussion of these works by asking my students why I would choose to use writings by these two men to shed light on this period of history. Of course, there are numerous answers to this question—Washington as one of the last African-American civil rights leaders born into slavery, his leadership of what is now Tuskegee University; Du Bois as the first African-American to earn a doctorate from Harvard, his role as a co-founder of the NAACP, and his leadership position of the organization’s journal *The Crisis*—but there tends to be some hemming and hawing by the students in answering this question. This is not enough to get them interested in how Washington’s and Du Bois’s lives can relate to theirs. After this basic biographical information, I introduce the students to how I started this paper—that Roosevelt invited Washington to the White House, the first African-American to be so invited, and the (particularly) Southern racial invective surrounding this invitation. Unlike just the general background of the two men, this anecdote tends to pique the students’ interest. No African-American had even been invited to the White House until the early 1900s, and now we have had a black president—the only president most of my students have known with any kind of real awareness. I explain that it was Washington’s publication of his autobiography *Up from Slavery* in 1901 and his firm place by that time as the leader of the African-American community that led

to this invitation. I mention that Washington was an astute politician, able to use his political skills as the “Wizard of Tuskegee” to lead the “Tuskegee machine,” a coalition of the black middle class, white philanthropy, and Republican Party support, while avoiding antagonizing white southerners. With the class’s attention directed toward Washington, I move to his best-known work and one of the most important speeches in American history—the “Atlanta Exposition Address” from 1895 (Washington 257–61).

In the posting assignment, I ask my students to write something about the two most noted parts of this speech—“cast down your buckets” and the hand and the fingers simile—and I can usually turn to asking them to tell me something about the argument of his speech and get solid answers. I also ask my students in their posting assignment to explain if they agree with Washington’s arguments. At this point, most students have not linked Washington’s speech with the context of the material I lectured about with post-Reconstruction. I challenge them to make this link. For instance, I ask, how does Washington’s speech relate to the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, decided in the year after Washington’s speech? How might it relate to Washington’s own experience as a slave during his youth? Of his experience leading an all-black trade and industrial school? The connection here is obvious when asked clearly—that our own life circumstances and history inform our perspective of what is practical and real for our time. We then move on to the term “accommodation” and how Washington can be seen as advocating this policy by making this speech.

It was Du Bois who labeled Washington the “Great Accommodator,” and we turn to the second reading assignment to explore Du Bois’s arguments. After briefly introducing Du Bois’s reactions to Washington—disdain toward his “Atlanta Exposition” speech, a critical review of Washington’s autobiography *Up From Slavery* and of his leadership in creating the “Niagara Movement” to oppose the principles of the Atlanta Compromise—we discuss how Du Bois faced the struggle for civil rights. As a class, we base this discussion off his famous statement, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” and the reading assignment from *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois 291–95). I ask my students for their reflections on Du Bois’s thoughts of black Americans integrating into white society. If not “accommodation,” for what might DuBois argue as a way for African-Americans to deal with a dominant white culture? Estrangement? If we can look at Washington’s upbringing, life, and personal circumstances as shaping his views on race relations, how might Du Bois’s context have led him to take a different stand? His views were certainly impacted by being born after the Civil War in a Northern town fairly open in terms of race relations and by not experiencing Jim Crow segregation firsthand until he was a student in his late teens. My students find it fascinating not only that Du Bois argued strongly for an African-American identity, both American and something more, but that he advocated for people of color everywhere, which is why he argued for the word “colored” rather than “black” in the NAACP. It was not just a concern for one marginalized racial group that he held.

It is the divide, the split, between Du Bois and Washington, two male African-Americans who were direct contemporaries of each other but with very different life circumstances, that opens up the most important questions, the ones that have direct

connections to our own world. These questions are why these readings should matter to us, because DuBois and Washington, in accessible ways, were struggling with issues that are timeless, that—even though we might now have had a black man and his family living in the White House rather than merely being invited to dinner—we still face and with which we still grapple.

Is race still such a dominant issue as Du Bois presented it? Is it the question of the twenty-first as well as the twentieth-century? Has it been supplanted? If so, what has supplanted it?

Can a group advance economically and hope that one day they will advance socially as well, as Washington seemed to be indicating? Or are social advancement and economic advancement part and parcel of the same whole, as Du Bois argued?

What type of education is the most important? Do students need a solid grounding in the liberal arts (as Du Bois—a Harvard graduate and instructor at Atlanta University—believed was necessary for his “talented tenth,” the leadership elite that was responsible for culture and progress), or is a trade and vocational education most important (as Washington, leader of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, advanced)?

How can a society traditionally dominated by one culture also be mindful of other cultures? Need the marginalized be integrated—as Washington seemed to push for—or can distinctions remain and be respected—as Du Bois maintained they must?

How open must we be to perspective and the issues and conditions and experiences that have shaped each person's perspective? Do we need to respect the perspectives of other people? Are there possibilities for compromise of two radically differing points of view?

Many of my students become quite passionate about their answers to these questions, and I would love to be able to claim that all my students come away from this discussion with a profound sense of why these questions are important and how we can see that Du Bois and Washington addressed them within the context of post-Reconstruction America, unfortunately, I cannot. What I can argue is that the discussion—in a history course of underclass young men and women mostly taking the course for a general education requirement—at least helps to open the door to them for thinking about why these questions do matter and how we can learn things from a study of key historical texts and their authors.

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# Claude McKay's *Banjo* and the Harlem Renaissance

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Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay stands out as the first to truly express the spirit of the “New Negro” that reflected confidence and called upon African Americans to have “self-respect and self-dependence.” The spirit of the “New Negro” emerged from the literature of the Harlem Renaissance as men and women affirmed their black heritage, blackness, and personhood. As McKay and other writers sought to deconstruct images of blacks, World War I successfully began refashioning the global landscape. It would be this confluence of events, ideas, and people that intellectuals, such as Alain Locke would write in 1925, inspired “a new psychology” (White et al. 510; Cooper 297). Transformed by his collective experiences, McKay’s voice would come to full fruition in his complex novel, *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* (1929). This fictional work, which examines the search for identity through diverse characters and their perceptions in interwar Marseilles, France, can be used by instructors who teach the postwar era from the vantage point of the Harlem Renaissance and its impact on definitions of personhood. Yet, even more, this complicated and compelling narrative is a road map for those who want to dissect the ideas of the Harlem Renaissance and the radicalization of the postwar world. McKay’s global perspectives are evident throughout the book and provide an important lens in understanding France at a time when Western society experienced a resurgence in racism, while those from colonial societies challenged the status quo by pushing the limited boundaries of their worlds through immigration. Thus, using *Banjo* as a core text allows instructors to examine those global changes through the black intellectual and artist’s perspective.

Using the backdrop of post–World War I France, Claude McKay infuses *Banjo* with the rhythms, flavors, tastes, and smells of that era from the vantage point of the underclasses that lived on the fringes of society and were the victims of the changing rules involving citizenship. Even the book's dialogue is filled with almost jazz-like riffs that symbolically reflect actions and attitudes of resiliency, improvisation, yearning, and confrontation that evolved in African American culture. Group members include the title character, Lincoln Agrippa Daily (aka Banjo), Ray, Buchanan Matt Avis (aka Malty), Ginger, Dengel, Taloufa, Buggy, and Goosey. This coalition of multiethnic people gathered on the beach of Marseilles in the slums called "The Ditch" after most had been deported from the United States for violating its immigration laws. And because most were too ashamed to return to their countries, they created a discordant new home for themselves in France (McKay, *Banjo*, 5–10).

McKay describes Banjo as "a great vagabond of lowly life." "His life was a dream of vagabondage that he was perpetually pursuing and realizing in odd ways, always incomplete but never unsatisfactorily." The "child of the Cotton Belt," Banjo had "wandered all over America" working "easily picked up jobs—longshoreman, porter, factory worker, farm hand, seaman." After tiring of America, Banjo wandered up to Canada and by the start of World War II joined the Canadian army, which allowed him "a glimpse of Paris and London" even though his travels as a fireman aboard a commercial vessel had provided him with a foretaste of Europe via the ports of Barcelona and Genoa. Not until after the war did Banjo achieve his dream: living in the "sailor's great port" of Marseilles, the site of African diasporic interaction (McKay 11).

The story of Banjo emerged directly from the complicated and well-traveled life of Jamaica-born writer and poet Claude McKay (Festus Claudius McKay, 1889–1948). And like fellow writer Jean Toomer, McKay uses the rhythms of speech as a technique for highlighting his narrative. He was caught up in the transformations characterized by the arrival of Marcus Garvey in America. McKay's immigration to America in 1912 would eventually transport him into the world of Garvey's Black Nationalist movement and into the intellectual discourse of the Harlem Renaissance. Also like Garvey, McKay initially was enamored of Booker T. Washington. But after briefly studying at Tuskegee Institute before transferring to Kansas State College, McKay discovered that his passion was poetry, not agriculture, and the racism in America was stifling, oppressive, and vicious. Moving to Harlem allowed McKay to pursue his passion. Harlem, also called the "race capital" in America, was the center of highbrow activity surrounding the two black-owned newspapers—the *Amsterdam News* and the *New York Age*—and the presence of black intellectuals at Columbia University. McKay's work with the *Liberator* magazine and the publication of his first American poems under the pseudonym Eli Edwards in 1921 raised his profile and drew him into the "radical-bohemian set." There, he learned of the "aimless, pointless life of the village" and the "toughness and militancy in its social attitudes" that framed the Bohemian world. It was in New York that McKay confronted not his duality as a black man in a predominantly white society, as W. E. B. Du Bois remarked in his classic work, *Souls of Black Folk*, but his struggle with identity. McKay was Jamaican in a nation that defined blackness from the African-American

perspective. He was also quick to judge black intellectuals, disdaining their perspectives and perceived haughtiness (as was McKay's judgment when first meeting Du Bois). Consequently, when the chance presented itself in 1919, McKay seized the opportunity to visit England on a subsidized trip in 1919, the same year he published the poem "If We Must Die" (White et al. 507, 512; Lewis 50–51; Cooper 298, 300).

Soon McKay's experiences in England, and the ignorance of English people about Jamaica's shared culture, soured him on "Mother England." Yet while there, McKay learned about Marxism through trade unionists and colonial nationalists. He befriended dockworkers and developed a penchant for Marxist writings. Upon returning to New York, McKay continued his radical journey, which brought him closer to Garvey's ideology and eventually led him to declare himself to be an international socialist. However, his intellectual acumen soon birthed disillusionment with Garvey and what McKay saw as his shortsighted rejection of Marxism. Frustrated, McKay dismissed Garvey as unprepared to understand modern revolutionary thought (Lewis 52–53).

Ever the philosophical wanderer in search of answers to society's ills, McKay was unimpressed with celebrity, even when it was his own, because he feared there would be limitations to his voice. So in 1922, he rejected the acclaim as the most famous black celebrity following the publication of his enormously successful book, *Harlem Shadows*, and he left the US for the Soviet Union. There, he witnessed firsthand that Marxists could also be racists, because the remnants of prejudice still floated to the surface in the communist rhetoric. McKay's *A Long Way from Home* highlighted this revelation, arguing that socialist ideology failed to "transcend racism." Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, his journeys took him through Marseilles and Morocco, learning firsthand the racism infused in the new immigration verification rules imposed by Western nations, to the detriment of those of the African diaspora. For McKay, "racial and national categorization" debased blacks and limited their humanity to a color (Lewis 54–55, 57–58; Chalk 357–358).

Most scholars who have analyzed *Banjo* consider Ray, the pragmatic intellectual drifter, as a thinly disguised McKay. Yet, it seems that Ray represented only one of the many characters expressing McKay's ever shifting and conflicting viewpoints about the postwar world and the challenges facing each person and society, especially with its global transformations that were complicated because of the war. Using the seaports as an allegory for immigration and internationalism in the 1920s, McKay juxtaposes his characters similarly to how jazz combos combine the deep resonating sounds of a saxophone with the clear, stringed, hammer-like cadences of the piano. Each character has a specific point of view about the experiences of blacks in Western society. Moreover, McKay identifies each man with a musical tradition because they make their money from playing in the band that Banjo envisions as his key to success. Ironically, the musical tradition they represent is pre-jazz, symbolized by Banjo's attachment to the banjo, ukulele, guitar, mandolin, and other instruments of the nineteenth century. He and Taloufa, for example, regard jazz as "that black-face coon stuff" or as "the money stuff today." Instead, the main character regarded his banjo as more important than a girl or a friend; it was an extension of him (McKay 6–7).

McKay's dialectic style, often ethnically associated with blacks, showcased how these men who lived as vagabonds used their free lifestyle as a shield to endure the cruelties of global racism that reached into every corner of the world and determined the value of each person based on color. It would be within the vagabond community that the ragtag group of expatriates would find their voice and sense of community. McKay often set the location for this group's interaction at a bistro table, described as "rough and long," where the group listened to music often played by Banjo, drinking wine and exchanging barbs about one another, Marcus Garvey, and white society on both sides of the Atlantic. There were even comparisons about how Europeans were in offering drinks to members of this tightly knit group who often performed in exchange for food and alcohol. No group was left untouched, from the Jugo-Slavs to the Corsicans, Armenians, Czechs, Russians, Greeks, Neapolitans, and Arabs. Banjo and his comrades commented about each, often lamenting how the whites in France were stingy while their experiences elsewhere were much more pleasant and accommodating to their desires (McKay 8).

As the uniquely American music form of jazz emphasizes the "process" rather than the finished product, with no rigidly set number of sections, so is McKay's *Banjo*. The book has no definitive narrative or plot. Its characters come from disparate locations and interact in the port city of Marseilles following World War I. Similarly, as there is no definitive or fixed version of a song in jazz with even the pace of the songs in accordance with how the performer "feels," so were the characters in the narrative. Their stories, as with the performance of jazz, range from the tragic to the comic. And as jazz reflects the movement of African Americans from the South to the North and the rural to the urban, so did McKay involve characters who came from various locations of the diaspora, including Africa.

It was at Café African, the first black-owned business in Marseilles, that Banjo tried to realize his dream of forming an orchestra. Because he believed that "the American darcy is the performing fool of the world. . . . He's demanded everywhere," he saw the orchestra as a sure way to get money on a regular basis. Goosey, the Senegalese café owner, like all those in the Ditch, had spent time in the US and acquired enough money to open his business. It was at this café that Martiniqueans mingled with Guadeloupians, Madagascans, North Africans, Senegalese, and African Americans, all coming together over money. And Banjo hoped that it would be there that his dream of a black orchestra would be realized. But his band would be different, dominated by the banjo, the "sharp, noisy notes" that "belong to the American Negro's loud music of life." For Banjo, this was "an affirmation of his hardy existence in the midst of the biggest, the most tumultuous civilization of modern life." It would be in this social landscape that those of the diaspora could talk freely about race and interracial and intraracial conflicts (McKay 14, 19, 45, 47, 49, 74).

Missing from most interpretations of *Banjo* is the central role that McKay's life's journey had on his characters and stories. And much like a jazz performer whose techniques improve with age and experience, McKay's travels and serendipitous experiences matured his imagination and perceptions. Thus, imbued in the story is the Universal Negro Improvement Association's (UNIA) global message of the "essential oneness of all African peoples" and the necessity of sharing resources as a

way of insuring self-determination and collective support (White et al. 508).

In the end, McKay's *Banjo* reflects the dissipation of the postwar optimism and idealistic fervor of a world free from opportunism, racism, and economic exploitation. Using the character Ray as his voice, McKay taps into this growing mood of pessimism, cynicism, and despair, voicing the sentiment of many from the African diaspora that the postwar policies did not transform the world into fairer society. Yet his radical voice in *Banjo* was singular among most Harlem Renaissance writers, perhaps because he was not constrained by the temperaments of white patrons or high society. Instead, McKay was free to voice the ideas of the people, agreeing with the UNIA to "close ranks" to survive. Played out in metaphor and allegory, Claude McKay tells this complicated story of the postwar world through the voices of those who occupied its underbelly. And in the end, McKay's message, as voiced by the character Ray, was to turn inward, seeking comfort in a racially closed world because "[o]nly within the confines of his own world of color could [a black man] be his true self" (164).

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# August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle: Ten Plays Chronicle African-American Culture and Racism in the US

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W. E. B. Du Bois's classic text of 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is a precursor to August Wilson's decalogue of plays of African-American life. Du Bois chronicles the nineteenth century and takes readers from slavery to emancipation to the struggle of blacks living in a white-dominated culture. In the forethought to his book, he states, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (xxx). His essays in the book reveal "the struggles of the massed millions of the black peasantry" as well as "the present relations of the sons of master and man" (xxx).

A century later, in 2005, August Wilson completed the Pittsburgh Cycle, a series of ten interconnected plays that present the lives of African Americans during the twentieth century. Each play represents one decade, from the end of Reconstruction to the brink of the twenty-first century. In myriad ways, Wilson reveals the relentless and insidious persistence of racists and racism. Yet, as a counterbalance, he displays African-American culture—oral storytelling, voluminous dialogue, songs and music, humor, and, as Wilson's writing of the plays progresses, more and more he investigates the critical link between the ancestors and the living. According to Wilson, this connection is essential: it is the foundation of the African-American community and the origin of its spirituality.

In the forethought to *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois offers readers a view of "the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive" (xxx). He states, "Leaving . . . the world of the white man, I have stepped

within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,— the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls” (xxxix). Wilson also lifts the veil, but he goes further than allowing audiences to glimpse a faint view; he raises the curtain high and vividly presents the interior lives of his characters. Mark William Rocha, in his essay “American History as ‘Loud Talking’ in *Two Trains Running*,” explains that Wilson’s drama “enables and empowers its [white] audience to cross the color line and become ‘black’” (126). In this way, they can leave behind their sociocentric perspectives and privilege as they enter unfamiliar territory. This crossing can open the much needed dialogue on race, Rocha believes.

Although Wilson invites white audiences behind the veil, throughout the writing of his plays he stands firmly within and for the black community. In the first play of the series, *Gem of the Ocean*, Aunt Ester, who embodies the history of blacks in this country, mentors Black Mary, a new spiritual guide for the community, and in the final play, *Radio Golf*, Harmond Wilks, at the expense of his own political ambitions, chooses to protect the home of Black Mary as the spiritual and historical center of Pittsburgh’s African-American community. Wilson clearly identifies himself as a resident of the Hill District, where he was born and raised.

In 1903 Du Bois concludes the foreword for his book saying, “I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil” (xxxix). So, too, is August Wilson. In the preface to *King Hedley II*, he describes himself saying, “Before I am anything, a man or a playwright, I am an African American. The tributary streams of culture, history and experience have provided me with the materials out of which I make my art” (vii). He asserts that his most crucial identity is with his race. And race, Wilson claims, is a vital and powerful unifying force.

With the Hill District of Pittsburgh as a microcosm of the United States, Wilson immerses his audiences in African-American culture, thus revealing the challenges his characters face and the racism inherent in white society. Through studying Wilson’s plays, students of all races and ethnicities begin to understand issues of power and privilege and the endemic nature of racism.

With his Pittsburgh Cycle of ten plays, Wilson creates core texts for literature and theater courses across the country as well as scripts for black actors, directors, scene designers, lighting designers, and costumers for many generations to come. In addition, he gives the theater a much larger, more diverse audience than ever before because his plays speak to the experiences of people of color in the US and beyond. Literary critic Mark William Rocha states, “Wilson supplies the American theater with something it has never had: an American history that is the product of an African rather than a European sensibility” (127).

So, how does the Pittsburgh Cycle contribute to the humanities and to a liberal arts education? Our first plenary speaker at the ACTC conference in April 2014, Dr. Norman Bradburn, professor emeritus of the University of Chicago, said that core texts demand that students learn to read, write, and think critically. On the panel “How Liberal Arts Education Influences the Student’s Professional Career,” Tom Krause, president of the Agora Foundation and CEO of Behavioral Science Technology, said that reading core texts taught him that he hadn’t been a good reader, a good

listener, or good at articulating his ideas, but reading core texts gave him the training to develop those skills. On the same panel, Nathan Haggard, of Apple and a graduate of Thomas Aquinas College, said that tackling core texts as an undergraduate helped him create a habit of thought: the ability to discipline his mind to think analytically and explore deeply. These skills are also goals of the general education curriculum at MacMurray College: to teach students how to think critically and communicate effectively.

When I teach Wilson's plays, I expose my students to the works of a world-class playwright, and they learn literary terminology and develop essential skills for deciphering a text. In discussion and writing assignments, students must analyze characters and relationships, themes, rituals, and symbols. In addition, through observant reading they begin to understand national history. These stories expose students to past and current social problems and encourage them to wrestle with corresponding ethical questions. The chronicles of Ma Rainey and the men in her band, Berniece and Boy Willie Charles, Caesar and Harmond Wilks, Bynum Walker and Herald Loomis, Troy and Rose Maxson often show the underside of their eras. Students begin to recognize both subtle and overt racist practices of white characters and institutions depicted in the plays.

Reading August Wilson's plays validates the history and experiences of many students of color while encouraging white students to develop emotional skills, including empathy. Reading the plays introduces white students to the Other and allows students of color to talk about their own lives. Reading Wilson's plays opens up civil discussion on complex and painful topics. So, as Norman Bradburn asserted, the humanities help diverse populations live together.

In the panel on how the liberal arts affect professional careers, Robert Bienenfeld of the Honda Corporation said that during his undergraduate career at St. John's College, reading primary texts required courage. Likewise, discussing Wilson's plays in mixed-race classes requires courage: race is a central issue in our nation. We see racism in our flawed judicial system, in communities that still deny housing to people of color, and in our public schools that fail to educate students from low-income families. But so often we avoid discussing race and racism. Yet where better to explore these substantial, critical issues than in an environment that fosters open-mindedness, critical thinking, and the development of listening skills? The classroom is a safe place to explore, to challenge, question, listen, and hear many viewpoints as students' horizons broaden.

Studying Wilson's texts in the classroom can open students' minds, but this learning experience is most powerful when accompanied by trips to see his plays in professional productions. On one weekend during the spring semester of 2007, I took my students to see the first play of the series, *Gem of the Ocean*, at the Indiana Repertory Theater in Indianapolis, and the next night we saw the final play of the cycle, *Radio Golf*, at the Goodman Theater in Chicago. The students were enthralled by the ritual in *Gem of the Ocean* when Aunt Ester and her household, using masks, movement, and candlelight, take Citizen Barlow on a voyage to the city of bones at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. And they felt the enormous energy and hope as Mame and Harmond Wilks burst onto the stage in *Radio Golf*, vibrant with the ex-

citement of planning Harmond's campaign to become the first black mayor of Pittsburgh. Giving students the experience of live theater enhanced their understanding and appreciation of the plays. After all, Wilson's dramas are meant to be performed and experienced.

August Wilson gives students and teachers an entire century of black history and culture to absorb; he encourages us to open the dialogue and connect with one another. The Pittsburgh Cycle rejuvenates American drama and is a body of work that will employ black artists and call new audiences into the theater in this twenty-first century and beyond.

W. E. B. DuBois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, lifts the veil offering readers essential descriptions of the conditions, culture, and history of blacks during the nineteenth century. One hundred years later, August Wilson draws the curtain open placing African-American life center stage. Both men offer us core texts to challenge and enrich our understanding of this country and its racial heritage.

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# Hrothgar Meets Iseeo: Parallels Between Leadership Ideals in Beowulf and the Kiowa Oral Tradition

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For six years I was one of several faculty members from the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma who worked with Kiowa elders to teach a cross-cultural Clemente course in Anadarko, Oklahoma. In this course, university faculty and Kiowa elders would take turns sharing canonical stories from their respective traditions, and the class would discuss them. The goal was to encourage students to understand the power of culture and to appreciate both Western and Kiowa traditions.

In one of the first years of the course, we assigned both *Beowulf* and *Bad Medicine and Good* by Wilbur Sturtevant Nye. Nye's book compiled recollections and oral tradition from Kiowa elders, whom he interviewed in the 1930s. Among the stories that Nye related was an account of Kiowa leadership practices by Iseeo, a Kiowa chief. This chapter is titled "The Pipe Men." After we had discussed this chapter in class, my friend Jay Goombi pointed out to me what he saw as startling parallels between the values described in Nye and those that we had encountered just a few weeks earlier in *Beowulf*.<sup>1</sup> I immediately agreed with his observation, and the parallels have stayed with me ever since. The ideals of leadership that Hrothgar described to Beowulf and those Iseeo explained to Wilbur Sturtevant Nye a thousand years later have remarkable similarities. As Jay told me pithily a decade ago, "They're both tribal." In *Beowulf*, after the death of Grendel, Hrothgar mentors Beowulf as a younger leader. His guidance references the stories of several past leaders, including Heremod, a failed king of the Danes. Iseeo's account of Kiowa leadership

practices was related to Wilbur Sturtevant Nye sometime between 1933 and 1937. Both attempt to convey what it is a leader does and the values important to successful leadership.

While Hrothgar and Iseoo share a number of key leadership values, these differ markedly from those of the present age. Since I first began teaching the Kiowa Clemente course, I have been the chief academic of two different institutions. I find the topic of leadership is a constant topic in the journals I read and at the conferences that I attend. The contemporary conception of leadership seems to be the ability to propel institutions forward. In this context, the successful institutional leader is both a manager and a motivator. His or her strengths rest in being able to provide a compelling vision for the future; to distribute effectively both tasks and resources; and to supervise others effectively through goal-setting, evaluation, and rewards. This vision of leader as manager seems entirely absent from both Hrothgar's and Iseoo's worlds. Although in *Beowulf* there are frequent references to the importance of wisdom and the value of wise counsel, these allusions often seem more concerned with the wisdom to act morally rather than strategically. We do not see Hrothgar or Beowulf setting strategy, organizing their forces, or even setting more than the most straightforward goals. Iseoo is clear about the Kiowa leader's lack of a management role. He explained that the Kiowa leader "has no commands for advancing, firing, or retiring, as soldier chiefs have. He just calls out, 'Take courage, take courage! Do not be frightened.' Or he shouts, 'Charge! Ah-Ko!' and continues to encourage his men" (67).

While Hrothgar and Iseoo seem immune to our stress on progress and constant improvement, both emphasize the importance of leaders behaving morally. Hrothgar describes himself as an old king "who has fostered truth and justice among his people" (67). Likewise, he encourages Beowulf to "become a sure and lasting comfort to your nation and a help to mankind." Hrothgar tells Beowulf the story of the Danish king, Heremod, as a negative example and a warning. Heremod failed as a king because "he took no pleasure in the happiness" of his people. Heremod "never distributed rings among the Danes, as honour dictates, but lived parsimoniously." He grew arrogant and selfish. In time, he came "to kill his drinking companions and close friends in his paroxysms of fury." While warning Beowulf, Hrothgar also praises him for avoiding Heremod's failings. He tells him, "Your fame is established everywhere among all people. You carry all of this great strength of yours with prudence and humility." Iseoo also expresses the selflessness of the ideal leader. He is more concise and states simply that "[t]he leader never abuses anyone. He would be ashamed to do that, for he loves all his men, and they love him."

In regard to leadership, a main theme of both works appears to be the importance of loyalty and the way in which this loyalty bonds the group together. For both Hrothgar and Iseoo, this loyalty is expressed through reciprocal relationships in which the leader plays the central role. In Hrothgar's world, the generosity of the king toward his men is a central value. The great crime of Heremod was that he came to put his own desires ahead of his duty to his men. Hrothgar emphasizes to Beowulf the threat that selfishness poses to successful leadership. He tells him that for a failed king, such as Heremod:

within him arrogance grows and festers. Conscience, which is the sentinel of the

soul, falls asleep. . . . What he has had for so long seems to him not enough. Greedily he covets, and no longer gives away collars of gold, as honour ordains. (68)

For Hrothgar, Heremod's greed is not merely immoral. It is presented as having led to suffering for the Danes by causing internal feuds. Ultimately Heremod was banished and died alone, betrayed by the Jutes. While a leader's greed drives a people apart, the giving of gifts creates bonds of loyalty among leaders and their men. It is strongly implied that Beowulf's arrival to battle Grendel on behalf of the Danes is repayment for an earlier favor. When he was young and a new king, Hrothgar had sheltered Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow, during a violent feud among the Geats. Later, Hrothgar "settled the feud with money, sending many valuable treasures overseas" (37). Years later, Beowulf repays this kindness by returning to defend the Danes from Grendel. Once the monster is killed, Hrothgar lavishes gifts on Beowulf and all the men who have accompanied him across the sea. These gifts are given not as payment, but with complete goodwill. In addition, Hrothgar announces that he will cherish Beowulf "in [his] heart as a son."

This relationship between the exchange of gifts and loyalty in times of danger is made explicit at the end of the poem when Beowulf kills the dragon. Only one thane, Wiglaf, stays by his side, while ten others flee into the woods. When Wiglaf rushes to Beowulf's aid and his own likely death, it is in the context of the loyalty that he owes his king for his gifts.

Wiglaf could see that the king, in spite of his armour, was in distress from the flames. And when he remembered those favours which Beowulf had showered upon him . . . he could hold back no longer, but gripped his yellow shield with one hand while the other drew his ancestral sword. (88)

Wiglaf scolded his comrades for their cowardice and disloyalty after accepting Beowulf's generosity. He told them:

I can remember a time when we used to accept mead and payment in the banqueting hall from our king, to whom we swore that if ever he fell into straits like these we would make some return for our fighting-gear—these swords and helmets. . . . That is why he gave me valuable gifts and you as well. He thought we were brave spear-men and daring soldiers. . . . [N]ow the time has come when our leader requires the help of brave men. . . . [I]t is dishonorable for us to take our shields home without first killing the enemy and saving the king's life. (89)

Following the battle, with both the dragon and Beowulf dead, Wiglaf tells the ten cowards that they will be dishonored before the entire world, saying: "To any fighting-man death is better than a life of dishonor" (95).

Iseco portrays very similar reciprocal relationships between leaders and warriors in Kiowa society. In Iseco's world, this reciprocity takes the form of service, rather than swords or helmets. The Kiowa war leader is distinguished by the risks that he takes and the sacrifices that he makes for his men. As Iseco explains, the leader scouts ahead of the band for dangers.

The leader always rides at the head of the party. When they are some distance from their camping place, he goes ahead to make sure there is no danger. He gets there before first light, looks around, and if the area is safe, makes his camp. Then he listens for the approach of his men.

The leader rides first in any attack and is responsible for the safety of his men.

During the battle if an Indian's horse is killed, the leader takes the rider up behind him and carries the man out of the fight. If a man is killed and the enemy approaches his body, the leader takes it up across his own horse and saves it from the enemy. If all the young men retreat, the leaders stay behind to ward off pursuit.

In turn, the warriors have a responsibility not to allow the body of a slain leader to fall into the hands of the enemy. "If he should be killed, the young men all dash towards the enemy to drive them back and bring away the leader's body. . . . If the enemy gets the leader's body, the people in the village would hear of it and everybody would be ashamed." The relationship between leaders and men seems to be symbolized by the pipe, which is carried by the leader and shared among the band as decisions are made. It is from this item that Kiowa leaders take their name: "pipe men."

I suspect that what we see in both these accounts is a set of leadership values grounded in the tribal nature of the two groups. That is to say, both operate according to the unspoken assumption that the group has no corporate identity beyond its members. Unlike institutions, companies, and nation-states, the Danes and the Kiowas have no existence outside of their membership. Under normal conditions, members cannot be alienated from the group, and such banishment is a severe punishment. The well-being of the people and the preservation of their way of life are essential goals. Without being able to change personnel or reorganize, concepts such as progress, constant improvement, and management in a modern sense make little sense. Instead, the emphasis appears to be promoting group harmony and collective well-being. These are the values that both Hrothgar and Iseco champion.

## Note

1. Jay is a great-grandson of Millie Durgan.

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# Dante Questions His World and Ours

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Imagine yourself a not very interested freshman or sophomore, sitting dutifully in a civilization or Great Books course. You would rather be on the field, or in a course in an area of your particular area of interest, perhaps business or a communication course on new media. Yet here you are, listening, barely, to the professor recite enthusiastically his or her understanding of Virgil, or Shakespeare, or, heaven forbid, something as obscure and irrelevant as a medieval work, *The Divine Comedy*. But without realizing it, you are listening. Something has grabbed you. Dante seems to be your contemporary. How did this happen?

I don't think we emphasize this often enough, at least I don't. Too often I spend my time attempting to work the students into another way of thinking, trying to help them see that not all people at all places and all times think like twenty-first-century Americans or as global citizens with a common popular culture. But Dante works against me and shows himself to be our contemporary and also to be a teacher of teachers.

You might have been grabbed when Dante finds himself on the surface of the moon and realizes that in this first realm of Heaven, these perfected souls are paradoxically imperfect and thus lower. He is puzzled and asks Piccarda, "Have you no wish to gain some higher grade?" (Paradiso 3, 65). What might be a reflection of medieval hierarchy is also as a breaking of hierarchy. Dante, like others in the story, seems to be comfortable with social movement, with rising status. They want to be equal, if not higher than those above them. You are piqued, and see someone who is concerned with your questions. This is not to say that you will like the answer that Dante receives—"in His volition is the peace we have" or wherever God wills is the

highest. As a sophomore you know that all should be equal, which means, of course, that you should be higher. Now you are listening; Dante is asking a question you have asked.

Dante has in fact reflected on this earlier. Let me note just few of the episodes that I emphasize in the classroom. First, Dante puts himself in the highest level of Hell, or Limbo. This seems to be an act of humility or realism. He recognizes his sins, and even his pride, by putting himself in the highest level of Hell or among the least of sinners, the best of the worst. And then he puts himself among the greatest poets of the Western tradition, a risky move for any writer and a supreme act of arrogance (Inferno 4, 100–103). In the deeper level of thieves, he proclaims himself greater than Lucan and Ovid, two who had been in the circle of the greats in Limbo (Inferno 25, 94–99). Later as he moves up the mountain of Purgatory, in the first level of pride, Dante meets Oderisi, an illuminator, whom he salutes as “great Gubbio’s glory.” Dante’s pride in intellectual and artistic accomplishment is then gently corrected as Oderisi honors another painter whose work surpassed his in greatness (Purgatorio 11, 79–84), in direct contrast to Dante’s treatment of his fellow poets. By the time we get to Heaven, we are ready for Dante’s errors, but perhaps not yet for his resolution and healing.

One of the great culminations of Dante’s conquest of pride and growth in humility is, of course, shown in Heaven, the realm of order, unity, and charity (Freccero 214, 220). In his visit to the fourth level of Heaven, that of the sun, in cantos X–XII, Dante meets a circle of theologians led by Thomas Aquinas. The light of their wisdom is a reflection of the sun’s light, a symbol of divine wisdom. Thomas introduces Dante and Beatrice to those who are with him in the circle: theologians, historians and philosophers from Christian ages. Some commentaries on the *Divine Comedy* emphasize that the theologians of the circle are those who reconciled philosophy and theology, reason and faith, political and churchly law (Sayers and Reynolds, commentary on cantos X–XII; Trovato). And in at least one case, Dante indicates an unhistorical unity or reconciliation. Siger of Brabant, against whom Thomas had written and whose conclusions were condemned by the Bishop of Paris, is a member of the philosophical circle (Boyde 213, 351; Gilson 122). The lights circle around Dante and Beatrice in harmony.

Then Thomas tells a story, as saint’s life, of the founder of one of the two great mendicant orders of the thirteenth century. These are the avant-garde spiritual traditions of the time. Thomas is a Dominican, one of the mendicant orders, dedicated to teaching and missionary activity and to living the apostolic life of poverty. Instead of telling of the life of St. Dominic, however, Thomas tells of the life of St. Francis, the founder of the other new mendicant order of the thirteenth century. The Franciscans were also dedicated to poverty, but they worked in service to the poor, to the sick, in Francis’s case to lepers, and to the restoration of the Church. Francis was the “Second Christ,” having received the stigmata, the unhealing wounds Christ received on the cross. Then Thomas compared the life of the Dominicans to that of Francis and lamented the state of his order (Paradiso XI, 118–23).

Soon we meet a second thinker and a second circle of lights, circling around the first circle. St. Bonaventure, the other great theologian of the mid-thirteenth cen-

tury, minister general of the Franciscan order, and a prolific theologian and spiritual writer. Bonaventure tells of the life of the founder of the other new monastic order of the thirteenth century, St. Dominic, and like Thomas he judges his own Franciscans against the standard of the life of St. Dominic (Paradiso XII, 112). He then introduces himself and the other eleven in his circle, once again reconcilers. Within his circle is another theologian we might not expect that he would invite, Joachim of Fiore, whose work Bonaventure had qualified and to some extent criticized (Ratzinger 117–18, Emerson), and which would inspire the more radical group of Franciscans by Dante's time, the Spirituals, who would cause loss of respect for and partial collapse of the Franciscans.

Dante is almost certainly reflecting his own reconciliation of the tensions of his own age. In the thirteenth and early fourteenth century when Dante was writing, the Franciscans and Dominicans argued with each other over which order was more Christlike, over which was the highest in the order of charity (*Early Dominicans* 149–50, 160). This question goes back to the disciples of Jesus; it is nothing new.

Now it is time, in the class, for moral allegorical interpretation. Where, I ask my students, might we see this kind of conflict and need today? They are full of answers: in competition over which majors are the revered and require the greatest intellect; or between groups of students—athletes and musicians, those who serve, those who govern, etc.; or it might be political—progressives and conservatives; for those of us in multi-denominational Christian settings, it might be very similar to Dante—which is the best, most biblical, closest to the teachings of Jesus. I have even seen it between groups of professors, though I am reticent to explore this further here or in the classroom.

Dante has revealed our weaknesses, our pride in who we are and to what and whom we belong in our contemporary world, as he did in his own. I ask my students, can we risk understanding others, even those with whom we might disagree, to have open souls as did Dante's Aquinas and Bonaventure? If we cannot, will we conflict like the Dominicans and Franciscans? Like Siger and Thomas, or Bonaventure and Joachim? Will we circle in at least partial harmony or always in partisanship? In politics our institutions force us to listen and compromise with those with whom we disagree. But in teaching, Dante especially has something to offer.

My doctoral adviser, many years ago, explained that he had learned that if you want to teach something well, you should do so with sympathy and enthusiasm. If you are to teach Dante, become a Dantisti. If you are teaching medieval Islam, teach the glories of Islamic practice and achievement. Become sympathetic and appreciative. Only then will we be able to step back, find balance, and offer a critical assessment. Many of us learn to teach through the unsystematic wisdom of practice learned through our apprenticeship working with masters in our field of study. It is a profound way of learning and learning to teach, and too little studied (Schon, Palmer <AQ: No page nos.? Are these general citations to the whole books?>).

If we do not begin the way my mentor described, with sympathy and appreciation, with attention to the fullness of what we teach, we will not be sure that we have taught or learned fully, clearly, and with integrity; and we will not offer our students a chance to learn with clarity and depth. Rather than begin with a hermeneutic

of suspicion, we might begin with a hermeneutic of sympathy, and perhaps charity (Jacobs<AQ: Page nos.?). My students confirm to me that Dante has the power to teach this hermeneutic. They look at others more appreciatively and clearly, at least for a while. One dose does not inoculate. They recognize that to discuss differences and to test their own gifts and those with whom they associate, they must do so in light of others with different associations and gifts. Some simply resist Dante's teaching. They offer this to me in after-class reflections, both those who accept and those who resist. Sometimes we can see it in their reactions to Dante—the head slightly bowed as they ponder what this means for them, their actions and words—or in their questions. Dante is decidedly modern, it seems to them, and one who teaches us how to teach.

## Note

All quotations of the *Divine Comedy* are from the translation of Robin Kirkpatrick.

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