THE ARTS & SCIENCES OF A CORE TEXT EDUCATION

WHAT ARE THEY?
WHY DO WE NEED THEM?

EDITED BY
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The Arts and Sciences of a Core Text Education: What Are They? Why Do We Need Them?

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(Arndt)
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The Wisdom of Art

Introduction: The Arts and Sciences of a Core Text Education—What Are They? Why Do We Need Them?

Tertullian once asked, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" This rhetorical quip signaled his view that the realms of philosophy and reason have little to nothing to do with the realms of theology and faith and his fear that their interaction might prove to be disastrous. Happily, the history of education in the West has largely disagreed with Tertullian, as evidenced by the medieval university in Europe and by many liberal arts colleges in the United States. Reason and faith have been seen not only as complementary but even necessary for people to hold together in their pursuit of an intellectually and spiritually whole life.

Today the quip might be, "What does art have to do with science?" This question would have been unthinkable to earlier generations of students and scholars raised in the liberal arts tradition of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, which brought the language-based arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric) together with the mathematics-based arts (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy) into a holistic view of life. More recently, for descendants of the German university research model, with its focus on specialized knowledge in ever more discrete disciplines, the division between the arts and the sciences is almost a given. Art and science resemble the relationship between science and religion in Stephen Jay Gould's NOMA (Nonoverlapping Magisteria) model.

Is this the education that best serves humanity and the natural world, especially in the face of the complexity, diversity, and interconnectedness of the twenty-first century? Are there overlaps between the arts and the sciences that combine in powerful ways to probe and pursue answers to life's big questions and problems? Can the arts serve the sciences? Can the sciences serve the arts? Can both strive together to

give us wisdom and shape our souls? Can we—university professors and administrators—bring the liberal arts back together again for the benefit of our students and the communities they serve? How can the arts and the sciences collaborate to help students better interpret art and science? How can they tag team to illumine students' intellects and shape their virtues toward what is true, good, and beautiful for the sake of good societies around the globe? And, in line with the tenets of ACTC, what role can core texts play in this pedagogical goal?

The selected essays in this volume address this basic question about the arts and the sciences as well as the practical ends of life that they often serve. Each essay highlights a core text or two that engages students in these broad disciplines and ends. The essays are thematically grouped under two headings: "The Art of Reason" and "The Wisdom of Art." "The Art of Reason" offers examples of how art helps students understand science, along with some creative methods for interpreting and evaluating texts, traditions, and beauty. "The Wisdom of Art" addresses the wisdom that can be gained from core texts about love, happiness, virtue, vice, life, death, soulcraft, and politics. The essays in each section are sequenced by subthemes to elicit conversations among essays.

ACTC hopes that these essays prompt you to consider, and perhaps reconsider, the role of and the relationship between the arts and the sciences in education and in life today. We also hope they provide you with pedagogical models for incorporating core texts into your courses for the benefit of your students and their communities.

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The Art of Reason

Still Bridging the Gap: Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream* as Literary Science and Scientific Poetry

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The question of disciplinary compartmentalization is prominent in the conference theme: "Is there a sense in which core texts of the humanities are 'artistic objects,' whereas core texts of the sciences or mathematics are something else?" Environmental literature is a very slippery genre because of the crossover between science and literature. Many ecological core texts bridge disciplines; Sandra Steingraber's work is a chief example of this, spanning the spectrum of toxicology to poetry, steadily taking its place as a new core text in environmental literature, justly compared to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring.* Both Steingraber and Carson have been accused of compromising their science by the use of story, metaphor, and beautiful language.[1] But in fact, the literary techniques they use not only frame the argument for a larger audience; they clarify the science and hearken back to the writing of science core texts like *Origin of Species*, stepping outside the sterile and sometimes misleading constraints of more commonly accepted scientific genres.[2]

In my Environmental Literature course, Carson and Steingraber function as bookends, published nearly fifty years apart, for the problem of environmental contamination, one on which we have particularly focused as our university has transitioned from chemical to natural lawn care. Often, Carson is read as if her work solved a problem that is in the past. DDT was banned in the United States, after all. By contrast, the facts show that the pesticide problem, along with other environmental contamination, has only grown more widespread. The volume of pesticides

used per year in the United States has climbed from 124 million pounds in 1947 to 637,666,000 pounds in 1960, figures cited by Carson, to over a billion pounds per year now (Carson 45; Grube et al.). Use in the developing world is burgeoning. The CDC Biomonitoring Project has shown how many pesticides and other toxic environmental chemicals contaminate virtually every American tested. Overall, it is fairly shocking how much worse the problem has gotten since Rachel Carson's time. Under the Toxic Substance Control Act (TSCA), the only regulatory legislation now in place, only six substances have been banned since 1978, and the ban on asbestos was overturned in court, despite damning, prolific evidence of its widespread harms.

What makes this unhappy information palatable to students and others is the way it is framed by Carson and Steingraber. Carson carefully distances and yet makes familiar the story of environmental contamination by casting it first as a sort of parable or story, which she later shows to be substantially real:

> There was once a town in the heart of American where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. . . . Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community. . . . There had been several sudden and unexplained deaths, not only among adults but even among children, who would be stricken suddenly while at play and die within a few hours. (27–28)

This "once upon a time" quality enables readers to gain the right distance for them from the problem. By bridging between imaginative, putatively fictional narratives, and facts, scientific narratives of the real, Carson is able to first invoke the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief" and then defuse their real incredulity, so thoroughly supported by facts that the narrative becomes believable. Frankly, it is often difficult to believe what we are really doing to ourselves. It is no wonder if we need authors' literary assistance to sort through the cognitive dissonance.

While employing Carson's poetic narrative vein, Steingraber, by contrast, very consciously and clearly refutes the silence on personal issues that Carson had carefully maintained. In addition to accounts of her good friend who died of cancer, she incorporates sometimes shocking, unforgettable, beautifully described flashes of her own experience as a bladder cancer survivor. After discussing elevated bladder cancer levels in whales in the St. Lawrence Seaway and in human smelters in nearby aluminum plants, she turns the narrative to herself:

> As for myself, gross hematuria arrived as I was finishing up a morning shift at a truck-stop diner. After making my final rounds with the ketchup bottles and syrup dispensers, I stopped in the restroom. Turning to flush, I froze. My urine looked like cherry Kool-Aid. I stood there a long time. (134)

It is important that her story is not *just* a story. Throughout *Living Downstream*, Steinbraber links that story with the scientific accounts, meticulously documented in notes at the back, as well as a larger story about the land and what we have done with it. That is one reason her prevailing metaphor, living downstream, is so effective, in both her book and the movie made from it: she begins with a Once Upon a Time narrative of villagers who wondered about the dead bodies that floated past on their river:

> There was once a village along a river. The people who lived there were very kind. These residents, according to parable, began noticing increasing numbers of drowning people caught in the river's swift current. And so they went to work devising ever more elaborate technologies to resuscitate them. So preoccupied were these heroic villagers with rescue and treatment that they never thought to look upstream to see who was pushing the victims in. This book is a walk up that river. (ix)

But Steingraber also clearly links this metaphor to other essential facets of her argument: the actual Illinois River along which she grew up, as well as the destruction of the fishing industry and the river's former uncontaminated beauty; the river of life that runs through the environment and all of us and which we ignore at our peril; and the evocative chapter titles that each focus on a different element—silence, time, space, war, animals, earth, air, water, fire, and finally, our bodies. Other critics have noticed the increasing number of ties being made between human health and environmental health, an important ligature between disciplines, one that has previously been unjustly neglected, or, if we are to believe Devra Davis in her *Secret History of the War on Cancer,* intentionally and diabolically obscured. Greg Garrard calls this *environmental autopathography*, a subset of ecocriticism, and includes Steingraber in this classification (494), praising her "remarkable combination of scientific and emotional intensity" (497). This scientific validity is essential and in marked contrast to other authors Garrard describes, "if 'material ecocriticism' is to be more than a mere pleonasm" (501), given our inbuilt biases in regard to ecological reality.

While immensely sensitive to the power of metaphor, Steingraber does not shy away from the real, hard science. She is challenging to read. Her citations at the end are primarily from peer-reviewed journal articles, the EPA, and other very credible sources. While some students do struggle with the hefty scientific content in a class filled with non-science majors, they have done far better over the years than I have expected, and I think the main reason for this is Steingraber's lyrical treatment of the material—her ability to capture the real storyline of the science through stories, real-world examples, and conceptual models like the story of living downstream, which mirrors the precautionary principle at the heart of her argument. I am familiar with the primary literature in this field, and its collective impact can be stultifying, one damn thing after another; each study adds to the burden of general gloom. So constructing a narrative that makes sense out of hundreds of individual scientific studies is no easy task—but one that is increasingly important. Now, more than ever, scientific literacy is challenged, in decline, and absolutely essential to our healthy functioning as individuals and as a society. What is important is that we teach narratives, like Steingraber's, that are "simultaneously symbolic and obdurately material" (Garrard 506). Steingraber juxtaposes hard scientific evidence and spare, lapidary personal narrative without ever confusing the two.

Clearly, I cannot do full justice to Steingraber's work within the context of a short conference paper, but my larger point is this: Just as Darwin used his image of the tangled bank to both enchant and entrain the reader in new ways of thinking, Steingraber, and Carson before her, have used imagery, poetic language, stories, and parables to reveal the truth of what is happening in the world. In this way, their projects exceed the truth available in neutrally written, enforcedly didactic formats like

those published under peer review, by including those essential findings along with important connections and judgments from other disciplines. Steingraber's integration of the best techniques of poetry and literature clarifies science, rather than just packaging or obscuring it. Not only that, but her work, because a trade paperback, transcends usual modern boundaries of academic and popular writing (Freedman 48), the professional and the personal; and this is embodied in the way her footnotes are written: invisible in the text, clearly documented at the end.

Often, what is meant by a core text is a beautifully constructed book that has stood the test of time, has been loved by generations, and has been an essential part of the conversation of great minds over centuries. As a scholar originally trained as a medievalist, I can scarcely quarrel with this. But I would qualify this definition in two ways: first, environmental studies demand that we forecast in advance to some extent what will be the greatest texts; this field demands discussion of environmental crises that are unfolding in real time, and we need texts that begin to conceptualize and describe these crises, ones that integrate the scientific with social, ethical, and personal narratives. Second, the conversation as it unfolds over time has always been contingent. Why else were major female medieval authors shut out of the conversation for many centuries, except for the fact of the sexism of the conversation? Medieval feminists have rightly remedied this lack. The point is that we shape the conversations in real time; we suit them to our real or perceived needs. There are some texts that, because of their power, eloquence, and importance, we should actively cast as the core texts of the future.[3] At base, there is a normative, ethical bent both to the concept of core texts and to ecocriticism. And I agree with critics who argue that we should not be so reflexively self-critical and deconstructive that we forget that ethical context (Garrard 510). It is not exaggerating to say that the future of civilization may depend on this union of literary and scientific discourses right now, shaping our students' views going forward, revealing the truth as we know it using as many paradigms and disciplines as needed, guiding the decisions that will have to be made in the very near future to support the continuance of civilization.

Notes

1. I am with Amy Patrick, who criticizes critics like M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer who argue that the fable is ineffective and even hysterically apocalyptic (Patrick 141–42) instead of well-constructed science writing that resembles that of great core text writers like Darwin.

2. Here I am thinking not only of constraints on the use of first person, still common in science writing and which gives a mistaken impression, often, of no scientist and therefore no bias. I am also thinking of constraints increasingly criticized by science writers like Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway on the acceptability of truth only at a p-value of 0.05, which prioritizes avoiding type I scientific errors—wrongly believing something that is false—disproportionately over type II errors, which wrongly disbelieve something that is true.

3. A quick survey of sample syllabi on the ASLE (Association for the Study for Literature and Environment) website reveals that Carson is common in Environmental Literature classes; Steingraber is not yet.

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Using Weiner's *The Beak of the Finch* to Create a Course That Is Accessible to First-Year Students from Any Major and Is Engaging for Upper-Level Biology Students

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The Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Beak of the Finch* by Jonathan Weiner is used in an interdisciplinary course on evolution and the Galápagos Islands to bridge the diversity of backgrounds among students, making the course accessible to first-year students who are not majoring in science and, yet, engaging for upper-level biology students. The book chronicles the ground-breaking, decades-long research on natural selection in the Galápagos finches by Peter and Rosemary Grant. However, the book also includes chapters on Darwin's voyage and discoveries, the development of his theory, examples of natural selection and adaptive radiation from other parts of the world, and the work of other evolutionary biologists. Each of these chapters serves as the starting point for students to explore more complex topics and for reading selections of Darwin's works, as well as primary research articles on more recent studies of evolutionary processes in Galapagos finches.

Two questions were embedded in the theme of the 2015 ACTC conference, "The Arts and Sciences of a Core Text Education: What Are They and Why Do We Need Them?" To answer the first question regarding the sciences, science is one of the ways of knowing. It is much more than a skill set or a compilation of information. This author does not regard science simply as one of the nonoverlapping magesteria (NOMA, *sensu* Gould 9–10) but, rather, as one of many perspectives from which to

view the world around us, *sensu* Aristotle (according to Guthrie 40) and *sensu* Moore (502–3). Science is an approach to asking questions, a disciplined manner of thinking, and a specific mode of inquiry. Science is *not* a litany of facts but rather a means of creating a framework by which various and sundry facts can be organized into a meaningful whole, allowing one to recognize emergent properties.

And why do we need science in a core text education? This author replies rhetorically, "Do we need a scientifically literate public and an informed electorate?" and offers an emphatic, "Absolutely!" in response. Many members of the public now believe that popular opinion or votes by elected representatives should be the basis for evaluating scientific results. Well-funded special interest groups, such as the Discovery Institute and Wyoming Citizens Opposing Common Core, fight to have any content that includes evolution, global climate change, geologic age of the earth, origin of the universe, or stem cell research removed from school curricula or to have non-scientific theories presented as alternatives (DeWolf et al., 1; Todd, 1). In addition, there are growing numbers of individuals who refuse to have their children vaccinated, who cry out against genetically modified organisms in the food supply, or who rally in support of "clean coal technology" without understanding or acknowledging the science behind such issues (Achenbach 35, 41, 44, 47; Mufson 1; Specter 1). The public often turns to unvetted websites and blogs, innuendo by cable news commentators, or pronouncements by television personalities (see, e.g., Kaplan 1) as its source for information with which to formulate opinions about scientific issues. In order to address these trends, it is important to train the general public to become more scientifically literate, and therefore it is very important to include the sciences in a core text education.

Many of the core texts in the sciences were published many decades, if not centuries, ago. A new candidate as a core text is proposed here: Jonathan Weiner's *The Beak of the Finch,* published in 1994. This text can be used as a starting point for exploring other core texts such as the various writings of Charles Darwin. Just as evolution is the thread that unites all of biology, *The Beak of the Finch* can be used as the thread that ties together a range of core texts and modern research reports in the area of evolutionary biology.

This author teaches an interdisciplinary semester-long course on evolution and the Galápagos Islands. This course is offered to students in preparation for a trip to visit and explore ecological zones and evolutionary processes in the Galápagos Islands. One of the challenges in teaching an interdisciplinary course is the diversity of the students with respect to their backgrounds and majors. Enrolled in this course typically are second-semester freshmen, graduating seniors, biology majors with extensive coursework in ecology and evolution, and students from majors as diverse as Spanish, communications studies, English, and sociology, many of whom have taken no introductory science classes. As the instructor, this author is confronted with delivering an engaging and rigorous course that meets the Biology Department's expectations for an upper-level course for biology majors and yet is accessible to first-year students and students from majors outside of the natural sciences. This author has discovered that *The Beak of the Finch* is an excellent vehicle for bridging the diversity of backgrounds among the students.

Far too often, biology is considered by some to be little more than an accumulation of facts about organisms. And unfortunately, sometimes biology courses are taught from this perspective as well. In its 2009 report, "A New Biology for the 21st Century," the National Research Council describes the need to train undergraduates to be able to integrate concepts across scientific disciplines (3). The goal in teaching this course is to help all of the students, not just the future biologists, to explore themes and concepts in evolutionary biology, particularly as these apply to the Galápagos Islands. As the students in the course discover details about the fascinating inhabitants of the Galápagos Islands through a conceptual approach, they can place these details within a framework of evolutionary themes and concepts. The aspiration underlying the use of this approach is for students to develop a rich understanding and a deep appreciation for the evolutionary process and for how it is a common thread throughout biology. Through this conceptual approach, students do, indeed, go far beyond a stamp-collecting attitude for exploring the natural history of the Galápagos Islands.

The Beak of the Finch is primarily devoted to describing the research of Peter and Rosemary Grant. The Grants spent decades studying the Galápagos finches as a living model system in which to understand and document the process of evolution through natural selection. The book's appeal to a general audience lies in its being written at a popular level and in the manner through which it explores both the lives and research of Peter and Rosemary, as well as that of other investigators in the field of evolution. The utility of this book to the course is that many of the chapters serve as starting points from which to lead the class into broader discussions of evolution and, more importantly, to the reading of other related texts and primary research articles. The students in the class are able to progress from the "soft" presentation of a concept or the summary results of a scientific study in Weiner's book to reading either the original text in which a concept was developed or the primary research article in which the original data were presented. Students read works by Charles Darwin, as well as articles on gene expression, the effects of individual proteins on embryological development of bird beaks, and phylogenetic analysis through genome sequencing.

Although it is possible to read and discuss chapters sequentially from the beginning to the end of *The Beak of the Finch,* in this course the students begin with Chapter 2, which frames the Grants' research in a broad context and also delves into the mind of Charles Darwin as he himself "evolved" from being a creationist to concluding that species must be changing over time and that organisms "have been, and are being, evolved" (Darwin, final sentence of the book). The students then read and discuss scattered sections of Weiner's book that discuss historical studies of evolution. In conjunction with these sections, the students read excerpts of Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* (3: vii–ix, 453–478), in which he recounts his travels along the west coast of South America and around the Galápagos Islands. The students experience earthquakes, mountain building, and volcanic islands through the eyes of Charles Darwin as they get their first glimpses of the geology and biota of the region. The class then reads Darwin's *Origin of Species.* Bit by bit, the students come to understand more and more about what Darwin saw, how his own ideas changed

over time, and how he slowly began to piece together a variety of seemingly unrelated observations to create his theory of evolution by means of natural selection. Through the reading of these core texts, the students see how science is a process, how scientific knowledge grows from observation of phenomena, to formulation of hypotheses, to articulation of a theory. They also come to discover that one legendary account actually is fictitious—the tale that, as soon as he saw the organisms on the Galápagos Islands, Darwin sprang to the conclusion that evolution was occurring. And finally, the students come to appreciate how some careless work and imprecise record-keeping by Charles Darwin and other biologists prevented them from collecting the very empirical data that would have conclusively supported the hypothesis that natural selection occurs. Indeed, Charles Darwin, who was but a few years older than the students themselves when he visited the Galápagos Islands, was far from perfect in his collection of specimens and recording of data.

The class then returns to the beginning of *The Beak of the Finch* and follows the narrative of the work by the Grants, whose tedious, meticulous research yielded what the evolutionary biologist William Hamilton described as "the most detailed and unified support to the Neo-Darwinian view of evolution that the theory has yet received" (Weiner 19). From the accessible text of *The Beak of the Finch,* the class can segue into reading original primary research articles by the Grants, by their colleagues and collaborators, and by other scientists mentioned in Weiner's book as they researched the process of evolution, not just in finches but also in species ranging from bacteria to guppies. As the class progresses through the chapters of the book, the students, including non–biology majors, read and understand primary research articles from journals, including *Science*, *Nature*, and *Evolution*, an understanding facilitated in part by the overviews provided by Weiner.

In the humanities and social sciences, it is typical for students from all backgrounds and majors to enroll in the same courses, whereas in the natural sciences, it is not uncommon for there to be special courses for non–science majors that are separate from courses for the science majors. Unfortunately, this practice merely reinforces the false dichotomy between people who can do science and those who cannot, as well as the idea that students who are not science majors are not able to develop a full and deep understanding of scientific principles. This author firmly believes that each and every student has the potential to understand and master any material that is presented in a course such as this. In the three iterations in which this course has been offered, those students who were not science majors never had the lowest grades in the course, few had scores in the bottom third of the class, and a non-science major typically earned among the highest grades in the class. The success of these students may have been due to the fact that their grade in this course was not reliant upon one's ability to memorize (and regurgitate) facts, but rather on their ability to understand concepts, to make connections among the course readings, and also to recognize emergent properties regarding evolution and speciation, particularly as these relate to the Galápagos Islands.

In 2014, after four continuous decades of research in the Galápagos Islands, Peter and Rosemary Grant retired. But their legacy remains as a foundation for subsequent evolutionary research. Weiner's *Beak of the Finch* will continue to serve as

a core text to make their research on evolution accessible to a widely diverse student population—and to support the contention that the sciences *do* belong in a core text education.

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Evolution and . . .

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William Cronon, in his essay *Only Connect: The Goals of a Liberal Arts Education,* states that "education for human freedom is also education for human community." Striving to be free from ignorance, and doing so with humility, empowers us to see connections that make responsible, productive, compassionate action possible. More than any other paradigm, the theory of evolution emphasizes connection—within the human species, between all forms of life past and present, and within the academy—and thus is an exemplary model for articulating the ideals of liberal education. In his essay *The Panda's Thumb of Technology,* Stephen Jay Gould asks us to consider our tenuous and fortuitous existence as a species in a manner that is witty, engaging, and readily accessible, thereby setting the stage for further discussions about our connection and obligation to the rest of the natural order.

Despite dire prophesies to the contrary, a strong case can be made that liberal education is becoming increasingly relevant, practical, and vital in the United States. Consider the role of a responsible citizen in a democracy: individuals must have the ability to assess and respond to the ever increasing amount of information that bombards us—good and bad—from entities like twenty-four-hour news networks and the Internet. Consider also the talents and perspectives needed for success in one's career: individuals must be able to interact effectively with diverse colleagues from across the globe, think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems (Humphreys and Kelly 6). Having the ability to tackle intricate or contentious issues, and proceed in responsible and respectful ways, requires that we take the time to acquire and critique as many different perspectives as possible. Such principles have always been central to the liberal arts philosophy, nuanced a bit by the changing needs and desires of undergraduate students over many centuries. How does one

articulate such ideals? Various strategies exist, most of which ask faculty to expose their students to what are deemed to be the best types of texts, the best collection of academy-spanning courses, or the most diverse types of experiences that together will constitute a liberating education. Such deliberate planning, coupled with timely mentorship and advising, certainly can produce the desired outcomes. The approach can be facilitated if these texts, courses, and experiences are organized around a central paradigm that itself embodies interdisciplinarity and challenges myopic thinking. An exceptional paradigm for articulating the objectives of a liberal education is the theory of evolution.

What does it mean to be a liberally educated person? William Cronon offers an exceptional answer in his essay entitled "Only Connect . . .: The Goals of a Liberal Education":

> More than anything else, being an educated person means being able to see connections that allow one to make sense of the world and act within it in creative ways. . . . A liberal education is about gaining the power and the wisdom, the generosity and the freedom to connect. (Cronon 78)

Seeing connections allows one to solve complex problems, critique information from a variety of sources, work with diverse colleagues, and function responsibly in a democracy. Cronon elegantly captures the philosophy behind the trivium and quadrivium, and all subsequent and expanded iterations thereof, with one simple word: connection.

How, then, does the theory of evolution allow us to see and understand connection? It does so in at least two ways. First, the theory of evolution allows us to see the interconnectedness of many knowledge domains and modes of inquiry within the academy. Focusing first on the natural sciences, evolution brings together areas that otherwise would seem unrelated, such as genetics, systematics, and paleontology. Casting the net more broadly, we find that evolutionary explanations for a diverse array of phenomena abound. As examples, understanding human behavior and social activity (Buller 2005), why we believe in gods (Boyer 2001), why we tell stories (Boyd 2009), why we enjoy particular combinations of sounds or colors or images (Dutton 2009), and why we suffer from obesity and morbidity (Lieberman 2014) can all be elucidated in the light of evolution. What appear to be disconnected domains found within the arts, the humanities, and the natural and social sciences are interwoven through one powerful explanatory paradigm. Evolution and . . . what? Evolution and *everything*.

Second, the theory of evolution emphasizes connections to each other and all of life. Stephen Jay Gould provides an accessible entry into this discussion in many of his essays and popular books, among them *The Panda's Thumb of Technology.* In this essay, Gould presents what he calls the "panda principle" and applies it to keyboard technology. Briefly, the herbivorous panda descended from carnivorous bears, the latter of which have thumbs that were "irrevocably committed to the *limited* motion appropriate to this mode of life and universally evolved by mammalian Carnivora" (61, emphasis added). The panda "needs" a more *flexible* thumb to assist it in acquiring and manipulating the bamboo that is the staple of its diet and so relies on a modified wrist bone, called into service by natural selection. The panda therefore

makes effective use of a suboptimal structure. We do the same with the QWERTY keyboard—the majority of Gould's essay describes how the quirky and random contingencies of history have left us with this suboptimal technology. "But," Gould asks, "why fret over lost optimality?"

> History always works this way. If Montcalm had won a battle on the Plains of Abraham, perhaps I would be typing *en français.* If a portion of the African jungles had not dried to savannas, I might still be an ape up a tree. If some comets had not struck the earth some 60 million years ago, dinosaurs might still rule the land, and all mammals would be rat-sized creatures scurrying about in the dark corners of their world. If *Pikaia,* the only cordate of the Burgess Shale, had not survived the great sorting out of body plans after the Cambrian explosion, mammals might not exist at all. If multicellular creatures had never evolved after five-sixths of life's history had yielded nothing more complicated than an algal mat, the sun might explode a few billion years hence with no multicellular witness to the earth's destruction. Compared with these weighty possibilities, my indenture to QWERTY seems a small price indeed for the rewards of history. For if history were not so maddeningly quirky, we would not be here to enjoy it. (Gould 71)

We humans like to think of ourselves as the pinnacle of life. To the uninformed observer, it is easy to conclude that there is something extra-special about us in comparison to the rest of the animal kingdom. Indeed, we in the West have Judeo-Christian origin myths to reinforce that perspective, myths that claim that we in fact are the one creature on the planet that emulates and is capable of relating to the Creator. Gould would nuance that perspective just a bit. Yes, we are an exceptional species, in many ways God-like in that we are capable of many amazing (and, alas, horrific) things, but as Gould would likely claim, our attributes are the fluky, unpredictable outcomes of random, undirected processes that have occurred on this planet for 4.5 billion years. Certainly, the awe and humility one experiences when truly contemplating our tenuous existence rivals what many experience on Sunday mornings.

And therein lies Gould's prowess as a writer. An unpretentious, entertaining look at the history of the keyboard results in the reader's humbly contemplating what it means to be human. Engaging students with an essay such as *The Panda's Thumb of Technology* serves as a springboard into the deeper exploration of human evolution. This deeper exploration leads to some truly fascinating, relevant conclusions, some of which are enumerated here (e.g., see Zimmer 2005):

1. Our closest *living* relatives, the great apes, have an awareness of self; are known to cooperate, solve complex problems that human children often cannot, and use modified natural materials like twigs and rocks as tools; and can learn and use human language.
2. One of our closest *extinct* relatives, *Homo neaderthalensis,* thought symbolically with brains the same size as or slightly larger than our own, fashioned sophisticated tools, displayed empathy for others in their social groups, and ritualistically buried their dead.
3. Hominins with brains comparable in size to our own, going back to *Homo heidelbergensis,* have existed for at least 600,000 years.
4. Approximately twenty species of hominin have existed on this planet,

going back to *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* roughly 7 million years ago. Approximately seven of these species belong(ed) to the genus *Homo,* which originated about 2 million years ago. *Homo sapiens,* which originated approximately 190,000 years ago in eastern Africa, is the only current survivor from this genus, though *Homo floresiensis* went extinct a mere 12,000 years ago. All known hominins were, or are, bipedal.

5. *Homo sapiens* began domesticating animals and crops beginning about 10,000 years ago. Prior to this time, all hominins were hunter-gatherers.

Focusing on what is known about primate anatomy and behavior from species both alive and extinct reveals something undeniable: we are not separate and distinct from the rest of the animal world. We differ from our primate relatives in degree only, and even then not dramatically.

Considering our place on this planet from an evolutionary perspective reveals something even more profound. Our history is life's history—without the fortuitous combination of molecules capable of self-replication that led to the emergence of life on this planet some 3.9 billion years ago, nothing alive would be found on Earth. Everything that lives, including us, owes its very existence to the intricate web that is the living world. Bipedal primates have existed for 7 million years, while our genus has only existed for roughly 2 million years and our species a mere 200,000 years. And we were all dark-skinned, big-brained hunter-gatherers living in small, egalitarian social groups, perhaps with a sense of the spiritual but nothing remotely close to organized dogmatic religions, for the vast majority of our existence. Paler skins came on the scene when groups of us began migrating out of Africa around 85,000 years ago, and phenomena like tiered economic systems and organized religions not until sometime after the Agricultural Revolution. The things that have divided us over the course of our history—different skin colors, gods, political systems, access to resources, and ill-informed perceptions about how one's place in society is dictated by private parts and sexual orientation—are relative newcomers. We focus so much on the things that divide us, yet those things have existed for roughly 5 percent of the time our species has existed, perhaps 1 percent of the time our genus has existed, and about 0.0002 percent of the time life has existed on this planet. An appreciation for the natural history of our species helps us to focus on the things that *connect* us, not just with each other but with the rest of life, past and present and future.

The ideals of the liberal arts, perhaps nuanced and adapted a bit for the twenty-first century, are at least as practical and relevant as they have ever been. What is essential is that individuals—be they in a voting booth, on an international business trip, or online looking for information—have the ability to appreciate and make sense of how complex things truly are. The solutions that are formulated quickly, that perhaps feel the most comfortable or automatic, are perhaps not the best solutions. Complicated problems require complex solutions that take into account as many perspectives as possible. We simply must find ways of working constructively with others, no matter how different "the other" may appear or act—things like free trade, the Internet, and transoceanic flights all but guarantee that the world will remain small. And we must begin to realize that the harm we are causing to this planet is ultimately

harm we are causing to ourselves. We must stop thinking narrowly and instead think broadly and as inclusively as possible if we are to productively and responsibly solve the problems that exist. We must love our neighbor as ourselves, realizing that our neighbor includes every living thing, bipedal or not. Thinking broadly and inclusively is greatly facilitated by focusing on connections—within the academy, to each other, to all of the living world—rather than differences. It is in this sense that the evolutionary paradigm provides an exceptional means to convey the ideals of the liberal arts.

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Life—One and Many

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In my freshman seminar "The Biosphere," I want to engage students in thinking about what life is.

Before Darwin, the tradition focused on the diversity of life: In *Genesis,* each thing is created "according to its kind." Aristotle and Theophrastus speak of the formal cause of species, the pattern that unfolds in the generation of each individual, ending in reaching and maintaining its fully developed state (Sachs, sec. 2). This view is embodied in the Neoplatonic "great chain of being" and later in Linneaus's *Systema Naturae*: a hierarchy of distinct beings, each having a place in a divine plan. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was controversial whether fossils represented extinct life forms, because it called into question the perfection of the creation.

Today, the idea that the biosphere is "self-regulating" is part of the environmental world-view. The "balance of nature" and the idea that every species plays a vital role in the ecosystem owe at least some of their force to the great chain of being. In ecology, the emphasis on deer, wolves, or whales and the comparative neglect of tiny arthropods, worms, and microbes suggests that a species' importance is in its visible activity. A bear is something. An equivalent weight of mites is not. Our courses, textbooks, and TV documentaries have a bias toward the big, fierce animals.

There is a different strand in our tradition, which begins right at the start of philosophy in the fragmentary work of Heraclitus of Ephesus. His view contrasts with those of Aristotle, Theophrastus, and their followers down to the present.

Heraclitus doubts that nature is ordered in a way easily understood from a human perspective, and he does not see fixed forms in a concordant harmony. To Heraclitus,

> The harmony of the world is a harmony of oppositions, as in the case of the bow and of the lyre.[1]

> We must know that war is universal and strife right, and that by strife all things arise.[2]

Heraclitus sees constant transformation of substances between the living and nonliving parts of the world. Fire is his primary element:

> Fire coming upon all things will sift and seize them.[3]

Anticipating precise accounting for the transformations of nature, he says:

> This world. . . always was, and is, and shall be, an ever living fire, kindled in due measure, and in due measure extinguished.[4]

> All things are exchanged for fire and fire for all things, just as wares for gold and gold for wares.[5]

And he speaks of natural cycles:

> Fire lives in the death of earth, air lives in the death of fire, water lives in the death of air, and earth in the death of water.[6]

For Heraclitus, balance is the result of a clash of forces, locked in opposition and dependence, mutual benefit and exploitation. The entire living world is a process of substantive transformation, and, while he does not name it as the source of transformative power, Heraclitus makes the sun one of his primary images. "Heraclitus is in search of the logos of the world. The Greek λογοσ refers to an account, or a relation, or a ratio—that is a rational summing up of affairs" (Brann 10).

In one of his most pregnant phrases, he makes a ratio between the individual and the world:

> ONE: EVERYTHING[7]

And there is the even more pregnant chiasmus:

> ONE : EVERYTHING :: EVERYTHING : ONE

Since Darwin's *Origin of Species*, science has brought us to a point where we can see how this logos sums up a fundamental truth about the living world. We can now describe the biosphere not as a hierarchy or a self-regulating "system" but instead as a vast array of rapidly evolving forms, the whole of which persists because of the robustness of its basic constituents and underlying principles. The constant flux is seen in the fossil record and in the history of the oceans, continents, and atmosphere. However, the basic processes of ecology, the functional aspects of the biosphere, have remained little changed for a half billion years—since the appearance of active, multicellular organisms.

Scientists in the first half of the twentieth century developed mathematical theories linking Darwin's natural selection with Mendel's laws of heredity. They also laid the groundwork for explaining living things' ability to replicate themselves, the great breakthrough being the discovery of the structure of DNA in 1953.

It has become possible, in principle at least, to develop mathematical theories of the four major processes of ecology: natural selection, population dynamics, energy flow, and nutrient cycling and to link these to the underlying chemical and physical laws. This is the logos that Heraclitus speaks of, the rational account of the visible phenomena.

Yet, among my freshmen, the view that biology is mostly about individual plants and animals persists. I am not unsympathetic to this, since I teach entomology and share a passion for natural history. But why does this view prevail? Because that's how life presents itself to our senses, and despite Heraclitus, it does not look like the living world is in flux. Aristotle's and Theophrastus's descriptions of plants are still recognizable more than 2,000 years later; they would know most of the species in a modern field guide for the Mediterranean world. Not surprising, since the average duration of a species, as judged by paleontologists, is on the order of a million years.

To see life as the unity it is, one has to take the long view. For this, *Origin of Species* is a good beginning. Despite the book's title, according to Darwin, species are only roughly distinguishable from mere varieties, and they change by gradual transitions, so that one cannot really say where one ends and another begins (Darwin chs. 2 and 4). Biologists for the last 150 years have tried to get around this uncomfortable idea in many ways.[8] We hate to give up the idea of distinct kinds of beings. We are, after all, individuals and members of a very distinct species. We do not live long enough to directly witness the changes that will inevitably occur. Nevertheless, as inquiring liberal artists, we ought to ask whether these preoccupations limit our understanding of life.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no single text that brings together Darwin and the twentieth century's discoveries in a way that would enable students to see clearly this Heraclitean point of view. What we most often get in recent work is a lot about genes and the concept of *information.* The notion of information as a biological concept seems to derive from an idea in Erwin Schrodinger's famous 1943 lectures, *What Is Life?* Schrodinger's point was that living things are systems of molecules that persist in a highly ordered state, far from thermodynamic equilibrium. This is related to the concept of entropy, and in modern theory, information and entropy are related. The structure of biological molecules is analogous to the nonrandom order of letters in writing, but it is too easy to think that because the analogy includes something familiar, you understand it. To me, this notion of *information* appears to be an echo of Aristotelian formal cause; it is not the same as Heraclitus's logos.

The nearest I have found to a suitable text is an essay, titled in homage to Schrodinger *What Is Life?* The author, Addy Pross, argues in parallel to Darwin: any replicating system of interacting molecules will multiply geometrically, and if some of the interacting molecules vary in ways that affect the rate of replication, the system will become subject to natural selection. That is, it will evolve over time as faster replicating molecules outpace slower ones in a molecular version of the struggle for existence. Such processes can be created in the lab. Pross says he has shown that evolution is not an exclusively biological phenomenon, but fundamentally a chemical one. This gives us a way to answer the questions, how did life begin? And is there

life on other planets? There is a lot more in his essay, but he tries to cover so many philosophical issues that I do not find it particularly useful, although it raises a lot of questions.

Like a ghost that will not be quiet, Aristotle comes back into the discussion. Pross tries to explain how a molecular system can develop into something that exhibits "teleonomic" behavior, that is, *apparent* purpose (as opposed to Aristotle's very real telos). In this formulation a bear's apparent purpose is to be a really good bear and make lots of little bears, but that is only apparent, because it is really just a system of interacting macromolecules in an aqueous medium. Which way is it really? I think it depends on whether you look at it from the perspective of a self-conscious observer: Teleonomy, like information, seems to imply something that can perceive purpose or meaning. Does Heraclitus's logos require it?

In conclusion, I find that even though our science can explain life as a Heraclitean flux, whose logos is expressed in mathematical formulas, we cannot shake off the usefulness of Aristotle and Theophrastus for talking about the living world. I am willing to live with the paradox. I'd like my students to reflect on both perspectives.

Notes

1. Παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη κόσμου ὅκωσπερ λύρης καὶ τόξου. All Greek text is from Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* ed. Walther Kranz (Berlin, 1951), available at http://www.heraclitusfragments.com/index.html. Translations are from G.T.W. Patrick, *The Fragments of the Work of Heraclitus of Ephesus on Nature*, *Translated from the Greek Text of Bywater* (Baltimore: N. Murray, 1889), with modifications based on Eva T.H. Brann, *The Logos of Heraclitus* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2011).
2. Εἰδέναι χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν· καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα.
3. Πάντα τὸ πῦρ ἐπελθὸν κρινέει καὶ καταλήψεται.
4. Κόσμον<τόνδε>τὸν αὐτὸν ἁπάντων οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησε, ἀλλ' ἦν αἰεὶ καὶἔστι καὶ ἔσται πῦρ ἀείζωον, ἁπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα.
5. Πυρὸς ἀνταμείβεται πάντα καὶ πῦρ ἁπάντων, ὥσπερ χρυσοῦ χρήματα καὶ χρημάτων χρυσός.
6. Ζῇ πῦρ τὸν γῆς θάνατον, καὶ ἀὴρ ζῇ τὸν πυρὸς θάνατον· ὕδωρ ζῇ τὸν ἀέρος θάνατον, γῆ τὸν ὕδατος.
7. ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶἐξένὸς πάντα (out of everything one and out of one everything).
8. Cf. the "biological species concept" and many other attempts to define species.

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The Liberal Art of Interpretation: Nietzsche and Gadamer on Reading

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What is the point of studying core texts? How should we read them?

One answer to this question invokes the notion of Great Books. Core texts are said to be great if they deal with great ideas, such as justice, freedom, beauty, and truth. Different authors may have approached these ideas from different angles and offered different views of what they are, it is said, but the ideas themselves are timeless, and this timelessness explains why Great Books are perennially meaningful and central to liberal education: they liberate us from our particular time and culture and introduce us to the realm of timeless and universal ideas.

This understanding of core texts has its strengths. It encourages students to ask essential questions. It pushes students to approach texts as possible sources of insight. It insists on the contemporary meaningfulness of the text. And this insistence is grounded in a real experience—the experience of having a classic text suddenly speak to us across the centuries and illuminate our lives and the world in which we live.

But this understanding of core texts also has weaknesses. It tends to ignore the ways core texts were implicated in their original cultural and historical context. It tends to neglect the difficulty of transcending our own cultural and historical context. This neglect leads to the naïve claim that students can have an "immediate" or unmediated relation to texts from distant times and foreign cultures. And this naïveté led some core text programs to present concepts proper to particular Western traditions as if they were universally and timelessly true. Conceiving core texts as Great Books leaves core text programs open to the criticism that, under the guise of liberating

students from their time and culture, they were merely perpetuating the values and ideas of one particular tradition.

But critics of Great Books programs have usually taken for granted a reductive understanding of core texts—an understanding that is historicist and culturalist.

Historicism takes three forms: 1. *Originalism* is the notion that the true meaning of a text is the meaning it had in its original historical context; the aim of reading is to understand writers just as they understood themselves. 2. *Presentism* is the notion that the true meaning of a text is the meaning it has in the present, either because we are trapped in the horizon of the present, so that it is impossible to recover the original understanding of the text; or because knowledge has progressed so much that we now understand writers better than they understood themselves. 3. *Anti-essentialism* is the notion that there is no true meaning of a text; at any point in history the meaning of a text is simply the way it is interpreted.

By "culturalism" I mean something analogous to historicism: the notion that core texts are artifacts whose meaning depends on their cultural context. Culturalism also has three versions, analogous to the three kinds of historicism. 1. One version—analogous to originalism—assumes the meaning of a foreign text is the meaning it has in its original cultural context; the task of interpretation is to suspend our Western ways of thought and to understand others in the way in which they understand themselves. 2. Another version of culturalism—analogous to presentism—assumes the meaning of a foreign text is the meaning it has in light of modern scientific theories. 3. A third version—analogous to anti-essentialism—assumes cultural artifacts have no "real" meaning, but have meaning only in the various cultural contexts into which they are appropriated. Meaning is not found within texts but imposed on them from without.

Historicist and culturalist approaches to core texts also have their strengths. They push us to focus on the historical and cultural specificity of core texts. They attune us to the changes texts go through when they are transposed into new contexts. They push us to discern nuances of meaning that tend to be invisible if we look too quickly for timeless and universal ideas.

But these approaches also have weaknesses. They discourage students from asking essential questions and trying to work out their own answers. They push students to approach texts as objects of analysis rather than as possible sources of insight. And so they make it difficult for students to feel addressed, questioned, challenged, and transformed by a text.

How then are we to read core texts? How can we preserve the strengths of the Great Books approach without falling into a naive ahistoricism or ethnocentrism? How can we take over the historicist and culturalist critique of the Great Books programs and still approach core texts as possible sources of insight into essential questions?

I think our approach to core texts should be guided by hermeneutics, and especially the recent tradition of hermeneutic theory that extends from Nietzsche through Gadamer. *To the seven traditional liberal arts we should add the art of interpretation.*

Nietzsche saw thinking as a form of interpretation, and interpretation as a matter of perspective. To think in a language is to take for granted the interpretation of

things implicit in the meanings of words, and this implicit interpretation constitutes our *standpoint*—the point from which we understand the world, which frames our perspective and circumscribes our horizon, which governs the way things appear to us.

This perspectivism led Nietzsche to rethink the ideal of objectivity. In his view, to be objective is not to escape the sphere of interpretation and to transcend the play of perspectives. It is to see things from many perspectives, to understand many interpretations, in order to reach an understanding more comprehensive than is possible from any one perspective alone. He makes this point in the *Genealogy.*

> Finally, as knowers, let us not be ungrateful towards such resolute reversals of familiar perspectives and valuations with which the mind has raged against itself for far too long, apparently to wicked and useless effect: to see differently, to *want* to see differently, and to *want* to see differently to that degree, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future "objectivity"—the latter understood not as "contemplation without interest" (which is, as such, a nonconcept and an absurdity) but as *having in our power* our "pros" and "con": so as to be able to engage and disengage them so that we can use the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations for knowledge. (92)

This approach to interpretation is exemplified by the *Genealogy* itself: Nietzsche's aim is not to celebrate the perspective of master moralities and to affirm their interpretations of good and bad, nor is it simply to denounce the perspective of slave moralities and debunk their interpretations of good and evil. Instead, his aim is to incorporate both interpretations into a broader account of the meaning of moral values—to lay out the insights, distortions, and blind spots of both perspectives in order to reach a level of understanding available to neither.

In *Truth and Method,* Hans-Georg Gadamer took up and extended Nietzsche's perspectival understanding of interpretation in his critique of both idealism and historicism.

Against idealism, Gadamer argued that it is an illusion to think that core texts allow us immediate access to timeless ideas. We always approach core texts from the perspective of our hermeneutic situation—the prior understanding of things that we take for granted, which constitutes our standpoint, circumscribes our horizon, and determines how things appear to us. "A hermeneutic situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the horizon of a particular present, for they represent that [horizon] beyond which it is impossible to see" (306). It is not possible to escape from our situatedness and to transcend all particular perspectives, and then to achieve a view from nowhere. Our encounters with core texts are never immediate since we always read them in light of our given understanding of the world.

Against historicism, Gadamer made three points.

1. Against anti-essentialism, Gadamer argued we cannot understand a text simply by tracing the history of its interpretation, without ourselves taking a stand on what it means. Nor can we understand a text simply by imposing our own meanings onto it. "We cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another" (268). Books are not blank slates onto which we project our own meanings. They resist, exceed, and elude our understanding, and

we have to attend to this resistance for them to move us, surprise us, and speak to us in ways we cannot foresee.

2. Against presentism, he argued that we are never trapped in the horizon of the present. "The closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon" (304). We are not imprisoned within our present standpoint and forced to see the past from the point of view of the present time, any more than we are trapped in our native language and incapable of learning other languages.

3. Against originalism, he argued that we can never wholly escape from the horizon of the present time and transpose ourselves entirely into a past way of thought, in the same way we cannot never wholly forget our native language. Even if we could forget all our own ideas and perfectly reconstruct the original understanding of the writer, this reconstruction would be for us simply an object of knowledge rather than a partner in a dialogue. "We think that we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint—i.e. [when we] transpose ourselves into a historical situation and try to reconstruct the historical horizon. In fact, however, we have given up the claim to find in the past any truth that is valid and intelligible for ourselves" (303). This kind of historical reconstruction would allow us know *about* the writer rather than allowing the writer to speak to us and challenge our own understanding.

How, then, should we approach and interpret core texts?

Gadamer described interpretation as a circular movement between what is other and what is our own—a hermeneutic circle between the foreign and the familiar. He explains this movement with an analogy: interpreting a foreign text is like learning a foreign language. Initially foreign words are opaque; we start to learn them by trying to translate them into words that are familiar. But at some point this kind of translation breaks down—we start to understand the language in its own terms, to enter the understanding of the world that the language articulates, and to some extent to make that understanding our own. We do not cling to our native language, nor do we forget it and go native. Instead, by learning the foreign language we expand our horizons: we not only see the foreign culture more clearly, we also come to see ourselves and our familiar culture in a new light.

The same thing happens when we read a core text. Initially it seems opaque; through its words we encounter an understanding foreign to our own. We try to make sense of the text by reading familiar meanings into its words, but this way of reading is at some point bound to fail. We have to interpret the text in its own terms—to clarify and explicate its implicit understanding of things. But we also have to appropriate that foreign understanding—to relate it back to our familiar world and to some extent to make it our own. Interpretation opens us to the author and lets us see her world more clearly; but at the same time it removes us from our familiar understanding of the world and lets us see our world in a new light.

What happens in this experience of reading?

Gadamer argued that we do not simply transpose ourselves into the standpoint of the other. But neither do we remain stuck in our own standpoint. Instead, in the act of reading the text moves us, removes us from our usual place in the world, lifts us

up above our given standpoint. And this movement upward expands the limits of our understanding, broadens our horizon, so that our horizon comes to include aspects of the world comprehended by the text. This fusion of horizons lets us see what had been hidden to us from within our initial point of view.

> Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another, nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising towards a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity, but also that of the other. The concept of "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. (305)

Understanding is this fusion of horizons. "There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (306). Appropriation of tradition means continual fusion: "In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value" (306).

Take the example of Homer. If we read his poems as Great Books, looking for a timeless idea of God, we are bound to misinterpret the meaning of divinity in Homer, and so to misunderstand the genealogy of the divine in the West. But if we read his poems as merely cultural and historical artifacts—if we try to understand Homer as he understood himself, and try to imagine how the world would appear if we believed what Homer believed—we are bound to fail, because this would require us to forget all of our post-Homeric inheritance. But even if we could reconstruct Homer's self-understanding, this reconstruction would make of Homer's text merely an object of knowledge. It would approach Homer as the occasion for a thought experiment, rather than as a partner in a potential dialogue, a partner who might change the way we think of ourselves. To understand Homer we have to explicate the understanding of things implicit in his work, to let his understanding of the world challenge our own, to see ourselves and our world in light of that understanding, and to appropriate the authentic insights in his work.

A number of recent books exemplify this kind of reading. In *Shame and Necessity,* Bernard Williams turned to Homer for insights that illuminate the limitations of contemporary moral philosophy. In *All Things Shining,* Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly appropriated Homeric insights in order to critique modern conceptions of the self as subject. In *Achilles in Vietnam,* Jonathan Shay used close readings of *The Iliad* to illuminate the traumas and moral injuries of soldiers today. In each case the point of reading was to engage Homer in a genuine dialogue.

This is the kind of reading proper to a core text course. It is guided by a few questions: How did Homer understand human existence? What does this understanding let us see clearly? What does it let us see only in a distorted way? What does it not let us see at all? In what ways does Homer's work still illuminate our lives? What in Homer is worth retrieving today?

To conclude: debates on core text today are largely polarized around two opposed positions: on the one hand, a tradition that views core texts as repositories of great ideas—a view that rightly emphasizes their contemporary meaningfulness, but

which risks a naïvely ahistorical and ethnocentric approach to reading; on the other hand, a tradition that views core texts as cultural and historical artifacts—a view that rightly emphasizes their historical and cultural specificity but which risks a naïvely historicist and culturalist approach to reading. Both positions fail to do justice to the nature of interpretation. Contemporary hermeneutics can help us both to preserve the insights in both positions while transcending their limitations.

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The Poetics of Community: Homer Meets Austen

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Speaking of the protagonists of heroic poetry, M. I. Finley observes that the "social background is little more than the stage on which the heroes move" and points to the "[epic] poet's fundamental disinterest in anything but his heroes as individuals." He goes on to note, describing the action of *The Odyssey:*

> Off the field of battle there are hundreds of small details essentially irrelevant to either the narrative or the action of the heroes. The hanging of the twelve slave girls, Mentes' cargo of iron, the purchase of Eurycleia by Laertes, Telemachus's visit to the storeroom—these odd bits are too fragmentary to have interest as independent scenes and in a sense they are all unnecessary for the movement of the tale. Yet the poet introduces them on every page, briefly, in a few phrases or lines, but with the greatest skill and attention. Both the artistry of the narrative and the conviction with which it was received rest in large measure on these incidentals. They underscore or elucidate behavior, they give color to the proceedings, and they remind the audience again and again of the truthfulness of the account. And today they make accessible the complicated social system and values. (Finley 75)

Another book, written at about the same time as Finley's, Peter Laslett's *The World We Have Lost,* offers a series of radical revisions of the ways pre-industrial England has been depicted and points to the dangers of relying on literary texts alone as the source of information about its social organization and characteristics. The key phrase in Finley's work, however, is "helping to make accessible." Fictional works are just that: they do not pretend to give factual information. What they do, however, is make the world of the past actual and therefore capable of being experienced in all its complexity.

What is especially striking in both investigations of the past is the undeniable commonality of certain key traits they display despite the enormous separation in time of the eras they describe. For instance, what Finley says of Odysseus' world is surprisingly applicable to that of Jane Austen's preindustrial society outside the big cities:

> In the action of the individual heroes, status was perhaps the main conditioning factor; in the first instance, class status. A man's work and the evaluation of his skills, what he did and what he was not to do in the acquisition of goods and their disposition, within the *oikos* and without, were all status-bound. It was a world of multiple standards and values, of diversified permissions and prohibitions. With respect to work and wealth, at least, the determinant was always the particular social grouping to which one belonged, not the skills, desires, or enterprise of an individual. The chief heroes were individuals, not robots. Nevertheless, in all their behavior, by no means in the economic sphere alone, the implicitly indicated limits to tolerable individual initiative and deviance were extremely narrow: among the nobles, only in the degree of one's strength and prowess, the magnitude of one's ambition for glory, and the development of one's sense of what was fitting. There were variations in temperament, too, like Odysseus' outstanding craftiness or Achilles' excessive sensitivity, but they were more puzzling than not. (Finley 75–76)

The confluence of these two accounts of widely separated eras suggests that—historically accurate or not—literary texts make use of a special imaginative type of social representation, a mode of defining the elements that make up a community. Literary critics and scholars who came after Finley and Laslett, whether structuralists, poststructuralists, deconstructionists, postmodernists, postcolonialists, feminists, or new historians, often focused heavily on certain social, political, anthropological, and other determinants in texts. In the wake of their efforts, it seems time to revisit the whole question of the way community is depicted in literature and ask whether or not there might be a set of themes and techniques that amount to a narrative poetics.

As a beginning, I should like to propose looking at two seemingly very different texts: Homer's *Odyssey* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park.* In so doing, I must caution that I am not approaching Austen's somewhat atypical novel as a Regency version of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Whether or not she was intimately familiar with Homer is not to the point; I am not claiming that there are any allusions in her text to Homer's nor that there is anything more than a very distant intertextual relationship between them, if even that. Rather, I am intrigued by the way they share certain common elements in the ways they depict the means by which a communal order is established, maintained, and safeguarded. Laslett's five-decade-old classic account of preindustrial England has been most influential and is still useful for students of Austen's world, but I shall not draw as much on it as I shall on Finley's rather briefer explorations. Above all, I want to show how certain narrative elements—episodes and minor details that are obviously congruent—point to a way of imagining the constitution of communal relationships and values that literary artists bring to our attention by making us aware of their conventional but necessary nature. At the same time, I hope to show one or two ways in which the very differences between the communal values of Homer's *Odyssey* and Austen's *Mansfield Park* reveal something crucial about the poetics of communal representation.

Parallels between the two works require, one must admit, both a bit of imagination and critical discretion. Sir Thomas Bertram, like Odysseus, is obliged to be away from his estate for an extended (though far shorter) period of time. In the interim, his household is in danger of being disrupted and perhaps, if certain people have their way, transformed. He returns just in time to avert such a catastrophe. The similarity between the two chiefs of their respective households is, nevertheless, slight. Odysseus does not return as himself but in disguise, and his personality is nothing like that of the cautious and straitlaced Sir Thomas. The place of the 108 suitors is taken by that of only 6 people: the Bertram sisters, their elder brother, Tom, his friend Mr. Yates, and the visiting brother and sister, the Crawfords. The younger Bertram son, Edmund, might be considered a kind of Telemachus, and Fanny Price, the cousin-ward of the family, a kind of patient Penelope. Yet these parallels are not very convincing. Fanny has none of the ingenuity of her weaving-unweaving counterpart (though she is equally suspicious of male visitors who make claims on her); and Edmund, unlike Odysseus's son, does not stand to inherit an estate and does not travel some distance to seek information about his father, though like him he has only recently come of age. Furthermore, Odysseus's line is conspicuous in its succession of a single male child for two generations. As heads of an estate (and, in Odysseus's case, somewhat more), Sir Thomas and his ancient Greek counterpart have their hands full even so, despite the differences in their solutions to the problem of keeping it intact.

Where the real similarities lie, then, is not in large narrative parallels so much as in the details of social structure and seemingly incidental episodes or comments. Speaking of Sir Thomas's return from Antigua in November and Maria Bertram's subsequent marriage to Mr. Rushworth and Henry Bertram's taking holy orders, Mary Crawford provides the most overt example: "Don't be affronted," said she, laughing; "but it does put me in mind of some of the old heathen heroes, who, after performing great exploits in a foreign land, offered sacrifices to the gods on their safe return" (Austen I:11). This is a comment that the "properly" educated Miss Crawford might make but that would very likely go over the head of the much less learned Fanny, whose knowledge of geography was thought by her cousins to be so flagrantly deficient, to say nothing of her inability to allude to Greek literature. It is revelatory, for all that, since one gets the impression that Jane Austen is deliberately alluding to the theme of *nostos* or homecoming that is so prominent in the *Odyssey*. That, in itself, hardly makes Mansfield Park an Ithaca (or an Argos or Sparta, to say nothing of an anticipation of Joyce's Dublin), but it does signal a key element in the novel. The return of the head of household marks the restoration of its proper order. Just as the novel is structured as a series of events, comments, descriptions, and other details, some of which are integral to its plot and ending but others less so and liable to be cast aside as one reads towards the climax, some members of the household have to be sacrificed in order to preserve its integrity. The maids who are so cruelly executed in the *Odyssey* by Odysseus and Telemachus are "evil" (to use Jane Austen's vocabulary) elements that must be eliminated, just as Maria and Mrs. Norris, along with the Crawfords, are driven out like the social scapegoats they have come to be. In short, plot structure and narrative technique here mirror the cathartic themes of

the action and the clarifying nature of the imaginative experience as the reader begins to understand what really matters in Austen's world.

At this point I introduce a useful concept elaborated by Italian critic Cesare Segre in his book *Structures and Time*, where he speaks of the act of reading a narrative as the building of a "memorial synthesis." According to him, as one reads a text sentence by sentence (the smallest units of discursive meaning), a number of elements are extracted from it and remembered. As the reading continues, however, some of these elements are eliminated when it seems that they have no role to play in the succeeding action. We cannot remember every word that we have read; instead, we construct a seemingly coherent summary of what we have read—though one constantly subject to change and revision. At the end of our reading, what remains is what we take away, as it were, from the narrative, a synthesis including not only the main lines of the action in chronological sequence but also other pertinent elements, ranging from thematic dimensions to tonal nuances. He explains that the "succession of events" as we recall it "is always a summary; but the sum of the motivations is so complex that only the text in its entirety can indicate it" (21).

Consequently, every subsequent reading of a text is a return, a *nostos* in which the reader becomes aware of precisely those elements that were discarded the previous time through it. Because in each rereading the reader approaches it as both a familiar place and yet one that contains strangely unfamiliar elements (not part of the previous memorial synthesis), the text becomes like Odysseus's Ithaca, which he fails to recognize upon first returning to his native land. The *nostos* motif is not simply a thematic aspect of the story but also a structural organization of it in the memory of the reader. Both reader and protagonist see the complex world of objects and text as a previously known but not altogether recognizable place that must be reexperienced in light of new information about it.

What Finley and Laslett both describe in their respective studies is a series of cultural and historical stereotypes. The new narratological techniques of analysis so well scrutinized by Segre were emerging at just this moment, when the archetypal behavior patterns that define characters from the folktale to modernist fiction were being recognized as unifying elements in the plot that go hand-in-hand with causal or motivic organizing principles. It is in these patterns of expected behavior that we find a second parallel to the dynamics of plot structure.

In both Odysseus's world as Finley describes it and Laslett's lost, preindustrial English one, certain modes of behavior are assumed as given and, though frequently violated, never thoroughly questioned by society at large. Austen's narrator assumes that what Laslett refers to as "status" (rather than "class") is a normative aspiration shared by all her readers, but those very values that sustain it are threatened by such unaspiring souls as Edmund and Fanny. Even as Sir Thomas struggles to protect his estate from external threats, Tom's lavish style of behavior, Mrs. Norris's constant plays for power, and Lady Bertram's passive self-indulgence menace it from within.

Though Fanny's stubbornness is similar to Penelope's persistence in delaying the suitors, the former evidences none of the latter's agility and resourcefulness. Moreover, the differences between Sir Thomas and Odysseus are far greater than their similarities in social rank and endangered estates. To be sure, both return only

to witness an attempt on the part of unwelcome invaders to take over and transform their households. But Baronet Bertram, so socially correct and lacking in imagination, is nothing like the versatile and crafty Odysseus, who plays the role of social outcast and lowly dependent of others in order to arrive home unobtrusively. The Crawfords, Mr. Yates, Mr. Rushworth, and his advocate Mrs. Norris are all suitors of one kind or another so ambiguous in their relationship to his *oikos* (are they in or out?) that Sir Thomas must contend with each in a different way. If Odysseus's *oikos* has been despoiled by 108 ravenous suitors, Sir Thomas's has been devastated by only 3: his elder son and daughter and Henry Crawford.

If only-child Telemachus was threatened by an assassination plot contrived by the suitors, Edmund Bertram is menaced by the thoughtlessness of his own elder brother. Telemachus must travel abroad to visit Nestor and Menelaus in order to see how a proper household is run, while Edmund will gain similar insights from taking holy orders and eventually running a parish. Even so, when tempted, he is also himself something of an Odysseus in relation to harp-playing siren Mary Crawford, a Circe, Calypso, Laestrygonian, and Scylla and Charybdis all in one in her attempts to deter Edmund from his clerical vocation. If Odysseus got into trouble by testing the cyclops Polyphemus's level of acculturation by ascertaining whether or not he exchanged gifts, the household guardians of *Mansfield Park* are, for the most part, intent only on making good matches for Maria and Julia. Yet that household is, itself, not properly managed. Penelope's role as manager of her husband's *oikos* is hampered by her ambiguous situation: is her husband alive or not? Is Telemachus in charge, now that he has come of age, or not? At Mansfield the proper person to run day-to-day operations, Lady Bertram, is concerned with efficient management only insofar as it centers on her "tolerable comfort." The managerial function is taken over by her sister Mrs. Norris, who is only too glad to step in and issue orders. From the start, despite Sir Thomas's stern allure and commanding presence, there is something rotten in the state of Mansfield.

In the concluding chapter of *Mansfield Park,* the narrator gives a lengthy "wrap-up" of the situation that followed the disastrous events threatening the very existence of Sir Thomas Bertram's estate. It begins in a rather arch tone and a deliberate concession by the "author" to the "reader": "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest" (428). Here the narrator is clearly playing to the crowd, ironically (even sarcastically) promising to conform to the expectations of readers of novels as practiced by other authors.

If one fails to recognize the radical shift of tone that this wrap-up represents, the somewhat preachy summary following these remarks may seem to be perfunctory. But the phrase "tolerable comfort," so typical of the world of the upper-class household, gives a clue not only to what is going on in this seemingly awkward ending but also to the poetics of community characteristic of the novel as a whole. Aeschylus' "patheimathos," or knowledge gained through suffering, is a theme signified by the total action of the book, just as it is from the very first lines of *The Odyssey,* but the maintenance in each person of both individual and communal integrity is surely em-

phasized as well. Sir Thomas "reads" Fanny differently when he returns home from bringing order back to his plantation-business in Antigua, having doubtless come to appreciate her even more after witnessing the effects of misrule on his slaves there. But when he yields to the conventional standards of "marrying well" for the sake of "tolerable comfort," he misreads her as willful, stubborn, and selfish because she refuses to entertain Henry's offer of marriage. It is only after the disastrous events resulting from Maria's infidelity to her newly acquired husband that she becomes once again "My Fanny" to him, a shift that is underlined by its prominent use as the opening phrase in the paragraph immediately following the one just quoted. The social values of Edmund and Fanny take center stage by the end of the novel, displacing the money- and property-centered values of the prevailing cultural forces. As a couple, their social role is to help and serve others, not to prevail over them in the name of a privileged class. The "wrap-up" ending, totally lacking in drama (one recalls Fanny's protestation, "I cannot act"), suggests by its veiled sarcasm and rapid rhythms of recounting subsequent events that the union of Edmund and Fanny is not so much a romantic event as a coming together of two compatible partners for the sake of a whole.

It is in the deceptively off-putting manner of the last chapter that the readers begin to see where their memorial syntheses, constantly being shifted in the course of the book toward the inevitable fulfillment of Fanny's love for Edmund and his recognition of her worthiness and suitableness for him, has to be reconfigured. The frequent use of free indirect discourse is a means of emphasizing both the idiosyncratic and the socially informed vocabularies of individual characters. We can tell when Fanny is speaking for herself and not simply mimicking upper-class clichés because the narrator casts her expressions in characteristically modest idioms and tones that typify her usual language. But on occasion, the narrator will deliberately mimic the alien modes of speaking typical of contemporary society and depart from a normal narrative diction.

The Odyssey is the first work in Western literature to make us aware of the narratologists' distinction between story and plot. The first is the chronological series of events that are imagined as occurring as a sequence in time. The second is the manner or order in which those events are presented. Much of the story of *The Odyssey* is told out of chronological sequence. The reader must integrate the dislocated segments back into their proper order in time in the process of building a memorial synthesis. That technique forces the reader to return to and reorganize those elements of the text that had been stored in the memory for the purpose of filling in gaps in the narrative. The events that Odysseus recounts do not occur in an order that relates them to one another as a causally linked chain. They are motifs that will later inform the range of Odysseus's experiences of different ways of organizing societies, as the opening lines of the epic suggest. As we read, we are constantly having to effect our own *nostos* or return to earlier portions of the text and integrate them into later ones. But before and after Odysseus's recital at the court of Alkinoos, events are organized as just such a linked chain, leading inevitably to the slaughter of the suitors and its aftermath. The unexpected appearance of Athena to reconcile the revenge-seeking relatives on Ithaca at the end and hints that Odysseus will be leaving his homeland

again at some later time shift our attention to a new thematic dimension and, with it, a further level of meaning.

Although *Mansfield Park* has no "flashback" or recounted past events of this sort, its narrator's opening and closing postures accomplish something similar by calling attention to the social atmosphere that envelops the world of the novel. At the beginning and end, the teller of the tale slips out of a neutral vocabulary to mimic the expressions (and with them, convictions) of contemporary social values. We read through the novel in expectation of a romantic ending, a fulfilment of the typical love plot that is normally the whole point of its fictional conventions. But a complex employment of various tactics starts to shift those expectations that have governed our memorial synthesis all along and led us, willy-nilly, to see that the story is not so much about Edmund and Fanny or even learning through suffering as it is about the kind of world we construct about us. The play-acting episode in the novel is but a metonymic version of how a community both represents itself, mimics others, and reconstructs itself through time. All of our little world is a stage, and even Fanny, who is incapable of acting, realizes that she is constantly having a role forced upon her. Her "No!" and "Never" draw attention to the way that the socially constructed world attempts to assign us our parts; and though a poor actress, she is certainly a quiet rebel, as is the narrator at the end who refuses to conform her novel to the fashionable narrative expected by the average reader. It is in the imitative nuances of diction, rather than the imitation of action, that the reader is led to participate in that rebellious poetics of community.

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Teaching Philosophy Through the Three Ps: Problem, Position, and Proof

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Two assumptions drawn from the pages of Aristotle govern my teaching. The first is that humans by nature desire to know (Aristotle 1553; *Met.*I.1 980a21). The second is that humans have a natural appetite for the good (1729; *EN* I.1 1094a1). Now these assumptions, beautiful though they may look on paper, seem to be at odds with the facts. Do students *really* have a natural desire to know? Their behavior—especially their failure to perform simple tasks like completing reading assignments—would suggest otherwise. Thus arises a dilemma. On the one hand, I believe that students, insofar as they are human, desire knowledge. On the other hand, students often display a marked poverty of epistemic desire: they do not want to read; they do not want to take notes; they do not want to learn. The empirical evidence, therefore, seems to make mincemeat out of my epistemological assumption, yet I remain firm in my conviction that humans, including my students, are by nature knowledge seekers. Some may accuse me of being irrational, a doe-eyed pedagogue unable or unwilling to face reality. I disagree. In writing this brief paper, I have two purposes: first, to explain what I take to be one of the principal causes of student epistemic apathy; second, to share one way that I have tried to help students overcome their apathy and recover their natural desire to know.

First things first: why are students so apathetic? There are a host of explanations, but I argue that the problem rests—if not chiefly, then at least partly—with the emphasis given to external goods: things such as course grades, grade point averages, class rank, and so on. Alasdair MacIntyre stresses the potentially deleterious effects that external goods can have on our ability to appreciate the goods internal to a prac-

tice. He asks us to imagine the case of a highly intelligent child learning to play chess (MacIntyre 188). Suppose that the child initially has little desire to play the game but that she does have a strong desire for candy. Getting the child to play, then, is as easy as giving her candy: if she plays, she gets one piece; and if she wins, she gets two. The child now has an incentive to play—and to play to win. But here is the problem: as long as the candy alone motivates the child, she has no reason *not to* cheat and every reason *to* cheat, provided that she can get away with it. What about the goods internal to chess? Will she ever come to appreciate the analytical skill required to play the game well, or the strategic imagination and competitive intensity, or simply the joy of sharing time with a friend in a leisurely activity? Not so long as candy is her sole reason to play. I see my students in a similar light. If external goods are their only motivation, not only will they have every reason to cut corners or even cheat to obtain these goods, but they will completely miss out on the goods internal to the practices of reading, writing, and conversing. External goods, therefore, deaden their natural desire to know. For them, there is nothing valuable in knowing for its own sake; knowledge is sought after only insofar as it can provide them with the candy that they so desperately crave.

This prompts the question: is there any way of helping students to recover their natural desire to know? Modern assessment practices with their emphasis on quantitative measures only exacerbate the problem. University administrators and state regents want to see evidence that students are meeting their learning outcomes—in other words, they want to see numbers. That game—the numbers game—needs to be played; there is no getting around it. But I have made an effort to play that game while at the same time treating students as more than just soulless beans to be counted. Although I do not teach in a Great Books program, I do teach the canon. My reading assignments consist entirely of primary texts: Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, and so on. Reading quizzes are a good way of ensuring that students read these texts, but I have found that quizzes tend to be more important to the students than the readings themselves. In other words, they read to prepare for the quizzes instead of reading to nurture their intellects. Or to put it another way, they read so that they can acquire the external good of a grade instead of the internal goods that reading can provide. Multiple choice and true-false quizzes are cases in point. Sure, they "measure" performance, but students spend more time trying to anticipate which questions they are going to be asked than they do digesting, critically assessing, and responding to the text. Thus, to break them of their addiction to external goods and to reignite their desire to know, another kind of activity is needed—one that recognizes their tendency to favor external goods but that will over time work to cultivate sound intellectual habits buttressed by an ardent concern for internal epistemic goods.

About a year ago, as I was putting together my syllabus for Introduction to Philosophy, something dawned on me. It was not a terribly original thought, but it was for me as a teacher nonetheless insightful. In that course, I assign readings from four philosophers: an ancient, Aristotle; a medieval, Aquinas; an early modern, Descartes; and a late modern, Nietzsche. In the roughly 2,200-year interval between Aristotle and Nietzsche, philosophy, like any academic discipline, underwent changes. Largely unchanged, however, was the manner in which philosophers operated. Philoso-

phers dealt with *problems*; they took *positions* regarding these problems; and they did their best to offer *proofs* in defense of their positions. Why not, then, develop in-class reading quizzes around these three Ps: problem, position, and proof? Each quiz would ask the same three questions:

- What is the problem, issue, or concern of today's assignment?
- Regarding this problem, does the author adopt a position?
- If the author does adopt a position, what is his proof?

Now, you may ask, what is the difference between this kind of quiz and a typical multiple-choice, true-false, or short-answer quiz? There are several differences worth noting. First, because the students get the questions ahead of time, there is no need for them to guess what is going to be on the quiz. This establishes trust between the instructor and his students. No one can accuse the instructor of asking trick or overly difficult questions. The students know what is coming and can prepare accordingly. Second, asking the same three questions helps to cultivate good reading habits. Students know what to look for. Sure, Aristotle and Nietzsche express themselves differently, but they are both philosophers and thus can be read through the lens of the three P-questions. Third, the questions, because they are general and not directed to a specific passage or philosophical idea, help to promote active reading, where students read not just to cram information into their heads for quiz-taking purposes, but rather to give structure and organization to the ideas that they do encounter. As a result, the students come to respect the text—to see it not merely as an obstacle to overcome or a means to some end, but rather as something to appreciate and understand on its own terms.

Have these quizzes worked? Have they rekindled my students' natural desire to know? I can only speak anecdotally, but here is my assessment. The quizzes by themselves are not some wondrous aphrodisiac: they do not get students to fall in love with philosophy; that would be silly. But when coupled with a pedagogical philosophy focused on the cultivation of intellectual virtue, they do make a difference. I do not merely want my students to cross the finish line and meet their learning objectives. I want them to develop the skills needed to run this race well, as well as any other race that they might run in the future. In other words, I want them to become virtuous—to be firm in their beliefs, courageous yet cautious, humble, autonomous, and charitable. I want to prepare them for tests, but I also want to prepare them for life—not just a career, but how they spend time alone or with friends and family. My quizzes, I think, play a small part in achieving this goal. First, by promoting trust between the instructor and students, the quizzes allow students to be open and receptive to their instructor. Second, the quizzes promote reading for comprehension rather than for mere quiz preparation. Third, the quizzes improve their understanding of texts, because rather than just memorizing information, students must give structure to what they read, and that same structure is repeated for each of their reading assignments. As John Locke puts it:

> There are those who are very assiduous in reading, and yet do not much advance their knowledge by it. They are delighted with the stories that are told, and perhaps can tell them again, for they make all they read nothing but history to themselves;

> but not reflecting on it, not making to themselves observations from what they read, they are very little improved by all that crowd of particulars that either pass through, or lodge themselves in, their understandings. They dream on in a constant course of reading and cramming themselves, but, not digesting anything, it produces nothing but a heap of crudities. (188)

The quizzes respond to Locke's concern by helping students to organize their thinking—to take what would otherwise be a heap of crudities and give them a meaningful structure.

There is certainly more that can be and needs to be said, but allow me to end with a personal story. Earlier this year, I attended a philosophy conference in Vancouver, British Columbia. It was my first visit to the Pacific Northwest. While I was walking along the bayside, looking at the snowcapped mountains in the distance dotted with trees and what appeared to be homes, it occurred to me: cities can be built in two different ways. One way is to raze to the ground everything—every tree, every flower, every blade of grass—and then to build upon the flattened, desolate space. Another way, however, is to clear away just enough to make it hospitable for city life, but to preserve enough as a reminder of our historical, or perhaps prehistorical, past. City planning of the first kind works against nature; planning of the second works with and within nature.

Education—the sort of education that assumes that we have a natural desire to know and a natural inclination toward the good and that believes that nurturing these inclinations is crucial to human flourishing—education of this sort, it seems to me, is lot like Vancouver: manmade and rationally ordered, yet structured around and committed to preserving the natural tendencies and ends that define humans and condition in which they live.

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From Monasticism to Scholasticism: Reflections on Anselm, Aquinas, and Approaches to God's Existence

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When it comes to proving God's existence, two major figures in the Christian intellectual tradition, Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas, are often pitted against one another. According to the conventional story, Anselm proves God's existence by his "ontological argument"—a misnomer invented several centuries later by Kant. As this story goes, Anselm tries to arrive at the existence of a Divine reality through thought alone or, one might say, purely by logic. Aquinas, on the other hand, rejecting Anselm's approach and sticking more closely to the physical, sensible world, proves that a God exists through *quinque viae*, the "five ways," that is, five paths of reasoning toward God that proceed from experience of the natural world, especially its motion and change, and reach their terminus in a first unmoved mover or uncaused cause. As with most conventional stories, this one reveals a little bit, but covers over much. This story overlooks, for example, the differing intellectual and pedagogical contexts within which Anselm and Aquinas thought and wrote. In what follows, then, I attempt to contextualize Anselm and Aquinas as monastic and scholastic thinkers, respectively, thereby enhancing our reading of two core texts in which their reflections on God's existence are found, namely, Anselm's *Proslogion* and Aquinas's *Summa theologiae.*

In order to contextualize Anselm and Aquinas within the development of the Christian intellectual tradition as a whole, it is helpful to look at that tradition through the lens of the three liberal arts of language: rhetoric, grammar, and logic. I am

inspired to do so, at least in part, owing to an address by Joseph Ratzinger—or, as he was then named, Pope Benedict XVI—namely, what has come to be known as the "Regensburg Lecture," a brief piece that could serve as a core text in its own right. Benedict XVI titled his lecture "Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections," which captures the lecture's subject matters and its mode. Among other things, the lecture delineates the contours of the Christian intellectual tradition, which came to be embodied historically in what we call "Europe." In terms of its intellectual genealogy, Europe resulted from the marriage between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry, a fruitful union that gave birth to the medieval universities—the great-grandparents, as it were, of our institutions of higher learning here in the United States.

Picture this medieval European synthesis as an onion with layers, each growing on the one underneath it. One reveals the interior structure of this onion by unpeeling layer after layer. Beginning from the outermost layer, which was the last to have grown, one unpeels the onion all the way down to its core. If we follow this analogy, then one can say this: Benedict XVI thinks that a gradual unpeeling of the European synthesis of Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry has taken place. He identifies this unpeeling process as "dehellenization," because it consists chiefly in a retreat from the Greek philosophical inquiry side of the medieval synthesis, that is, a retreat from the modes of rationality according to which Biblical faith had been appropriated. These modes of rationality can be clarified, moreover, by correlating them with the liberal arts of language: rhetoric, grammar, and logic. What results is an illuminating "liberal arts" story of the Christian intellectual tradition.

Briefly, the story runs thus: The Christian intellectual tradition began to develop first in a *rhetorical* mode, by means of persuasive proposals of a new vision of reality that had been revealed in Jesus Christ. This first stage was an age of preaching that established a community that shared this new vision of reality. Such was the apostolic and patristic age, a beginning rhetorical stage in the nascent Christian intellectual tradition.

Subsequently, this community generated and cultivated a set of shared signs and symbols. It developed, in other words, a common *grammar* of thinking and living, one framed by a Christian ethos based on the shared acceptance of what is most significant in life. This second stage was the monastic age, the age of monks, who exemplified a Christian ethos by living together in localized communities united in a single underlying activity: *quaerere Deum,* seeking God. Within these communities a grammar of thinking and living matured and was passed on to ensuing generations. It was a context of this sort in which the *Proslogion* was written by Anselm, a man who understood himself first and last to be a monk.

Inspired, no doubt, by what the monasteries accomplished, and yet also in contrast with them, universities arose. These were communities in which, as the name itself suggests, education was more universal, not only with respect to its students—universities were often located in major cities—but also with respect to the subjects and authors that came under its purview. Unsurprisingly, thinking within university settings gave rise to wider and more systematic visions of reality—metaphysical and sapiential visions. This third stage was the scholastic age, the age of master

teachers at budding universities. To articulate their universal vision of reality, the scholastics chiefly deployed *logic,* which provided their worldviews with coherence, nuance, and urgency. Coincidentally or providentially, Aristotle's *Organon*, the full collection of his logical treatises, arrived to provide guidance. Thomas Aquinas in particular appropriated the *Organon* and deployed Aristotle's insights into how one achieves a scientific understanding of reality as a whole.

Now, if this "liberal arts" story of the Christian intellectual tradition bears some truth, then an argument for God's existence in a monastic context is likely to differ from one in a scholastic context. Hence pitting Anselm's *Proslogion* against Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* is not as straightforward as it may seem. Anselm the monastic thinks primarily in grammatical mode, which arises chiefly from concerns that are (broadly speaking) ethical, while Aquinas the scholastic thinks primarily in logical mode, which arises chiefly from concerns that are metaphysical. And we come to see these differences when we consider the ways in which each author disposes readers for a proof for God's existence.

In the *Proslogion,* Anselm's argument for God's existence is often thought to begin in chapter 2, where he introduces the difficult but compelling thought of God as "something than which nothing greater is able to be thought" (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*). This reading of the *Proslogion,* however, skips over the crucial opening chapter, which Anselm calls *Excitatio mentis ad contemplandum Deum,* "Arousing (or: Awakening) the Mind Toward Contemplating God." In it he draws the reader into a serious act of self-reflection. As the reader, I come to see the degree to which I have not achieved what I ought to have achieved at this point in my life. Yet, despite my evident unreliability as one who has clearly fallen short, I still strive for a better future. Hence, while acknowledging my defectiveness, my life opens up before me in the manner of hope. Toward what am I opened up in hope, and with what assurance do I strive to attain it? My continual striving implies the ongoing presence—in front of me, as it were—of a higher reality, a reality that remains ever out of reach of my striving and yet one that might satisfy my restless heart. Through thoughtful reflection on my having fallen short and yet still striving, I am awakened to a Divine reality as the ever-present ground and object of my hope-filled longing.

These reflections lead into chapter 2, which Anselm titles *Quod vere sit Deus* (That God *Truly* Exists). Anselm shows that God truly exists by expanding my thinking beyond reflection on the meaningfulness of my own life so as to encompass the meaningfulness of thinkable reality as a whole. Does not thinkable reality as a whole, replete with beings that are good and yet only finitely satisfying, point beyond itself? Do not all these finite goods signify something beyond themselves, something that matches—indeed, surpasses—the fullest extent of my thinking? And would not this "something" be that than which nothing greater is able to be thought, the denial of whose existence implies a denial of the meaningful attraction of the world's goods, that is, their signification as both good and yet not ultimate?

In the *Proslogion*, then, Anselm's thinking is driven by an ethical concern to render my life as a whole—and, by extension, reality as a whole—meaningful. I call this a grammatical mode of thinking insofar as Anselm is attempting chiefly to unveil the full significance and signification of God as captured by our underlying (and not

yet fully conscious) forethought of him as something than which nothing greater is able to be thought. It would be absurd of me to deny the existence of such a divine reality, insofar as doing so undercuts the very significance of my thinking rationally and living prudently in a world of finite goods.

In comparison to Anselm's more grammatical, ethically informed approach to God is Aquinas's more logical, metaphysically informed approach. The question in the *Summa theologiae* in which Aquinas endeavors to prove God's existence has three articles. In the third article Aquinas asks "whether a God exists" (*an sit Deus*), and there we walk with him along his five ways or paths to a God. To prepare us for the journey, though, Aquinas asks in the preceding articles "whether that a God exists is known in its own right" (*utrum Deum esse sit per se notum*) and then "whether that a God exists is able to be demonstrated" (*utrum Deum esse sit demonstrabile*). These two preliminary queries bring to the forefront the logical character of Aquinas's approach to a God. Consider, for example, how Aquinas phrases these queries: "whether *that a God exists* is known in its own right"; "whether *that a God exists* is able to be demonstrated." At the beginning of the *Summa theologiae,* then, Aquinas is focusing primarily on this proposition: "A God exists." Regarding this proposition, he asks, first, whether that proposition is evident to us by definition, as it were—as, for example, "A whole is greater than its part" is evident as soon as we know what both "whole" and "part" mean. Now, if the proposition "A God exists" is not evident in this way—and Aquinas does not think it is—then are we able to construct a compelling argument whose conclusion is, precisely, the proposition "A God exists"? To construct such an argument with that conclusion could then serve as the starting point of a scientific approach to God, beginning from the rational analysis of our experience of the natural world.

Indeed, after these two preliminary queries, Aquinas offers five such arguments, each of which deploys a middle term gathered from our experience of some crucial aspect of the natural world (motion, change, contingency, nameable hierarchy, and order). These arguments permit us to predicate "exists" of the subject "God" and then to go on predicating other attributes of this existing Divine reality. Much more could be said, of course, about Aquinas's approach to God in the *Summa theologiae,* but this brief exposition indicates, I hope, the underlying logical mode of rationality that predominates in his thinking here—a mode of rationality characteristic of the age of scholasticism.

In this brief paper, then, I have narrated a concise "liberal arts" story of the Christian intellectual tradition as it developed toward a medieval European synthesis, which in turn gave birth to the university. The growing community to whom this tradition belonged passed through a rhetorical stage, a grammatical stage, and a logical stage. This story helps one to understand that tradition historically and to read the core texts of that tradition with keener vision. In addition, understanding this story should also bear on our own activity of teaching. For if our going forward intellectually and pedagogically requires the prudent recovery of things that have been lost in the Christian intellectual tradition—something that I believe is the case—then delineating it should help us appropriate that tradition in a manner that amplifies and enhances our own teaching. This demands, however, that we become

acquainted or reacquainted with these different modes of rationality—the rhetorical, the grammatical, and the logical—with a view to deploying them in a manner that suits students within various institutions. Moreover, it is my hope that, as I think this story suggests, when it comes not only to proving God's existence but also to any matter under the sun, there is much to learn about how to teach. And, perhaps to our surprise, the oft-neglected medieval monks and schoolmen may turn out to be some of our best pedagogues.

A Pedagogy of Beauty: Teaching Plato's *Republic* through Mathematics and Music

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The teaching of political philosophy often begins with Plato's *Republic*. Its protagonist Socrates is said to have brought philosophy down from the heavens and introduced it into politics. By identifying a standard beyond the existing laws and conventions of the city, he implicitly challenged its political order—and explicitly troubled the Athenian old guard. He brought particular controversy by denouncing the existing poetry and music of Athens as failing to conform to the true standard of beauty. His consequent revolutionary call to censor some types of music—among other provocations—led the Athenian assembly to charge him with preaching false gods and corrupting the youth.

Today the charges of teaching false standards are just as likely to come from the youth themselves. How dare anyone suggest that musical beauty is not in the eye of the beholder? Most students consider music a matter of individual taste, and they jealously guard their prerogative to choose it. Largely gone are the days in which young people learned music in participatory fashion: by singing or playing in social gatherings led by community leaders. The advent of recording technology has largely turned music into a passive encounter, and headphones have individualized the experience. Moreover, applications like Spotify and Pandora offer an incredibly wide palette from which to choose one's personal collection. If we define our identities today as individual choosers, music offers one of the earliest opportunities to express one's personhood. Hence, when students today hear the voice of Socrates suggesting that true musical beauty is not in their own eyes as beholders, but instead is grounded in a preexistent and unchanging order of nature, they are inclined to

change the (Pandora) station.

The attitude of defining beauty for oneself is often worn as a fashionable and current look. Yet the philosophic roots of this position predate even Socrates in the works of Heraclitus. Heraclitus sought to explore the foundations of ultimate reality. To do so, he asked the question of nature: What is fundamentally constant in the cosmos? His answer sounds remarkably familiar: the only constant is change itself. As Heraclitus explains, one cannot step into the same river twice. By the time one takes the second step, the river appears to have physically changed (Heraclitus DK22 B12, 17).[1] This position seems so plausible to those who follow the dizzying fluctuations of politics that Heraclitus' answer has become a contemporary cliché. But the implications of his position are not trite. The river does not simply change its physical shape, like a singer changing costumes during a Super Bowl halftime set. Rather, the very essence of the river changes, as if Katy Perry were to become an actual shark thrashing about in search of water. Because there is no essential commonality between pretransformation Katy and posttransformation shark, a concertgoer cannot use the same name (e.g., "human being") to describe both. What is more, Heraclitus asserts that the very person who steps into the "river" (if we can still call it such) for the second time has *himself* also changed since the first step. Concertgoer "John" who called her "Katy" may now be concertgoer "Megatron" who describes her as "shark." To extend the analogy, a second concertgoer might name posttransformation Katy "dolphin"—and a third might apply the name "unicorn" to her (him? it?). Each appearance is utterly unique for each person; it is an apparition in the eye of the beholder. Heraclitus's connection to the musical preferences of students now becomes apparent. If each student can define musical beauty for himself, there is no necessary common thread connecting each individual's definition of beauty.

In the *Republic,* Socrates addresses this Heraclitean conundrum with his concept of the forms. Socrates does not deny the fact of change in the physical world. However, he identifies an additional world—one more truly real—that is known by the mind rather than the senses. This higher world contains perfect, unchanging forms of each of the names (e.g., "human being") by which we group (or define) a multitude of individual physical appearances (e.g., individual human beings at different times). Hence, a costume change does not change Katy Perry's substance as a "human being," because both before and after the change she participates (however imperfectly) in the same human essence. Likewise, all individual concertgoers can employ the common name "human being" because each one's individual perception (however imperfect) grasps a common essence. In other words, each of Katy's individual physical appearances is a different shadow of the stable, unchanging category "human being."

According to Socrates, the same applies to the particulars that we group into the category named "beauty." Each eye (or, more accurately, each mind's eye) grasps something of the ideal form of beauty in an individually beautiful instance of music. Hence, beauty does not simply exist in the eye (or ear) of the beholder. Rather, it exists (and exists most fully) in a higher realm. However, these transcendent ideals also imply exclusion, as some individual instances fail to participate in the form of beauty. Likewise, not all human actions participate in the ideal of goodness, nor do

all uses of reason participate in the ideal of wisdom.

What, then, is this ideal form? How can we define real beauty, or goodness, or wisdom? This is precisely the question Socrates faces in the *Republic*. Paradoxically, however, Socrates never offers his interlocutors a rational definition of these forms. Why not? Partly because of the subject matter. The forms are not first principles deducible—and thus definable—through logic. Rather, they are higher realities grasped by intuition. Hence, the best that Socrates can do is to point toward them. But Socrates also demurs because such subject matter calls for a unique pedagogy. The ideal form of reason—wisdom—is not a possession or a stock of knowledge. Hence, Plato's approach to education cannot ultimately be a didactic transmission of knowledge from an active giver to a passive receiver. Instead, education requires a dialectic process. The soul of the learner must open toward a participation in the good, the true, and the beautiful.

It is fitting that Socrates presents his ideals of beauty most clearly in the most notorious element of his pedagogy: musical education. Naturally, Socrates is concerned with the content of the stories to be told: the characters must demonstrate the higher ideals of goodness and virtue. However, he is equally concerned with the musical form in which they are delivered: the "words, harmonic mode, and rhythm" (Plato 398c, 75).[2] Some modes of musical harmony are suitable for lamentation. Socrates dismisses these as inimical to the virtue of courage. Others create a relaxed setting that promotes softness, idleness, and drunkenness (398e, 75). He also rejects these, later comparing drunkenness to tyranny (573c, 243). However, he endorses a mode "of someone engaged in a peaceful, unforced, voluntary action, persuading someone . . . or of someone submitting to the supplications of another who is teaching him" (399b, 75). Evidently music is capable of leading the soul toward vice—but also toward virtue.

What is it about these latter modes that fosters goodness and virtue? Socrates concludes as follows: "Harmony, grace, and rhythm follow simplicity of character—and I do not mean this in the sense in which we use 'simplicity' as a euphemism for 'simple-mindedness'—but I mean the sort of fine and good character that has developed in accordance with an intelligent plan" (400d–e, 77). In other words, he suggests that simplicity is a sign of order in the cosmos. By definition, music must necessarily use a plurality of different notes. The function of musical modes is to relate these notes to each other in more or less harmonious ways. Musical harmony requires simplicity. This is fitting, because Socrates' theory of the ideal forms shows how a multitude of individual appearances can be related to each other through a simple overarching descriptor. This distinguishes his position from the chaos of a Heraclitean position that sees no regularity among individual instances.

The preceding arguments attempt to explain the content of Socrates' ideal forms. But do they captivate the souls of first-year students who have barely awoken in time for class, let alone prepared themselves for a challenge to the validity of their musical preferences? Strangely enough, the very morning hour provides an opening. When queried, students will universally indicate their distaste for waking up to the din of a jackhammer outside their dorm window—effective though it might be. But why should they? After all, if music is in the ear of the beholder, why can't one person's

Stihl be another's Stradivarius? Aren't they both instruments? While students are apt to reject natural standards by which to judge music, they nonetheless rush to distinguish between the pitch of a musical instrument and the noise of an instrument of destruction.

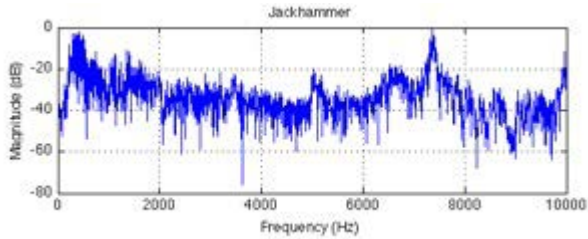
There is a good reason for this. Happily, it comes from the physical sciences—the one area in which students will generally accept the authority of nature. To use the language of physics, sound is a mechanical waveform that displaces air particles. More specifically, every sound—an earthquake, a voice, a power tool—creates a multitude of such waveforms.[3] (For instance, consider how a jackhammer manages to be simultaneously earsplitting *and* earthshaking.) Moreover, each of these many waveforms oscillates at a different speed: the higher-pitched earsplitting ones oscillate more frequently per second than the lower-pitched earthshaking ones. The relative loudness of the high-pitched and low-pitched waves imparts to each sound its distinct and recognizable tone.

Indeed, every sound in fact emits waveforms that oscillate at both high and low frequencies, as well as all frequencies in between. Hence, it is easy to represent the unique profile of each sound on a graph. The *x*-axis represents the frequency of each of the many waveforms, from low to high (measured in oscillations per second, or hertz). The *y*-axis represents the relative loudness (in decibels) of the particular waveform that oscillates at each rate. When we graph the harsh and unpleasant noise of a jackhammer on such a chart, we discover a line that is utterly random, displaying no regularity or order among its multitude of individual frequencies.[5]

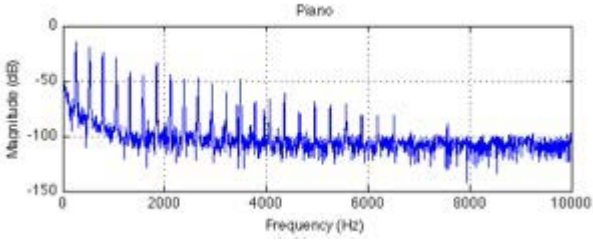
In contrast, when we graph the pitch of a musical instrument such as a piano, we see a remarkable orderliness. If the first peak comes at frequency x, the next will come at the mathematically simple frequency of $2x$. Another will come at $3x$, then $4x$, and on and on, as the chart below indicates.

Although each distinct key on the piano will have a different value for x, each key will produce an identical overall shape. Hence, there is a natural physical basis for the perceived distinction between noise and musical pitch.[5] The operators of the Stihl jackhammer produce a qualitatively distinct sound from the musicians of Steely Dan.

Students are often happy to discover a scientific foundation on which to base



their aversion to noisy morning awakenings. This natural basis enables them to reject industrial cacophony without threatening their casual agnosticism about music. However, their souls tend to become more troubled at the next implication. Just as the waveforms of a particular sound must be mathematically organized in order

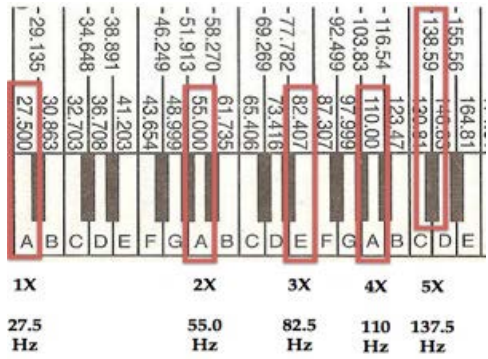


to qualify as a musical pitch, the pitches themselves must be combined with other pitches in order to qualify as music. There are a potentially infinite number of pitches (frequencies) that could be chosen for combination, of which the Western twelve-tone scale is but one. Yet when we examine the *x* values of each note in that scale, we quickly discover the mathematically simple series of *x*, 2*x*, 3*x*, etc., that matches the mathematical overtone series above. If *x* is our first note, 2*x* is an exact octave above. This most perfect and mathematically simple interval of 2:1 thus corresponds to the octave (or unison interval) that is present in all musical systems around the world. Furthermore, 3*x* produces a note an octave and a half above the original. This means that the 3:2 interval produces a "perfect fifth": the interval that is present in virtually every Western musical chord, no matter how basic.[6] Adding 4*x* produces another octave above, and 5*x* adds a major third to complete the major chord—the most common and basic chord. In other words, as the chart below indicates, the five notes representing the frequency interval of 1:2:3:4:5 form the most basic building block of music.

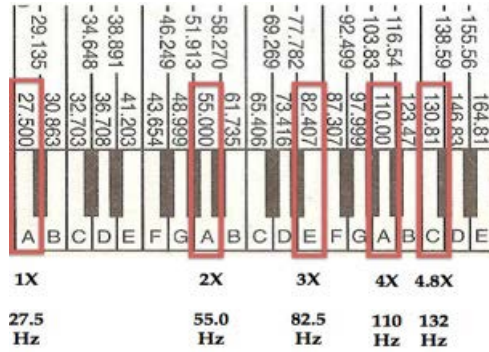
At this point, an uncomfortable realization begins to dawn on students: natural science is revealing a standard that might judge their choice of music.

This (numeric) harmony is also evident in a minor chord—the second most common chord in music. As we see below, here the musical interval is 1:2:3:4:4.8. In other words, the final 4:4.8 interval is actually a ratio of 5:6—the next most numerically simple interval in that continuing sequence.

Out of the almost infinite number of musical pitches that could be combined, Western music has converged on those that match the most numerically simple frequencies. Indeed, even the seemingly arbitrary division of the octave into twelve tones in the West quickly reveals the most numerically elegant relationship possible



between each of the intervals. Hence, the beauty of music is a manifestation of the mathematical nature of the universe, or what Socrates earlier intimated as an "intelligent plan." Thus, by using the standards of physical nature to distinguish pitch from mere noise, and then music from mere pitch, students are opened to the idea of an independent philosophic distinction between beauty and ugliness. They can now begin to grasp why Socrates might endorse some kinds of music as more natural (and



thus ideal) than the others to be avoided.

Happily, this investigation of physical nature that grounds Plato's philosophical argument *about* music can also be taught *using* music. I teach Plato's *Republic* as part of a team-taught Art and Politics course: the gateway course for the Fortin and Gonthier Foundations of Western Civilization Program at Assumption College. The course moves chronologically through great political texts and works of art from the ancient world to the twentieth century. Its deeper purpose, however, is to enable students to recognize the unity of knowledge by drawing connections between two different fields. To this end, I illustrate Plato's unity of truth, goodness, and beauty in one of the great musical works of Western civilization: Chopin's *Fantaisie-Impromptu in C-sharp minor.* The movement among the five notes of the minor scale outlined above forms exactly the first four measures of this piece. As the second-most numerically consonant interval (1:2:3:4:4.8), this establishes a solid foundation for the piece's first minute of bold energy. One can imagine this section meeting Socrates' criteria for inspiring the virtues of courage and self-control. This first movement finally resolves into a C-sharp major chord with the even more elegant 1:2:3:4:5 interval ratio. This major chord then establishes the mode for the following section—an even more orderly form appropriate for cultivating the even higher virtue of wisdom. The beauty of one of Chopin's master works is itself a testament to the physical regularity and mathematical elegance of music.

And this is fully appropriate. After all, to demonstrate natural standards of beauty using the graphs and charts of physical science is a rather didactic way to approach Plato. But the *Republic* is not a scientific treatise aiming to fill the reader's head with laws of nature. Its content is subordinate to its form as a dramatic dialogue. Like beautiful music, this dramatic approach seeks to captivate the reader's soul and open him to participate in the higher ideals that ground all knowledge of nature. Just as students choose the orderly beauty of music to open their eyes and awake from slum-

ber each morning, so can music be used to open their souls and ease their awakening toward Plato's *Republic*.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

1. The Heraclius citation includes the Diels-Kranz numbering system consistent across editions.
2. The Plato citations include the Stephanus numbers consistent across editions.
3. A very small number of digital sounds are exceptions to this rule, such as a pure sine wave.
4. I thank Joel Geddert for producing these graphs, and—more broadly—for the conversations about the physics of sound that inspired and made this paper possible.
5. This is not to say that music cannot include sounds lacking musical pitch; drums are one obvious example. However, without musical pitch, melody and harmony are impossible; only rhythm remains.
6. The diminished chord is an exception, as is the little-used augmented chord. However, both of these display mathematical regularities in the equal tonal distance of each of the intervals. The half-diminished chord is another exception, but its three highest notes form a mathematically elegant minor chord.

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The Wisdom of Art

Hollywood Love and Liberal Arts Love in Plato's *Symposium*

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How can educators provoke within their students a love for the liberal arts? What sort of benefits can be presented to students as resulting from such a love? In this essay I respond to these questions by discussing how my approach to teaching Plato's *Symposium* is aimed at persuading students of the love-worthiness of the liberal arts. Specifically, I will discuss my approach to teaching the *Symposium* in an introduction to philosophy class, that is, to an audience that primarily will not already have a strong desire to pursue the liberal arts or will not have thought through the benefits of such a pursuit. Thus, this essay does not focus on my views of how the *Symposium* as a whole should best be interpreted (e.g., whether Socrates actually agrees with Diotima's speech, or what role Alcibiades's speech plays in critiquing her views) but, rather, simply discusses how I present certain parts of the text to young students, who are most likely encountering philosophy for the first time.

As I address in further detail below, my approach to teaching the *Symposium* begins by addressing the view of love that most students already possess when they come into the classroom—the view of love typically presented by Hollywood films, which I will argue has important similarities to that of the character Aristophanes. Following Plato, I then call this view of love into question by comparing it with Diotima's view of love—viz., one that includes a love of what we today call the liberal arts. To conclude the essay, I will relate my teaching of the *Symposium* to two additional aims of a true liberal arts education: first, the task of helping students understand the individual liberal arts systematically, i.e., in their relation to one another; second, the task of equipping students with the ability to shape their own minds and their own lives.

There are advantages and disadvantages to teaching college students a topic that, like love, has the appearance of being accessible. An advantage is that students will have given at least some passing thought to the topic before, which means that the teacher can appeal to something familiar in their experience. A disadvantage is that students will have given some passing thought to the topic before and will likely see this thought as an obviously true one and in no need of further reflection. To effectively educate students on such seemingly accessible topics, we can make use of that extremely effective Socratic tool of *elenchus*: draw out the position of the interlocutors on the topic in question, and then guide the conversation in such a way that they, on their own, come to see the instability of their position.

To engage the students in an *elenchus* with the idea of love, I spend the first part of my first class on the *Symposium* asking them how love tends to be depicted in Hollywood films (e.g., Disney movies, romantic comedies, adventure films). By compiling their comments on the board, we work together to extract, first of all, a loose definition of "Hollywood love," and, second, how this view of love is connected with the idea of happiness. Typically the definition that ends up on the board involves the idea of love being a feeling or emotion, something that one feels toward one's "soulmate." And typically the idea is that, when this feeling of love is reciprocated by the soulmate, then and only then can one find genuine happiness. Occasionally, and ideally, a student will mention the film *Jerry Maguire*, with its famous encapsulation of Hollywood love spoken by Tom Cruise to Renee Zellweger: "You complete me."

Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* is, of course, infinitely more insightful and more beautiful than the film *Jerry Maguire*. In the myth Aristophanes tells, human beings originally had two faces set in one head on one neck, along with four arms and four legs. Their great strength and ambition led them to attack Mount Olympus, leading Zeus to split them all in two. After Apollo turns their heads around and sews up what are now their front sides, each human desperately longs to unite with another human so as to return to their original state, i.e., their original completeness. Aristophanes' speech, in a manner genuinely comedic and genuinely profound, illuminates both the cosmological causes and the first-person experience of human longing better than all the Hollywood blockbusters combined.

Nonetheless, the core of his view of love, and also of loves' connection to human happiness, is much the same as the view that makes billions of dollars every year at the box office. Human beings, according to both the typical Hollywood narrative and Aristophanes, are fundamentally incomplete outside of a romantic relationship. A human being can achieve wholeness, and therefore happiness, only through intimate union with another human being. Because the idea of love held by young people today is so strongly shaped by Hollywood, I have found students to be deeply drawn to Aristophanes' view and to his claim that "our race would be happy if we were to bring our love to a consummate end, and each of us were to get his own favorite on his return to his ancient nature" (Plato 193c). When Aristophanes concludes that only love can make us complete and therefore happy, my students typically agree.

And it is not surprising that they agree—they are twenty-first-century Westerners. If they lived in the year 1200 or in certain Eastern cultures today, they likely would take a different position. For Aristophanes' ideas of love and happiness, like

those of Hollywood, are characterized by a striking individualism. In this account, one needs no family, no culture, no institutions, and certainly no education in the liberal arts to be fully happy. One simply needs one's feelings and one other human being.

Diotima's speech, as we know, includes a direct critique of this Aristophanic view of love. As she says to Socrates, "My speech denies that eros is of a half or of a whole—unless, comrade, that half or whole can be presumed to be really good" (Plato 205E). Diotima goes on to argue that love is not simply directed toward the good but also toward "the good's being one's own always" (Plato 206A). Humans attempt to achieve this "having the good always," she says, by directing their love toward "engendering and bringing to birth in beauty" (Plato 206E)—that is, a reproduction of offspring from either the body or the soul. And what we strive for when we strive for this reproduction, Diotima states, is immortality (Plato 207A, 208B).

The notion that what love ultimately seeks is immortality forms the basis for Diotima's famous "ladder of love." In this extended metaphor, she places various beautiful entities, i.e., various objects of love, on the rungs of a ladder, with each beautiful entity's place on the ladder being determined by the longevity of its existence. Beautiful souls are higher on the ladder than beautiful bodies because the former last longer than the latter; beautiful customs and laws are higher than beautiful souls because they last longer; the sciences, which seem to be intrinsically (as opposed to contingently) beautiful, are higher on the ladder than beautiful customs and laws for the same reason. Higher on the ladder than the sciences as a whole is a "single philosophical science" (210D), and the top rung of the ladder is the object being sought by the single philosophical science, namely, unchanging and self-standing "beauty itself" (211C). Diotima argues that, because "beauty itself" is eternal, loving it and joining ourselves to it will bring us the immortality and the happiness that we seek to the greatest degree possible for humans. For in the presence of the unchanging essence of beauty, we will be inspired to procreate via our souls, producing actions more virtuous, and a life more fulfilled, than we ever could have created otherwise.

By including beautiful bodies and souls on the ladder, Diotima's account of love and happiness clearly includes elements of Aristophanes' account. But she goes beyond his account by naming other beautiful entities that are deserving of our love, given that our achievement of them provides us with greater and longer-lasting beauties, in the presence of which we can give birth to longer-lasting offspring. And now we can return explicitly to the theme of the liberal arts. For these longer-lasting and more beautiful entities that allow for corresponding acts of reproduction are, all of them, either the liberal arts themselves or those elements of reality that the liberal arts investigate. The "laws and customs" that Diotima mentions are obviously studied by disciplines such as political science, history, and sociology. "The sciences" or "knowledges"—that is, various kinds of *episteme*—would seem to include mathematics, physics, psychology, etc. The science that is knowledge of eternal and unchanging "beauty itself" is not further specified by Diotima, but her brief description of it would seem to include both philosophy and religion. Overall then, her argument is that we should learn to love the entities on the ladder above bodies and souls with a more intense passion than one loves a human lover, because doing so will grant us

what we all already seek: the greatest immortality and happiness possible.

Needless to say, when my introduction-to-philosophy students grasp these claims by Diotima, they typically find them to be either silly or absurd. The vast majority of students I have ever taught possess the deeply held assumption that both love and happiness are purely subjective and personal matters, matters about which no one has the right to make any general judgments or prescriptions. (A phrase I hear from my students like a drumbeat is "everyone decides for themselves what makes them happy.") Thus when they realize that Diotima is directly contradicting their deeply held beliefs, they often find her ideas not only absurd but offensive.

One way that I encourage such students to consider more carefully Diotima's arguments and their implications for the liberal arts is the structure that I give to their essay assignment. This assignment requires them to provide a comparison of her speech with Aristophanes' speech, thereby giving them the chance to more thoughtfully compare her views with views that are much closer to their own. Another way I encourage them to take Diotima's ideas seriously is by asking them in class which is a more gratifying kind of love over the long term: loving someone for their body or loving them for their mind. This question and the ensuing conversation often softens their initially strenuous objection to the idea (expressed not only by Diotima but also by Aristophanes) that there is an objective connection between what one loves and one's long-term happiness, a connection that cannot be determined simply through one's personal acts of the will. However, many students still find very implausible the idea that something nonhuman and unchanging deserves not only my love, but my most passionate love. Thus another approach I use in class is to ask them to imagine a scenario in which they might commit some deeply unjust deed, such as arranging the death of a group of innocent children, in order to save the life of their lover. Ideally this conversation leads to the question of what, if anything, a person should love and honor more highly than their lover—for example, the idea of justice (in relation to the group of children). Many students typically remain skeptical of Diotima's ideas and the implications these ideas have for one's view of the liberal arts; nevertheless, such class conversations at least encourage them to engage her arguments more seriously and in a less reactionary manner.[1]

Let me conclude by making some connections between my approach to teaching the *Symposium* and two additional issues related to a liberal arts education. One of these issues is the question of whether a core texts education can provide students with an understanding of how the liberal arts are tied together, as opposed to the more common student view that they are relatively isolated and distinct. Diotima takes a very clear position on this issue when she argues that the ordering principle of the various fields of human knowledge is the unchanging and self-subsistent principle "beauty itself." The ladder of love presents the fields of human knowing as systematically related and hierarchically organized in terms of the degree to which their objects of study are manifestations of this unchanging principle. Thus Diotima presents an "architectonic" of the liberal arts, for she quite literally presents "beauty itself" as the *arche* of these disciplines, in the multivalent Greek sense of that term: an origin, a beginning, a ruler. We as educators might agree with Diotima that "beauty itself" is the ordering principle of the liberal arts, or we might identify this principle as some-

thing else. Whatever the case, the architectonic image presented in the *Symposium* is a powerful one for thinking through the individual liberal arts, their relations to one another, and their relations to a possible unifying source.

Another way that the *Symposium* can help students see a kind of unity behind all the separate liberal arts is the way in which Diotima implicitly defines the liberal arts: namely, as loves. Every discipline, when truly exercised, passionately seeks after some knowledge of reality, a knowledge that it lacks. Additionally, Diotima's language implies that we can love the disciplines themselves—that is, we can love and strive after these loves. For it is possible for someone to recognize that he does not yet love a certain discipline—for example, mathematics—and seek to move himself into the condition of loving that discipline, of loving that love. Once the discipline is loved, then the person is able to truly seek after that part of reality that the discipline seeks to understand. So in addition to characterizing the liberal arts as loves, Diotima encourages us to love these loves themselves, so that we can then love what those loves love.

A second issue related to the liberal arts is the question of how such an education can equip students to shape their own souls, that is, to engage in a "self-crafting." On this point the *Symposium* has much to say. Diotima's ladder of love provides a specific plan and method for such a self-crafting, in terms of gradually educating one's eros to be capable of loving entities that possess greater and greater longevity. In thus shaping their loves, students will be shaping one of the most fundamental parts of their souls. If Diotima's arguments are correct, such an education and crafting of one's loves allows us to give birth in our own lives not to phantom virtues but to true virtues, and to live the life that is "worth living" (211d). As unromantic as the claim sounds to students, Diotima's argument is that only by loving what is unchanging can humans shape their souls to be capable of experiencing the greatest happiness. Whether she is correct about this or not, the *Symposium* provides an outstanding opportunity for educators to challenge students' common equation of romantic love and human fulfillment, and to call their attention to the possibility that the liberal arts play an essential role in living the best life possible for a human being.

Note

1. To list one additional strategy: In my introduction to philosophy class we read the *Alcibiades I* earlier in the semester, and this makes it easier, when reading the *Symposium*, to raise the question of what the older Alcibiades loves the most. If, as the *Symposium* suggests, Alcibiades is unable to go beyond a love of human beings (e.g., Socrates), this inability to go beyond the second rung of the ladder—e.g., to a love of something impersonal such as justice—might help explain his eventual betrayal of Athens.

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Give Me a Liberal Arts Education or Give Me Death: Seneca on the Shortness of Life

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Although initially attracted by its exciting title, the undergraduate students who register for my Philosophy of Death class often become apprehensive once the course begins. This apprehension coincides with their realization that they will indeed spend the next fifteen weeks reading about, writing about, and discussing death and dying. The discomfort of my students is not completely unjustified. Several have been traumatized by the death of at least one close friend or relative. Most are terrified of dying and being deprived of everything that is familiar and of value to them. Many are uncomfortable with uncertainty. They find facing their own lack of knowledge about what—if anything—happens to the dead after death to be disturbing. Almost all are worried that a semester-long investigation of death and dying will be a depressing and futile exercise.

As I see it, these student concerns should be addressed early in the course. Most undergraduates that I have taught are only willing to commit themselves to an academic investigation once they have felt its existential import. Students seem willing to take intellectual and emotional risks required for a genuine philosophical study of death only if they see that it has the potential to help them to improve their lives. If this is true, then an investigation of the metaphysical, biological, psychological, medical, and legal aspects of death and dying—although all essential to the philosophical study of death—ought to be postponed until later in the course. The class must begin with personal ethics and, more precisely, with a text that addresses the question: "How might serious reflection upon death and dying actually benefit me?"

Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life* is such a text. In direct and rhetorically power-

ful language, Seneca explains the significant benefits that accrue to those who reflect upon death, especially to those who contemplate their own inevitable demise. Given its short length, its accessibility to undergraduates, and its success in quelling student fears about the study of death, I recommend this core text to those who teach or will teach courses on death and dying. Additionally, Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life* is an excellent text with which to begin either an introduction to philosophy or an interdisciplinary course that employs a variety of core texts from various disciplines. This is because Seneca argues that liberal arts education, especially the study of great works of philosophy, will enable people to extend their lives. Seneca gives students a reason to care about the study of death, about the study of philosophy, and about the study of core texts.

Underpinning all of the main arguments in *On the Shortness of Life* is Seneca's distinction between life and time. Seneca begins his work by claiming that most human beings neither understand nor live their lives in light of this crucial distinction. This conclusion is evidenced by most people's fear of death, by the ubiquitous complaint that human life is too short, and by the fact that many dying people claim to have not yet prepared themselves to really live.

Although many bemoan the short lifespan granted to human beings, Seneca argues that "we do not receive a life that is short, but rather we make it so" (140; ch. 1). As he sees it, the problem we as human beings face is not that we lack adequate time in which to live. Seneca believes that the time—the years, months, days, hours, minutes, and seconds—that human beings have been granted is adequate: "Life is long, if only you knew how to use it" (140; ch. 2). The limited duration of the normal human lifespan does not necessitate the fear of death nor does it require the dying to feel that their lives have not been lived adequately.

Instead, Seneca claims that fear and regret in the face of death are the result of not really *living* during the time that one is alive. He explains, "There is, therefore, no ground for thinking that, because of his white hairs or wrinkles, someone has lived too long: he has not [necessarily] lived a long time but existed a long time" (147; ch. 7). Existing is not the same thing as living. Seneca insists that most people genuinely live only a small portion of the time that they are alive. It is not a lack of time available to people but the choice to squander their time that leads so many to feel terror and remorse as death approaches. For Seneca, we need not add more time to our lives, as a normal human lifespan is adequate. On the contrary, we should focus our attention on adding more life to our time—that is, on making the most of the time that we have.

Throughout *On the Shortness of Life,* Seneca develops his conception of genuinely *living.* Initially, his definition of "living" is established by means of a contrast with wasting one's time. Seneca maintains that vices—including lust, indolence, drunkenness, greed, anger, unjust hatreds, gluttony, love of honor, unchecked ambition, and vain dreams of glory—enslave those who possess them, chaining the vicious to both the whims of their unruly passions and the arbitrary opinions of others. Vice makes people slaves to Fortune, rendering their happiness dependent upon things that they cannot control and cannot enjoy without regret. The vices prevent people from "return[ing] to their proper selves" (141; ch. 2) and from achieving the

"unqualified and unshakeable freedom" that comes from escaping Fortune and being one's own master" (144; ch. 5). Seneca insists that the lives of the vicious, "though they should exceed a thousand years, will contract into the smallest span . . . [for] those vices of [theirs] will swallow up any amount of time" (145; ch. 6).

The vices also prevent people from making decisions in awareness of their own mortality. Seneca claims that the vicious "live as though [they] were going to live for ever, at no time taking thought for [their] weakness, and [they] fail to note how much time has already passed by; [they] waste hours as though [they] were drawing from a well that was full to overflowing, though all the while that very day [they] are giving to some person or thing is possibly [their] last" (142–43; ch. 3). Such a lack of self-awareness, such a fear of facing one's own mortality, such forgetfulness that one's time on earth is limited ensures that the vicious will waste their time and meet death paralyzed by fear and full of regret: "they shout repeatedly that they have been fools, as they have not really lived" (Seneca 151; ch. 11).

On the contrary, Seneca claims that real *living* depends upon remembering that you are mortal, that your time is limited, and that you are unable to know when your time will run out. Each choice that you make, each action that you perform could be your last. As such, the importance of what one does and who one *is* constantly impresses itself upon those who do live in awareness of their own mortality. Such people, according to Seneca, make choices that will leave them without regret when they exit the world. They will not be afraid of their conscience and will remember their past actions and choices with delight. Additionally, Seneca is emphatic that "the wise man will not hesitate to approach death with a steady step" (151; ch. 11). Even if his time on earth is far shorter than that of most other people, the wise man will die fearless, entirely at peace with himself. This is because he has lived in preparation for and in knowledge of his own death.

For Seneca, as for Socrates and Cicero before him, "learning how to live" (146; ch. 7) is intimately connected with "learning how to die" (ibid.), and both require a lifetime to perfect (Plato 34, 64a; Cicero 54, I.31). Clearly, living with an acute awareness of one's own mortality is not easily attained. Neither is learning how to "plan every day as if it were [your] last, neither long[ing] for nor fear[ing] tomorrow" (Seneca 147; ch. 7). According to Seneca, such achievements require one to cultivate virtue, to delight in one's own thoughts and actions, to jealously guard one's time, to achieve inner tranquility, and to be immune to the effects of Fortune. He insists that genuine *living* requires leisure. People cannot devote themselves to learning how to live and how to die if they are constantly working. Additionally, Seneca rejects the obsessive concern with home furnishings, athletic contests, one's appearance, popular music, private banquets, luxurious living, sunbathing, the study of useless trivia, and a variety of other hobbies as "busy idleness" (151; ch. 12), maintaining that such activities are useless in helping one to cultivate the knowledge of how to live without regret and die without fear.

Yet, in this awesome task of self-cultivation, of learning how to live, Seneca maintains that we do not need to discover everything from scratch for ourselves. Devoting one's leisure time to liberal arts education, especially to the study of great works of philosophy, enables one to take advantage of the deep insights of the great-

est thinkers who have come before us. Seneca insists that all of them "will teach you how to die; none of these will wear out your years but rather will make you a gift of his own" (156; ch. 15). Through our studies we can learn how to model the best attributes of some of the greatest human beings who have ever lived. With the help of their insights, some of which took many years to develop, we can increase the amount of our time that is actually spent living and, thus, increase the amount of life in our time. Seneca explains:

> Of all men, only those who find time for philosophy are at leisure, only they are truly alive; for it is not only their own lifetime that they guard well; they add every age to their own; all the years that have passed before them they requisition for their store. Unless we have no gratitude at all, those glorious fashioners of sacred thoughts were born for us, for us they laid the foundations of life. By the efforts of other men we are led to contemplate things most lovely that have been unearthed from darkness and brought into light; no age has been denied to us, we are granted admission to all, and if we wish by greatness of mind to pass beyond the narrow confines of human weakness, there is a great tract of time for us to wander through. We may hold argument with Socrates, feel doubt with Carneades, find tranquility with Epicurus, conquer human nature with the Stoics, exceed it with the Cynics. (155; ch. 14)

According to Seneca, such liberal arts education enables one to befriend the noblest intellects, to receive their most valuable ideas, and to generously share their insights into life and death with others. Such an education, Seneca claims, enables one to learn beyond one's time and thus to lengthen one's life.

Although most of the undergraduate students who register for my Philosophy of Death course have doubts about Seneca's more provocative claims, including his insistence that only those who find time for philosophy are truly alive, *On the Shortness of Life* is nonetheless an incredibly effective text. Students are genuinely fascinated by Seneca's distinction between life and time and often are convinced by Seneca's claim that seriously reflecting upon one's mortality will help one to live a more meaningful life. Students want to discuss Seneca's claims about the value of philosophy and the value of liberal arts education. Most importantly, after reading Seneca, many of my students begin to question their prejudice that the study of death will be both depressing and unproductive. With these anxieties at least somewhat alleviated, many students come to see the value of committing themselves both intellectually and emotionally to the serious philosophical study of death and dying.

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Aristotle, Temperance, and *Oedipus Tyrannus*

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For a number of years now, I have found it quite beneficial to use Aristotle's views on the ethical virtues from the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a lens to evaluate the moral dispositions of leading figures from some of the great works of ancient Greek literature. This approach has provided wonderful results. By considering how Aristotle's ethical concepts apply to individuals as they are portrayed in their specific circumstances, this approach has given me a deeper understanding of Aristotle's moral ideas. Likewise by providing a substantial moral theory through which to judge the ethical dispositions of these individuals, this approach has enriched my assessments of the moral natures of these larger-than-life figures. This paper makes use of Aristotle's views on temperance and the related states of continence and incontinence to evaluate the ethical dispositions of Oedipus and Jocasta as depicted in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus.*

We all know about Oedipus and his incestuous relationship with his mother. Oedipus was married to Jocasta for many years, and fathered four children with her. And yet both were completely unaware they were son and mother, as was almost everyone else in Thebes, with the exception of Tiresias, who only revealed his knowledge when verbally attacked by Oedipus (e.g., 337–38, 412–28, 456–62). So how should we judge the moral state of Oedipus and Jocasta? To Oedipus and Jocasta themselves, they were living temperate lives, as one would expect a husband and wife to live who were also the king and queen of Thebes. Indeed, if they were not son and mother, they seemed to have conducted themselves appropriately regarding the triumvirate pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex that make up the material domain

of temperance for Aristotle (1118a23-b3). From Oedipus and Jocasta's vantage point, given their ignorance of their circumstances, they were temperate people engaging in temperate actions.

But how, according to Aristotle's standards, are they to be judged? They are to be judged as people having engaged in intemperate actions. Their actions failed to achieve the mean and were excessive because they were incestuous. Nonetheless, neither Jocasta nor Oedipus had the vicious state (ἕξις) of intemperance because vicious (and virtuous) states require voluntary actions, and their actions were not voluntary. For Aristotle, there are two conditions under which an action is said to be involuntary. One, when the moving cause is entirely external to the agent. In that case, the action performed is involuntary, and the person who performs it is not responsible for the completed action (1109a35–1110b17). Two, when the agent acts because of ignorance. In such cases, three conditions are at play. One, the person who performs the action is ignorant of the necessary particular knowledge of what he/she is doing. Two, the person is not responsible for his/her ignorance about the particular matter—that is, the person is not responsible for not knowing what he/she does not know.[1] Three, the person feels pain or regret when he/she finds out what he/she has done (1110b18–1111a21).[2] These three conditions apply to Oedipus and Jocasta. Oedipus and Jocasta lack an essential and necessary fact—a particular—about the identity of the other. Oedipus does not know that Jocasta is his mother because he believes his mother is Merope Queen of Corinth. When as a young man there was a question about his true parentage, Oedipus pursued this directly with his parents Queen Merope and King Polybus and then again pursued this at Delphi (774–790). Moreover, upon learning from the Delphic oracle that he would kill his father and marry his mother, he believed he had taken measures never to be near his mother, Merope, let alone marry her—Oedipus stayed away from Corinth since receiving that oracle (791–833). Even upon hearing of the death of his father Polybus, Oedipus refuses to go back home to Corinth while Merope is still alive, fearing he will fulfill the remainder of the oracle and lie with his mother (950–999). Likewise, when Jocasta and Laius learned from the Delphic oracle that a son born to them would kill Laius, they believed they had eliminated that threat by ordering a servant to expose their infant on Mt. Cithaeron (707–725). So Jocasta does not know that Oedipus is her son because she thinks that the boy she birthed died a long time ago. Finally, when Oedipus and Jocasta find out the true identity of the other, there is no shortage of pain and regret on both their parts—Jocasta commits suicide and Oedipus blinds himself.

Oedipus and Jocasta stand as paradigms; they are people who have engaged in involuntary actions because of ignorance. They chose in general to do actions, but because they were ignorant of the full identity of the person with whom they were involved, they did not specifically choose to do incestuous actions. Furthermore, neither of them was responsible for their ignorance, and both intensely regretted their actions when they realized they were mother and son. Aristotle, in his discussion of justice in book V, chapter 8, classifies parallel kinds of actions as accidentally unjust (κατὰ συμβεβηκός, 1135a18, b3, b6). The person accidentally does unjust actions but lacks the vice of injustice. Likewise, we can say that Oedipus and Jocasta

accidentally perform intemperate actions but lack the vice of intemperance, since they did these actions involuntarily because of ignorance.

Let me use another vantage point from which to evaluate the ethical dispositions of Oedipus and Jocasta. This is to compare their moral state to continence (ἐγκράτεια) and incontinence (ἀκρασία). For Aristotle, a continent person, more so than most people, is able to direct one's actions through the use of right reason despite having appetites that desire what is bad (1151b34–52a3, 1152a25–27). In contrast, an incontinent person is led by bad appetites instead of reason, and so performs bad actions (1148a5–10, 1151a20–26). For Aristotle, there are two types of incontinents—the weak and the impetuous (1150b19–28, 1151a1–5, 1152a18–19, & a27–29). Weak incontinents exercise deliberation,[3] but when confronted by their bad appetites, they abandon reason and follow the bad appetites. Impetuous incontinents react so quickly that they do not actually engage in deliberation, but respond from appetite (1150b26–28). So, the continent person's moving cause is reason, whereas the incontinent person's is appetite. Also, Aristotle says that after incontinents have engaged in excessive actions, they feel regret. This is because they know generally the right thing to do but have failed to do it. The presence of this knowledge and the regret that follows is why Aristotle thinks incontinents are curable, whereas intemperate people are not, since the latter have no regrets because they believe their actions are right (1150b29–51a4).

So where do Oedipus and Jocasta stand in regard to continence and incontinence? They are neither continent nor incontinent. They are not continent because the continent person does the right action, whereas they have done wrong actions. In addition, continent people have bad appetites; they are aware that they desire the wrong things, but their reason prevails over their bad appetites. But this differs from Oedipus and Jocasta, who do not have bad appetites; rather they have a lacuna in the knowledge of an important particular fact. And so they have sex with the wrong person because they do not realize they are mother and son. Oedipus and Jocasta are also not incontinent. It is true that what they have in common with incontinent people is that they are engaged in excessive actions. It is also true that what Oedipus and Jocasta have in common with incontinent people is the presence of ignorance in their souls. However, the nature of that ignorance differs. Oedipus and Jocasta's excessive actions result from an ignorance for which they are not responsible. Incontinent persons' excessive actions result from an ignorance for which they are responsible, an ignorance that arises because the person has the general knowledge of what is right but has failed to integrate that knowledge into their soul and this knowledge is coupled with the strength of their badly habituated appetites (1147a10–24). So, unlike weak incontinents who deliberate but then reject their deliberations in favor of their appetites, and unlike impetuous incontinents who do not even deliberate, Oedipus and Jocasta's interior moral faculties are arguably superior to that of incontinent (and continent) people whose failure lies in the quality of their interior faculties and not because of involuntary ignorance.

It is also illuminating to rank the moral state of Oedipus and Jocasta with that of intemperance, incontinence, and continence, for in so doing, one comes away, once again, with a richer insight into the ethical disposition of Oedipus and Jocasta. Let's

assume, for obvious reasons, that the repeated excessive action engaged in (or resisted as in the case of continence) is incest committed by two adults who are mother and son. The ranking will be from worse to better states. The worst state seems easiest to identify—intemperance—where people are fully responsible for their actions, believe their actions are right, enjoy their actions, and afterward have no misgivings about what they have done. Next I would rank incontinence as immediately superior to intemperance. For even though the same bad actions are performed, the incontinent person is internally conflicted about his/her actions, whereas the intemperate person is not. Since the incontinent person, after committing incestuous actions, believes that what he/she has done is wrong and feels regret, whereas the intemperate person has no regrets, the incontinent person has the possibility of being cured and thus seems morally superior to the intemperate person.

I would place the state of Oedipus and Jocasta as immediately superior to incontinence. It is the quality of their internal conditions that elevates their ranking over incontinence, not the actions performed although they are the same. Oedipus and Jocasta act out of complete ignorance of the biological relationship between them, operating from an ignorance for which they are not responsible. Moreover, had they been aware that they were son and mother, judging from their reactions when they did find out, not only would they have not engaged in incestuous actions but such actions would likely not have been a temptation. The interior state of incontinent people in comparison seems inferior, since they are aware to a certain degree that what they are about to do is wrong but engage in incestuous actions anyway.

The most challenging moral ranking to consider is whether continence or Oedipus and Jocasta's moral state is superior. That is, is it morally superior to be tempted to commit incestuous actions but to have the rational strength to ignore those temptations, or is it morally superior to commit incestuous actions involuntarily because of ignorance when all other internal conditions are operating correctly? This is not an easy call to make. If one were to make the judgment focused only on the quality of the internal conditions operating in their souls, Oedipus and Jocasta's state would seem to be morally superior, since their faculties are sound. However, for Aristotle one's moral state cannot be judged solely by one's internal conditions. The actions that the agent does are a necessary part of the equation. Thus, even though Oedipus and Jocasta did not choose to do incestuous actions, the fact is that they engaged in such actions repeatedly for many years and conceived and raised four children between them. Additionally, Oedipus and Jocasta are not simply private citizens, they are the king and queen of Thebes, and as such their actions impact the entire community. They have brought shame not only to themselves but to all of Thebes; they have brought a pollution that will need to be cleansed. Therefore, in this specific case, I have ranked continence as superior to the moral state of Oedipus and Jocasta for three reasons: (1) the magnitude of the actions Oedipus and Jocasta committed, (2) the repercussions of those actions beyond the two individuals involved, and (3) there is no way to redress Oedipus's and Jocasta's actions. Thus, even though I view the interior moral faculties of Oedipus and Jocasta as superior to that of a continent person, in the end the incestuous actions tipped the scales. Indeed, if one could have given Oedipus and Jocasta the choice of which state to be in—

either to be continent, which would involve having incestuous desires for each other but not act on them or to be involuntarily engaged in incestuous actions for years—I think there is little doubt that they would have chosen continence.

Let me end this paper by addressing this final question. What name should we give to the moral state of Oedipus and Jocasta, since Aristotle does not actually have a specific term for their state? Here I have drawn on Aristotle's discussion of the five pseudo states of courage (1116a16–1117a28). In those cases, people perform courageous actions but fall short of having the virtuous state of courage because there is something amiss in one or more of their interior faculties (e.g., passion, knowledge, final end). Using this kind of nomenclature, I am inclined to say that Oedipus and Jocasta possess the pseudo-temperate state of involuntary ignorance. With the exception of their involuntary ignorance, which is the root of their intemperate actions, their interior faculties are properly developed.

Notes

1. Aristotle has a high standard for personal responsibility. Even if an agent performs a particular action in ignorance of the specifics of what he/she is doing, the agent may still be held responsible for what he/she has done. According to Aristotle, if the agent's ignorance is caused by the agent's own neglect, Aristotle views the agent as responsible for his/her own ignorance and does not consider the action to be involuntary. So, if the person's ignorance is the result of one's drunkenness or the result of one's excessive appetite for sex (as occurs in the incontinent person) or because of one's excessive anger or because one has simply failed to become informed about a particular matter about which one ought to be informed, Aristotle views the agent as responsible for the bad action performed and refrains from calling the action involuntary (1110b24–27, 1113b19–1114a21, 1152a4–24). Aristotle will sometimes describe the person who acts under these conditions as acting in/by ignorance (τοῦ ἀγνοιοῦντα, 1110b25).

2. When these three conditions are fulfilled, Aristotle views a person as having acted involuntarily. Aristotle sometimes refers to this person as having acted because of ignorance (δι'ἀγνοιαν, 1110b25) as distinguished from the person who has acted in/by ignorance (τοῦ ἀγνοιοῦντα, 1110b25).

3. Aristotle often uses the term *deliberation* (τὸ βουλεύεσθαι, e.g., 1150b19–21, 1152a18–19) but sometimes uses the term *decision* (προαίρεσις, e.g., 1148a9–10, 1151a5–6, 1152a17).

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My Second Self: Augustine and Newman on Friendships in a University

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When college students encounter core texts in a modern university, they often seek to draw lessons from them in order to shape their own souls. In my experience as a teacher, I have observed this phenomenon. As my students contemplated Plato, they wished to apply his notion of friendship to their daily lives. Despite this desire, they often experienced a disconnection between themselves and the text and implied that it is a mere intellectual exercise to read a core text. Students objected that they could not apply the lessons of Plato to their own personal relationships and thereby craft their own souls.

To begin to answer this objection, I will draw upon John Henry Newman and Augustine of Hippo, two of Western civilization's greatest thinkers on education. I will argue that by forming personal intellectual friendships with their students, faculty can educate them in a way lectures cannot. In my discussion, I will begin with Newman's understanding of the role of friendship and personal influence in a university and then show how this concept is demonstrated in Augustine's engagement with Cicero's *Hortensius* in the *Confessions.*

In *The Idea of a University,* Newman writes that a university must develop in the student "a philosophical habit of mind" (*Idea* 77). This habit "consists in a comprehensive view of truth in all its branches, of the relations of science to science, of their mutual bearings, and their respective values" (ibid.). Since the university's primary objective is to cultivate the intellect, Newman argues that this philosophical habit has no direct bearing on the moral and religious formation of a student. As he states, "It is a real mistake to burden it [a philosophical habit of mind] with virtue or

religion . . . knowledge is one thing; virtue is another" (*Idea* 90–91). However, Newman argues that a university that only cultivates the intellect is insufficient; even if a student successfully forms a philosophical habit of mind, his education is far from complete. In *Idea*, Newman also stresses education's moral dimensions when he describes how students learn about the Truth through friendship. Rather than build universities that educate students through "an examination in a wide range of subjects," Newman stipulates that an ideal university rests upon the foundation of "residence and tutorial superintendence" (*Idea* 109). If students and faculty live together, the personal intimacy between young men who are "keen, open-hearted, [and] sympathetic" engenders friendships and helps to create a philosophical habit of mind (*Idea* 111). Newman states that after three to four years under the personal influence of his friends, a man becomes liberally educated, prepared to become potentially a hero or a statesman (*Idea* 110). Despite the power of personal influence of friends, it does not automatically guarantee that a liberally educated person will become moral. When he compares Saint Basil with the Roman emperor Julian, Newman acknowledges their disparate moral dispositions although they "were fellow-students of the school of Athens" (*Idea* 161). Basil utilized his liberal education from Athens in order to defend the Truth and became a Doctor of the Church, while Julian was the Church's "scoffing and relentless foe" (ibid.).

By insisting on the pursuit of liberal knowledge for its own sake and the formation of friendships, Newman creates tension between the moral and intellectual aspects of education. In order to account for this tension, we must understand how Newman defines the *integrity* of a university and the way in which a college tutor helps sustain it. As Newman states in *Rise and Progress of Universities*, the *integrity* of an object depends on what enables it to fulfill its *telos* (183). By communicating knowledge through lectures, the professorial system may "fulfill the strict idea of a university and is sufficient for its being." Nevertheless, it is the college and the personal influence of the tutor that compose its *integrity* (182). Newman emphasizes that "an academical system without the personal influence of teachers upon pupils, is an arctic winter" (74). Since the tutor of a college should concern himself with the moral formation of his students (228), he utilizes his personal influence in order to help them cultivate a philosophical habit of mind that does not lead them to develop a specious moral character like the Roman emperor Julian.

Newman himself had weathered the arctic winter in his own education. When he reflected on his undergraduate days, Newman realized that he had hindered the development of his own intellect because he did not possess the personal friendship of a tutor to guide him. In his *Autobiographical Writings*, Newman writes that "I needed a kind of friend. . . . I thwarted the real progress of my mind by dabbling in studies" (52).When Newman gained a tutorship at Oriel College, he believed that he had to open the hearts of his students to genuine friendship for the purpose of forming character, healing their afflicted souls, and nurturing their intellect. Since he saw his vocation as a priest extending into his work as a tutor and remembered his own suffering from his own undergraduate days, he strove to develop this kind of friendship between student and tutor. The aim of his tutorial work, as Newman saw it, was to gain souls for God, and he laid it down as a firm rule not only to cultivate relations

of intimacy, but those of friendships of the intellect as well (90).

As "a minister of Christ" (*Autobiographical* 88), Newman opened his hearts to his students and created friendships with them by using his own suffering as a way to develop their intellects. Because Newman recognized his own suffering as an undergraduate, he worked tirelessly to form a philosophical habit of mind with his students, going so far as to quarrel openly about the discretionary power of the tutors to schedule the lectures of their students (92–94). By remembering his own trials and risking even more on his students' behalf, Newman encouraged them to realize the fruits of the life of the mind in their own sufferings. In *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent,* Newman argues that reason does not often move the heart, but that "persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us" (89). When Augustine read the *Hortensius,* he concluded that he needed personal intellectual friendships in order for this great text to heal the affliction of his soul. In spite of comprehending this fact, Augustine soon recognized that he needed a second self like Newman. After becoming enflamed by Cicero's words, Augustine constantly searched for a teacher who desired to offer his life as an example of what it costs for the soul to embody the lessons of a great text.

Although the *Hortensius* only survives in fragments, Augustine explains in *The Confessions* that Cicero's dialogue not only inspired him to pursue Truth but also showed him how to seek it. Cicero's *Hortensius* was a protreptic for pursuing philosophy as a way of life rather than as merely an abstract idea and, like Newman, claimed that philosophy requires a community of friends. At the time Augustine read the *Hortensius*, the quality of his friendships with his fellow students were less than ideal. He associated with a group of young men called the "Overturners," who acted like the devil by mocking students and performing other sinister acts (*Conf.* III.3.6). Newman's students or those in the modern university may not embody such debauchery. Nevertheless, Augustine's friendships with the Overturners demonstrate his need for someone like Newman's tutor who would be charged with caring for his soul (p. 79). Augustine abhorred the actions of the Overturners, but he enjoyed their fellowship because he was in "love with love" and was willing to endure illicit friendships even at the cost of his soul (*Conf.* III.1.1). In order to heal it, Augustine had to turn to the *Hortensius* to recognize that true friendship exists only when one desires Wisdom, God, above all else and to discover friends similar to Newman, who suffered for the souls of his students. Augustine states:

> Following the normal order of study I had come to a book of one Cicero, whose tongue practically everyone admires, though not his heart. That particular book is called the *Hortensius* and contains an exhortation to philosophy. Quite definitely it changed the direction of my mind, altered my prayers to You, O Lord, and gave me a new purpose and ambition. Suddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after immortal wisdom. I had begun the journey upwards by which I was to return to You. (III.4.7)

On an intellectual level, the *Hortensius* motivated Augustine to seek Truth itself and to develop the philosophical habit to possess it. Like Newman, Augustine understood the value of a liberal education for its own sake. They also both agreed that a liberal educator cannot simply nurture the intellectual development of students but

also must look to their souls and moral formation. Augustine attempted to establish a community of friends in the spirit of the *Hortensius*. In this community, Augustine thought that the "sincerity of friendship" would sustain it and enable him and his friends to pull all their resources together to pursue Wisdom (VI.16.24). Nevertheless, secular ambitions such as marriage broke up this endeavor (ibid). Augustine remained haunted by the *Hortensius* for thirteen years and his inability to grasp the Truth (VI.11.18). Cicero disturbed him because, while he comprehended the need to pursue Wisdom, he did not possess the moral capacity to achieve the vision of the *Hortensius*. Augustine understood that he could not actualize his capabilities since he never had a teacher willing to risk himself for Augustine's afflicted soul and offer his own life as a paradigm of virtue. In his education, Augustine emphasizes that none of his teachers displayed the slightest interest in helping their students pursue Truth virtuously. Augustine states that they forced him to "excel in the handling of words" in order to gain social prestige and riches through his rhetoric (I.9.14). Augustine did not apprehend the personal influence of a teacher like Newman's tutor, who could show him how to pursue Truth in the midst of the world's demands. Without such a personal intellectual friendship, Augustine became like his teachers, only interested in making friends with students insofar as he offered "for sale skill in speech" (IV.2.2). Consequently, Augustine needed to befriend Simplicianus, Saint Ambrose's mentor, who could discipline Augustine in the name of Truth.

According to Augustine, Simplicianus as a minister of Christ had both cultivated his intellect and lived a moral life. Simplicianus learned much due to "a long lifetime spent in so firm a following of Your way [O Lord]" (VIII.1.1). By becoming friends with Simplicianus, Augustine hoped that "if I conferred with him about my problems he might . . . show me the best way for one affected as I was to walk in Your path" (ibid). Implicit in Augustine's comment is the desire to discover friends of Christ who could enable him to understand what kind of life one must adopt to remain on the way to God. Not only did he find such a friend in Simplicianus, Augustine also had the opportunity to hear about such a friendship through the old priest's story about the famous orator Marius Victorinus. Simplicianus told Augustine that he and Victorinus were very similar to each other: they were pursuing careers in the imperial government, they possessed a desire for philosophy, and they had both undertaken an intense study of Scriptures (VIII.2.3–4). What set Victorinus apart from Augustine was a willingness to abandon his secular career and undertake a philosophical life for Christ. Augustine reports that Simplicianus told this story in order to show him that Victorinus had resigned his position to pursue the philosophical life (VIII.5.10). While one lacks Simplicianus's own testimony, one can infer that the priest acted in a similar way to Newman's idea of the true tutor. In seeing a soul suffering like Victorinus, Simplicianus reached out to Augustine so that he could realize the meaning of the *Hortensius* and convert to Christianity. Due to Simplicianus's affection, Augustine noted he possessed a new will, "by which I willed to worship freely and to enjoy You, O God" (ibid.).

Through the friendship of Simplicianus, Augustine began to move beyond purely intellectual pursuits and become a true friend in Christ. As Augustine recounts in the *Confessions,* he blazed a path to recognize the full implications of Cicero's work,

and he almost lost himself in the process. From Augustine's narration, one sees that the professor may enflame the soul of the student lecturing on Plato's *Republic* or even the *Confessions.* For both Newman and Augustine, they could neither teach nor learn from a merely intellectual tome without speaking heart to heart. Therefore, it will take someone like Newman's ideal tutor to guide today's students to Truth ever ancient and ever new and to preserve the integrity of a university.

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Criticism, Creativity, and Tradition in Mohammad Iqbal's *Secrets of the Self*

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This essay examines a collection of poems entitled *Asrar-iKhudi* or *Secrets of the Self*. The poems were written and first published in Persian in India (1915) by the poet, philosopher, barrister, and sometime politician Mohammad Iqbal (1876–1938). They were translated into English by the English "orientalist" R. A. Nicholson in 1920. The poems energized the debates that eventually led to India's emancipation from colonial rule and the creation of Pakistan as an independent Muslim state in 1947, where Iqbal remains the national poet and is considered the intellectual progenitor of the nation.[1] They compose a relatively short text that will well serve those interested in integrating core texts on Islam and the colonial/post-colonial period into core curricula.

By drawing upon major intellectual movements in Europe (especially the philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson), Iqbal hoped to "reconstruct" the religious thought of Islam and to reawaken within the minority Muslim peoples of India a renewed sense of their historical identity and destiny. Iqbal's work thus illustrates one of the themes of ACTC's 2015 conference, namely the tension—real or apparent—between providing students with a critical capacity to challenge externally imposed constraints and to fashion their own souls, while also providing them with the essentials of a specific religious or cultural tradition within the limits of which criticism and the art of soulcraft are to be exercised. Iqbal sought critically to excise from the corpus of his Islamic tradition the sclerotic tissues and accretions that were preventing Muslims from creatively engaging in the struggle to shape India's future, but to excise them without killing the patient, that is, without jettisoning the Islamic

tradition itself. This essay examines the manner in which Iqbal criticizes the Islamic tradition and attempts to reinvigorate his coreligionists for creative participation in reshaping the politics and culture of the subcontinent.

In her study of the life and thought of Iqbal, *Gabriel's Wings,* Anna Marie Schimmel notes: "The Asrar-iKhudi were a shock therapy for almost all of Iqbal's friends and admirers. One must think of the highly negative significance in Persian of the word Khudi, Self, with its implications of selfishness, egotism and similar objectionable meanings. Iqbal gives this word a new meaning as Self, Personality, Ego in an absolutely positive meaning" (42). Iqbal exhorts his reader to intensify one's inner life, deepen one's identity, and revitalize one's unique personality or ego.

Iqbal's concept of "khudi" or "self" emerged in response to India's tradition of mystical Sufism. In his doctoral dissertation in 1908, "The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy," Iqbal examined both Islam's classical philosophers and the metaphysical traditions of Sufism, both of which had been heavily influenced by Neoplatonism. In his introduction, he had high praise for the Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), for example, in whom he discovers a depth and vitality comparable to the vitality of Vedantic mysticism. Iqbal exhorts students of Islamic mysticism to turn to Arabi's profound teaching that "stands in strange contrast with the dry-as-dust Islam of his countrymen" (Iqbal, *Development* x–xi). But Europe changed Iqbal. When he returned from Europe, under the influence of Goethe and Nietzsche, he became highly critical of Sufism's quest for the mystical self-negation or annihilation in God (*fana*). The sixth poem in the collection, for example, is titled: "A Tale of Which the Moral Is That Negation of the Self Is a Doctrine Invented by Subject Races of Mankind in Order That by This Means They May Sap and Weaken the Character of Their Rulers"

As the tale goes, there was a time of old when sheep dwelling in a pasture feared no enemy. Tigers that delight in conquest and dominion arrive from the jungle. A clever old sheep begins preaching to the tigers, proclaiming that it is the vegetarian who is truly pleasing unto God. He exhorts: "Oh thou that delightist in the slaughter of sheep, slay thy self, and that wilt have honour." The tigers are pleased with this "soporific advice." Fear robs them of their courage, and "poverty, pusillanimity, and low-mindedness" follow (Iqbal, *Secrets* 48–55).

The seventh poem (*Secrets* 56–59) follows suit. The target is Plato. As Iqbal saw it, Islamic mystics had inherited the doctrine of self-annihilation from Neoplatonism. Iqbal entitles the poem: "To the Effect that Plato, Whose Thought Has Deeply Influenced the Mysticism and Literature of Islam, Followed the Sheep's Doctrine, and That We Must Be on Our Guard against His Theories." Plato is an ascetic fascinated with bloodlessly abstract Ideals and has no taste for action, according to Iqbal. The poverty of Plato's moralistic, world-denying idealism is juxtaposed with the aesthetic values achieved by acting on desire: "The partridge's leg is derived from the elegance of its gait, the nightingale's beak from its endeavor to sing. Away from the reed-bed, the reed became happy: The music was released from its prison. Why does the mind strive after new discoveries? Knowest thou what works this miracle? Tis desire that enriches Life, and the intellect is a child of its womb" (*Secrets* 11).

These poems' thematic content mirrors themes that are frequently found in the

writings of Goethe and Nietzsche and form the substance of Iqbal's reconception of the self or *khudi*. Most notable are the elevation of desire and action over intellect and contemplation, an emphasis on aesthetic rather than moral values, and the centrality of vitality as a mark of virtue. Equipped with the concept of self, Iqbal hopes to free religious thought in Islam from its medieval encrustations, especially the doctrine of self-annihilation that contributed to the reduction of the Muslim minority peoples of India to a state of passivity and decadent helplessness.

Iqbal distills his critique of the Islamic mystical tradition into a single image, the image of the pearl, which—unlike a drop of water—resists reabsorption into the oceanic environment from which it precipitates: "When a drop of water gets the Self's lesson by heart, It makes its worthless existence a pearl" (*Secrets* 20). Thus, Iqbal remarks in his major philosophical work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, "The end of the ego's quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it" (198). Iqbal's philosophical model of the self is a modified version of Leibniz's monads. Monads are for Leibniz the primary entities from which all other things are composed. Every monad possesses some degree of interior perception, through which it mirrors the rest of the universe within itself, and some degree of desire, by which it moves from one perception to the next. So, too, the basic entities of Iqbal's universe; each is to a lesser or greater degree a self. But, unlike Leibniz's monads, which did not causally interact with other monads, Iqbal's selves are not self-enclosed or windowless.

In a letter from June 1936, responding to a synopsis of work about Iqbal's educational philosophy by K. G. Saiyidain, Iqbal comments: "I suppose you are aware of the implications of Leibniz's monadism. According to him the monad (the mind of man) is a closed mind incapable of absorbing external forces. My view is that the monad is essentially assimilative in its nature" (Saiyidain vii). Assimilation, as Iqbal sees it, is a matter of willful action rather than passive contemplation; to assimilate is "a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego, and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts, but something to be made and re-made by continuous action" (*Reconstruction* 198). Cognitive apprehension is assimilation's instrument: "Nose, hand, eye, and ear, thought, imagination, feeling, memory. And understanding—All of these are weapons devised for self-preservation by him that rides into the battle of life, life that is occupied with conquest alone" (*Secrets* 25, 60). But conquest is not expansion. Iqbal considers any war aimed at territorial expansion, for example, to be forbidden. One is to conquer like Mohammad conquered the desert in a story told by Rumi, to which Iqbal refers in his introduction to the English translation of *Secrets of the Self*: "The prophet, when a little boy was once lost in the desert. His nurse Halima was almost beside herself with grief, but while roaming the desert in search of the boy she heard a voice saying: 'Do not grieve, he will not be lost to thee; nay, the whole world will be lost in him'" (ix–xx). Mohammad assimilates the world but does not increase in size; he remains Mohammad. Interior intensity, not exterior expansion, is the perfection of selfhood.

Iqbal identifies Sharia or law and the five pillars of the Islamic faith as the forces necessary to limit the expansive force of self-seeking egotism and delineates their

functions for authentic self-development in the ninth poem in *Secrets of the Self,* titled "Showing That the Education of the Self Has Three Stages: Obedience, Self-control, and Divine Vice-Regency" (72–84). Obedience, for Iqbal, primarily means obedience to the law of Islam. He exhorts his coreligionists: "Oh thou that art emancipated from old Custom, Adorn thy feet once more with the same fine silver chain. Do not complain of the hardness of the Law; do not transgress the statutes of Mohammad" (*Secrets* 74). He then extols the self-control and self-mastery to be won by practicing the five pillars of the faith: confession of divine unity yields the fruit of the fearlessness of he who fears nothing and no one but God; prayer is the dagger that slays sin, forwardness, and wrong; fasting breaches the citadel of sensuality; pilgrimage destroys attachment to one's native land, that is, the sort of European nationalism that Iqbal found deplorable; almsgiving causes the love of riches to pass and makes equality familiar, thereby countering attachment based on race and blood that Iqbal took to be characteristic of European polities. Obedience, religious practice, and acts of self-submission deepen the intensity of one's interior life (egohood), and they promote the self-mastery required for the final stage of self-development: divine vice-regency.

Iqbal's presentation of divine vice-regent is a panegyric on the perfect man. The concept of the "perfect man" has multiple meanings within Islamic tradition. It can refer to Mohammad, who serves as a paradigm for action. In the Islamic mystical tradition, especially in the writings of the Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) and al-Jili (1366–c. 1424), the perfect man is a cosmic principle, (the ontological ground for mediation between God and man) and an esoteric agent (the transhistorical identity of the historical Mohammad that is at work within the destiny of humankind) (Danner 101–6; Siddique). Iqbal frees the perfect man from the deterministic fatalism of Neoplatonic schemes of emanation. Iqbal's perfect man is the yet-to-be-achieved *telos* of an evolutionary process from the collections of the proto-egos that are characteristic of the inorganic nature to the emergence of consciousness, free individuals (of which Adam is the figurative representation in the Koran). In Mohammad, the last of the prophets, according to Iqbal,

> prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot forever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Quran, and the emphasis that it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of the finality [of prophethood]. (*Reconstruction* 126)

After the death of Mohammad "all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin, has come to an end in the history of man" (*Reconstruction* 127). The perfect man is not a prophet; nor, though he has achieved spiritual depth made possible through religious experience, a mystic or a religious scholar. He is a vicegerent—a deputy of God capable of establishing a new political order that Iqbal construes as a "democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth" (*Secrets* xviii).

Iqbal's contributions to the political debate in the waning years of the British Empire were informed by the individualism to which he gave poetic expression in the *Ashrar-I Khudi*. His philosophy of the "self" set him apart, shocking the traditionalists of his day, who he contends failed to see that "the fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of individual men. In an over-organized society the individual is altogether crushed out of existence" (*Reconstruction* 151). On the other hand, he remained deeply Islamic. He was convinced that "the search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity becomes possible [only] with the perception that all human life is spiritual in its origin" (ibid. 146). His experience in Europe while getting his degrees in law and philosophy convinced him that Christianity had failed; race, blood, and nation had displaced the "simple ethics of Jesus." As World War I was intensifying in Europe, Iqbal penned and published the *Ashrar* to uncover those enduring values within Islam that might serve as a new foundation upon which to build a more just society in both the East and the West. Nearly a century later, most of his admirers fear that his vision has been forgotten.

Note

1. In the decades leading to the partition of India in 1947, "communalism" and "nationalism" signified opposing points of view. Nationalists advocated for a unified India; communalists advocated for dividing India into states along ethnic/religious lines that would remain somehow united as a loose federation. Mohammad Iqbal played a significant role in the communalist-nationalist debates after his return to India from Europe in 1908. He was disillusioned by the rising nationalism of pre–World War I Europe and became convinced that the communalist approach was the only viable solution for India's Muslim population. Thus, in his now famous presidential address to the All-India Muslim League in 1930, he called for the amalgamation of the Punjab North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan, into a single self-governing country regardless of its independence from the British, a call that eventually resulted in the formation of modern-day Pakistan and has deeply influenced the thinking of other Muslim states, most notably Iran (Anjum). For another recent biography of Iqbal, see Shafique.

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Seeing the Exquisite Shadings: Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) as Colorful Core Text

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> Was ist eine Virginia Wiese gegenüber eine Texas Prairie?
>
> Peter Handke, *Der kurzen Brief zum langen Abschied* (1972)

In an age when students need assistance to read any text written pre-1960—much less to tackle cerebral authors such as Henry James or T. S. Elliot—assigning Willa Cather's 1927 modernist masterwork *Death Comes for the Archbishop* might require students to undergo a lengthy critical catechism, an initiation into the "secret rites" of close reading. Only a recent convert to Cather myself, I have not yet dared to proselytize students, but this paper explores why the effort might be worthwhile. Cather's subject matter—French Catholic missionaries in the mid-nineteenth-century Southwest—is decidedly arcane to twenty-first-century young people at our HBCU (Historically Black College or University) but at least her sources have been thoroughly scrutinized and explained by her longtime devotees. It has long been known, for instance, that Jean-Baptiste Lamy is the "real" archbishop of the American Southwest on whose life Cather based that of her protagonist Jean Marie Latour (Mutter 95). It has long been known that Cather came across Lamy's story in *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf* by William Joseph Howlett (Woodress 486) and that Machebeuf himself is fictionalized into Father Joseph Vaillant, Latour's friend and complementary "missing" half in Cather's study of the ideal priestly character. Often

considered Cather's best book, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (hereafter *DCA*) was also inspired by Cather's own trips to the Southwest in 1912, 1914, 1915, 1925, and then again in 1926 (Woodress 474–76). John Hilgart suggests why this historical moment and its cultural conundrum seem to have attracted Cather:

> Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821 and just twenty-five years later, New Mexico was ceded to the United States. Cultural animosity, as fairly represented by Cather, was widely dispersed, indicative of the (even greater) lack of coherence following independence. (Hilgart)

Hilgart notes the volatile mix of various Indian tribes (Apache, Navajo, and many others), Catholic Mexicans with an "uncontrolled Catholic clergy" (ibid.), and white Protestant Americans moving in to take advantage of trading opportunities. He notes, "All vied for power and cultural self-determination" (ibid.). Into this fascinating fusion (and *con*fusion), enter two French priests (Lamy/Latour and Machebeuf/Vaillant) charged with the spiritual rule of a territory so immense and wild that it has not even been fully mapped. In fact, one of Cather's finest accomplishments in the narrative is to convey a sense of the world's vast spaces and the huge chunks of time needed to cross mountains and deserts on foot, horseback, or muleback (Cather 199). Critic Sarah Mutter makes the point by citing just a segment of one of Latour's itineraries: "Latour goes from Riom to Paris to Cincinnati to New Orleans to Texas to New Mexico to Old Mexico and back to New Mexico—all before the action of the novel has begun" (72). She continues, "Latour and Vaillant seem to be always in transit, always on their way somewhere: always in a space of betweenness, 'trying to reach' their next stop" (73). Mutter goes so far as to call it an "ethos of betweenness" (ibid.).

Famous for her "pictorial" bent, Cather shared with her readers the works of visual art that inspired her choice of title, her prologue in Rome, and much of the narrative's content and style. The title *Death Comes for the Archbishop* alludes to Albrecht Dürer (Schwind 72) or Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death* (Woodress 474). Cather wanted the novel to resemble the legends of medieval saints, those episodic narratives of temptations, folk interactions, and miracles that compose a hagiography (Bloom and Bloom 479). Cather also said she was thinking of Jehan Georges Vibert's painting *The Missionary's Story* when she wrote the prologue in Rome. She also spoke of her desire to emulate *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's* rather flat, monochromatic murals in her own descriptive style. These details, thanks to James Woodress's "The Genesis of the Prologue of Death Comes for the Archbishop" and other studies, are now generally known. What is less well understood is how Cather transmogrified external visual cues into the narrative insights or "visions" that she shares with her readers. Says Woodress, "The *Archbishop* . . . represented an intensely personal experience, in conception and growth. It was not so much a piece of fiction—a mere story—as it was her vision of life and attitude toward truth. . . . The fact is her experiences of life were the book and the book was her life" (484–85).

The probability that a Virginia-born, Nebraska-bred woman such as Willa Cather could describe in utterly convincing, *intimate* detail the secret machinations of cardinals wielding their power in 1848 Rome is just as infinitesimally small as the probability that a young, privately bred village woman could write convincingly of life in a military garrison. But neither situation is/was impossible. To perform such a

miracle, one simply needs to be, in those well-known words of Henry James (source of the lady-and-the-garrison example), one of the people "on whom nothing is lost" (James 440–41). Cather was assuredly such a one.

This paper examines the "Prologue: At Rome" (especially p. 4) and the Southwestern cave scene in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* with attention to Cather's famous use of color and pictorial detail to create her exquisitely fused and subtle shadings of meaning. The fineness and acuity of Cather's embedded moral observations make this a modernist core text that invites postmodern scrutiny and that even reverberates with our contemporary cries for social justice. Moreover, the critical thinking skills needed to "see" and appreciate Cather's colorful work are precisely those we seek to cultivate in ourselves and all other students of the liberal arts and sciences.

The Prologue "in Heaven" (Rome)

> "Beginnings," murmured the Venetian, "there have been so many. But nothing ever comes from over there [America] but trouble and appeals for money."
>
> —DCA, 6

The painting that inspired the prologue, Vibert's *The Missionary's Story*, depicts elegantly dressed Church officials inside a stately, high-ceilinged room, listening to a rather ragged-looking cleric who has clearly just arrived from a road trip. Cather, however, moves the scene out of doors to a "hidden garden" and devotes considerable attention to the men's view from the Sabine Hills (cf. *The Rape of the Sabine Women*—a painting subject known to many). The men are gazing across an intervening landscape to the dome of St. Peter's, the ultimate symbol of papal power, in the distance. So great is the pope's power, the current one's name is never even mentioned in the scene. His cardinals represent him—perhaps as he would have them do so, perhaps not. The real nature of ecclesiastic power is hazy, like the blue-gray skyline. The clerical host for the "confab" even controls the celestial lighting effects by setting dinner hour "eccentrically" early—an hour before sunset:

> It was early when the Spanish Cardinal and his guests sat down to dinner. The sun was still good for an hour of supreme splendor, and across the shining folds of country the low profile of the city barely fretted the skyline—indistinct except for the dome of St. Peter's, bluish grey like the flattened top of a great balloon, just a flash of copper light on its soft metallic surface. The Cardinal had an eccentric preference for beginning his dinner at this time in the late afternoon, when the vehemence of the sun suggested motion. The light was full of action and had a peculiar quality of climax—of splendid finish. It was both intense and soft, with a ruddiness as of much-multiplied candlelight, an aura of red in its flames. It bored into the ilex trees, illuminating their mahogany trunks and blurring their dark foliage; it warmed the bright green of the orange trees and the rose of the oleander blooms to gold; sent congested spiral patterns quivering over the damask and plate and crystal. The churchmen kept their rectangular clerical caps on their heads to protect them from the sun. The three Cardinals wore black cassocks with crimson pipings and crimson buttons, the Bishop a long black coat over his violet vest. (Cather 4).

The unusual use of "fret" as a verb keeps the reader suspended between its very different meanings. Is the "low profile of the city" bothering or worrying the skyline or should we imagine a fretted ceiling—perhaps like the inside of St. Peter's dome. The light itself is "full of action"— almost orgasmic in its "peculiar quality of climax—of splendid finish." Cather's oxymoronic use of the adjective "soft" with "metallic" and then yoked with "intense" reveals the impossible ambiguities at the heart of the passage. Sunlight is being oddly likened to "much-multiplied" candlelight. Not only does the light move, it can actually "bore" like some insect or carpenter into trees, both "illuminating" their "mahogany trunks" (a mahogany-colored ilex?) and "blurring their dark foliage" at the very same time. The image of mere light producing "congested spiral patterns quivering over" the wealthy host's table linens and sumptuous settings may not bear up under rational scansion, but works quite well in the terms Cather has set for herself. If light can be "full of action," then perhaps it can do all these things such as "spiral." After selecting red (Kuhlken 373) as her dominant color for this sunset scene—red, after all, is the color of the blood of Christ, the Sangre de Cristo mountains and the clay soil in the Southwest—Cather lets the light more conventionally "warm" the tropical colors "bright green" and "rose." The rose is thereby transmuted into gold, an alchemy that raises still more questions about the goals of the Church. Given the impossibly lively actions of the setting sunlight, the clerics are perhaps wise to cover their heads! They wear familiar costumes revealing their rank in the church hierarchy: black and red for the three cardinals; black and scarlet for the "lowly" visiting bishop.

The Edenic garden and dining area are perched on a rocky cliff with stairs leading up and down to the villa (cf. "In my Father's House are many mansions" [John 14:2]). Stairs are, as always, symbolic of the union of different realms: the feminine Sabine Hills/masculine Rome; Old World/New World; Heaven/Earth (or Heaven/Earth/Hell). One is also reminded of the early sections of Job's story where God and Satan meet in Heaven to discuss the tests that Job must undergo.

The Venetian cardinal, Spanish cardinal, and French cardinal significantly refer to the part of the world they are discussing (America's Southwest) using different terminology. The Frenchman and Italian say "Le Mexique," while the Spaniard says "New Spain," clearly conflating secular colonial politics with spiritual concerns. The men no longer chat in Latin— official language of the Vatican—but in the other lingua franca: French (Cather 5). Cather suggests their cosmopolitan world by including brief phrases in Italian and French, untranslated. She says, for example, of the bicultural Spanish cardinal: "With his *caffé oscuro* eyes, he had a fresh, pleasant English mouth, and an open manner" (5). His name is García María de Allande, and he used to wield even more power under a previous pope. Now he plays—we are shocked to hear it—tennis (!). The men chat about art, opera, one admitting his knowledge of America is "chiefly drawn from the romances of Fenimore Cooper" (10). The men's wearing of their caps to protect them from the sun (4) foreshadows the deadly desert heat that awaits their nominee. The missionary (named Ferrand, perhaps to connote his "iron" disposition) mentions that the desert in the Southwest "has a peculiar horror" (7)—fissures that open up and entrap the unwary. This idea, too, will return with both literal fissures and figural schisms affecting Latour's real

and spiritual landscape. The new archbishop they are appointing (with such apparent casualness) must be, says the Spanish cardinal, a man "full of zeal, and, above all, intelligent. . . . He must be a man to whom order is necessary—as dear as life" (8). National stereotypes are then trotted out. The French are great missionaries; the Spanish great martyrs. And the Germans? "Oh, the Germans classify, but the French arrange!" (9). And so a Frenchman it will be: our future hero Jean Marie Latour, the Great Arranger. He will be the man to "drink in" a country of bison and *serpents à sonnettes.* Cather counts on her readers' ability to translate the charming-sounding *serpents à sonnettes* into its better known, less charming English equivalent: rattlesnakes.

Critic Klaus Stich sees the prologue as Cather asserting herself against (by inserting herself *into)* a world of male domination:

> The whole scenario amounts to a feminist challenge to the power of Rome in the distance; at the same time, it suggests the precariousness of the dinner guests' own eminence in their quasi-retreat from Rome and perilous closeness to a symbolic fall. (59)

A shorter reaction to the prologue might be to simply ask in wonder, "How does Cather *know* this world so different from her own?" To answer that question—"by means of her imagination"—really only further begs the question.

But Cather's skills do clearly take the form of fused, often oxymoronic ideas and their implied moral shadings. Our eventual hero, Jean-Marie Latour, is a paragon of openness and intellect—amazingly tolerant of the syncretic forms that Catholicism takes in his new home. But he is by no means perfect or ready for sainthood when we meet him. He is, in fact, dangerously lost in the desert and just as subject to temptation as Christ once was in his arid Holy Land.

Enter the Serpent

Cather's novel is, in fact, full of serpents both human and reptilian. A brief look at the scene in the Indian Cavern reveals that Cather is as skilled with dark color shadings as she is with light. While Latour's malaise in the cave is not so extreme as E. M. Forster's heroine's in the Marabar Caves of India (*Passage to India,* 1924), something similar is in play, and it likewise may relate to repressed sexuality:

> Looking up, the Bishop saw a peculiar formation in the rocks; two rounded ledges, one directly over the other, with a mouth-like opening between. They suggested two great stone lips, slightly parted and thrust outward. Up to this mouth Jacinto climbed quickly by footholds well known to him. Having mounted, he lay down on the lower lip, and helped the Bishop to clamber up. . . .
>
> A few moments later the Bishop slid after Jacinto and the blankets, through the orifice, into the throat of the cave. Within stood a wooden ladder, like that used in kivas, and down this he easily made his way to the floor.
>
> He found himself in a lofty cavern, shaped somewhat like a Gothic chapel, of vague outline,—the only light within was that which came through the narrow aperture between the stone lips. Great as was his need of shelter, the Bishop, on his way down the ladder, was struck by a reluctance, an extreme distaste for the place. The air in the cave was glacial, penetrated to the very bones, and he detected at once a fetid odour, not very strong but highly disagreeable. . . .

> "Padre," said the Indian boy, "I do not know if it was right to bring you here. This place is used by my people for ceremonies and is known only to us. When you go out from here, you must forget." (Cather 127–28)

A major source of Latour's and our uneasiness is the idea introduced only a few pages earlier in this fourth book of *DCA*, which is itself titled "Snake Root." On page 123, Father Latour reports on a centuries-old rumor that the local Indians had a gigantic snake hidden in the mountains to which they sacrificed "young babies" and "thus diminished their numbers." Latour quickly adds a more rational explanation for the drop in the Indian population: "It seemed much more likely that the contagious diseases brought by the white men were the real cause of the shrinkage of the tribe" (123). But Latour also recounts the story of a young woman who fled to the Church out of fear her baby might be sacrificed. The suggestion of a giant snake in a dark cave somewhere is too powerful for readers to just forget.

So when Latour flees with his young servant Jacinto into a secret cave, Cather has no need to bring on an actual snake. We bring our own. Add to this Cather's insistent use of threatening female imagery—labia and lips that threaten to consume the uninitiated trespasser—plus a foul smell, plus a dark hole that Jacinto hurriedly closes up with rocks, plus a weird roaring sound (the River Styx on a rampage?), and one has a thoroughly disturbing image of a horrible Underworld. No matter how much Jacinto tries to "sweeten the air" of this cave, we and Latour find it mortally dangerous. Latour is prepared to accept and admire the Indians. His Catholicism allows for syncretic features: a Holy Family that visits Indians and not just the Jews. But Latour draws the line at pagan rites (even imagined ones). He is ready to leave this Heart of Darkness moment as soon as he possibly can. The cavern seems to represent for Latour forbidden, uncontrollable impulses—perhaps sexual in nature: "But the cave, which had probably saved his life [from a blizzard] he remembered with horror. No tales of wonder, he told himself, would ever tempt him into a cavern hereafter" (Cather 133).

Latour has arguably been steeled for the cavern experience by his previous encounter with the pure evil of Buck Scales, thief, wife beater, and "degenerate murderer," earlier on in his peregrinations (Cather 77). Harder to judge are Latour's encounters with the rogue priests supposedly under his purview. But their fathering of children and entrees into commerce do not always coincide with purely evil natures. Father Martinez, in fact, conducts Mass with extraordinary sincerity and beauty—a holy rite in the hands of an unholy man. (Cather's fascination with such paradoxical fusions is unrelenting.) And long before postcolonial criticism made the term "hybridity" so popular, Cather celebrates it. Latour's enthusiasm for the "Italian-Moorish-Spanish-Mexican-Indian [church] bell" (Mutter 83–84) becomes a telling, tolling allegory of cultural fusion and hybridity.

As Latour and Vaillant move through their various "stations" of priestly life, Latour eventually manages to fuse these discrete life experiences into a timeless/timely Gestalt. As death approaches, Latour brings all his experiences into a "spatially arrayed consciousness" (Mutter 90). He "sits" in the "middle of his own mind" (Mutter 91). Though we cannot see exactly what he sees, readers sense that Latour has achieved an aesthetic victory, a victory for humanism, and a victory for God. He

may even have achieved "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." In addition, he has left behind as a legacy his great cathedral made of yellow desert rock (inspired by the real Santa Fe Cathedral), something he recognizes as an act of both vanity and contrition. Cather's own cathedral is, of course, the novel itself.

Conclusion: ". . . Thousand-Year Soup"

Cather wisely balances her "fastidious" Father Latour with his boon companion Father Vaillant, a man of the people not above some hucksterism when it comes to fund-raising. The "bromance" between the two lifelong friends is purely innocent, and Latour's last thoughts are of his friend, but both feel a sense of French superiority they cannot conceal at the dinner table: "There is nearly a thousand years of history in this soup," Latour says of the *soupe à l'oignon* (38–39). Still, recipe substitutions have been made (onions for leeks), creating a "fused" cuisine appropriate to their American context. It is difficult to know if the men's sense of superiority to the simple Mexicans, wily Indians, and rather venal Americans is condoned, condemned, or merely just "passed along" by Cather. The truth is that no perspective is pure. Cather's point of view—especially considering her Virginia/Nebraska roots—is remarkably worldly and sophisticated, but decidedly and inevitably "white." Even her admiration for the hybridized (e.g., the two white mules who are far more valuable than horses) is fixed in a given time, place, and culture—however liberal.

Recent discussions on the canonization of a figure quite analogous to Lamy/Latour help reveal the problem. Father Junípero Serra arrived in California in 1769 to convert the natives. Cather mentions him in her own tale as the man to whom the Holy Family supposedly appeared (Cather 280) right there in the American West. Latour believes that such miracles of syncretism are true not in the supernatural sense but in the intellectual (i.e., allegorical) one. But according to a January 2015 article by Joe Mozingo, Rev. Serra is not revered by all. He is both "hailed" and "pilloried" as "the Columbus of California" (8). So much depends on one's point of view. Once again cardinals and committees in Rome decide on matters affecting the Indians and their sense of self and history. Where Cather would stand in the 2015 debate over Serra's canonization is anybody's guess, but she surely prepared the critical ground for such a debate in her extraordinary 1927 novel.

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Modern Political Effects of Medieval Creation-Eternity Debates

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This paper argues that medieval debates in the writings especially of Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas concerning the creation versus eternity of the universe ("the All") had an important, subsequent effect on European conceptions of political order. In brief, the paper speculates that by giving the theory of creation *ex nihilo* a philosophic respectability (though holding it indemonstrable), lacking since Parmenides' quip that "out of nothing, nothing comes," these debates made conceivable and possible a "creative" alternative to the political *techne* model for generating political order expounded in Plato's *Republic*.

The essay explores the implications for its theme in *The Guide of the Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides, who arguably shows a clearer apprehension than Thomas Aquinas's often obfuscatory account in the *Summa Theologica* of the profound philosophic and practical implications flowing from the biblical account of a created (vs. an eternal) universe. (And, this, regardless of where Maimonides' own sympathies may have been in this debate.) This paper faithfully attempts to summarize Maimonides' argument in part III, chapter 13, and then draw upon this summary to articulate the differences *between* a crafted *and* a created object (including a human being). Finally, the paper will speculate briefly on how the idea of creation influenced conceptions of the origins of political order in modern thinkers such as Hobbes and Rousseau.

In his twelfth-century Arabic-language masterpiece, the Jewish thinker Maimonides ostensibly writes to a former disciple perplexed by apparent differences *between* biblical revelation and law *and* the Greek philosophical inheritance alive

in southern Spain for several centuries among the three Abrahamic faiths. In part II, chapters 13–25, Maimonides lays out the various differences *between* especially Plato and Aristotle *and* the biblical account of creation, indicating his reasons for preferring the latter, and then in part III, chapter 13, he shows in some detail how the theory of creation differs from a teleological account of both the world and human beings. It is this latter subject I wish to explore in order to highlight the differences between a created and an eternal, teleological world and universe.

In part III, chapter 13, Maimonides begins by observing that purpose adheres only to that which has passed from nonexistence into existence through the action of an external agent, and since God is eternal, it is meaningless to ask the purpose or final cause of his existence. After a digression on Aristotle (who "holds the eternity of the universe"), Maimonides turns to the view of those supporters of the theory of creation out of nothing that "all that has been made exists only for the human species so that it should worship God" (451). He proceeds to critique this view through the stages of a reductio ad absurdum to arrive at the "correct answer," which is that all that can said of the purpose of creation is that it was the Will of God:

> Thus . . . the quest for the final end of all . . . collapses. For we say that in virtue of His will He has brought into existence all the parts of the world, some of which have been intended for their own sakes, whereas others for the sake of some other thing that is intended for its own sake. (452)

And God has created all, of himself, and for his own glory, "and for no other purpose." Even objects of creation, such as stars and human beings, are not ascribed a purpose carefully speaking, says Maimonides, but only given a specific nature, such as the ability to give light or have dominion over the fish of the sea, respectively. Maimonides concludes this discussion by observing again that we "are obliged to believe that all that exists was intended . . . according to His volition" (454). And, again, "we shall seek no other cause or final end" whatever, except for "His volition" (ibid.).

Now, what are the implications of Maimonides' characterizations of the theory of creation *ex nihilo* and how might they be summarized? Before turning to this question, it will be useful to look briefly at another piece of Maimonides' text, concerning various theories of the genesis or eternity of the universe ("the All"). In part II, chapter 13 of *The Guide,* Maimonides distinguishes "our" theory of creation out of nothing from the Platonic theory, the Aristotelian theory, and the godless theory of the Epicureans. The relevant point here is the care Maimonides takes to correct the imprecise view among us that Plato's account in *The Timaeus* of a divine craftsman is of "the same belief that we have." His point is that the Platonic theory assumes the preexistence of some primary substance that the divine Craftsman subsequently informs or shapes, while "we believe that the heaven was generated out of nothing after a state of absolute nonexistence." And, again, Maimonides concludes that "every follower of the Law of Moses and Abraham . . . is to believe that there is nothing eternal in any way . . . with God" (284) and that "the bringing into existence out of nonexistence is for the deity not an impossibility" (285).

Now, let us attempt to gather up the relevant implications for our theme of Maimonides' discussion of the difference between a created and an eternal universe. On

Maimonides' interpretation of the biblical account of creation, God willfully created "the All" (to include form, matter, and time) for no purpose other than the act of creation itself and "for Himself." No final, preexisting cause can be identified, and even God's creations such as stars and human beings are not ascribed purposes on this account, carefully speaking, but rather only certain characteristics. Nor can a comprehensive, ascending chain of teleological purposes be presumed in a created universe (the view of Thomas Aquinas to the contrary notwithstanding).

Implied elements of this account might be described in more modern philosophic language as the ideas that *contingency* is essential to nature and *will* to both God and human beings. Additionally, although we did not inspect Maimonides on Mosaic law (III, chs. 31, 33), he says that while the law has both rational and moral benefits, the obligation to obey derives not from its wisdom or morality but from its being the expression of willful, divine *commandment.* In more modern terminology we might render the implication of this insight by saying that *positivity* is essential to law, though its rationality and morality are not thereby excluded.

Now, how might we contrast this account of a willfully created universe "from nothing" with the teleological, ontologically dualist account of the Greek rationalist philosophers, especially as given and implied in *The Republic* of Plato. What follows is a condensed, interpretive account that hopefully is not controversial in its mere characterizations.

As in generally known, in the Greek rationalist world view, both form and matter are given eternally; the essence of any object is its "detachable" form, which is known by intellection; matter adds nothing positive to form; and both thinking and making are purposive and involve discovering and copying preexisting forms or models. Even Plato's divine craftsman in *The Timaeus* only molds or informs preexisting matter into preexisting forms.

By contrast, the account of cosmological "creation" in the ancient Hebrew and early Christian texts entails the ideas that creation is not purposive in the Greek sense, that is, it is not directed toward a distinctively conceived and antecedently existing end or form in advance of the act of willful creation; and, by implication, in creation and in a created (versus crafted) object, there is no intellectively graspable form distinguished from its accidental embodiment.

Several more implications follow. Creation is an act of will that can exceed regulations prescribed by reason. Contingency is an important aspect of created objects (including physical nature and human beings), that is, their "accidental" embodiments are not necessitated by, nor can they be deduced from, their form or idea. And, finally, there can be no degrees of being in creation as there are in the Greek concept of *ousia*: if something is created *ex nihilo*, "it must be entirely present as soon as it has ceased to be wholly absent" (Foster 464, n. 1). (Hence the impossibility of an ascending chain of more perfect ends in a created universe; in such a universe, "lower" beings are no less *real* than "higher" ones, an insight about the reality of matter that eventually makes possible modern empirical science.)

It is instructive at this point, by way of further illumination of the difference between a created and crafted object, to consider the case of modern political sovereignty contrasted with the case of the political craftsman in Plato's *Republic.* The

idea of the state (vs. the *polis*), as articulated especially by Hobbes and Rousseau, requires the presence of a sovereign will that creates or imposes upon itself its own constitutional form (a creative act by definition), contrasted with Plato's account of a founder as constitutional craftsman, standing outside the *polis* and forming or informing an inert, citizen subject matter. The modern state, by contrast, is created or "artificial" (as men imitate God's art in Hobbes's usage) because (1) it is the product of a sovereign will that informs itself (clearer in Rousseau than Hobbes); (2) it is informed by no antecedently existing and conceptually distinct purpose (Hobbes omits final causality in the *Leviathan*'s subtitle); and (3) therefore its essence cannot be separated from its existence by philosophic intellect and used as an external standard against which to critique existing states, which, by implication, can only be judged historically. Additionally, since the modern state's existence cannot be separated from its essence, its realization (as in the case of Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God) inheres in it, or completes it in a way that Plato has Socrates explicitly deny to the ideal *polis* of *The Republic* in the conclusion to book IX, where Socrates is explicitly indifferent to the actualization of the *callipolis*, except as a model for internal order in the souls of certain rare individuals.

By way of summarizing my argument, I will simply note that this paper is predicated upon the observation that Western civilization of the past five centuries or so ("modernity") is (1) characterized by the increasing tension with, and even liberation from, Greek intellectual forms, modern Enlightenment rationalism to the contrary notwithstanding; (2) that this liberation has been led by the largely implicit spread of the idea of "creativity" in both thought and action, as initially developed in medieval creation-eternity debates; and (3) that the idea of the "creative" provides a speculative basis for appreciation of the concomitant spread of diversity and plurality, with all of its attendant cultural advantages and political-constitutional disadvantages.[1] (That is, if the creative deconstruction of all inherited hierarchy issues in the validation of all difference, then some sort of crisis of authority would seem inevitable and, in fact, is already under way.)

Finally, in terms of the conference theme, the role of medieval texts in illuminating the origins of the spread of "creativity" in thought and action is almost too obvious to state for the constitutive elements of modern and postmodern secular identity. In a longer paper this progression could be traced from fourteenth-century British voluntarist/nominalist thinker William of Ockham's theories about the freedom of both divine and human will (and the role of government as a mere external check upon human freedom) to Germany, to which he emigrated and where it eventually appears in its purest form in the Kantian account of the autonomy of the human, moral will.

Note

1. For a critical view of the effects of the "creative" for conflating knowing with doing and making, see Strauss, especially 572–573. For a more positive view of the "creative," see Foster (464, n.7). For the view that modernity is characterized by less, not more, diversity, see Dupré, especially 249.

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Back to the Future: Erasmus and Machiavelli in 2040

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All too often, critics of expensive liberal arts education ask why college students need to study classic texts. In an era of smartphones and Twitter, how could they speak to our future? I regard these attitudes as a challenge to faculty to show how classic texts can be relevant to the sorts of problems our world will face in the coming years.

In my freshman Liberal Studies course, we read Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Erasmus's *The Education of a Christian Prince.* On their own, these texts sometimes appear boring to students who have little appreciation for the politics of late Renaissance and early Reformation Europe. How to transform Lorenzo de Medici into Cesare Borgia or educate future Holy Roman emperors as Christian statesmen holds little interest for many nineteen-year-olds, despite the best efforts of the HBO potboiler series *The Borgias.* However, I thought that if I hypothesized a twenty-first-century scenario and compelled students to use these texts to resolve a future political conundrum, they might well become quite passionate about Erasmus and Machiavelli. I was not proven wrong.

I chose to have the students ponder a hypothetical situation in 2040. Albert Zimbe, a 2018 graduate of New York University's Liberal Studies undergraduate program, is president of a fictitious African country named South Kenbabwe. As leader of the African Unity Party, he is up for reelection to a second six-year term, and, although he has championed a multiracial society, he now faces a demagogic opponent, John Ngabe, who spews racial hatred of whites and Asians in a cynical attempt to garner the support of the black majority for his People's Party.

Rich in diamonds and iron ore, South Kenbabwe is heavily dependent upon foreign direct investment for its prosperous mines. The national budget is based largely on taxation of foreign corporations, which have contributed to the building of the economic and physical infrastructure of the country. Zimbe has refrained from expropriating the largely white-owned farms, knowing that the efficient administration of the agricultural sector is South Kenbabwe's bulwark against the famine that has beset other areas of Africa. Because of his evenhanded racial policies, Zimbe is popular among descendants of white colonialists, foreign investors, and the largely middle-class Asian population who constitute the majority of professionals and small-business owners in the country. Although relatively poor compared to whites and Asians, the income of the black populace improved markedly during the first four years of Zimbe's presidency, in part because of his support for the union movements among mine and farm workers and in part because of his suppression of government corruption. However, the collapse of the derivatives market in world capitals has caused a global recession. As a result of the decline in consumer spending, manufacturing sectors no longer need nearly the volume of raw materials from South Kenbabwe's mines, and unemployment is rampant in the countryside and the streets of the capital.

Zimbe's longtime political foe, John Ngabe, seeks to exploit the situation in the upcoming election, painting Zimbe as a pawn of foreign interests, white farmers, and Asian businessmen. He claims that Zimbe is in the pay of neighboring foreign powers. Preaching a message of racial animus, Ngabe advocates the expropriation of whites' and Asians' property and the nationalization of the mines. Zimbe believes that Ngabe and his cronies will seize control of the diamond trade and the iron mines to make themselves rich, and he fears that their incompetence in administering the agricultural sector will create a manmade famine, which they will exploit for their own profit.

Zimbe's pollsters have told him that, due to the recession, he will undoubtedly lose the election by ten points. His political operatives have shown him People's Party documents (unsigned by Ngabe) indicating that, if elected, Ngabe will abolish the constitution, declare himself president-for-life, make mass arrests of political opponents, and execute the National Unity Party cadre, including Zimbe himself. Some of Zimbe's advisers are urging him to avoid that outcome by "fixing the election" and arresting Ngabe and his cronies.

Zimbe fondly remembers his days as an undergraduate at New York University, where he studied Erasmus's *The Education of a Christian Prince* and Machiavelli's *The Prince* during his freshman year. Although he no longer actively practices his faith, he was raised an Anglican and still has the greatest respect for the Church, so he is not put off by the title of Erasmus's treatise. He believes that these two texts hold the answer to his dilemma. Zimbe asks his advisers (i.e., the class) to split into three groups: the first, advocates of Machiavelli; second, advocates of Erasmus; third, the undecided, who will make a recommendation to Zimbe based on the presentations by the first two groups. Should he, like Machiavelli's prince, hold onto power at any cost, knowing that his welfare and that of the state are coextensive? Or should he, like Erasmus's prince, accept defeat rather than subject his country to the civil war

that is sure to follow from a fixed election?

The Machiavelli and Erasmus teams are each given fifteen minutes to expound arguments based on the respective texts to support their position. After each fifteen-minute presentation, the presenting team is cross-examined by the opposing team and the undecideds for ten minutes, probing for weaknesses in their arguments. Finally, the Machiavelli and Erasmus teams are given three minutes each for a summation. Following the debate, the undecideds confer with Zimbe to decide the "winner" of the debate. I have used this exercise in eight classes, and the students usually advance a common set of arguments.

Although Machiavelli's prince advocates a form of ethical egoism (what's good for me is good for the people), Machiavelli teams normally adopt a teleological position common to realpolitik: the end justifies the means. They emphasize that Machiavelli's prince is not inherently evil: "he ought not to quit good courses if he can help it, but should know how to follow evil courses if he must" (Machiavelli 46). They argue that, in Zimbe's case, he must, lest democracy fall, racial injustice reign, corruption spread, and murder (Zimbe's and their own) ensue. Machiavelli recognized that the wise man "who becomes a Prince through the favor of the people should always keep on good terms with them" (25), but, in this case, economic conditions are beyond Zimbe's control. The Machiavelli advisers suggest that he should take heed of Machiavelli's warning about the people who "are thankless, fickle, false, studious to avoid danger, greedy of gain, devoted to you while you are able to confer benefits upon them . . . but in the hour of need they turn against you" (43–44). The Machiavelli teams typically suggest that there is an informal social contract between the prince and the people; for example, Zimbe and the voters, whereby the voters place their faith in him and he rules for the benefit of all under the law. But the people have violated the trust that Zimbe has placed in them. Foolishly following the demagogue Ngabe whose values are repugnant, they are simply either too stupid or too venal to know better. " A prudent Prince neither can nor ought to keep his word when to keep it is hurtful to him and the causes which led him to pledge it are removed. If all men were good, this would not be good advice, but since they are dishonest and do not keep faith with you, you, in return, need not keep faith with them" (Machiavelli 46). Since the people have broken faith with him and hail Ngabe's invective against the legal equality of all South Kenbabweans, the Machiavelli team routinely argues that he need not follow the law.

Above all, the Machiavelli supporters claim that Zimbe must be practical. If he expects to remain the head of a political movement, he cannot forsake his supporters, who depend upon government jobs for their livelihood, nor abandon them to Ngabe's paramilitary thugs, who will kill them in the street with impunity after Zimbe loses the election. "For when the class, be it the people, the soldiers, or the nobles, on whom you judge it necessary to rely for your support, is corrupt, you must needs adapt yourself to its humours, and satisfy these, in which case virtuous conduct will only prejudice you" (Machiavelli 51). Zimbe must place his supporters higher than personal ethical foibles. "It is essential, therefore, for a Prince who desires to maintain his position, to have learned to be other than good" (Machiavelli 40). That does not mean that Zimbe should openly seize power, for that would undermine his

efforts to save the country. Instead, for his own welfare and that of the people, he should be disingenuous. "He need never hesitate . . . to incur the reproach of those vices without which his authority can hardly be preserved; for if he well consider the whole matter, he will find that there may be a line of conduct having the appearance of virtue, to follow which would be his ruin, and that there may be another course having the appearance of vice, by following which his safety and well-being are secured" (Machiavelli 40). Accordingly, "fixing the election," which has the appearance of dishonesty, is necessary if he is to preserve everything he has so arduously accomplished. Although civil war will certainly ensue between Ngabe, convinced rightly that the election has been stolen, and Zimbe, "you ought never to suffer your designs to be crossed in order to avoid war, since war is not so to be avoided, but is only deferred to your disadvantage" (Machiavelli 8). Zimbe can most likely rely on Western powers, who are heavily invested in the country's diamond and iron ore mines and most likely fear Ngabe's threat of nationalization. Finally, the Machiavelli team advises that refusing to fix the election will have irreversible consequences. "He who is the cause of another's greatness is himself undone" (Machiavelli 8).

The Erasmus team commonly provides a different image of the prince. Erasmus cites Aristotle to argue that the prince must be an individual of "the highest and most complete integrity" (51). Following Plato's *Republic,* Erasmus suggests that "unless you are a philosopher, you cannot be a prince, only a tyrant. . . . Being a philosopher is in practice the same as being a Christian" (15). Hence, power and morality are intimately tied together. The Erasmus team frequently quotes this passage, "nothing [is] really good unless associated with moral worth" (13). Although Erasmus endorsed pure monarchy and the mixed model of republicanism and aristocracy, his political view held one thing in common with contemporary democracy. "What makes a prince a great man except the consent of his subjects?" (Erasmus 89). That compact is manifest in the rule of law and "the happiest situation arises when the prince is obeyed by all and himself obeys the laws" (Erasmus 79). Accordingly, Erasmus teams frequently argue that by "fixing the election," Zimbe would not rule by the consent of his people, and that far from being a great man, he would not even be a good man. He is not only betraying his people; he is betraying himself. "The good, wise, and upright prince is simply a sort of embodiment of the law" (Erasmus 79). By corrupting the law, he in effect corrupts himself, or, as Erasmus argues, "it is impossible for a prince to harm the state without harming himself" (66).

The Erasmus advisors contend that in fixing the election, Zimbe would in effect abolish democracy—the very thing that he wants to save. The Machiavelli advisers may argue that it is only temporary, that they will otherwise follow the demands of the law and that they are not abolishing the constitution. On the contrary, in another six years, a new presidential election would be scheduled. But the Erasmus team typically retorts that, once this election is fixed, what is to stop Machiavelli advisers from fixing subsequent elections, confident that it is in the best interests of the country—-and themselves. After all, they wish to remain in power as well. The Erasmus team therefore uses the slippery-slope argument to suggest that, once made, this decision will corrupt the entire political process, citing Erasmus: "The corruption of an evil prince spreads more quickly and widely than the contagion of any plague"

(21). They suggest that for the good of the country and its democracy, Zimbe should accept the election results. "Give up the position of prince," writes Erasmus, "rather than become a bad man" (51).

The students usually have a sobering realization. They are most likely condemning Zimbe to his death. "A good prince has the obligation of looking to the welfare of his people even at the cost of his own life if need be" (Erasmus 14). Hence, Zimbe will face martyrdom and most likely so will his advisers. Is that something they would be willing to do for their people and country, even though the majority would not even appreciate their sacrifice until years hence, after Ngabe has despoiled South Kenbabwe?

The climax to the debate between the Machiavelli and Erasmus advisers usually turns on the interpretation of a specific passage in Erasmus. Erasmus writes, "But if people are obstinate and resist what is to their own advantage, then either you will have to go along with them for the time being and gradually win them over to your plans, or do this by some skillful strategy or some benign deception" (73). Would not fixing the election be just that, a "benign deception"? If so, don't the very words of Erasmus support the Machiavelli advisers? Many an Erasmus team member has squirmed when the Machiavelli team brings this passage up; yet, some have the poise to ask whether fixing the election is "benign"? After all, is breaking faith with the people innocuous? Is destroying democracy harmless? Is corrupting ourselves without consequences? The Erasmus team frequently makes the point that freedom is worth dying for—even if the lives lost are their own. They point to the sacrifices of men like Nelson Mandela, who suffered decades of imprisonment to stand against racism, that provide a powerful rebuttal to the Machiavelli team.

Surprisingly, the decisions of the undecideds in these debates have been evenly split: half have given the victor's laurels to the Machiavelli teams, half to the Erasmus teams. I have been somewhat surprised and pleased by these outcomes. After the reading of the texts and before any mention of the debate, I poll students as to which political approach they prefer, Machiavelli's or Erasmus's. About 80 percent of the students choose Machiavelli. Being a baby boomer who believed that political morality was essential for the redemption of the American soul, I confess I was somewhat taken aback. I had also taught for a number of years at Presbyterian and Catholic colleges where Machiavelli's realpolitik was widely repudiated by students through a series of wars in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Perhaps the difference is teaching now at a secular university. Perhaps it is the millennial generation. Or perhaps it is a sea change in the attitudes of the American people, 50 percent of whom approve the use of torture in the "war on terror." But whatever it is, I am happy to see that after the debate, the support for realpolitik falls from 80 percent to 50 percent. It confirms my belief that the classics are still worth reading.

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