TRADITION & RENEWAL

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN CORE AND LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAMS

EDITED BY TUAN HOANG

Tradition and Renewal: Continuity and Change in Core and Liberal Arts Programs

Selected Papers from the Twenty-Second Annual Conference of the Association of Core Texts and Courses, Atlanta, April 14–17, 2016

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Acknowledgments

(Park)
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(McGrath)
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(Galaty)
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Introduction: Core Texts and Tradition in Atlanta

Textual analysis has always been at the heart of annual conferences of the Association of Core Texts and Courses (ACTC). The 2016 edition in Atlanta was no exception. From the opening plenary address (on Montaigne) to the last panel on the schedule (on Homer, Plato, Dostoevsky, and Morrison), conference participants proposed theses about the texts under discussion, located supporting evidence, and analyzed them toward particular arguments. Some of the presentations focused on the larger landscape of the humanities, the liberal arts, and the roles of tradition. Others named particular institutional programs and the students that they served. This volume of selected and peer-reviewed papers provides a representation of the vigorous engagement about core texts and core and liberal arts programs among the participants of this conference.

Reflecting the twin themes of "tradition" and "renewal," the first quartet of essays seeks to renew tradition, directly or indirectly, by juxtaposing, comparing, or complicating two or more works. This section begins with Jay Lutz's discussion of the oral tradition in the *Odyssey* and, to a lesser extent, the African epic *Sundiata* and the novels *Beloved* and *La Rue Cases-Nègres*. "Once you start unearthing the oral," observes Lutz, "and finding ways to bring it alive again, orality starts showing up everywhere." The section ends with an exposition of the aesthetic ideal in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice.* It is no simple exposition, however, because Park contrasts Mann's view with the Nietzschean view of Dionysian wisdom in *The Birth of Tragedy*. She further argues that it is not with Nietzsche but with Plato's *Phaedrus* to which the novelist's vision is better aligned. Mann's novella is not an easy text to teach, but Park has proposed a fruitful way to dissect its central ideas in conjunction with two other texts.

Between these papers on literature are two essays about tradition in political theory. On the "Great French Triumvirate," writes John Ray, "let us acknowledge

that Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville differ greatly on many of the most prominent themes in modern political philosophy." Yet as indicated by the title of his paper, Ray argues that it is unity among the triumvirate that most deserves our intellectual engagement. He names their opposition to Hobbes as a negative unity; and he focuses on their positive aspects, particularly their views on human "malleability, including human passions." On the other hand, Wade Roberts's essay emphasizes differences rather than similarities regarding two other thinkers: Burke and Alasdair MacIntyre. This essay is essentially a MacIntyrean critique of the more extreme aspects of the Burkean view of tradition, and it argues for a more expansive concept—again, MacIntyrean—in which tradition engages reason and does not define itself in opposition to reason.

The next group of papers also seeks to complicate several aspects about the human person in the Western tradition. Similar to the first section, two of these essays focus on literary characters. In his discussion of "unheroic heroes," Michael Nichols recounts his experience of teaching *Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* to sophomores and juniors in the core program at his institution. Why unheroic? Because these figures are paradoxical in some respects and ambiguous in others. Why studying them this way? Because the direction of ambiguity—Nichols references William Perry's scheme of cognitive and moral development—helps students to move past the dualistic view of the human experience and prepares them for autonomous commitment in the future. Caleb Karges also relates the subject of his paper to teaching one of the core courses at his university. While this particular class is history rather than literature, Karges employs a twentieth-century German novel to explore several "enduring questions" about the individual in the course of history: How should I be governed? What is the nature of a just society? What are the characteristics of a virtuous citizen? "What does one do," Karges would ask his students, "and where does one go, if one's society has rejected one's answers [to these questions]?"

Between these papers, April Dawn Olsen and Molly McGrath address very different topics from very different philosophers, yet both find their texts to be problematic. Olsen gives a lucid exposition of the twelve passions according to *Rhetoric*, but she also finds Aristotle's treatment to be limited in the end. Nonetheless, she suggests that beyond public rhetoric, the main focus of this text, Aristotle "leaves open the possibility of a private rhetoric communicated through well-crafted writings that successfully inspire different passions in different people." It is a point worth pondering about the nature of public social media of our times, which favors not-so-well-crafted tweets and memes over well-constructed writing. McGrath, too, concludes that the philosopher of her paper—in this case, Montesquieu in *Spirit of the Law*—falls short of reaching a position on the ultimate human good. It is a curious situation because Montesquieu actually has a lot to say about good and bad laws, but not so much on the *summum bonum*. In McGrath's final analysis, it was the Frenchman's fear of despotism that led him to sidestep the problem of the ultimate human good.

In comparison to the time-honored themes among these four essays, the next batch of papers centers on three of the biggest concerns in the humanities today: race, gender, and the environment. It begins with Douglas Casson's consideration

of Addison's play *Cato*, best remembered today for its popularity among American colonists around the time of the American Revolution. However, Casson focuses not on the principal character but on the Numidian prince Juba. Notwithstanding some stereotypes in his representation of Numidians, Casson argues, it is Juba that actually "carries the hope of a free and honorable republican future." In the next essay, Page Laws performs one of the closest of close readings that this editor has read in all past ACTC collections. In this case, she discusses a poem by Richard Wright on the premise that "experiencing tradition and continuity can sometimes be excruciating, when dead tongues rattle on interminably and corpses keep rising—Banquo-like—in all-too-recognizable forms." Wright renders the experience of lynching in a horrifying fashion and dissects violence in three types: disciplinary, retributive, and intimate. The close reading leads Laws to conclude that the "relationship among the three types is as fluid as the horrible liquids in Wright's poem and just as scalding to the national soul and body politic in 2016 as in 1935." Like Laws's paper, Reshmi Hebbar's essay on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which she calls a "wonderful, complicated, not-quite-knowable, yet perfectly teachable text," references the Black Lives Matter movement. To help students decipher the complicated issues in the novel, Hebbar employs a variety of other sources from popular culture, public radio, political science, and interviews of the author. Its difficulties notwithstanding, she finds that this text ultimately lends "itself to energetic discussions about the potential impact of literature . . . [and] to shape social consciousness" regarding the complex American society today.

Anneke Stasson's essay discusses another text by a woman author: the autobiography of Thérèse of Lisieux. Stasson recalls her advocacy for teaching this text in part by questioning *and* clarifying some of the criteria for inclusion of *any* text. She does not mention that *The Story of a Soul* was enormously popular as a devotional text in its time, but this fact should support her conclusion that the autobiography "presents us with a life—a *female* life, which I think is significant—lived in search of greatness." In this case, Thérèse recasts greatness from a conventional attribute "of mighty deeds" to an attribute "of the soul." This section ends with William Cromartie's essay on teaching Thoreau's ecological thinking found in his late writings. Focusing on the significance of seeds, Cromartie observes the tendency to "overlook the small beginnings of things" and gives the example of ecology students writing "a whole essay on a particular family of plants without ever mentioning the importance of the seeds." He argues that a careful reading of Thoreau helps one readjust this tendency and reconsider the philosophical relationship between nature and self, including the significance of one's local ecology. Thoreau's engagement on this topic has made him, in Cromartie's words, "the beginning point for living locally."

Thus far, all sections make many references to teaching. The fourth section, however, focuses squarely on teaching in the United States, Myanmar, and Hong Kong. Opening this section is David Galaty's paper on using short texts from Galilei to teach science *and* the humanities to first-year students at his institution in Oregon. In contrast to the assumptions that humanists should not or cannot really teach scientific texts, Galaty believes that "humanistic tools honed over years of practice are precisely designed to unpack core science texts." He illustrates this point by discuss-

ing two analogies from Galilei, one of which is persuasive while the other one not at all. Next, Andrew Mossin describes teaching a combination of two models at his institution in Pennsylvania: the Great Books model and the Effective Citizens model. Mossin provides an illustration of this method with a description on teaching Jane Jacobs's book about American cities to mostly white and suburban students. Allowing for the limitation of the text, Mossin nonetheless argues that Jacobs's presentation "has one immediate and important effect" in forcing students, "no matter their racial/ethnic background or economic status, to confront their own, often unarticulated assumptions about cities and the people who live in them."

The next pair of papers is quite different in textual contents, pedagogical method, even the level of education among students that they describe. Nonetheless, both share a common goal in using core texts to help students reach insights about their personal lives. For Dorothy Guyot, who has taught pre-collegiate students in Rangoon, the famous episode of the Ring of Gynes in the *Republic* provides the basis and inspiration for the Touchstones Discussion. A series of questions are asked and discussed in the classroom. "What will you," goes the first question, "normally avoid doing in front of your parents, grandparents, or teachers?" Then the next: "Would most people take money left on a table?" There are a multitude of goals attached to this program in Rangoon, including very practical goals such as preparing for college in the United States. But the engagement should also lead students toward lifelong qualities such as self-teaching and having awareness of how others might see one. Yang Yeung's contribution, too, seeks to instill a particular if more abstract value among her students through teaching: hope. This essay opens with a message about the growing number of student suicides at her institution in Hong Kong. After a reflection on the situation, Yeung takes the cue from anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki to reorient her teaching in the core program, especially when teaching two very different texts: Marx's writings on "estranged labor" and the political tract *Waiting for the Dawn* by the Ming neo-Confucian Huang Zongxi. Given the growth of depression and suicide among college students in many parts of the world today, including North America, this essay should be read by any faculty interested on "teaching" hope, not only those planning to teach Marx or Huang.

Yeung's essay reads at times like a meditation on students, and this volume indeed ends with two other meditations. The first, by the late political theorist Peter Augustine Lawler, was presented at one of the plenary addresses at the conference. Taking the lead from his beloved Tocqueville, Lawler turns around the term "countercultural" to apply it to the teaching of core texts today. His address is a rousing call to be countercultural in the Tocquevillian sense, but he also proposes that teachers of core texts seek inspiration from an eclectic mix of educational models, including the neo-Puritan Oberlin College, the Catholic parochial system, and the old City College of New York "staffed by mostly leftist émigrés who taught the Great Books as if they really mattered to New Yorkers of all races, classes, and religions." Last but not least is a shortened version of the last annual address by then outgoing president of ACTC Richard Kamber. Calling himself a "liberal arts pusher," Kamber offers some recollections and thoughts on his many years of involvement with the association.

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Tradition Juxtaposed and Complicated

The Oral Voice in Ancient and Contemporary Texts

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The *Odyssey* was a longtime cornerstone of Narratives of the Self, a sequential interdisciplinary core course required of all students at Oglethorpe University. It is oral in its inception and bears many a trace of orality in its written transcription as a text of the enigmatic Homer. We learn of the adventures of the hero of the epic poem, Odysseus, upon leaving Troy as he tells his story to the Phaiakians on the island of Scheria. Odysseus has been shipwrecked there on a raft of his own making in his attempt to return to Ithaka and his beloved Penelope. In typical fashion for Odysseus, a warrior characterized by craftiness, he does not at first tell the Phaiakians who he is, fearful of how they might respond. It is only when he is teased into showing his prowess in athletic games that he ultimately reveals his identity at the beginning of Book IX, which constitutes the real beginning of the story of his voyage from Troy to Ithaka:

> I am Odysseus son of Laertes, known before all men
> for the study of crafty designs, and my fame goes up to the heavens.
> I am at home in sunny Ithaka. There is a mountain
> there that stands tall, leaf-trembling Neritos, and there are islands
> settled around it, lying one very close to another.
> There is Doulichion and Same, wooded Zakynthos,
> but my island lies low and away, last of all of the water
> toward the dark, with the rest below facing east and sunshine,
> a rugged place, but a good nurse of men; for my part
> I cannot think of any place sweeter on earth to look at. (*Odyssey*, Lattimore, 138–39)

Here Homer takes his time as Odysseus presents his homeland. We get to know the surrounding area and are even informed about the rugged island's personality, which Odysseus finds sweeter than any place on earth.

As initial readers in a core class looking forward to getting an assignment or paper written, we may well want Odysseus just to get on with it. In fact, readers already know that Odysseus is from Ithaka and is trying to get home. Can Homer "just get on with it"? Well, no, he cannot. The very point of telling the story in the first place is that you don't just get on with it. Rather you savor each drawn-out moment in the spirit of the storyteller around a campfire or the way someone might proceed on NPR's "StoryCorps." I tell my students to be patient as I guide them in appreciating the digressions and diversions from the narrative, which are some of the finest morsels of the storytelling feast set before us by someone not a writer but an oral poet who memorized all his lines and sang them constantly, retelling his story in slightly new and revised versions. The storyteller might well, at times, make changes to accommodate the makeup of his audience. Think how someone might tell the story of the Alamo to a class of Texas schoolchildren in contrast to Northerners with little personal knowledge of and connection to the site—not to mention a group of Mexican schoolchildren whose historical perspective would be considerably different. This approach calls for patience on the part of the listener, that is, the reader, who must find a means to listen her way through the text.

There is also a stylistic element here. Our stories, and therefore our literature, began as poetry, not prose. There were transcribed texts of the stories in verse of bards and troubadours in France long before any prose was written down, and the texts were meant to be sung. The first prose in written form to appear in the medieval period in France were sermons, not stories. Why, then, verse and not prosaic narrative? For one thing, if you are an itinerant teller of stories with no script, it is much easier to remember rhymed verse than dry text. It is also more attractive to the ear, just as the verse translation of *The Odyssey* by Richmond Lattimore is richer and ultimately more engaging than a narrative that simply communicates the plot, almost completely missing the point of telling the story in the first place. Literary conversation over the centuries has more or less come to the conclusion that it is impossible to completely separate form and content in written texts. So, the way a text is written is part of the meaning of the text itself, inseparable from the story, the plot, the narrative, or whatever else you may want to call it. Therefore, speaking aloud and singing a story is part of the story itself.

All of this may seem paradoxical. Here we have a story that comes out of an oral tradition to which we have access only by the written word; but this means that we must read, and listen, in a particular way. The first thing we need is patience, lots of it, and time, not something that we have plenty of in our contemporary society. It doesn't matter that it has gotten late, that we are tired. Who turns a sports event off the screen midway through an exciting contest? That is the spirit we need, and it is the spirit that is modeled for us by our storyteller, Homer himself, in *The Odyssey*. When Odysseus has gotten part way through his story for the Phaiakians and it has gotten late, here is how king Aliknoös responds:

> But come now, tell me this and give me an accurate answer:
> Did you see any of your godlike companions, who once with you
> went to Ilion and there met their destiny? Here is
> a night that is very long, it is endless. It is not time yet
> to sleep in the palace. But go on telling your wonderful story.
> I myself could hold out until the bright dawn, if only
> you could bear to tell me, here in the palace of your sufferings. (177–78)

This retelling of suffering connects to the way in which Paul D and Sethe respond to the need to retell the past in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, another Oglethorpe common text in the core course Narratives of the Self. This is the case even if Sethe finds pain in the retelling and not the pleasure evoked by the ancient Greek Homer. Sethe finds herself lolled into hearing her own oral history from Paul D, a story that seems to take on its own life and force itself upon the listener. She responds by angrily saying to herself that she just can't shut the story of suffering out once it appears, thus putting into question the storytelling itself, a major theme in the novel.

This brings us a little closer to how story may be more closely attached to memory and oral history than are literary narrative and the plot of a novel. There is something singular about the notion of story, and it connects to oral discourse. It is at once more insistent and more supple than the written word. Stories have survived through centuries due to written transcription; but the published, inalterable text has a complex and troubled relationship with oral storytelling, something that needs to be taken into account when approaching oral-based texts like *The Odyssey* and, I would assert, even a modernist, literarily sophisticated text like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The litany that concludes the Morrison novel says that it was not a story to pass on. One of the paragraphs expands on this notion, speaking of a "tale" and says that remembering seemed unwise.

Closely connected to the oral tradition and storytelling, the archiving of stories and the way to reproduce the story, and stories, of history is another important issue. It is interesting to note that in French, "story" and "history" are the same word, *histoire*. This issue resonates particularly strongly with the tradition of African epic, a close cousin to the kind of oral-based story told by Homer in *The Odyssey*. *Sundiata* is an epic from West Africa, part of the epic story-telling belt that descends the Atlantic coast of the continent and then crosses the Congolese heartland as it reaches the Indian Ocean. The West African bard, troubadour, or Homeric poet is called a *griot* and serves not only as storyteller but also as historian and spokesperson for royalty. He embodies the archives of the society in his person and is virtually the only source for a country's history in this region. Similar to a poet like Homer, the griot depends upon memorization and song to reproduce the epic and thus needs to start at the beginning of the story and continue uninterrupted to its conclusion. This presents an interesting way to consider historical research, one in which the story always would have to be considered only in its entirety from oral cover to cover.

In turn, it brings up yet another issue: that of permission to transcribe the oral into the written. Griots have traditionally been hostile to this process, claiming that only the oral storyteller can adequately and correctly interpret the past. This was the case when D. T. Niane, a young Senegalese graduate student studying in France,

chose to write his master's thesis on this aspect of his country's heritage. He returned to Senegal and found a griot willing to let him write down the epic story of Sundiata, emperor of ancient Mali. It is this text in translation from French that my students studied in the Narratives course as a parallel epic to *The Odyssey* and another example of oral-based literature from ancient sources. With this is mind, I also asked the students to read *Black Shack Alley* (*La Rue Cases-Nègres*), a novel written by Martinican Joseph Zobel that includes a sage in a community of descendants from African slaves, an old man who reproduces the oral traditions of the continent he called Guinea. This gave us yet another example of transcribed oral tradition, something I suggested to my students in conjunction with the following possible topic for a paper: *Compare the griot Balla Fasséké in Sundiata with Mr. Médouze in Black Shack Alley. Despite obvious differences, what do the two storytellers have in common? Be specific with references to the texts. You may also want to consider commentary about storytelling in these two texts.*

We are then left with a dilemma in reaching back to the origins of literary production, activating stories and relating to contemporary storytelling cultures, especially those that maintain a connection to the epic poem. How do we best understand this material through the use of written texts, the only way to access this ancient medium? It requires a different mindset that tolerates digression and practices patience. A verse format aids in reproducing the feel for the oral. The human voice is a fine instrument and can be used in class effectively to compensate for the limitations of silent reading and writing. Brainstorming on the notion of stories and storytelling can also be effective in identifying what is special about oral-based texts. All our institutions of higher learning are charged by accreditors to include oral work in our curricula, which may provide an opportunity to do so in core courses by linking the traditions of the oral past to oral production in a communal classroom setting. Once you start unearthing the oral and finding ways to bring it alive again, orality starts showing up everywhere. It becomes a foundation from which literacy can be developed, and redeveloped, with fresh emphasis on expression and the nature of the written text. This ultimately constitutes a modernist turn that allows connections between the ancient oral epic and what has been cutting edge in Western literature for at least the last hundred years, a move worthy of consideration as we construct and reconstruct the corpus that serves as the very core of our curricular efforts.

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On the Unity of the Great French Triumvirate

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The theme of this year's conference, "Tradition and Renewal: Continuity and Change," seems ready-made for a discussion of the Great French Triumvirate.[1] Supposing that a finding of continuity among authors depends on a unifying or harmonizing thought, we may wonder if Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville, despite their more than apparent disharmony, share a thought of such significance as to link them in concord. If so, what is that thought?

The question of the unity of our authors goes beyond and is far more problematic than the question of how they are related. That they *are* related is especially evident in *Democracy in America*, which reads almost as a combination of Montesquieu and Rousseau applied to the American experience. Scholars disagree on whether Montesquieu or Rousseau had the greatest influence on Tocqueville, but the influence of both is obvious: Montesquieu's emphasis on climate and geography, on the benefits of commerce, and on constitutional devices to preserve liberty are visible in volume I. Tocqueville's discussion of the Puritan origin of the Americans, the New England town meeting, the family and the role of women in society, and the importance he assigns to religious sentiments reveal his debt to Rousseau. Of Montesquieu's relation to Rousseau I will have more to say, but to refer again to the conference theme, I would argue that no writer captures better than Rousseau how an attempt at renewal can result in profound change. For Rousseau sought to restore ancient virtue and citizenship without returning to the view of human nature that had supported it.

In addition to the question of the citizen, which may by itself to be enough to fracture the unity of our authors, let us acknowledge that Montesquieu, Rousseau,

and Tocqueville differ greatly on many of the most prominent themes in modern political philosophy. Consider their differences over commerce, religion, constitutional protections, and interest groups. In speaking of commerce and its benefits to liberty, Montesquieu and Tocqueville are on the whole positive, while Rousseau reacts negatively to the inequality and luxury it produces as harmful to human freedom. Of religion, all three authors see potential benefits to liberty, yet while Montesquieu and Tocqueville support the Protestant variant of Christianity, Rousseau is hostile to all existing sects and recommends a simpler version of civil religion shorn of its specifically Christian elements. Montesquieu advances constitutional arrangements to protect liberty, including an entirely new theory of the separation of powers. Tocqueville downplays constitutional devices in favor of a Rousseauian teaching on sentiments, the general will, and the family. Rousseau condemns partial groups in society as undermining the general will, but Tocqueville praises civic associations as counterweights to individualism.

We must also not ignore the attitudes and legacies of our authors with respect to political change. Montesquieu represents the wisdom of moderation and the limits of politics. He is not a revolutionary but a reformer, encouraging enlightenment and incremental improvements whenever conditions allow it. Rousseau rejected this approach and inspired the French revolutionaries; in addition, he was the first philosopher to proclaim sanguinary fanaticism as politically healthier than the cold atheism of the rationalists. Tocqueville followed Montesquieu, siding with his fellow aristocrat against destabilizing revolutions.

Does all this mean that our authors cannot be brought into concord? Far from it. What our authors do share may be expressed both negatively (as what they are against) and positively (as what they are for). Negatively, they are drawn together in their opposition to Hobbes, explicitly so in the cases of Montesquieu and Rousseau and implicitly in Tocqueville (Tocqueville evidently felt himself relieved by the work of the earlier writers from explicitly separating himself from Hobbes). Expressed positively, our authors are united in their recognition of the malleability of man, including human passions.

Chapter 2 of book I of the *Spirit of the Laws* presents a substantial modification of Hobbes's description of man in the state of nature. Agreeing with Hobbes on the importance of the concept of a prepolitical state, Montesquieu observes that "Hobbes gives men first the desire to subjugate one another, but this is not reasonable. The idea of empire and domination is so complex and depends on so many other ideas, that it would not be the one they would first have" (6). Instead, men in the state of nature would feel only weakness and timidity. And they would be drawn to each other out of the pleasure they would feel in the company of a member of their own species and also out of sexual attraction. Montesquieu says that a state of war would break out only after society had been established. He thus makes the state of war derivative of society and not a cause for fleeing the state of nature for the safety of society. This is a perplexing move on Montesquieu's part and was not followed by Rousseau, who otherwise follows and radicalizes Montesquieu's critique of Hobbes. Rousseau, in the *Second Discourse*, accused Hobbes of speaking of need, avarice, oppression, desires, and pride, thus carrying "over to the state of nature ideas . . . acquired in

society" (132). Hobbes described natural man by observing civil man.

The obverse of the rejection of Hobbes' account of the natural condition of humanity is the insistence by Montesquieu and Rousseau on the malleability of human beings. In the Preface to the *Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu declares man [to be] "that flexible being who adapts himself in society to the thoughts and impressions of others" (xlvi–xlv). He will later attempt to show an important source of those thoughts and impressions to be physical in the literal sense of climate and terrain. More importantly, Montesquieu was the first modern to provide an understanding of human existence that drastically reduced the importance of nature or natural passions and vastly enlarged the bearing of history, customs, and institutions on the passions and sentiments as well as on the beliefs and behavior of human beings. Nature is so little responsible for what we are that it can be hard to recognize; man only knows, says Montesquieu, "his own nature when it is shown to him" and is capable of "losing even the feeling of it when it is concealed from him" (xlv).

Rousseau claims to have thought through Hobbes's description of a hypothetical pre-political state of nature, and in effect says to Hobbes, what you call natural is not natural at all, but the result of a series of external historical accidents that altered the basic passions of malleable human beings long before the rise of civilization. With great imaginative power, Rousseau tells a story of human development from brute nature to origin of civilized societies that greatly diminishes nature in favor of history. Rousseau's sensational books, including his constructive *Emile*, were immediately hailed as a giant advance over the naïve thinking of Hobbes on the passions. Rousseau came to be seen as the first to reject the basic assumptions of the Enlightenment. Today he is seen as the undisputed originator of the counter-Enlightenment or of the reformation of the Enlightenment. He is the source of the criticism we have of liberal life with property and especially of the human type it generates, the alienated bourgeois who, in the memorable formulation of Allan Bloom, "when dealing with others, thinks only of himself, and on the other hand, in his understanding of himself, thinks only of others" (5). The bourgeois lacks the psychological wholeness of natural man, who lived entirely for himself, or of the ancient citizen, who at least, according to Rousseau, lived entirely for the community.

Where does the high estimation of Rousseau's achievement leave Montesquieu? The view of Rousseau as being the first to break sharply with the classic Enlightenment of Hobbes and Locke, has harmed the reputation of Montesquieu, even among his greatest admirers. In making natural man less aggressive and more social, Montesquieu removed, perhaps inadvertently, the motive Hobbes had supplied to natural man to leave the state of nature. Thomas Pangle, the greatest living student of *The Spirit of the Laws*, argues that "Montesquieu's modification of Hobbes may provide a broader basis for, and in this sense a more convincing explanation of, man's sociability. But the description of the state of nature which results is unsatisfactory" (37). He concludes: "The inadequacy of Montesquieu's attempt to provide a coherent historical account of the state of nature opens the way to Rousseau's critique"—the root of which is, "if men do not attack one another, why should they fear one another?" (39).

To see Montesquieu as an unsatisfactory bridge between Hobbes and Rousseau, or perhaps as a poorly designed halfway house, is to diminish unfairly Montesquieu's

magnificent achievement as one of the greatest defenders of human liberty. To me, Montesquieu's state of nature, with its fourth natural law of sociability, has much to recommend it. It avoids, as Pangle admits, the consequence of Rousseau's more radical denial of human sociability, namely, severing the link between man's natural existence and his civilized existence, or to put it another way, denying the capacity of nature to supply normative standards to political life. Readers of Montesquieu certainly wish he had fleshed out his much too sparse account of the historical development of man in the state of nature. But I contend that Montesquieu's basic position looks inadequate only if one accepts Rousseau's thoroughly nonteleological account of human development. In fact, I don't see why Montesquieu's assumptions about human nature are less satisfactory than Rousseau's. Perhaps we may see Montesquieu as a modern Aristotle, allowing nature to continue to be a universal if sharply circumscribed source of standards for human conduct. All accounts of human nature suffer from ambiguities. It is only fair to note that the accounts of human nature given by Aristotle (man as rational and political by nature), by Hobbes (human beings as natural enemies), and by Rousseau (reducing man to a naturally good but dumb animal) have at least as many problems as Montesquieu's description of man as rather timid and somewhat social by nature.

Tocqueville, perhaps because of the difficulties in giving a clear and coherent account of the history of the state of nature, dispenses with the concept altogether. He does not speak often of what is by nature (although when he does, it is significant). Instead his analysis of the Americans begins with their existing social state, which has its source in the customs, sentiments, religion, laws, and geography of the nation. In this he takes his bearings from both Montesquieu and Rousseau, borrowing and weaving together their most profound insights and adding his own, producing an amazingly accurate portrait of the strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies of the first modern democratic nation.

Do we find, on reflection, that our authors share a point of view sufficiently weighty to justify a claim of philosophical unity? I believe we do. The disagreements, especially on the level of politics, that we are compelled to notice are not so overwhelming that we are prevented from linking them in concord and placing them in a harmonizing disposition. For indeed they belong together. They share the view that the nature of human beings, whether somewhat social or not, is a fairly small ingredient in what makes human beings what they are. It is our second nature, formed, sometimes over centuries, by religious beliefs, sentiments, customs, and geography, that truly makes humanity what it is. Man certainly is a flexible being, and what he becomes has less to do with nature than with well-functioning political institutions and the beneficial circumstances that he himself creates and maintains.

Note

1. Although Rousseau signed himself, "A Citizen of Geneva," he lived most of his adult life in France, was a major influence on the French Revolution, and gave the French their original understanding of the "bourgeois."

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Burke, MacIntyre, and Two Concepts of Tradition

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In a 1991 interview, Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre lamented the fact that within contemporary political debates, tradition is either invoked by reactionaries in order to defend "the mindless conservatism of hierarchies of power," or it is derided by liberals who wrongly assume that we can resolve disputes concerning subjective preferences "without reference to a common good" (quoted in Fuller, 26). It is perhaps appropriate, therefore, that MacIntyre has set himself the task of attempting to rehabilitate the concept of tradition by delving into the history of Western philosophy in order to discover neglected alternatives that have been marginalized by the individualism and emotivism that are prominent features of many contemporary approaches to morality. In this regard, he has developed a conception of tradition that is nuanced and subtle, containing richness and layers of complexity that are often overlooked by both the unreflective defenders of dying traditions and the adamant enemies of living ones.

In this essay I intend to use MacIntyre's comments regarding tradition as a departure point for the discussion of Edmund Burke's greatest political treatise, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre observes that Burke posits a false dichotomy between reason/transformation on the one hand, and custom/stability on the other. Burke famously emphasizes the importance of preserving the historical mores of society against the onslaught of rationalistic metaphysics, but MacIntyre contends that Burke's argument is premised on a misunderstanding of the dialectic that governs the relationship between reason and traditional norms. Indeed, he suggests that when rationality and conflict disappear from a society's traditions,

they are either dead or on their way to dying. Finally, I will conclude the essay with brief comments on what I call, following MacIntyre, living and dead traditions, and how we might apply his distinction to help us think about the liberal arts tradition in our current educational environment.

First is Burke on tradition. Burke reports that the text of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was composed, at least initially, in response to the French aristocrat Charles-Jean Francois Depont, who in the course of their correspondence had asked Burke to comment on the recent collapse of the *Ancien* Régime, an event that had shaken France especially, and Europe more generally, to its very core. The more proximate target of Burke's essay, however, was a speech delivered by the Reverend Richard Price on November 5, 1789, before the so-called Revolution Society, which met on this date annually to commemorate the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Price was a well-known Unitarian Dissenting minister who celebrated Enlightenment principles of egalitarianism and freedom, and he took the opportunity of his address to highlight points of continuity between the revolution that had brought William of Orange to the throne and the more recent upheavals in America and France. Commenting on the democratic impulses that had produced two successful challenges to the authority of monarchs, Price's rhetoric verged on the millenarian. In one of the more ecstatic passages, he enthused as follows: What an eventful period this is! I am thankful that I have lived to see it; and I could almost say, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* . . . I have lived to see Thirty Millions of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice, their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering to his subjects" (quoted in Burke 157).

Burke himself had been a well-known proponent of conciliatory gestures toward the American colonists, and when it became evident in 1778 that momentum had shifted decisively toward the former British subjects, he supported calls for American independence (Coniff 210). In addition, he had delivered fiery speeches in Parliament condemning laws that codified the second-class status of Irish Catholics. Thus, he was not categorically opposed to either acts of revolt or pleas on behalf of the oppressed, but he contended that the rhetoric of Price and his fellow travelers was altogether different from American demands for liberty or Irish Catholic hopes that England would honor basic principles of religious toleration. Rather, what Burke detected in the various speeches that heralded the French Revolution was an attack on the very foundations of British society, and to that extent he regarded the assorted anticlerical and antimonarchical discourses as a fundamental challenge to a way of life supported by the twin pillars of a reverence for tradition and skepticism toward rationalist metaphysical abstractions.

Indeed, both of these themes figure prominently in Burke's criticisms of the speeches of British sympathizers who defended actions that he regarded as regicidal terrorism. For Burke it was necessary to understand the dialectic that existed between Enlightenment rationalism and the war that was being waged, in both metaphorical as well as literal senses, against tradition. In a conceptual move that would establish an understanding of tradition that was central to virtually all of the conservatisms that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution, Burke contends that the proponents

of Enlightenment values intend to overturn the conventions that buttressed English society for half a millennium in the name of empty formalisms and rationalist hyperbole. As he is quick to note, however, abstract principles are inevitably ill-suited for the purposes of governance (Burke 150–51), since effective rule demands prudential consideration of the specific circumstances and choices that confront us at particular junctures in time. Indeed, in a singularly striking turn of phrase, Burke writes that "[a]ll the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved in this new conquering empire of light and reason" (Burke 171).

It is no exaggeration to say that this passage from Burke's *Reflections* became a veritable rallying cry for conservative opponents of the French Revolution, and in evocative language that weaves together nostalgia and melancholy, Burke brilliantly captures the collective attitudes of people throughout Europe who observed events in France with the mixture of awe and horror. One of the most notable aspects of this passage, however, is Burke's fearful description of the Enlightenment project. Unlike Kant, who would associate *Aufklärung* with courage and the desire for freedom, Burke depicts it as an imperious aggressor that destroys the customs that prevent us from hurtling into the abyss of injustice. Moreover, Burke's language takes an even darker turn later in the same passage, where he writes that "[a]ll the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off" (171).

Indeed, one of the central themes of the *Reflections* is the difference between, and opposition to, reason and tradition. Custom is associated with the stability, continuity, and preservation of society, while reason becomes the harbinger of aggression, rupture, and destruction. Later in the *Reflections*, moreover, Burke goes so far as to valorize prejudices not as goods that promote the maintenance of the social order; rather, they are ends-in-themselves. He writes that "in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess that we are generally men of untaught feelings; that instead of casting away all our old prejudices we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them" (*Reflections* 183). This is, if the reader will permit me a slightly incongruous formulation, an even more radical form of conservatism: here tradition becomes valued merely qua tradition, rather than because it is conducive to other and more valuable ends. Indeed, Burke celebrates the English national character for its "sullen resistance to innovation," and he reverently invokes the power of the "silent tomb" to "[impose] its law on our pert loquacity" (*Reflections* 182).

Now I turn to MacIntyre on Burke and tradition. How should we evaluate this Burkean distinction between reason and tradition? It is undoubtedly the case that Burke's understanding of the relationship has played an important, and possibly even outsized, role in shaping the way(s) in which both conservatives and liberals have approached the dialectic of custom and reflection. Indeed, MacIntyre argues that Burke's stance has actually undermined our capacity to think rigorously about tradition; In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, for example, he goes so far as to claim that "Burke has actually been an agent of positive harm" insofar as he excluded the

possibility of "rational theorizing as a work of and within tradition" (353). Moreover, Burke is accused of establishing a false dichotomy between reason and conflict; for MacIntyre, when traditions are thriving, they actually tend to foster robust disagreements. A tradition is, at least in part, a conversation that spans generations, and accordingly, it brings different historical epochs into dialogue with one another; as MacIntyre writes, "When a tradition is in good working order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives that tradition its particular point and purpose" (*After Virtue* 222).

The key phrase in MacIntyre's formulation is "good working order,, since he also recognizes the possibility that traditions can gradually wither away when they cease to motivate adherents. Indeed, he claims that "when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead" (*After Virtue* 222), and while MacIntyre's description of dying traditions is vague, we can draw inferences about his intention if we consider his criticisms of Burke in greater detail. For MacIntyre, Burke's conceptualization of tradition is emaciated and one-dimensional; Burke's understanding of tradition closes off the possibility of dialogue and disagreements about the good, which is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it consigns traditions to a virtually inevitable death, and this is surely part of what MacIntyre means when he says that Burkean traditions already confront their mortality; if they can't speak to new generations, they will simply cease to exist, since in order to bridge the chasm of time, we have to remain open to the possibility that they will get taken up differently in specific contexts, and this process of appropriation will in turn transform the tradition itself. Second, a tradition that isn't renewed through debate becomes moribund; it will ultimately ossify dogmatic prescriptions that no longer have the capacity to motivate us and help us understand the world. Thus, a dying tradition is one that is emptied of rational content, and as a result it is no longer able to command the respect and allegiance of its former practitioners. In order to secure their compliance, therefore, it demands their unreflective obedience; indeed, it will regard reason as a threat to its very existence. And here, strangely enough, we encounter a point of convergence between the Enlightenment's understanding of tradition and the conceptualization articulated by Burke: they each conflate dying traditions with traditions *tout court*.

But if this is what MacIntyre characterizes as a tradition that is in the process of dying, what would we describe as its antithesis? Here MacIntyre is much more explicit; he defines a living tradition in the following way: it is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" (222–23). Indeed, for MacIntyre a living tradition actually enables us to engage in meaningful discourse insofar as it sustains the conceptual frameworks that help us to understand the world we inhabit, and it furthermore does so not by imperiously requiring our unreflective consent. Rather, it speaks to our rational faculties and, to the extent that it helps to facilitate dialogue concerning the nature of the good, it is able to span the temporal gulf that separates generations, ensuring that it will survive and even flourish through the vigorous argumentation that characterizes provocative but respectful debates.

With MacIntyre's distinction in mind, it is worth at least briefly exploring one of the most important questions that we teachers of the liberal arts confront today:

Is the grand tradition that has sustained us over the centuries withering away? Is it moribund, confronting its imminent death? Or does it exhibit the robust debate and contestation of ideas that characterize living communities? It is clear that institutions that have historically promoted the ethos of liberal education face a number of challenges today, including (but certainly not limited to) pressures from any number of sources to move in explicitly vocational directions, the elimination of humanities faculty due to underenrollment, and attacks on the very idea of learning from the past. Yet it is also evident that when the very ideas of truth and the good are being undermined in our public discourse, liberal education has an essential role to play in terms of restoring integrity to our civic and collective lives; thus, it is imperative that we retrieve the wisdom that has been handed down to us in the texts and maxims of our greatest writers.

How, then, do we renew the tradition of the liberal arts? How can we ensure that it will continue to speak to present generations of students in the same compelling way that it continues to speak to us as teachers? It's undoubtedly the case that Burke is correct to insist on the importance of hearkening to the counsels that have been transmitted to us through the annals of the Great Conversation that animates liberal education. In short, do we still have the capacity to learn from Aristotle as he encourages us to strive for excellence? Can we recognize the possibility of grace that Augustine offers us from the depths of sin? Do we have the courage to follow Nietzsche into the abyss, even at the risk of confronting the terrors of nihilism?

At the same time, when an Edmund Burke is confronted with the discordant prose of a Samuel Beckett or a Toni Morrison, is he only able to interpret it or hear it as the inarticulate stammerings of tradition's opponent, or is he rather open to the possibility that these cries from the depths of existential pain represent a Herculean struggle to understand? Our answers to these questions will undoubtedly determine whether the traditions that have sustained us throughout time will continue to do so, or whether they become hollow promises that can no longer contribute toward the life of the mind.

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Happiness as a Moral End: On Prudence in Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* and Austen's *Persuasion*

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Kant's attempt to undertake a radical "cleansing" of the tradition of moral philosophy in his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* has earned his work a prominent place in the Western core texts tradition. Kant argues that happiness cannot be an objective moral end for a rational being because it can only yield a "hypothetical" imperative, not a categorical one. Happiness is too slippery, too dependent on external circumstances. Kant thus argues that the basis for moral obligation "mustn't be looked for in people's natures or their circumstances, but must be found *a priori* solely in the concepts of pure reason" (Preface). As a result, imperatives of prudence are to be taken merely as counsels rather than as commands of reason. The very notion of an "a priori" rational standard for morality, together with the intricacies of Kant's argument, make the *Grounding* a difficult text for students to engage.

This essay will explore Kant's moral philosophy by placing it in dialogue with Jane Austen's development of prudence in the character of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion.* Austen suggests that the rational imperatives we use to determine moral action not only have happiness as their ultimate end but are also subject to experience, that is, they are necessarily informed by both context and empirical consequences. The novel provides both a context for understanding Kant's view of the relationship of prudence to happiness and a challenge to his conclusion that "reason of itself and independently of all experience commands what ought to happen" (20). In *Persuasion*, Austen develops a virtuous prudence that sees happiness as necessary to the

full flourishing of a human being, a flourishing Aristotle called *eudaimonia* in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. In what follows, I will suggest that Austen's depiction of the virtue of prudence in *Persuasion* places it in continuity with the Aristotelian tradition, and that reading *Persuasion* in dialogue with the *Grounding* allows students to understand more clearly what is at stake in Kant's separation of happiness from rational moral action.

In the case of philosophical treatises, beginnings are very important, and in the beginning of the *Grounding* Kant questions the Aristotelian notion that happiness is the real end of human nature. He asks if, in the case of "the natural constitution of an organized being . . . suitably adapted to the purpose of life," which is a being having reason and will,

> that being's preservation, welfare, or in a word its happiness were the real end of nature . . . then nature would have hit upon a very poor arrangement in in having the reason of the creature carry out this purpose. For all the actions which such a creature has to perform with this purpose in view . . . would have been prescribed much more exactly by instinct . . . and attained more certainly by instinct than it ever can be by reason. (8)

Here Kant separates happiness from reason; happiness for him is an end reducible to our animal nature and its welfare and preservation, not the end of our nature as rational beings, as it is for Aristotle. He goes on to argue that humans must promote their happiness not from inclination, but from duty, for "what is essentially good" in a moral imperative is not "the matter of the action and its intended result, but rather . . . the principle from which it follows, let the consequences be what they may" (26). Every individual must thus "act on a maxim which at the same time contains in itself its own universal validity for every rational being" (42–43).

For Kant, then, happiness has no moral worth whatsoever, and "the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to obtain happiness, yet he can never say definitively and consistently what it is he really wishes and wills" (27). There are just too many variables that go into making us happy; in any given situation we cannot see the whole, the "maximum of well being in my present and in every future condition" (28). Kant suggests that "happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination" and concludes that "the problem of determining certainly and universally what action will promote the happiness of a rational being is completely insoluble" (28). Any counsels we give to ourselves or one another regarding our happiness are thus entirely pragmatic, and any imperatives we decide upon can only be called hypothetical, not categorical. Kant refers to these imperatives as "prudential," but he does not mean to suggest that prudence is a virtue in Aristotle's sense. These imperatives cannot command us to perform actions as objectively necessary, for there are always a number of options when it comes to pragmatic ends. When we posit perfect happiness as our end, as both Aristotle and Jane Austen do, Kant suggests that a person can only engage in instrumental "counsels of prudence" that may or may not lead to the achievement of happiness, since one is incapable of willing one's own happiness categorically.

In her more contextual and empirically based moral universe, Austen demonstrates that this instrumental view of prudence not only is subject to error, but also

leads to the undermining of a person's ultimate good, as becomes the case when Anne Elliot follows the counsel of Lady Russell regarding her possible marriage to Wentworth. Austen thus adopts a more complicated view of morality, allowing for the influence of experience on moral behavior over time. Because *Persuasion* is a novel, we garner Austen's moral framework from the way her characters act and the context in which they are portrayed, and this is especially true in regard to her protagonist, Anne Elliot. In keeping with Kant's moral framework, it is clear that Anne has a good will and that her decisions are motivated by a sense of duty. When she is nineteen years old, she is "persuaded to believe the engagement [to Captain Wentworth] a wrong thing" (Austen, 27), even though she is very much in love with him. Anne relinquishes her relationship with Wentworth on the grounds that the engagement was "indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it" (27). She yields to a duty imposed via a "counsel of prudence" by Lady Russell (and arguably British society at large) so as to avoid entering into a risky marriage with a poor man without prospects, because of the hypothetical risk that such action might lead to future hardship and unhappiness. When she looks back later on her decision not to marry Wentworth, she says she "thought [she was yielding] to duty" in yielding to the advice of Lady Russell (229). The narrator says of that time in her life, "She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older: the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning." Anne also cites a sense of duty in her reasoning for later rejecting Mr. Elliot, despite the counsel of Lady Russell, reasoning that "all duty [would have been] violated" if she had married him (229).

While Kant's second moral proposition contends that such an action done from duty has its moral worth in its principle and not in its consequences, Anne's sense of duty is directly linked to an anticipation of the consequence of her actions. Her end is consistently one of happiness, not merely for herself but for those around her, including Captain Wentworth. What is different in her moral reasoning eight years later is that she has come to understand the counsel of Lady Russell as a form of instrumental prudence—a Kantian prudence based on happiness as a matter of the preservation of her welfare, not the possibility of her flourishing. Anne's maturation as a moral agent is in part due to her family's move from the relative isolation of their country estate to the city of Bath. This move allows her to observe and engage in a number of moral situations in which attainment of her good requires the exercise of prudence. Reflection upon these various situations causes Anne to move away from an instrumental view of morality as circumscribed and pragmatic. She comes to realize, as Aristotle says, "One swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy" (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.7.1098a18).

Aristotle also argues that human flourishing requires a certain amount of luck (*tuche*). Wentworth's reappearance in Anne's life may be due to luck or it may be destiny; regardless, it requires that she overcome the loss of her "bloom" and rise to meet the occasion with all the strength of character of which her humanity is capable. Aristotle writes that the truly happy person "will bear the chances of life most nobly and altogether decorously, if he is "truly good" and "foursquare beyond reproach'"

(I:10.1100b20). Happiness requires an ability to withstand wretched situations and to live well over time. Aristotle goes on to ask,

> Should we not say that he is happy who is active in accordance with complete virtue and is sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life? Or must we add "and who is destined to live thus and die as befits his life"? Certainly the future is obscure to us, while happiness, we claim, is an end and something in every way final. If so, we shall call happy those among living men in whom these conditions are, and are to be, fulfilled—but blessed men. (I:10.1101a14–20)

When she is twenty-seven, Anne Elliot is given the opportunity to amend the decision she made eight years prior, and she chooses to be with Captain Wentworth. The span of time between these two differing decisions is emphasized by repetition—on eight totally different occasions throughout the novel (often multiple times per occasion), the narrator mentions the fact that eight years have passed since Anne's fateful choice not to marry Wentworth. Austen's reiteration of this long passage of time suggests its importance to Anne's ultimate decision as well as Austen's Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between happiness and experience. Anne suggests as much herself when she laments during that eight-year interim period that she "hopes to be wise and reasonable in time; but alas! Alas! She must confess to herself that she is not wise yet" (168). Her conviction that time will bring her wisdom is ultimately supported by her reasoning at twenty-seven, when she notes that she "thinks very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen" (29). She tells Wentworth, "I have been thinking over the past . . . and I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, in being guided by [Lady Russell]. . . . I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience" (231).

With the clarity of retrospection, Anne assesses the morality of her earlier choice and determines that by her own criterion (i.e., following a moral imperative to perform an action that will result in achieving happiness), she acted rightly. She understands that she had been faced with the choice between the unhappiness of losing Captain Wentworth and the unhappiness of an uncertain economic future as well as a conscience dirtied by disapproval from Lady Russell and society. Anne thus chose what she thought was the lesser of two evils, rather than the one that would possibly bring her happiness. She was young, and the virtue of prudence had not been sufficiently honed to allow her to look at the marriage as a likely good instead of a likely harm. Aristotle defines practical wisdom as "a state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good and bad for man" (6.5.1140b4–5.20–21). In her attempt to be prudential, Lady Russell was in error, for by definition a person of prudence deliberates well concerning that which contributes to the good life; prudence only regards good ends (6.5.1140a24–32; 6.12.1143b23). In dwelling only on the potential evils of such a marriage, Lady Russell fails to teach Anne how to reason in light of her own good. This lack of true prudence is borne out in the novel when Lady Russell urges Anne to marry her cousin William Elliot, failing to see the evil character of a man who is attempting to win Anne's hand for the sole purpose of securing his place as heir to the Elliot estate.

Austen implies that in the ensuing eight years and the experiences that time afforded her, Anne has been habituated into the virtue of prudence as Aristotle understands it, for he writes: "the virtues we get by first exercising them" (II.1.1103a31). Aristotle also argues that prudence regards the particular facts (6.8.1142a23–27) and therefore experience (6.7.1141b14–21, 6.8.1142a12–20). Prudence not only lets us know what is good, but also commands us to do it (6.10.1143a6–9). Anne further muses that the counsel of Lady Russell "was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides" (231). In her newfound happiness as the betrothed of Captain Wentworth, she exemplifies Aristotle's view that if, indeed, activity is

> what determines the character of life, no happy man can become miserable; for he will never do the acts that are hateful and mean. For the blessed man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances. (I.10.1100b33–36)

The painful loss of Wentworth, along with the intervening life experience she gained, enabled Anne to make a better decision when he proposed a second time because she has made the best of her circumstances and has not allowed the desire for her own happiness to be completely extinguished. She states that she would not give a young person the advice given to her by Lady Russell when she was nineteen; for the mature Anne, acting out of trust in the happiness that true love can bring outweighs considerations of the vicissitudes of fortune.

In conclusion, Kant was correct in stating that we cannot foresee all of the contingencies that may bear upon our achievement of happiness. Nevertheless, while any given counsel of prudence may indeed be a "hypothetical imperative" with all the risks such an imperative entails, Austen shows that for a truly moral being, for whom happiness is not merely a natural end but the supreme rational end of a good human life, this is the only imperative worth pursuing.

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"The Stranger God" and the "Artistic Socrates": On Nietzsche and Plato in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*

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Thomas Mann's 1912 novella, *Death in Venice*, depicts a man in his fifties who tries to live according to a classical ideal of reason and Stoic self-discipline then current in Germany.[1] The narrator introduces Gustav von Aschenbach as a great writer whose writing and life are examples of a new and artful heroism. A critic had observed that "the new type of hero this writer preferred . . . was based on the concept of 'an intellectual and youthful manliness which grits its teeth in proud modesty and calmly endures the swords and spears as they pass through its body'" (9). The culmination of his efforts is a dignified and "masterful maturity" that goes hand-in-hand with bourgeois respectability: "he did not refuse when a German prince . . . bestowed on the author . . . a nonhereditary title" (12).

Yet Aschenbach cannot help being drawn to something that is not part of a life devoted to this aesthetic ideal, something he does not understand and cannot name. On seeing a man standing in the portico of a mortuary chapel, a man whom he surmises is a foreigner and a traveler, Aschenbach is struck with "a feeling so intense, so new—or rather so long unused and forgotten—that he . . . felt his heart pound with horror and mysterious desire" (5). As a sensible health measure, he plans a month-long trip to Venice. There, he undergoes an increasing sense of disorientation, as if the world itself was being distorted, as he falls helplessly in love with a beautiful boy.

German classicism at the turn of the century is clearly a point of reference in Mann's portrayal of Aschenbach. A reader of Nietzsche, Mann saw the aesthetic

ideal to which Aschenbach devotes his life as a simplified, sanitized, and ultimately dangerous version of Greek thought, part of a Greco-mania that distorted the Greeks in a way that was acceptable for the bourgeoisie.

For example, Aschenbach sees the world and interprets his experiences in terms that clearly evoke the dualism of the gods Apollo and Dionysus that Nietzsche saw in Greek art: "Through Apollo and Dionysus, the two art deities of the Greeks, we come to recognize that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition . . . between the Apollinian art of sculpture, and the nonimagistic, Dionysian art of music" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 33). When Aschenbach first sees Tadzio, the boy with whom he falls in love, he uses the imagery of classical sculpture: "It was a face reminiscent of Greek statues from the noblest period of antiquity" (21). The next day, he is dazzled by the boy's "godlike beauty" and imagines that his face is "the face of Eros" (25). On the third day—after feeling ill, making plans to leave, and finally determining that he would stay—Aschenbach envisions the horizon as a bright, divine, Homeric landscape:

> The god with fiery cheeks now, naked, directed his horses, four-abreast, fire-breathing, day by day through the chambers of heaven, and his yellow curls fluttered along with the blast of the east wind. A silky-white sheen lay on the Pontos, its broad stretches undulating languidly (34).

Here and elsewhere, when Aschenbach imagines himself as being under the influence of Apollo, Mann employs Homeric hexameters (in German), thereby evoking the heightened, dreamlike state Nietzsche associated with Apollo.[2]

Later, a different and sinister influence invades and destroys what, as it turns out, Aschenbach has only fooled himself into believing is the pure image of "spiritual beauty" (37). Mann uses terms Nietzsche associates with Dionysus to describe the flip side of Aschenbach's attraction to Tadzio: "He was intoxicated in head and heart, and his steps followed the instructions of the demon whose pleasure it is to crush under foot human reason and dignity" (46). "Ecstasy" leads Aschenbach to "allow himself the most bewildering transgressions without timidity or embarrassment" (47). It is also revealed that the entire city is being ravaged by a cholera epidemic that fills the air with "vile, evil wind-spirits" (59). In the streets, "low-life virtuosos" play "vulgar, pining melodies" in an "incomprehensible dialect" (49, 51). Recall that, for Nietzsche, such folk songs, which are akin to the songs of the satyric choir in Greek tragedy, reflect the truth of "Dionysian reality" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 59). That is, they retain the vestiges of a sphere of life that is "beyond and prior to all phenomena," which cannot be rendered in language and is opposed to what appears as human will (*The Birth of Tragedy* 55). In the end, Aschenbach succumbs to the superior power of this "scornful deity" (Mann 55). He has a nightmare whose setting is his soul, and in which he is possessed by a "foreign invader" he recognizes as none other than "'the stranger god'":

> His heart pounded with the rhythm of the drum beats, his mind whirled, rage took hold of him and blinded him, he was overcome by a numbing lust, and his soul longed to join in the reeling dance of the god. . . . Now among them, now a part of them, the dreamer belonged to the stranger god (57).

Shortly thereafter, Aschenbach dies on the beach while gazing at Tadzio, who finally appears to him as a "pale and charming psychagogue" (63). This, Walter Kaufmann notes, is a title for Hermes, who in Greek myths led souls to the underworld (63).

In light of Mann's engagement with Nietzsche, *Death in Venice* can be read as a twentieth-century illustration of the perils of divine possession, as it has been dramatized in Greek tragedy. The story seems to illustrate a universal human tragedy, the experience of being overcome and ruined by powers that exceed our control, as in Euripides' *The Bacchae*. Moreover, it asks specifically about our relation to the powers the Greeks called Eros and Dionysus. How do we handle their occurrence in our lives? Can they be controlled, and if so, by what? Can Dionysus be the source of a new ideal for human flourishing, as Nietzsche proposed?

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche suggests it may be possible to imagine a new way of being with oneself and the world through a newfound ideal that is best apprehended in the Greek devotion to the god Dionysus. To Nietzsche, Dionysus is "the genius of heart" whose touch, if we are open enough to it, can allow us to be reborn to ourselves and to each other:

> The genius of heart, as that great concealed one possesses it, the tempter god and born pied piper of consciences whose voice knows how to descend into the netherworld of every soul . . . the genius of heart from whose touch everyone walks away richer . . . richer in himself, newer to himself than before, broken open, blown at and sounded out by a thawing wind, perhaps more unsure, tenderer, more fragile, more broken, but full of hopes that as yet have no name, full of new will and currents, full of new dissatisfaction and undertows. (233–34).

Nietzsche is pointing to the larger possibility of a revolution in being and morality that would challenge Christian conceptions by recalling and rethinking Greek models.[3] He can only hint, however, at the specific character of this new ideal. Like Socrates' *daimonion*, Dionysus speaks to Nietzsche of his thoughts and plans for mankind: "'I am well disposed towards him: I often reflect how I might yet advance him and make him stronger, more evil, and more profound than he is'" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 236). These values—stronger, more evil, and more profound—are clearly opposed to Christianity (and reactive to it) and would be, in Nietzsche's view, the basis of a new kind of human flourishing, what he elsewhere calls the "Great Health" (*The Gay Science* 346).

Mann shares with Nietzsche the insight that the image of pure spiritual beauty (which is only an illusion) is a compensatory response to the apprehension of horrible truths, or as Nietzsche put it, "Dionysian wisdom" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 69).[4] When he gazes upon Tadzio, Aschenbach imagines that he is "grasping beauty itself, the pure form of divine thought" (37). But Mann suggests that this is a response to a lack of knowledge of his own desire, which he assumes is merely physical sickness: "He was overwhelmed by that horrible condition produced by the sea air . . . His eyes ceased to function, his breathing was labored, he felt feverish, the blood pounded in his head" (29). According to Nietzsche, the whole self and world conception of the Apollinian poet is a response to the sight of the "abyss," a figure for whatever horrible truth is revealed by Dionysian wisdom.[5] Recall that the wisdom of Silenus, Dio-

nysus's companion, is simply everything negative about human life that we would prefer not to see: "'What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is—to die soon'" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 42). Mann seems to arrive at the same conclusion when Aschenbach, imagining himself as Socrates talking to Phaedrus, declares that knowledge is itself the abyss: "knowledge . . . has neither dignity nor discipline . . . it has sympathy for the abyss; it *is* the abyss" (61).

While Nietzsche sees Dionysian wisdom as the source for a new ideal and affirmation of life and human potential, the same cannot be said for Mann. In the end, Tadzio is revealed to Aschenbach not as "the face of Eros" but as the "charming psychagogue," Hermes (25, 63). There is a beautiful moment in which Aschenbach seems to accept being led into a new and boundless horizon of existence: "It seemed to him . . . as if the pale and charming psychagogue out there were smiling at him, beckoning to him; as if, lifting his hand from his hip, he were pointing outwards, hovering before him in an immensity full of promise. And, as so often before, he arose to follow him" (63). If Mann had ended the story there, he could be read as supporting Nietzsche's view. But Mann adds a final paragraph in which he clarifies the fact of Aschenbach's death: "Minutes passed before anyone rushed to the aid of the man who had collapsed to one side in his chair. . . . And later that same day a respectfully shaken world received the news of his death" (63).

Mann is closer to the Greek tragedians than to Nietzsche in his emphasis on Aschenbach's subjection to powers that are beyond his ability to understand and control. The "stranger god" in his dream has the power of "shameless enchantment," and under his influence, Aschenbach finds himself in the midst of a manic ritual frenzy, similar to that depicted in *The Bacchae*:

> Now among them, now a part of them, the dreamer belonged to the stranger god.
>
> Yes, they were he, and he was they, when they threw themselves on the animals, tearing and killing, devouring steaming gobbets of flesh, when on the trampled moss-covered ground there began an unfettered rite of copulation in sacrifice to the god (57).

Unlike Nietzsche, Mann does not see anything in this deity other than the demonic. In his characterization, Dionysus is a purely obscene and death-dealing, amoral tempter god. There is no path that leads from Dionysus to any kind of life. The only option seems to be to offer oneself as a beautiful and willing sacrifice, and Mann seems to be suggesting, with a certain side of Euripides and contra Nietzsche, that it is preposterous to think otherwise. *Death in Venice* refutes Nietzsche's claim that Dionysian art is that which would "convince us of the eternal joy of existence" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 104).

But Mann's thought on divine possession goes further, through his engagement with Plato's *Phaedrus*. There are two dialogues in the story, very dreamlike, in which Aschenbach assumes the persona of Socrates conversing with Phaedrus.

The first takes place early on, after Aschenbach had mistaken his feelings for Tadzio for physical sickness; his reason had determined he must flee, but he was forced to stay when, incredibly, the hotel misdirected his luggage. As he gazes at the lovely form on the beach, Aschenbach recreates Plato's setting in his mind's eye: "He

saw the ancient plane tree not far from the walls of Athens"; "The crickets sang. Two figures reclined on the grass that gently sloped . . . an older man and a younger, one ugly and one handsome" (38). The dialogue is consistent with Socrates' palinode to Eros in affirming that the "image of eternal beauty" is what is worth loving, and that the sight of a "perfect body" by a "sensitive man" (as opposed to one who is "impious, bad") is what allows the lover to access the divine. Aschenbach's description of the lover under the influence of divine madness is remarkably close to Plato's:

> He spoke to him of the searing terror that the sensitive man experiences when his eye lights on an image of eternal beauty . . . how he then trembles and is beside himself and scarcely dares turn his eyes upon the sight and honors him who has beauty. . . . For beauty, my dear Phaedrus, beauty alone is both worthy of love and visible at the same time. (38)[6]

The last sentence exactly echoes Plato: "beauty alone has this privilege, and therefore it is most clearly seen and loveliest" (485). For Plato, as for Aschenbach here, divine beauty is what shines through the beloved and is the true object of Eros. Thus, possession by Eros cannot but be desirable and good: "If Love is, as indeed he is, a god or something divine, he can be nothing evil" (Plato 461).

The second dialogue, which takes place near the end and after the nightmare of the "stranger god," reads like a recantation of the first, and thus of Socrates' palinode. Here, a skeptical Socrates asks whether Eros inspired by the clearly visible form of beauty—the path of the senses—actually leads to a higher vision of divine Beauty itself:

> But do you suppose, my dear boy, that anyone could ever attain to wisdom and genuine manly honor by taking a path to the spirit that leads through the senses? Or do you rather suppose . . . that this is a dangerously delightful path, really a path of error and sin that necessarily leads astray? (60)

This poet-Socrates cannot fathom any life-giving path forward. He rejects both wisdom and beauty as deceiving, concluding that, for the poet, both lead not to the realm of the spirit but to a dead-end abyss. The poet's knowledge is either false or malignant: "We poets can be neither wise nor honorable. . . . The masterly demeanor of our style is a lie and a folly. . . . Let us say we renounce analytical knowledge . . . [knowledge] *is* the abyss" (61). The poet's sensitivity to beauty does not offer a viable alternate path: "form and ingenuousness . . . lead to intoxication and desire . . . they too lead to the abyss" (61).

Is divine possession by Eros always desirable and good, as Plato's Socrates would maintain? Can Eros be experienced as demonic? Can the visible form of beauty, beauty insofar as it is visible to us, lift us up to the sight of divine Beauty itself?

Nietzsche surmised that, for Euripides, "a new demon" came to the fore and effectively destroyed Greek tragedy: "the deity that spoke through him was neither Dionysus nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn demon, called *Socrates*" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 82). According to Nietzsche, Euripides gave expression to an "artistic Socrates" who annihilated Dionysian tragedy through the imposition of a rational aesthetic principle (92):

Like Plato, Euripides undertook to show to the world the reverse of the "unin-

telligent" poet; his aesthetic principle that "to be beautiful everything must be conscious" is, as I have said, the parallel to the Socratic, "to be good everything must be conscious." So we may consider Euripides as the poet of aesthetic Socratism. (86)

Aschenbach, in his first Platonic dialogue and throughout much of the story, seems just such an "artistic Socrates," as seen and distorted through the lens of German classicism. His whole literary production and fame, which sought a "sense of beauty, a noble purity, simplicity, and sense of proportion," is actually based on the deliberate disavowal of knowledge (11). Mann's narrator repeatedly satirizes Aschenbach's cultivation of a calculated ingenuousness that made a virtue of aestheticism at the expense of morality for the sake of bourgeois dignity and respectability: "But moral determination that goes beyond knowledge . . . would that not also be . . . a moral simplification of the world and of the human soul and therefore also a growing potential for what is evil, forbidden, and morally unacceptable?" (11) In Aschenbach, the attempt to live according to an aesthetic ideal blinds him to the power of Eros, and when he does recognize it for what it is, he cannot experience it as anything other than demonic. Certainly, he is morally compromised and knows it, when, for example, he fails to tell Tadzio's mother the truth about the cholera epidemic: "'Let them keep quiet,' he whispered vehemently. And: 'I will keep quiet!' The consciousness of his guilty complicity intoxicated him" (56). Eros becomes an evil influence for Aschenbach only because he has disavowed knowledge. This portrayal is completely consistent with Plato's view of Eros as divine, as the error is clearly located in Aschenbach's dishonest relation to knowledge.

However, the Socrates of Aschenbach's second Platonic dialogue, which seems to recant the first, is closer to the writer that Aschenbach had been as a young man, before he had refashioned himself as a debased artistic Socrates: "Aschenbach had been as problematic and uncompromising as any young man can be. He had pandered to the intellect, exhausted the soil of knowledge . . . revealed secrets, put talent under suspicion, betrayed art" (10). *This* Socrates dares to contradict Plato when he uncompromisingly argues that the love of worldly beauty—"the way of the senses"—leads only to intoxication and ruin and nothing higher. Perhaps the best support for this view in the story is the transformation Aschenbach undergoes when he decides to have his hair dyed and curled, his brows arched and defined, and his lips and cheeks rouged, in a grotesque imitation of a "ghastly old fop" he had been horrified by at the start of his journey (21). In short, he becomes the embodiment of everything degraded and vile that he sought to reject through his art. His body serves as proof of the fact that the divine does not dwell within it. There is a Dionysian wisdom that is implied here, which is expressed explicitly by Aschenbach's second, skeptical poet-Socrates, namely, that knowledge is a Scylla, beauty a Charybdis, and Eros a chimera.

Aschenbach's critique of Plato must be qualified as being primarily applicable to poets, and perhaps *Death in Venice* may be read finally as a twentieth-century phenomenology of the problem with poets, as Mann saw it through his readings and in the context of German classicism. But I think the novella is more than that. It reopens significant questions about our relation to knowledge, beauty, and the divine, and invites us to answer them for ourselves. Aschenbach's skeptical poet-Socrates adds

an interesting parenthetical comment in the midst of his questioning about whether the path of the senses might really be a path of "error and sin" (60). He says, "(I leave the decision up to you)" (60).

Notes

1. My title quotes *Death in Venice* (56) and *The Birth of Tragedy* (92).
2. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche associated the experiences of dreams and intoxication with Apollo and Dionysus, respectively: "In order to grasp these two tendencies, let us first conceive of them as the separate art worlds of *dreams* and *intoxication*. These physiological phenomena present a contrast analogous to that existing between the Apollinian and the Dionysian" (33).
3. This is Nietzsche's broader project in *Beyond Good and Evil* and other works.
4. Nietzsche writes, "The Greeks knew and felt the terror and horror of existence" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 42). The myth of Oedipus is a prime example: "the myth seems to wish to whisper to us that wisdom, and particularly Dionysian wisdom, is an unnatural abomination; that he who by means of his knowledge plunges nature into the abyss of destruction must also suffer the dissolution of nature in his own person" (69).
5. Nietzsche writes, "The [Apollinian] poet's whole conception is nothing but precisely that bright image which healing nature projects before us after a glance into the abyss" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 68).
6. Compare it to Plato's description: "But he who is newly initiated . . . when he sees a god-like face or form which is a good image of beauty, shudders at first, and something of the old awe comes over him, then, as he gazes, he reveres the beautiful one as a god, and if he did not fear to be thought stark mad, he would offer sacrifice to his beloved as to an idol or a god" (487).

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The Human Person in Core Texts

Unheroic Heroes: Ambiguous Categories in Three Core Texts

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By the time students reach their sophomore year at Saint Joseph's College, they have taken two courses in Core, our integrated, eight-semester liberal education program. Those courses have introduced them to issues from the modern era of the Western world as well as from twenty-first-century global life. Upon entering their third course in Core at the start of their sophomore year, these students encounter something completely different: an ancient Mesopotamian king, Gilgamesh. In the years of teaching this course, which recounts the roots of Western civilization, I focused on *Gilgamesh* as an artifact of Mesopotamian society, using it to communicate ideas about the historical concerns of those ancient peoples. Consistently, though, student questions percolated along different lines, specifically Gilgamesh's moral identity and his status as either a hero or a villain—as one student put it, "I don't know whether this is a good guy or a bad guy." Rather than slough off these questions, I decided to table issues of historical context and contend directly with these issues of ambiguity. This had a profoundly positive effect on the class discussion, and, reflecting later, I realized the same kind of status ambiguity lay in other key texts employed elsewhere in the Core program. The ensuing conversations created extended explorations of the theme of categorical and moral ambiguity. In the following, I will briefly sketch out the presence of that theme in a few Core texts (*Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*) before considering the pedagogical benefits of explicit work on the topic of ambiguity.

The sense of ambiguity students detected in *Gilgamesh* appears very early in the story. The king is described as oppressing his subjects, forcing himself on women,

and otherwise "exceeding all bounds" until "the people suffer from his tyranny" (Mitchell 73). The situation changes somewhat when Gilgamesh is humanized by his friendship with Enkidu, yet the two embark on a quest to destroy the forest creature Humbaba, an adventure for which the motive is rather murky. For instance, at one point the objective is given as driving out evil, while at another, Gilgamesh is said to crave fame (Mitchell 91–94). Yet a third possibility arises when, after Humbaba's defeat, the two friends chop down the cedar forest into logs for a temple, suggesting a desire for resources as a possible motivation (Mitchell 128–29). Regardless of the incentive, the quest to destroy Humbaba arouses the attention of the goddess Ishtar, who takes an interest in Gilgamesh as a potential husband. Rather than react to this proposal in a measured manner, Gilgamesh seems to regress to his earlier, more transgressive habits, rejecting Ishtar in insulting terms; for instance asking rhetorically, "Why would I want to be the lover of a broken oven that fails in the cold?" (Mitchell 132). Not content to leave the matter there, he goes on to recite Ishtar's numerous other failed romances: "Remember what happened to that beautiful boy Tammuz: you loved him when you were both young, then you changed, you sent him to the underworld and doomed him to be wailed for, year after year" (Mitchell 133).

Gilgamesh's behavior sets in motion events leading directly to the death of his friend Enkidu, after which his grief propels him onto an ill-fated journey for immortality. Along the way, in my experience, his despair and desire for the impossible achieve at least a level of pathos and commiseration among students, if not necessarily admiration.

To that point, however, Gilgamesh's actions can certainly be characterized as erratic, impulsive, and selfish. Indeed, even the journey for immortality is motivated almost entirely by self-interest rather than any desire to better his community. Overall, the reaction in student discussions to this series of events and characterizations in the epic is that Gilgamesh does, and achieves, impressive heroic things, but not things that would necessarily qualify him as a hero in the light of their often implied definitions of a hero. Having embraced this line of inquiry, I countered with a series of paradoxes: Can one do heroic things and not be a hero, or would that imply that one can be a hero without doing heroic things? In other words, is there such a thing as an unheroic hero? The combination of furrowed brows, smiles, and wide eyes was almost as gratifying as the ensuing discussion.

Teaching further in the Core program, additional ambiguous characters emerge. Later in the sophomore year, students encounter Beowulf, a Germanic warrior dripping with arrogance and as interested in putting other warriors in their place as in slaying monsters. Take, for instance, this passage from Seamus Heaney's version of the text, when Beowulf feels the need to defend himself against the charges of a rival warrior:

> Now I cannot recall any fight you entered, Unferth, that bears comparison. I don't boast when I say that neither you nor Breca were ever much celebrated for swordsmanship or for facing danger on the field of battle. You killed your own kith and kin, so for all your cleverness and quick tongue you will suffer damnation in the depths of hell. (Heaney 39–41)

Further on, in the junior-year intercultural portion of our Core program, students

delve into the *Bhagavad Gita*, experiencing another paradox: Arjuna, the epitome of warrior prowess, who will not fight. Indeed, Arjuna occupies a liminal position in terms of status, but also literal geographic space, ordering his charioteer to drive them into the no-man's land between the two armies preparing to slaughter one another. In that ambiguous space, Arjuna rejects everything his warrior (in Sanskrit, *Kshatriya*) class stands for, remarking to his charioteer upon seeing the opposing army arrayed before them: "I do not want to kill them, even if I am killed, Krishna, not for kingship of all three worlds, much less for the earth" (Stoler-Miller 28).

Aside from these main characters, the three texts abound with ambiguous, paradoxical characters. In Humbaba, we find a monster who is not really a monster, despite his fearful looks. He poses a danger when sought out, but not a threat. His stated purpose is to guard the forest regions, being appointed by no less a figure than the god Enlil (Mitchell 125). As for the beasts in *Beowulf*, students are at times disoriented when it is suggested that they might have something in common with Grendel, Grendel's mother, or the dragon, all of whom spread mayhem in the epic. Yet, have they not felt alienated when left on the outskirts socially and "nursed a hard grievance" as Grendel is described (Heaney 9)? Similarly, if someone were to harm a loved one, might they not react with rage and vengeance as Grendel's mother does? And, finally, have they not ever possessed the desire, however negatively portrayed, to hoard and hold onto possessions all to themselves, as the dragon does?

If these hypotheses hold true, one may be forced into the uncomfortable position of admitting that either the monsters are not completely monstrous or that we ourselves are not as unmonstrous as we would like to think. Finally, Krishna, the guide and god in disguise for Arjuna, quite definitely challenges many students' conceptions of deity, composing a vision of a god that is anything but comforting:

> I see no beginning or middle or end to you, only boundless strength in your endless arms, the moon and sun in your eyes, your mouths of consuming flames, your own brilliance scorching this universe. You alone fill the space between heaven and earth and all the directions; seeing this awesome terrible form of yours, Great Soul, the three worlds tremble, and so do I. (Stoler-Miller 100).

Beyond simply teasing out this thread of ambiguity, it is worthwhile to consider its usefulness pedagogically. In many ways, the Core curriculum at Saint Joseph's College can be seen as parallel to William Perry's scheme of cognitive and moral development. According to Perry's scheme, in the first stages of moral development, most students see the world as divided "between the familiar world of Authority-right-we, as against the alien world of illegitimate-wrong-others" (59). Approaching these Core texts from the direction of ambiguity can be helpful when leading students through the early stages of dualistic, authority-driven commitment. When faced with a critique and analysis of certain Core texts, a black–and-white, good-and-evil, dichotomous view simply fails as a hermeneutic, calling for a more varied approach. By challenging and undermining easy categorization, the unheroic heroism of Gilgamesh and non-monstrosity of Humbaba can complicate a dualistic worldview.

On the other hand, and perhaps counterintuitively, focusing on the ambiguity of these literary characters can be a springboard past the next stages in Perry's scheme. In these middle stages, students may react to the implosion of dualism by develop-

ing a sweeping relativistic position in the face of which all values are vacated (115). The actions of these ambiguous figures, though, ultimately point to the latter stages of the scheme, when students aspire to commitments, determining in the midst of flux and conflict who they will be and for what they will stand (Perry 153–54). After all, apart from his own ambiguous personal status, Gilgamesh's choices have concrete impact on the people of Uruk and his friend Enkidu. Similarly, however one reacts to Beowulf's boasting, he does confront Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon, primarily on his own when the respective communities need to be defended. And, perhaps most dramatically, Arjuna comes to grips with his situation through Krishna's tutelage and resolves his liminal status by committing to fight in the war, choosing his side on the battlefield. The text puts his resolution this way: "Krishna, my delusion is destroyed, and by your grace I have regained memory; I stand here, my doubt dispelled, ready to act on your words" (Stoler-Miller 145).

Thus a focus on ambiguity in these texts can interrogate both black-and-white dualism and grayish relativism, nudging students to complicate their notion of heroism through contact with figures like Gilgamesh, but also to contemplate and make their own commitments, like Arjuna on the battlefield. By using these characters to question such categories as hero, villain, god, or monster, each of the figures involved in these texts eventually looks less clearly defined, but also less remote and less abstract. In the end, by muddying the waters and graying the divides, the characters within these Core texts paradoxically become more graspable, more understandable, and perhaps more like us.

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The Passions of the Soul in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

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Traditionally, the study of rhetoric has been an essential part of a liberal arts education. According to Aristotle, the rhetorical art enables one to be persuasive on both sides of an issue, "not that we should do both (for one ought not to persuade people to do what is wrong), but that the real state of the case may not escape us, and that we ourselves may be able to counteract false arguments, if another makes an unfair use of them" (*Rhetoric* 1.1.13). Given the balanced perspective of rhetoric and the defense against manipulation it supplies, a renewal of rhetorical studies within liberal arts education would be of great benefit today. To that end, this paper will consider Aristotle's enumeration of the passions in book two of the *Rhetoric*.

The most familiar legacy of Aristotelian rhetoric is the division made among three aspects of persuasion: logos, ethos, and pathos. Although Aristotle begins his treatise by focusing almost exclusively on the logic of a speech, and by explicitly rejecting all attempts to manipulate the passions of an audience, he later admits the necessity of some passionate appeals (1.1.4, 2.1.4). Because rhetoric is always aimed at a particular judgment, the artful speaker must prepare each given audience so that its members can follow his reasoning more easily (2.1.2). This means that rhetoric includes both the knowledge of how different feelings affect our capacity to judge and the ability to counteract those effects when necessary. Aristotle enumerates twelve major passions that are relevant to the art of rhetoric.

Anger is the primary rhetorical passion. Aristotle defines it as a painful longing for revenge in response to an undeserved belittling of oneself or one's own (2.2.1). It is important to note that though anger may be a reaction to some bodily harm, the

revenge that is longed for has to do with the opinion another person must have had before committing the assault. For example, being slapped in the face might be painful, but Aristotle claims that you can become angry whether or not you feel the physical pain. You assume that the person who slapped you must believe you are worth no serious attention—you are neither someone to be liked as a friend nor someone to be feared as an enemy (2.2.4)—and it is that assumption about another's opinion, rather than any immediate pain, that causes you to become angry. Moreover, since anger is derivative in this way, it can be caused by even the slightest indication of another's low opinion. For example, you might become angry when someone simply forgets your name (2.2.26).

Like anger, the next seven passions also arise whenever our own opinion about what we deserve comes into contact with the opinion someone else holds about our worth. The painful passions of anger, hatred, fear, and shame are all in response to a disharmony between one opinion and another, and the more pleasant passions of gentleness, friendship, confidence, and charity are all in response to some harmony of opinion. Thus, the first eight passions are all direct reactions to the opinions we assume other people hold in regard to ourselves. With the final four passions, however, the perspective shifts to account for the indirect reactions we have while observing the experience of other people.

Pity, indignation, envy, and emulation all share the same basic object—another person's experience. As we observe things happening to our neighbors, our emotional reaction depends upon three things: whether we believe their experience is good or bad, whether we believe they deserve it or not, and finally whether the observation itself is pleasant or painful for us. Pity is defined as the pain we feel when we see another, who is like us, suffering some evil without deserving it (2.8.2). Thus what we usually observe with fear in relation to ourselves is felt as pity when it happens to another person (2.8.13). Indignation is also a painful observation of what is undeserved, but it is felt when we see someone enjoying good things without deserving them (2.9.1). Indignation is contrary to pity, but despite their opposition, the same kind of person must be capable of feeling pity and indignation because it is the sign of a decent character to be pained by seeing what is undeserved (2.9.4). Envy, on the other hand, is completely opposed to the decent passions of pity and indignation. Envy is defined as the pain we feel when we observe another person enjoying good things even though we also believe them to be worthy of those good things (2.9.3). Envy is a sign of an indecent character and belongs to someone who has not been habituated correctly. In other words, it is not right to be pained by just deserts.

The final passion of emulation is similar to the passion of envy, but it is ultimately self-regarding and decent. Aristotle does not propose a straightforward definition of emulation but instead begins with a conditional statement. If emulation (*zēlos*) is a certain pain at the apparent presence of honorable goods that are possessed by those who are similar to us by nature . . . then an emulous person is necessarily someone who deems himself worthy of those same goods (2.11.1). In other words, the emulous person believes that he, too, deserves what another person has, but not at the expense of that other person's having it. Unlike envy, the passion of emulation prompts someone to prepare himself to acquire the goods he thinks he deserves

by nature. Thus it avoids the envious feelings of an indecent person who does not actually deserve the goods he sees the worthy person enjoying. Emulation requires appropriate self-esteem. Of course, if the emulous person is ever to be satisfied, then there must an abundance of goods that can be possessed by many persons of a similarly deserving nature at the same time.

As we read the *Rhetoric* to learn what Aristotle has to say about the passions, it is important to keep in mind the ways in which the focus on public speaking may limit his analysis of human experience. In addition to the separation of logos, ethos, and pathos mentioned above, there is also a less familiar legacy of Aristotelian rhetoric: his division between advisory, judicial, and display speeches. Advisory rhetoric is mainly found in the assembly hall regarding what would be advantageous in the future; judicial rhetoric is mainly found in the courtroom regarding the justice of what was done in the past; and display rhetoric is about what is beautiful in the present. This third kind of rhetoric is traditionally identified with funeral orations, but Aristotle never specifies such a setting for display speeches. All three kinds of rhetoric are delivered in public, and due to this political horizon of the treatise, Aristotle's enumeration of the passions excludes those that are not useful for persuading a crowd. The most conspicuous absence is that of desire (*epithumia*).

In the brief lists found in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, and *On the Soul*, Aristotle includes desire among the passions (1105b22, 1220b13, 403a8). In the *Rhetoric*, it is occasionally called a passion, but desire is not explicitly analyzed in the enumeration of book two; instead, it is said to be what "paves the way" (*hodopoiein*) for the passion of anger, since those who are prevented from getting what they desire often become angry (2.2.10). This silence about desire as a passion in its own right is understandable given the rhetorical aim of a public speaker. Crowds are composed of individuals who may desire very different things, but those individuals will all share the same basic hope for the satisfaction of their various desires. Therefore, the public speaker must try to abstract from the essential particularity of each person's desire in order to persuade the crowd as a whole using the more thumotic passions, beginning with anger. The final passion of emulation is the closest that Aristotle's rhetorical enumeration gets to the more erotic passions mentioned in other treatises.

Does the *Rhetoric*, then, have anything to say about inspiring feelings of desire? Is the art of rhetoric only concerned with appealing to the thumotic passions of a crowd and not at all concerned with the erotic passions of an individual? Does Aristotle's treatise have anything to say about the seductive rhetoric described in Plato's dialogues, especially the *Phaedrus*?

In book three, Aristotle insists that the style of display rhetoric is most appropriate for written speeches—the work (*ergon*) of a display speech is accomplished in the reading itself (3.12.5). All three kinds of rhetoric are politically useful, but only display speeches allow each audience member to judge for himself, since assemblies or juries eventually must vote to reach a single judgment. All twelve rhetorical passions are also politically useful, but only the final passion of emulation points toward a kind of speech that could be tailored to individuals. Written display speeches, then, could aim to induce the passion of emulation in particular readers, even though its

readership as a whole might remain unpersuaded by such rhetoric. These written display speeches could also aim to counteract the passion of emulation and perhaps spur individual readers to reflect on their own self-estimation and to question their own opinions about the goodness of things.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the treatment of the passions in the *Rhetoric* is limited, and I would also like to suggest that Aristotle is fully aware of this limitation. Both the final passion of emulation and the third kind of display rhetoric point beyond the political horizon of the assembly hall or law court. Aristotle leaves open the possibility of a private rhetoric communicated through well-crafted writings that successfully inspire different passions in different people. Therefore, the study of rhetoric is important not only as a traditional subject within a liberal arts education, but also as a method for educators to understand how the core texts themselves are able to persuade students.

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Montesquieu and the Mystery of the Missing Good

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The premodern style of philosophy would build an account of political order around an answer to the question of the ultimate human good; the modern style more often denies a *summum bonum*, or identifies it with goods traditionally considered subordinate—e.g., satisfaction of desire, security, freedom, economic prosperity—and in this way still answers the question and builds around it, at least implicitly. This paper searches *The Spirit of the Laws* for clues as to Montesquieu's answer, wondering how his answer might guide his overall view of political order. One finds the reverse, or so this paper argues: Montesquieu's view of decent political order, especially his fear of despotism, guides him to consistently sidestep the question.

The Spirit of the Laws is missing certain markers of modern philosophy. First, the premoderns think of sovereignty concretely: "the sovereign" names a person or group, next to others, with authority to order a political community. Sovereignty in modern thought is abstract and intangible—an essentially hidden *source* of authority the philosopher identifies as the reality underneath the appearances, some secret spring of legitimacy to be tapped by a procedure the philosopher specifies. Montesquieu's sovereignty is concrete, not occult. The modern view of sovereignty starts with Jean Bodin: the unified, absolute power to command, in no way subject to the commands, rules, or consent of others. In a curious turnabout, Montesquieu seems to recast this as his definition of despotism: "where one, without law or rule, can do anything according to his will and whims" (II, 1).

This leads to a second missing marker of modern philosophy: the epistemological problem of getting out of the human head, of needing a procedure to map the

essentially hidden reality that cannot show up, because we see perceptions and not things, think ideas, not things. Things do not have natures or orders that pre-philosophical reason discerns; rather, through its methods and ideas, modern philosophical reason calculates and controls cryptic substructures beneath what shows. But Montesquieu goes about his business without addressing the Way of Ideas; he steps over this modern epistemological mousetrap and seems to believe that natural reason discerns things, their natures, and their orders. He uses a more phenomenological method, returning to the lifeworld, *zu den Sachen sebst*. He even implies that only by more closely attending to human things, their natures, and their orders, as they show up in mundane facts, may we hope to know and order *ourselves*. He indulges no pretense to a theory that constructs the occult truth of legitimate power and no promise of a procedure to solve the problem of politics. His method of knowing is description and discernment; his method of politics is moderation and prudence.

Another thing is missing: an account of the good life. It is in this failure to root his account of politics in a developed conception of the good life rather than in an aspect of mere life that Montesquieu seems quite modern. In the only all-capped text of *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu announces, "The well-being of the people is the supreme law." But by the time he makes this statement (part 5, book 26, chapter 23, p. 516), the reader has earned the right to ask: *And what the heck is human well-being?*

Montesquieu says a lot about good and bad laws and customs. While some are bad thoroughly (e.g., slavery), he never lights upon an always good human law or custom. He despises despotism, the bad we recognize more easily and against which he takes his bearings. But we seek in vain his unequivocal partisanship for republic or monarchy. Not written to defend, simply, one or the other, the book yet has a political point, which he marks clearly: "I say it, and it seems to me that I have written this work only to prove it: the spirit of moderation should be that of the legislator; the political good, like the moral good, is always found between two limits" (602). This may intimate why he fails to ground his account of good and bad human things in a potentially distracting account of the human best: our good is always situational and relational, between excess and deficiency. He then gives an example of an atrocity in pursuit of the good: "Shall the excess be the good, and all the relations between things be destroyed?" Excess destroys *the relations* between things, and we know from sentence 1 of the work that laws are the "necessary relations deriving from the nature of things" (3). Perhaps the human good appears in Montesquieu as living by good laws—that is, discerning in the circumstance the proper *relation* between things grounded in the *nature* of things. And good laws are complex and various because the human good is relational in a second way: there are many goods. "Human laws enact about the good," and "there are several goods" (495). Presumably, our good relation to any single good must allow good relations to other goods, based on distinction and comparison between them.

But no principle appears to order our proper relations with the many things to which we relate. *The Spirit of the Laws* frustrates a philosophical reading because it fails to ground approval or disapproval of this or that in any such principle; one wonders why, ultimately, Montesquieu endorses x, y, or z for us.

These—relationality and multiplicity—are formal features of human goods. An early chapter sketches some content, primordial human desiderata. In book 1, chapter 2, "On the laws of nature," these apparent goods—yielding laws "deriving uniquely from the constitution of our being"—include preservation, nourishment, company with others, sex, knowledge, and God. Here he approximates the structure of classical natural law reflection: use basic human inclinations as clues to the human good, which goods then indicate natural laws. (The argument structure and enumerated inclinations are close to those in Aquinas, *ST* I–II Q 94a 3.) Montesquieu never returns to this quick and thin treatment to ground his praise for this or that "good" regime, law, or custom or his disapproval of a "bad" one. He also never gives a principle or a fundamental good in light of which these various apparent goods ought to be ruled and measured, compared, ordered together, and prioritized one over another.

Montesquieu informs us of several fundamental relations in which human beings find themselves: relations that might be used to schematize the desiderata of book 1, chapter 2. Though occasionally attending to our relation to the material world—physics, nourishment, topography, climate—in concluding book 1, chapter 1, he highlights three others: our relations to our creator, to ourselves, and to our fellows, relations we are liable to forget and to which we are recalled, respectively, by God via the laws of religion, by philosophers via the laws of morality, and by legislators via political and civil laws. Good laws put us in proper relation to the many things to which we are related by our nature, by the constitution of our being. In this mystery of Montesquieu's missing good, we readers seek a meta-law relating these basic relations.

By the work's title, Montesquieu promises us one. The "spirit of the laws" names, according to book 1's surprising definition, the *relations* between laws and all the many things to which they are related, *including each other* (9). The work is about not laws, but meta-laws: the spirit of the laws comprises the relations (i.e., laws) between laws and myriad things, including laws. The law relating the basic types of law—religious, natural, political, civil, domestic—would be the principle determining how to relate the different *orders* of things to which these different laws relate. And by putting the several realms of human goods in proper relation to us and each other, based in our nature and the nature of things, it would entail an account of the human good. Therefore, we should uncover Montesquieu's missing good in his account of how to relate the basic types of law.

In Thomas's *Treatise on Law*, this occurs in the prioritization of natural and divine laws (which can never truly conflict) over human law (and in his claim that while human reason rules and measures our good, it is itself ruled and measured by God). Montesquieu's treatment occurs in book 26, titled "On the laws in the relation they should have with the order of things upon which they are to enact." As the title indicates, book 26 focuses on the different orders of things and how these orders *should* be related, given the natures of these things, to different types of law. "The idea" of book 26 is that "There are different orders of laws, and the *sublimity* of human reason consists in knowing well to which of these orders principally relate the things on which one should enact and in not putting confusion into the principles that govern men" (494; emphasis added). That is, we must distinguish, according to

their natures, the various realms of things to which we relate and keep our types of law straight, properly related to each other. Implicitly, insights should follow about ordering these orders, distinguishing, comparing, and balancing the many kinds of things that can be good for human beings.

This book, in which Montesquieu identifies "the supreme law" as "the well-being of the people," reiterates two themes: conforming to "the nature of things," and not letting one type of law govern outside its jurisdiction. He defends the multiplicity of jurisdictions and the prerogatives of lower types of law; and he highlights our need to attend to the particulars of our circumstances to respond to the natures of things. By recognizing the multiplicity of goods and putting everything in its proper place, we may, it seems, better order them toward human well-being.

Book 26 presents examples in which the traditionally subordinate law has jurisdiction: the natural law sometimes has jurisdiction against the religious, the political against the natural, the civil against the political, and the particular case against the civil law. This deflationary strategy, which seems rather modern in style, coheres with the spirit of part 5 (books 24–26) generally, which begins with a begging off of theology: "As in this work, I am not a theologian, but someone who writes about politics, there may be things that would be wholly true only in a human way of thinking, for they have not been at all considered in relation to the more *sublime* truths" (459; emphasis added). He investigates religions in book 24 to "seek the ones that are the most in conformity with the good of society, the ones that, though they do not have the effect of leading men to the felicities of the next life, can most contribute to their happiness in this one" (459). He seeks to secure natural goods and punts on factoring in transcendent goods, perhaps suggesting the dualistic separation of transcendent goods and their irrelevance to our natural good; and perhaps suggesting that one can understand our this-worldly good in *abstraction* from the ultimate human end, that human reason can or must go about its business without ruling and measuring itself against some more sublime reason. In sum, and more precisely: perhaps suggesting that nature can *be* and *be understood* without grace. Put more tendentiously: to what extent can one be a political thinker without doing *any* theology? It is not a rhetorical question.

The idea of a closed material system as natural is another common mark of modern philosophy, in both its material-scientific and moral-political sides. Does Montesquieu bear this mark? It is unclear whether he buys the modern autonomy of the natural or emphasizes natural goods for prudential reasons. There are indeed prudential reasons to do so: for even true religious belief often runs over natural goods on its enthusiastic way to the eschaton.

The multiplicity of human goods, and our relationality not just to a possible creator but also to ourselves and our fellows, are clear. The social usefulness of some religions is "more evident" than religious truth (462), and Montesquieu seems to defend, moderately, belief in the sacred on this secular ground. On the whole, though, he defends these phenomenologically prior goods and relations against less known philosophical and theological absolutes that might disrupt prudence and moderation. He worries, because "men [are] made to preserve, feed, and clothe themselves, and do all things done in society" (466), that some religions encourage an overly

contemplative life or political detachment. But it isn't clear, philosophically, how mundane goods could ever be balanced against an absolute. He seems aware of the problem. "Human laws enact about the good; religion about the best. The good can have another object because there are several goods, but the best is one alone" (495). Because the ideal does not apply identically in all circumstances, religion should give counsels, establishing ideals but not laws (464). And, of course, *The Spirit of the Laws* persistently emphasizes that we should not allow our idea of the best to become the enemy of the good.

If we should not allow the good to become an enemy of goods, is the bigger problem—for human beings and for Montesquieu—that The Good is missing, or that it might be found? Both involve problems. Montesquieu helps us face what we could call "the problem of goods" rather than the clichéd "problem of evil." While experiencing evil may motivate skepticism of a competent and benevolent God who fails to spare us, the experience of natural goods may motivate not only indifference to (489), but also fear of, an absolute, transcendent Good who could suffocate real but relative worldly goods.

Montesquieu's bogeyman is despotism, undivided power: it destroys the relationality and multiplicity belonging to politics by the nature of things. And does not the god of monotheistic revelation portend exclusive rule? We are reminded of Aristotle's advice not to make all sacrifices to the same god, for we owe different relations, different dues, and there are multiple parties—the gods, our parents, philosophy teachers—to whom we owe too much to repay.

An analogy: for Montesquieu (echoing Aristotle), "nobility is of the essence of monarchy," that is, the prerogatives of the multiple nobles save the monarch from despotism, rule by one in which "there is no fundamental law" (18). He seems to use a parallel strategy regarding the sovereignty of the good. The prerogatives of multiple goods prevent the good's despotism, rule by one in which there can be no relationality. In religious terms, can the one true God be a king, rather than a despot? In answering this question, the theological content of different monotheisms would matter: Judaism's emphasis on covenant and negotiation between God and his people, the Trinity's relationality and the Incarnation's apotheosis of human life (carnis and all), and submission to Islam's untranslatable God dispose people, I think, to different attitudes. Manner of belief matters also: "The truest and most saintly dogmas can have very bad consequences when they are not bound with the principles of society" (472). It's not just what you think, but the way that you think it.

This problem arises not merely in the Montesquieu interpretation, but also, for example, in the Aristotle interpretation, with scholars debating between "dominant end" and "inclusive" views of human happiness. In book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle identifies the highest human good as something divine and above us: *theoria*, intellectual contemplation. But then, reminding us that we are social and compound beings with practical goods and needs, he reiterates the appropriateness for us of political life and noble deeds. This problem arises also in monotheistic theology. For example, Thomas—who certainly defends the goodness of creation, the reality and moral weight of created goods—still says that one should never pray for anything other than salvation. And not just some philosophically or theologically

imported weed, the problem sprouts autochthonously within the lifeworld. Let's start with the phenomenological evidence of the relative goodness of the many mundane things we must distinguish, compare, and balance. Doing so is a challenge of everyday life, one which—when watered, pruned, and admired—may flower into philosophy. What makes these many goods good, and different goods, and one more choice-worthy than another? (Here arises an ethical version of the classic metaphysical "Problem of the One and the Many.")

Natural goods can't be defended in merely naturalistic terms: flattening them out, the modern tendency is to make men mere animals, closing the way to anything higher. Yet defending natural goods—digging beneath them to ground their goodness, in search of a principle to verify and synthesize them with each other well—threatens to undermine them. The task of distinguishing our many goods and putting our many relations in proper relation truly requires "the sublimity of human reason" (494) even if "the laws should not be subtle" (614).

We cannot defend good regimes without an account of, or unaccounted assumptions about, the ultimate human good. Yet, it is not clear how we can prevent the source, the Good that would authenticate our many goods, from displacing their goodness. That remains a mystery. Montesquieu merely sidesteps it. He at least avoids dismissive solutions. Clearing a space for human reason to relate its many relations, this mystery—what is the ultimate human good, and how does it relate to subordinate goods?—might deserve some shelter from our solutions, might ask for appreciation rather than answer. Thus, perhaps one unfairly complains about a good that Montesquieu fails to do, when he does some good things, and when, compared to many, he chooses a lesser evil (book 26, chapter 2).

The fear of despotism guides Montesquieu to sidestep the problem of the ultimate human good. This is tied both to his rejection of the modern, despotic concept of sovereignty and to his more descriptive, phenomenological procedure with its appreciation of more manifest human goods like liberty, security, and prosperity. Is he, in all this, modern? Well, yes. Of course. Kind of.

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Looking at the Individual's Role in History through Joseph Roth's *The Emperor's Tomb*

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At Concordia University Irvine, I teach history in the Enduring Questions and Ideas curriculum. Our history classes are constructed in a thematic way around how individuals and societies have explored and answered certain enduring questions throughout history. Some of these questions can be summarized as follows: How should I be governed? What is the nature of a just society? What are the characteristics of a virtuous citizen? The purpose of this paper is to explore the use of the book by the great Austrian author Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb (Die Kapuzinergruft),* as a case study in answering these great questions. *The Emperor's Tomb* is Roth's 1938 sequel to his 1932 novel *Radetzky March (Radetzkymarsch)*, which is widely considered to be one of the great works of German literature. *Radetzky March* traces the half-century before the collapse of the embodiment of the answers to those questions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As the sequel to that great work—and a great work in its own right—*The Emperor's Tomb* explores the individual's place in human history when it seems the course of history has swept one aside. Or, another way to put it, what does one do and where does one go, if one's society has rejected one's answers to the above-mentioned enduring questions?

First, it may be odd to refer to Joseph Roth as an Austrian in that he was not an Austrian in our current sense of the word, which is someone who is a citizen of the European Union member state that straddles the Alps known as Austria and more than likely a native German-speaker. Roth was an Austrian in the traditional sense. He was born into a family of Galician Jews in Lvov (now in Ukraine) and a subject of Franz Joseph I, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, King of Bohemia, etc. (Roth,

Radetzky March, viii). Roth and his protagonist in *The Emperor's Tomb,* Trotta, are products of what might be called the Austrian (or Hapsburg) idea. This idea was a particular answer to those above-mentioned enduring questions in the Central European context, namely in regard to how nationalism approached these questions. The old Austrian idea was counterintuitive to the patchwork of nation-states that now make up the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, but one could argue that it was in some ways a spiritual predecessor to the European Union. The idea was that Austria-Hungary formed a supra-nation inclusive of its myriad of peoples, religions, and classes. It put forward a vision of society in which the various nations of Central Europe (German, Hungarian, Slav, and Jew) could work and trade together while maintaining their unique identities under the benevolent protection and leadership of the emperor.

Before one thinks that Roth believed that the old empire was some sort of golden age, Trotta, the narrator of *The Emperor's Tomb*, hints to the reader at the beginning that the implementation of the Austrian idea was still imperfect. Trotta lived in Vienna and came from a family of Slovenian peasants, ennobled by Franz Joseph I in the 1850s. (This story would be familiar to readers of *Radetzky March*.) Trotta indicates that his deceased father saw the then-current constitutional arrangement of the Dual Monarchy, in which Germans and Hungarians dominated Slavs, as deficient. His father's solution to the problem was that Austria-Hungary would become a "Triple Monarchy," in which Germans, Hungarians, and Slavs would all receive fair treatment and equal representation (*The Emperor's Tomb,* 3). It was this optimism in the adaptability and inherent tolerance of the monarchy that was passed on to Trotta and shared by his friends and family.

The first half of the book captures a snapshot of the opportunities Austria-Hungary offered the peoples of Central Europe in the lives of its characters. The Trotta family owed their luxurious, aristocratic existence in Vienna to their military and administrative service to the emperor. But perhaps more emblematic of these opportunities were two other characters in the book from the lower classes. Trotta's cousin, a simple Slovenian peasant named Joseph Branco, traveled the whole breadth of the monarchy from modern-day Slovenia to western Ukraine roasting and selling chestnuts in what was essentially a large free-trade zone with open borders. This peripatetic business put Branco in contact with a Jewish cabbie from Galicia named Manes Reisinger. Reisinger used his friendship with Branco to contact Trotta in Vienna, who in turn contacted more powerful men in the Imperial government, to have Manes's talented son Ephraim sent to the music academy in Vienna. These three men formed such a powerful friendship that at the outbreak of World War I they all joined the same infantry unit so they could fight and die for the "Austrian idea" against the forces of Russian Pan-Slavism (one of the great existential threats to the monarchy in the early twentieth century).

Nonetheless, the tide of history flowed against the three men. The Emperor Franz Joseph I died in 1916, and Austria-Hungary lost the war in 1918. The Austrian idea was buried with the emperors in the Imperial Crypt, while the three friends were, in Trotta's words, "found unfit for death" (*The Emperor's Tomb,* 136). They were captured by the Russians in the opening campaigns of 1914 and remained

isolated in Siberia as prisoners of war. Trotta escaped from his internment and returned, like Rip van Winkle, to a Vienna that had been radically altered by the death of the Austrian idea and its replacement by four other, competing answers to those ever nagging and enduring questions: "How should I be governed? What is the nature of a just society? Who is a virtuous citizen?" Trotta, with his own answer rejected and buried with Franz Joseph I, spent the second half of the book attempting to navigate this new world as four ideologies—liberalism, communism, Austro-fascism, and German national socialism—battled to impose their answers upon postwar Vienna.

For the entirety of the 1920s, Trotta lived in a Vienna under the liberal Republic of Austria, in which he had to adapt to the abolition of nobility and the inconvenient fact that he needed to hold a job in a free-market capitalist economy. Nonetheless, the liberal republic still provided a model that allowed for the coexistence of the former nobility with other classes, and it tolerated the non-German elements of the old monarchy such as the Slovenian Trottas or their Polish friend (the former Count) Chojnicki. The disadvantage of the free-market was the plague of various financial charlatans with cockamamie business schemes. Trotta's estranged wife, Elisabeth, fell under the spell of two of them, a Hungarian known as Jolanth Szatmary and a Prussian called Kurt von Stettenheim. Trotta, in his attempts to win back Elisabeth's love, continued to lend money to her foreign business partners and took out multiple mortgages in order to continue lending them money. Elisabeth's father, who had been supplier of uniforms to the Imperial and Royal Army, was nearly ruined by the monarchy's collapse. He lost his remaining fortune backing his daughter's associates' poor business ventures and completed his ruin by betting against the French franc on the stock market. In Austria, as in much of 1920s Europe, liberal free-market capitalism proved inadequate. Perhaps, in Austria's case, the former monarchy's free-trade zone was replaced by many border controls and tariff walls, which, for example, reduced Joseph Branco to selling chestnuts in Vienna. The growing number of communists in Vienna aimed to provide a better answer.

The communist idea was an international one. In this way, it somewhat shared the nationally inclusive spirit of the old Austrian idea, and Roth represents this spirit in the return of the character Ephraim Reisinger. After the war, the Galician Jew gave up his studies at the music academy to become a communist agitator and propagandist. He provided his father, Manes, with a fake passport so he could remain in Austria. Trotta's interactions with the communists throughout the book proved to be largely negative, thanks to their derisive views towards the upper classes. However, Ephraim and the communists had to compete not only against the liberals but also against two decidedly anticommunist answers to the enduring questions. Things accelerated with the 1933 elections in neighboring Germany and the victory of the Pan-Germanist National Socialist Party under Adolf Hitler. Pan-Germanism was perhaps the greatest threat to the old monarchy since the Revolutions of 1848. Count Chojnicki, at one point in the second half of the book, goes to the café just so he could pick a fight with any random (in his eyes) treasonous Sudeten German (*The Emperor's Tomb,* 135). On the other hand, Trotta remained decidedly aloof of contemporary politics. The Nazi electoral victory in Germany forced changes in Austria

that led to the destruction of the communists and Ephraim Reisinger during the four-day Austrian Civil War in 1934.

The result was the rise of the clericalist Austro-fascists under Engelbert Dollfuss and Kurt Schuschnigg. They attempted to build a new nation with the only remaining part of the old monarchy along Italian fascist lines that was decidedly against National Socialism and Pan-Germanism. By this point in the novel, Trotta and his mother had turned their home into a boarding house for many of their friends, who were also relics of the old monarchy. Trotta's wife, Elisabeth, ran off to Hollywood with her former business partners. Trotta sensed that there was little hope in Vienna for his only son, Franz Joseph Eugene, and sent him to boarding school in Paris. While the Austro-fascists continued to rule, Trotta and his fellow former aristocrats went daily to a café owned by a Jewish man in the city. In the final chapter, their evening socializing was interrupted by a jackbooted man, who looked like he serviced the toilets, announcing Austria's incorporation into the Third Reich. This moment is the most unsettling for Trotta, which is the announcement of the triumph of the most anti-Austrian idea of them all—an idea that would set the nations against each other with the goal to enslave them to the German *Volk*. It is here in the novel that Trotta reveals why he has not been a political participant since 1918—that he does not believe in any of the answers put forward. Alone and disturbed, he wanders at night through the streets of Vienna and attempts to enter the tombs of the emperors at the *Kapuzienergruft*. He ends the book with a question: "Where can I go now, a Trotta?" (*The Emperor's Tomb,* 183).

When confronted with Trotta's conduct in *The Emperor's Tomb*, one can easily accuse him of being disinterested and inactive in political affairs and ultimately failing to make peace with the reality set before him. Furthermore, his attempt at self-entombment with the emperors can strike one as cowardly in the face of the great Nazi evil, especially since the modern reader knows how the story ends in 1945. Roth, writing in 1938, did not. Nonetheless, if one looks closer, Trotta's behavior after the war does provide an answer and links with other readings in a core class. Rather than becoming involved in postwar politics, he tends to his family. One may note that he may be tending to his own garden like Candide or cultivating his family, which Aristotle sets in his *Politics* as the basis for political life. Trotta attempts to reconcile himself with his wife through his reckless loans to her business partners, he cares for his aging mother, he raises his son, and he maintains his friendships. Furthermore, the dispatch of his son to Paris may say even more about his thoughts on Austria and Europe's future. If the old Austrian answer could not be resurrected, then liberalism was the next best answer. While Trotta knew that he could not make peace with the new world, his son could grow up a part of it and, through his name of Franz Joseph Eugene, carry the torch of the old one.

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Race, Gender, and the Environment in Core Texts

Cultivating Cato: Race, Resistance, and Sociability in Joseph Addison's *Cato, A Tragedy*

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In an age that preached freedom while promoting the transatlantic slave trade, Joseph Addison chose the character of an African prince to represent a refined and sociable stoicism suitable for the modern world. When it was first performed in London in 1713, *Cato, A Tragedy* attracted praise from both crowds and critics. Whigs and Tories almost immediately enlisted Addison's language for their own purposes. Throughout the eighteenth century, writers shamelessly stole lines from the play. Addison's depiction of honor, virtue, and the love of liberty captured the imagination of an entire generation, permeating European society and spreading to the colonies. There is some evidence that George Washington broke army regulations and ordered *Cato* to be performed for his soldiers at Valley Forge in 1777, and at least two revolutionary slogans, Nathan Hale's "I regret that I have but one life to lose for my country" and Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death," can be traced to passages in the play. Addison's words helped shaped the heroic self-understanding of a new people. Yet *Cato* is seldom performed today. In fact, Joseph Addison, who gained fame not only as a playwright but also as an essayist, makes only the rare cameo in college classrooms. By revisiting this important but neglected play, we can uncover some of the tensions concerning honor, liberty, and race that lie at the core of modern self-understanding.

By portraying resistance to tyranny as virtuous self-restraint, Addison appropriates elements of ancient stoicism from the writings of Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch.

Yet he does not simply transmit ancient stoicism to a new age. He transforms it. He shifts the focus away from the "rigid virtues" of Cato and offers the alternative figure of Juba as more appropriate for polite society within a modern commercial republic. Addison does not just praise Cato; he cultivates him, translating his austere virtue into something softer, more modern, and projecting it across racial divisions.

One of the wonderful surprises of the play is that the most important moral exemplar in *Cato* is not Cato. Cato's godlike austerity and moral perfection are too distant, too inaccessible for the viewer to embrace or emulate. The true moral exemplar of the play is the young Numidian, Juba, who had fought with Cato against Caesar. In the end, it is Juba and not Cato who embodies a "sociable freedom" that is both principled and civil. It is Juba and not Cato who carries the hope of a free and honorable republican future.

The play unfolds in Northern Africa in 46 BCE, as Cato the Younger and his Numidian allies are making a last stand against Julius Caesar. When Juba's father, the Numidian king, dies on the battlefield, the young Juba must decide whether to continue to support Cato or betray him and his father's memory in order to align himself with the conquering Caesar. We find Juba in a whirlwind of passions, possessed by vengeance and love. Not only does he burn with anger for his father's death, he is also drawn to Cato's daughter, Marcia. He experiences both righteous fury in the face of aggression and tender hope for sustained union. At the same time, Juba's general, Syphax, urges him to break with Cato, and when he refuses, Syphax secretly schemes to overthrow him. Young and untested, Juba finds himself in a political and military crisis, forced to make decisions that will shape not only his own life but the lives of his people.

In the midst of these unsettling emotions, Juba sees in Cato a calm confidence worthy of emulation. Yet he goes beyond Cato by seeking to bring Cato's virtue down from the heavens and make it dwell in the world. For Juba, leaders must do more than exhibit heroic restraint themselves; they must strive to encourage it in others. Early in the play, Juba announces the proper aspiration of a virtuous leader:

> To civilize the rude, unpolished world,
> And lay it under the restraint of laws;
> To make man mild, and sociable to man;
> To cultivate the wild, licentious savage
> With wisdom, discipline, and liberal arts —
> The embellishments of life; virtues like these
> Make human nature shine, reform the soul,
> And break our fierce barbarians into men (I.iv.32–38 p. 18)

Juba insists that a leader must not only model self-restraint, but also employ law and the liberal arts to make citizens mild and sociable, to reform their souls, and to cultivate their virtue. Although he appeals to the civilizing mission of government, it is worth noting that Addison places this task in the hands of Juba and not the conquering Romans.

Yet not all of the characters of *Cato* are equally committed to these "civilizing

arts" (I.iv.40 p. 18). Juba's general, Syphax, remains unimpressed. He questions the worth of "Roman polish, and this smooth behaviour / That render man thus tractable and tame" (I.iv.41–42 p. 19). In fact, what Juba praises as virtue, Syphax scorns as hypocrisy. Syphax contrasts the naturalness and authenticity of the African hunter with the artificial virtues and "haughtiness of soul" that the Romans call stoicism. Here Addison articulates a powerful critique of Cato and the way in which Juba seeks to emulate him. For Syphax, the self-command that Cato embodies forces the Numidians into an alien and inauthentic mold, changing them "into other creatures / Than what our nature and the gods designed" (I.iv.47–48 p. 19). It is with obstinate pride that Syphax asserts, "I have not yet so much the Roman in me" (I.iv.10 p. 17).

It is worth noting that both Numidian leaders, Juba and Syphax, in very different ways, aspire to liberty. They agree that freedom from domination is essential to a life worth living. Both would accept the claim, made later in the play, that a good life consists in more than subsistence:

> 'Tis not to stalk about, and draw fresh air
> From time to time, or gaze upon the sun;
> 'Tis to be free. When liberty is gone.
>
> Life grows insipid, and has lost its relish (II.iii.5–9 p. 38).

While both Juba and Syphax desire liberty, they have very different views about what that liberty entails. Syphax follows Hobbes in defining freedom as the capacity to pursue one's desires without interference from others. He is skeptical of those who talk of virtuous or honorable self-restraint. In fact, he suspects that those who preach virtue are hiding their true natures from others and perhaps even themselves. Not only are pompous appeals to self-restraint foreign to Numidians, they are also alien to Romans. Syphax tells Juba, "The boasted ancestors of these great men, / Whose virtues you admire, were all such ruffians." Rome itself was founded on a rape, and Cato is merely the offspring "of violated maids, of ravished Sabines" (II.v.43–50 pp. 46–47). If Juba wishes to "know the world" he must unmask this "extravagance of virtue" (II.v.55–56 p. 47). The type of self-restraint that is honored as virtuous is nothing more than self-deception; it limits freedom and threatens ruin. Syphax insists,

> Honour's a fine imaginary notion,
> That draws in raw and unexperienced men
> To real mischiefs, while they hunt a shadow (II.v.39–41 p. 46).

Honor is an illusion that binds the individual and limits their liberty.[1] It is important to note, however, that this cynical rejection of honor combined with the unchecked pursuit of desire leads Syphax to betray his people and place himself in the service of Caesar. His thirst for unrestrained liberty leads him to accept the yoke of unrestrained tyranny.

For Juba, however, freedom is not unfettered action. He insists that genuine freedom requires a certain type of binding. And this liberating restraint depends on shared notions of honor and the social bonds entailed in those notions. Juba declares,

> Honour's a sacred tie, the law of kings,
> The Noble mind's distinguishing perfection,
> That aids and strengthens virtue where it meets her,
> And imitates her actions, where she is not. (II.v.103–107 p. 50)

For Juba, honor either crowns virtue or serves as a type of training into virtue. And virtue is necessary in order to experience freedom. To be free is not simply to pursue desire uninhibited. To be free is to be bound by virtue, to have one's desires shaped by what is good, right, and honorable.

At several points throughout the play, Addison seems to trade in stock representations of the Numidians as primitive, untamed, and wily savages in contrast to Roman self-discipline. It is hard not to wince at stereotypes that would have reflected an audience's prejudices concerning the civilized world of Europe and the wilds of Africa. Viewers in Britain and even in the American colonies might have more easily identified themselves with the ancient Romans than with the Numidians. Yet Addison also seems to subvert or at least complicate these stereotypes. The entire play takes place in the shadow of Roman vice, embodied in the person of Julius Caesar. For Addison, Caesar is the anti-Cato—wild, unrestrained, and licentious, thirsting for domination. In contrast, the African prince, Juba, represents a modern virtue that consists of rectitude combined with affection. It is Juba and not Caesar, or even Cato, who represents the hope of civilized liberty.

Of course, some readers today might see this subversion of stereotypes as an attempt to erase cultural particularity. Insofar as Juba masters his own desires and acts with virtue and honor, he becomes less African and more Roman. Addison certainly provides us with some evidence for this reading. When Cato gives his blessing to Juba's union with his daughter, he announces, "Whoe'er is brave and virtuous is a Roman" (V.iv.91 p. 96). It is Juba and not Caesar who possesses a "Roman soul." One could argue that even though Addison celebrates the character of Juba, he reasserts racial boundaries. To be Roman is to be honorable; to be Numidian is to be suspect.

Yet Addison also calls this distinction into question. "Alas! young prince," Cato says. "Falsehood and fraud shoot up in every soil, / The product of all climes—Rome has its Caesars" (IV.iv.40–45 p. 82). It would be simplistic to associate licentiousness and greed with any particular people. Both Caesar the Roman and Syphax the Numidian seek unfettered freedom that ends in tyranny, just as both Cato the Roman and Juba the Numidian seek freedom through self-restraint. The message of the play seems to be that character and not origin determines honor.

More importantly, Juba is worthy of praise not simply because he meets the external standard of Roman virtue. Juba exceeds that standard. He represents a new type of cosmopolitan and social virtue. Addison prefers Juba to Cato as a moral exemplar for a polished and civilized society. He presents Cato's austere character as too stern, too inhumane to be entirely admirable. Cato's insistence on moral purity leads to a neglect of the people around him, a shortsightedness about the outcome of the military conflict, and an unwillingness to continue to pursue virtue under Caesar's rule. His suicide reveals a type of uncompromising rigidity, ending the possibility of pursuing virtue in community. Addison hints that Cato's devotion to abstract

principle, as admirable as it seems, might also be self-deluding and self-defeating.

In contrast, Juba combines a commitment to public principle with a recognition of private attachment. He is a more appropriate hero for an age of politeness and civility. He recognizes the importance of duty, but sees that maintaining honor is not in conflict with maintaining the bonds of friendship and love. As Marcia observes, "Juba to all the bravery of a hero / Adds softest love, and more than female sweetness" (IV.i.13–14 p. 72). By promoting Juba as both brave and loving, Addison attempts to moderate the "haughty" and "stubborn virtue" of Cato with a softened stoicism. He presents his audience with a figure who embodies "sociable freedom" by combining heroic self-restraint with private affection.

Addison calls his play a tragedy, yet it combines elements of tragedy with elements of comedy. It ends with both a suicide and a marriage! As Caesar approaches, Cato reflects on the death scene of the *Phaedo* and then, in contrast with Plutarch's messy account, he tidily takes his own life. At the same time, Juba prepares to wed Marcia. Their interracial union represents the possibility of a new society characterized by virtuous and sociable freedom. The tyrant might have won the battle and the sage taken his life, but the message of the play is clear: in spite of imperial occupation, the future belongs to the young married couple who are bound by both resilience and love. It is no surprise that in private letters the young George Washington identified himself not with Cato, but with Juba.

Note

1. In Guardian #161, Addison references Syphax as an example of those "old battered miscreants" whose "imaginations are grown callous" and who "ridicule every thing as romantick that comes in competition with their present interest."

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Between the World and Us: Richard Wright's Poem "Between the World and Me" as Core Text Revenant

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> I had already grown to feel that there existed men against whom
> I was powerless . . . men who could violate my life at will. . . .
> I had already become as conditioned to their existence
> as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings.
> (Richard Wright, *Black Boy*, qtd. in Gussow 145)

> They are, in effect, still trapped in a history
> which they do not understand: and until they
> understand it, they cannot be released from it.
> (James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, p. 8)

At our ACTC conferences, we tend to rejoice in our great literary legacy, the tradition of great minds speaking great thoughts, stretching back to Homer. But experiencing tradition and continuity can sometimes be excruciating when dead tongues rattle on interminably and corpses keep rising—Banquo-like—in all-too-recognizable forms.[1] Richard Wright's 1935 poem "Between the World and Me" is a classic within the canon of American core texts written to condemn the baleful act of lynching. William Faulkner's "Dry September" (1931), Billie Holliday's 1939 recording of "Strange Fruit" (lyrics written by Abel Meeropol, a New York Jewish leftist), James Baldwin's short story "Going to Meet the Man" (1965), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)—

all belong to this horror-laced anti-lynching tradition. And they were joined in 2015 by Ta-Nehisi Coates's National Book Award–winning nonfiction bestseller, which he titled *Between the World and Me* in direct tribute to Wright's seminal poem.[2] Repeatedly compared in importance and cogency to Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Coates's book-length epistolary essay (written to his son) suggests that police violence against black bodies today is a haunting echo of the Jim Crow–era immolations described in Wright's poem. A close reading of Wright's poem may help illuminate the way past racial horrors still entrap us, and why America *still* needs to hear that black lives matter.

Because Wright's entrapment poem takes the form of a conventional lyric, albeit in free verse, we begin the reading of it casually enough under the assumption that the first-person speaker is likely a persona of the poet himself and the one experiencing the events unfolding. As the poem progresses and we sense danger, we still assume that it is he, not we the readers, who should be wary. But the safety of spectatorship is illusory. Reaching out to us, the poem entraps us just as surely as it has enveloped its creator, a snake swallowing its own tail. Here is a look at how the trap is built and sprung.

The first word, "And," should warn us that something has been going on before our arrival as readers/witnesses: "And one morning while in the woods . . ." The very mention of woods should likewise conjure up warnings of people going dangerously astray. Recall Robert Frost's woods: "lovely, dark and deep" but still potentially deadly (death by freezing). Think of Hawthorne's colonial-era woods where witches dance out the fate of Young Goodman Brown, who also thinks he is a mere onlooker. Think of Goethe's father clutching his child, riding through wild night forests in "Der Erlkönig."

But, one might counter, Wright's is a matinal scene and his woods are sunlit. What can go wrong in broad daylight? The sylvan scene, however, is soon troubled by the speaker's very first verb: "stumbled." Stumbling can be a minor physical setback or the prelude to a serious, painful fall. Wright's speaker stumbles "suddenly upon the thing" with the adverb "suddenly" being followed by a sudden enjambment, literally a "fall" in our reading gaze, and the object that precipitated the fall being disturbingly indefinite: a "thing." Wright then repeats the word of happenstance, "stumbled," followed this time by "upon it"—"it" being the pronoun of indeterminacy—in a grassy clearing. Grassy clearings in the woods are precisely where Hawthornian trouble happens.

But we are still as yet unmolested and in daylight. Furthermore, the clearing is "guarded" by trees. Yet even these "guard" trees seem forbidding. They are "scaly" oaks and elms, an adjective that describes bark but also reptiles. And we know what happened in Eden. The beginning stanza's last line repeats that same conjunction of circularity or repetition: "and." The scaly trees figuratively part: "And the sooty details of the scene rose, thrusting themselves"—another enjambment—"between the world and me. . . ." The details "rise" in an obscene, almost sexual way, "thrusting" themselves—unwantedly and rapaciously—into our consciousness. The ellipsis is our last warning that something dire is about to occur.

Surely no one, not even an arson investigator, has ever before used the adjec-

tive/noun pairing "sooty details." "Sooty" is properly used to describe the blackened remnants of a fire. It has also been used in racist speech to describe black skin, as in Othello's "sooty bosom."

And how, the reader wonders, can something come "between the world and me" if the world is generally understood to mean *everything* outside of a person's own body? Can something thrust itself between a person and the world and be part of neither? The white space offers us our last possible chance for escape from this deadly cycle of reenactment. But the body of the poem rises to meet us, and it is too late to look away.

"There was a design . . ." The word "design" denotes intentionality, even artistry of arrangement. But then we see the gruesome content of this artistic form: "white bones slumbering forgottenly [with another enjambment for suspense] upon a cushion of ashes." We are reminded of the dry bones in prophetic Old Testament passages. We cannot yet be sure if these bones are human or animal, and the participle "slumbering" gives us some hope. An innocent child or an enchanted princess "slumbers." Arthur Rimbaud's "Le Dormeur du Val" slumbers in the forest. And the thought of that poem will turn out to be apropos for this one.

These bones slumber, however, "forgottenly," as if the result of some oversight. Have the bones forgotten us, or have others forgotten the bones, or both? Yet there was forethought, a "design," in the bones' placement. And they are even resting on a cushion. A pillow is generally for sleeping or slumbering; a cushion is for presenting a precious object such as a crown or ring. But the real heart stopper here is that this particular cushion is made not from fabric and feathers but from ashes. Now the "soot" ties in, and the whole scene begins, inexorably, to make sense.

The speaker repeats his solemn "there was," this time to introduce another remnant of fire: "a charred stump of a sapling pointing a blunt finger/accusingly at the sky." The stump, as other critics have noted (cf. McGrath, Harris), reminds us of amputation. Trees may be harvested for the good of mankind. But this was not the case here, since this stump is charred, and the tree was just a sapling, too young to have been cut down for lumber. Whom is the blunt finger accusing? "Blunt" can, of course, mean frank or candid as well as lopped off. Is it the sky or God or the onlookers?

The description continues with another repetition of "there" and the verb "to be," this time plural. The epic catalogue of items is this: "torn tree limbs, tiny veins of burnt leaves, and a scorched coil of greasy hemp." The past participle "torn" again implies intentionality. Someone or something has torn these limbs: people, of course, have limbs as well. We see tiny—a cherishing diminutive—veins of leaves that were exposed to the fire. People, of course, have veins and arteries, too. There is also a coil here, not serpentine, but instead a looping natural fiber from which we make rope: hemp. It, too, has been exposed to fire. And, most distressingly, it is greasy. A rope used by laborers in a train yard might be greasy from machine oil. But this grease was likely rendered from the flesh of a living man.

The speaker next catalogs a set of damaged or dysfunctional human possessions: "a vacant shoe, an empty tie, a ripped shirt, a lonely hat, and a/pair of trousers stiff with black blood." The shoe is empty because its owner has no more feet. The tie

is empty because there has been a "necktie party"—an unfunny euphemism for a lynching. The hat is personified as "lonely" because the head that wore it is, temporarily, missing until we discover the skull. Surrounded by his tormentors, the man died alone, snatched away from family and friends, leaving only his possessions to mourn him. As before, Wright uses enjambment to set off the most gruesome item in the list: the bloody trousers. The adjective "black" does double duty: The man was black, but his blood is incorrectly assumed to be black as well. (Southern hospitals never mixed their blood supplies during segregation.) The blood on the pants is also blackened by fire and exposure to the elements. The trousers are particularly bloody, critics have suggested, because male lynching victims were often castrated (Harris 101).

Wright goes back to his linking conjunction "And"—almost biblical now in its intoned repetition—to list a new set of items "upon the trampled grass" belonging not to the victim but to others. The trampling crowd, too, has left evidence of its presence: buttons, perhaps drunkenly ripped from someone's bodice or shirt; matches that, having been once used, are now equally as "dead" as the one they killed; nasty cigar and cigarette butts (people possess "butt-ends" as well); peanut shells (lynching was a spectator sport—like a circus or a ballgame); a "drained gin-flask" (connoting intoxication); and "a whore's lipstick." Just as James Baldwin points out in his short story "Going to Meet the Man," lynchings were covertly sexual rituals, arousing white women's curiosity about and white men's fearful jealousy of black men's supposedly superior sexual potency.

As if to remind us just what the crowd was gawking at, Wright shifts our focus back to the victim's final frantic moments. We are shown "scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the lingering smell of gasoline." The elements themselves seem supernaturally fresh. A smell lingers long after the gasoline must have evaporated. Feathers are personified as "restless" in their waving, air-stirred motion. And in spite of this evidence of unspeakable horror, life is going on. Nature is renewing its cycle: "And through the morning air the sun poured yellow surprise into the eye sockets of a stony skull."

Is the sun astonished at man's ferocity toward his fellow creature, or is it the victim himself who remains perpetually shocked? Wright's second ellipsis brings us back to the set-up of the scene being portrayed/replayed. He begins with another, linking "and": "And while I stood my mind was frozen with a cold pity for/ the life that was gone." The coldness seems related to the inefficacy of the pity but also our shared denial. And at this point in the poem, we see the trap spring on the speaker: "The ground gripped my feet and my heart was circled by icy walls of fear—." Ice has prevailed over fire in two images of the speaker's hopeless entrapment, both by the earth and by fear itself.

The scene now shifts quickly and supernaturally to night and a reenactment of the lynching, put into perpetual motion by the very act of observation: "The sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the grass/ and fumbled the leaves in the trees; the woods/ poured for the hungry yelping of hounds; the/ darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the wit-/nesses rose and lived:" The imagery is still an unholy mixture of violence and passion. "Muttered," "fumbled" and even "screamed" can relate to

sexual passion. "Hungry," "yelping," and "thirsty" voices connote appetite as well. The lynchers are arriving for their unholy communion, and their human sacrifice is being reembodied as we watch. The dry bones "melt" themselves—suddenly liquid—into the speaker's own bones, and "The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into my flesh." It is a scene of Frankensteinian reanimation. The reanimated crowd members likewise reclaim their possessions: their booze, their tobacco, their sexual stimulants.

The point of view has also shifted cinematically, making the panicked speaker the center of all attention but now looking *outward* at the circling crowd. "And a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that my life be burned." The synecdoche ("faces" for lynchers) brings us ever more tightly into the center of the circle and the panicked speaker's ever-contracting field of vision.

The final stanza of the poem, beginning "And then they had me . . ." recalls Christ being prepared for crucifixion, except that this time we are totally trapped in His perspective, and it is a death by molten fire. The imagery of liquids—"voice drowned," "black wet body," "bubbling hot tar," "rose like water," and "boiling my limbs"—conveys the horror of fire clinging, napalm-like, to human flesh. Longing for the torture to end, the speaker strives for more pain and thereby a quicker death. "And my skin clung to the bubbling hot tar, falling from me in limp patches." It is, of course, the tar that sticks to the skin, not the other way around, but the victim desperately seeks quietus. The sexual imagery disturbingly continues with the postcoital term "limp" and "moaned in my agony." The feathers, including quills (the traditional symbol for writing) pierce the speaker's flesh, and the gasoline—only temporarily cooling until it, too, ignites—continues the dyadic reversals of heat and cold, fire and ice, liquid and solid that permeate the poem's disarmingly simple diction and narrative structure. Death is finally, perhaps most shockingly, personified as a mother. The dying man is the child, "clutching" to his mother's "hot sides" begging, not for a treat but for an end to this pain beyond all human endurance but clearly not beyond human causation.

We feel some relief when the poem ends with the first-person speaker losing his humanity and being reified back into dry bones and the stony skull. The dry bones cannot feel the pain. But we also realize that it is only a matter of time until the trap is sprung again, and we are, again, a complicit part of it. Both onlookers and victim, we will be there, and it will all happen again, ad infinitum. Like some Chinese finger puzzle, the more one struggles against the trap, the more certainly it holds one fast. The poem will reincarnate and reanimate—taking on its own "grey" flesh—with every new reader who stumbles upon it. And it will just as surely self-immolate, taking its reader vicariously through the victim's exquisite pain. That is, and always will be, the poem's fatal, revenant "design."

Brian McGrath has analyzed Wright's poem as a use of prosopopoeia (granting the power of speech to inanimate things or the dead). Though we tend to think of nature or love as the stuff of lyric poetry, McGrath sees the genre as "deeply embedded within historical and political discourse, [and] capable of responding . . . to historical and political conditions" (82). McGrath notes the claim of theorist Paul de Man that prosopopoeia is the "master trope of poetic discourse" (84) and that it is also, accord-

ing to Barbara Johnson, "*the* figure for reading" (ibid., after McGrath 85). McGrath explains these claims, saying that "in reading one grants the dead writer the power to speak from the grave." He then returns to de Man to say that "by making the death [sic] speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies . . . that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death" (qtd. in McGrath 85). And this is indeed the arc of Wright's fateful/fatal poem.

Walter White, the nation's pioneer chronicler of lynchings, speaks of "nearly five thousand mob murders within less than half a century" (5) during the heyday of the practice (roughly late Reconstruction to shortly before WW II). Though there were some white victims, the vast majority of lynchings involved blacks; for example, of 561 killed in Mississippi between 1882 and 1927, 44 were white and 517 were black (White 256).

Having grown up in and barely escaped from Mississippi, the epicenter of lynching, Wright, according to Trudier Harris, elevates the baleful practice to an aesthetic:

> Richard Wright uses the lynching and burning ritual, and historical and social connotations surrounding it, to shape the basis of his aesthetic vision of the world. Metaphoric lynching, along with literal lynching, permeates his works. Together they set a pervasive tone of fear and apprehension (95).

Harris lists not only this poem but also "Big Boy Leaves Home" (1938), *Native Son* (1940), and *The Long Dream* (1958) as especially pertinent examples of Wright's obsession with the theme.

Adam Gussow locates three types of related violence in Wright's work: disciplinary, retributive, and intimate. The first is "white-on-black violence that aims . . . to keep the Negro in his place." "Lynching, police brutality and white vigilantism" are examples. The second type, "retributive," is "black-on-white violence that strikes back at disciplinary violence and other forms of oppression" (Gussow 143). The practice of "badman swagger" in figures such as Stagolee is an example. The third type, "intimate violence," entails "black-on-black violence driven by jealousy, hatred, and other strong passions" (144).

One of the most horrifying traits of violence, particularly of the first type, is its communicability. The relationship among the three types is as fluid as the horrible liquids in Wright's poem and just as scalding to the national soul and body politic in 2016 as in 1935. Though death may now come by bullet and not hemp, it comes. Wright's poem "Between the World and Me" stands ever ready to entrap its readers and teach its gruesome lesson ad infinitum —a core text revenant.

Notes

1. W. E. B. Dubois famously deemed race our national "ghost at the feast" in his *Souls of Black Folk*, 1903.

2. Though I've known of Wright's poem since the late 1980s, when I was first assigned to teach the anthology *Black Voices* (1968) at NSU, I had sidestepped its allure until a reading in conjunction with Ta-Nehisi Coates's bestseller caught me in its mind trap and actually provoked a vivid nightmare. The word "revenant" in my title was triggered by Alejandro G. Iñárritu's 2015 movie of that title. But the word seems to fit this poem by Richard Wright in

its very essence. It is a revenant poem——a corpse poem that keeps returning from the dead to entrap more victims.

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Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: A Perfectly Teachable Narrative in an Imperfect Canon

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In some ways, placing *Beloved* at the end of a two-semester curricular list of core master narratives authored by white men rectifies the absence of works by women and cultural minorities. At the end of my third year of teaching this wonderful, complicated, not-quite-knowable, yet perfectly teachable text, I almost feel that its placement as the last of six narratives representing three thousand years of Western literary production warrants the exclusivity of the other five selections (Homer's *Odyssey*, Plato's *Apology*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*).[1] Morrison's employment of the more universal themes of self-seeking in the midst of trauma expand upon notions of the self and conflict explored in earlier texts within the curriculum. Her identity as a woman writer of color, as well as her postmodernist approach to narration—wherein roving, fragmented points of view perform the difficulty of consciousness, memory, and story-telling to illustrate the effects of systemic societal exploitation and displacement—allow for students to appreciate the full extent of literature's potential as a force for protest, community-building, and education. I will not go so far as to assert here what I implied above—that the triple threat of Morrison's 1987 novel (being a woman's text, an African American voice, and a novel about a major historical condition of oppression) excuses the representational homogeneity of our other text selections. Instead, I argue more generally that teaching *Beloved* effectively can provide a stopgap measure given the additional necessary task of using its more political themes as inspiration to work backward and diversify the rest of a more traditional canon, while also meeting the student demand for diversity of perspectives in a twenty-first-century classroom.

Beloved works as a text precisely because it frustrates and provokes students to ask questions. While the same can be argued about the complex prose of Dostoyevsky or the arcane jokes about "aquiline" mouths in the parodies of love poetry in *Don Quixote*, students seem more invested in Morrison's story of a house haunted after a woman chooses to kill her own child.[2] Morrison's narrative experiments with the gothic style, and her decision to hold off on a clear explanation about what has happened to her heroine until two-thirds of the way through the novel teases students by promising resolutions that arrive only *after* they have already empathized with a protagonist who commits the unthinkable. Before they arrive at this moment of clarity, students ask seemingly simple questions that can lead to complex discussions about the power of different narrative strategies. Some of my favorites of these include the following: Why wasn't Beloved named like the other children? Why is it so hard to tell what moment I am in—the past or present? And, finally: Why is this book so "weird"? These questions have answers that prove worthwhile to walk students through while emphasizing concepts like postmodernism, the neo–slave narrative versus the slave narrative, Morrison's painstaking and sometimes self-critical experiments with and reflections on her use of both third-person and first-person narration strategies, and, finally, the literary impact of nonlinear narration in configuring selfhood.[3] I echo the claim that Morrison is giving voice to the voiceless and correcting the gaps in the historical record, an assertion in line with Sima Farshid's Foucauldian reading of the novel as a sort of historical unearthing (Farshid 305–309).[4]

To help students understand and contextualize the role of these literary and cultural forces over our lives outside the classroom, I bring in numerous examples from media, including the Broadway smash *Hamilton*, Beyoncé's "Formation" video and ensuing controversy, televised interviews with Morrison, and Alfre Woodard's reenactment of Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech.[5] Additionally, the string of events of police brutality in 2015 and resulting mainstream discussions about mass incarceration and the Black Lives Matter movement provided a subfocus last year on institutionalized racism, which we connected to Morrison's decision to use the form of the novel to critique the vestiges of historical enslavement within American culture and public policy. I have also read aloud from a short essay by Alex Zamalin published in the *Women's Studies Quarterly*, which considers the novel's social commentary on Reconstruction-era labor and economics in relation to contemporary debates about social assistance and welfare. Students connect the enforced segregation in 1870s Ohio described by Morrison to unofficially institutionalized segregation in contemporary school districting and the "white flight" realities of today. For two years running, we have also listened to an account on NPR's StoryCorps, in which a loving black father describes his justified fears about his sons growing up in Mississippi, where since 2002 one in three black men is incarcerated.[6] As one of my students explained, that type of text allows the listener to understand the unfortunate and unfair inevitability of one man's child being sent to prison despite living in a loving environment. It is pedagogically rewarding to connect that type of instinctive listener response with Morrison's use of certain themes in her novel, as well as her initially prickly, and later redemptory, characterization of love at 124 Bluestone Road.

I find that the light-bulb moment in class occurs in our coverage of the slim section of the novel that first accounts for Sethe's murder of her child Beloved, which narrates the collective perspective of a cadre of white men and officials in free-indirect discourse, representing the racialized quality of nineteenth-century mainstream authority (148–53). As we move through this section, students face the full force of what Morrison calls "raced" writing and notice that the very characters with whom they have emotionally empathized—Sethe, Baby Suggs, and Stamp Paid—are rendered alien and subhuman by the repeated use of the "n" word.[7] In *Playing in the Dark,* her scholarly work on race and literature, Morrison terms this type of narrative strategy on the part of canonical American writers as "metonymic displacement," and students can witness Morrison's parodying of the phenomenon in the casual yet aggressively dismissive points of view of the slave catcher, Schoolteacher, his nephew, and the sheriff:

> The slave catcher dismounted then and joined the others. Schoolteacher and the nephew moved to the left of the house; himself and the sheriff to the right. A crazy old nigger was standing in the woodpile with an ax. You could tell he was crazy right off because he was grunting—making low, cat noises like. About twelve yards beyond that nigger was another one—a woman with a flower in her hat. Crazy too, probably. (149)

This lesson allows students to feel the weight of dehumanization as the consequence of unconsciously violent language structures, particularly in the sheriff's conclusive reflection that Sethe, her family, and friends represent the "damnedest bunch of coons" who require "every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life" they supposedly gravitate towards (151). With hope, students are then better able to appreciate the significance of having the rest of the novel continue to be told from the point of view of a collective cultural voice that resists these marginalizing linguistic forces, which then allows them to measure Morrison's artistic and political deliberations with the likes of Cervantes, Dostoyevsky, and Shakespeare.

Thus, the difficulty of the subject matter in this text lends itself to energetic discussions about the potential impact of literature—and in our curriculum, "Narratives of the Self" —to shape social consciousness. My last paper assignment requires students to commit to this line of inquiry by asking for a comparison between *Beloved* and an additional text from the semester toward an assessment of the effectiveness of different narratives about "the self." This assignment necessitates an understanding of those structural elements that build our core narratives and rewards students who also necessarily articulate the benefits of reading one text over another. In this way, students get to make the case for or against *Beloved* in their own words. I have found that in an increasingly diverse classroom, students voice their appreciation of our inclusion of a text about a woman suffering from exploitation and disenfranchisement. In fact, at Oglethorpe's 2016 student academic debate, "Enslavement and the Core," which I coordinated with the help of some ACTC colleagues, students from various ethnic backgrounds spoke with conviction not only about the ways in which *Beloved* provides insights into the lingering, societal effects of slavery, but also about their desire for the curriculum to incorporate more narratives written by authors sharing their own cultural backgrounds and perspectives.

Despite the advantages rendered to our core canon through Morrison's placement within our sequence, and despite the ways in which students have sometimes made connections to identity seeking and the symbolism of "home" in *The Odyssey* versus *Beloved* and other fruitful comparisons, my concern is that Morrison's novel, for some instructors, retains a thorny image, not necessarily because of its complexities as a text, but because of the overtly political underpinnings of the characters' real internal and external conflicts. If students at my institution continue to see *Beloved* as the only work that allows them to discuss enslavement and institutionalized forms of exploitation, they may assume that these themes constitute the sole objective of this novel. While I worked hard in my last two paper assignments to combat such simplistic assumptions, I feel that the true impact of *Beloved*'s relevance to our society remains potentially muffled unless students gain the opportunity to read *more* women's voices and non-Western and ethnically diverse writers within our core sequence. I have argued as such administratively and been puzzled by resistance to the suggestion, particularly to the recommendation that we officially include slave narratives within our sequence to better prepare students for *Beloved*, a move that some colleagues worry might lead to "too much slavery" in our curriculum. I disagree. Such a claim strikes me as out of step with the purpose of studying literature today—which remains an enterprise in garnering empathy for victims of, and understanding forces contributing to, oppression, within a broader project of educating better "citizens." It also brings to mind the ways in which narratives like *Beloved* continue to be maligned in ongoing politicized debates about allowing students to "opt out" of having to read texts like it due to "moral" objections—objections that contribute to a lack of awareness about the continuing presence of systemic displacement today and suggests that for too long in our institutions, the project of making better citizens has not adequately aligned with critical readings of marginalization.[8] Turning a blind eye to that possibility in favor of so-called more "universal" or classic texts seems a bit too much like *Beloved*'s characterization of the cultivated, erudite but cold Schoolteacher, who, for all of his writing in notebooks, fails to understand the full range of language's potential in revealing—and concealing—humanity.

Notes

1. These are the official canonical authors for the course "Narratives of the Self I–II," although faculty have recently instituted a change to take out *The Odyssey* to make room for Sophocles's *Antigone* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in order to highlight women's perspectives and/or subject-constitution, as well as non-Western voices. See http://oglethorpe.edu/academics/the-core/core-courses/ for more information about Oglethorpe University's Core Program.

2. See the Penguin edition of *Don Quixote*, translated by John Rutherford (2003), in which Altisidora sings love poems of inferior quality to the famous don.

3. In the "Afterword" to the 1994 Plume edition of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison critiques her inability to provide Pecola Breedlove with a real voice to express her longing and self-loathing and seems to regret her decision to use the point of view of Pecola's peer, along with a more distanced third-person perspective (211).

4. Farshid's 2010 article pulls from Michel Foucault's 1971 *Archeology of Knowledge*.

5. See the following web links: *Hamilton* (http://atlanticrecords.com/HamiltonMusic/); Beyoncé and "Formation" controversy (http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/23/entertainment/be-

yonce-controversy-feat/); Morrison interviews with Charlie Rose (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4vIGvKpT1c/); and Alfre Woodard's reenactment (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vr_vKsk_h8/).

6. See StoryCorps' interview with father and son Albert and Aiden Sykes from March 20, 2015.

7. Again, see her interview with Charlie Rose, in which she expounds upon "raced" narrative and subjectivity.

8. See articles in the *Washington Post* about debates within the state of Virginia on "sexually explicit" material in *Beloved*, which led to the passing of HB 516 by both the Virginia House and Senate. The bill was eventually vetoed by the state's governor in April 2016.

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Women and the Core: A Pitch for Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*

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This paper addresses the discussion about including more female authors in our core text curricula. It asks whether incorporating more female-authored texts is a primary good or a secondary good, a value that should strongly shape our selection process or an ideal that we should strive for when possible. Regardless of where individuals come down on that question, the discussion about adding more female authors should cause all of us to clarify our criteria for determining which books to include in our curricula. We often say that our texts have shaped the course of history, but this criterion heavily favors male authors. Besides, most of our curricula include some texts that are not game changers. Such texts are simply doing something so creative, substantial, or illuminating that we feel compelled to offer them to the next generation. Our conference theme asks us how we can "rejuvenate and reshape the next generation." Ultimately, this paper argues that Thérèse of Lisieux's autobiography is one text that has great potential to "rejuvenate and reshape." Through its discussion of sin and mercy, childhood, confession, and evil, it offers a nineteenth-century, female-authored parallel to Augustine's *Confessions.* It also offers a unique perspective on "greatness." Throughout the text, Thérèse emphasizes her own "littleness," but she also tells the reader that she has always aspired to be a saint. In the end, Thérèse of Lisieux became not only a saint, but also one of four female doctors of the church.

In the program where I used to teach at Biola University, the majority of my colleagues did not think that more female authors in the curriculum was a good worth pursuing *in and of itself.* A couple of us, however, did believe that adding more wom-

en authors to the curriculum was a good *in and of itself*. We gained immense insight from reading both primary texts by women and secondary texts about these women, and we lamented the fact that there were only three texts by women in our 60-unit curriculum: a collection of short stories by Flannery O'Connor, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, and Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*. We believed that having only three women authors communicated to our students that women were not part of what we call "the great conversation" when in fact they *have* been part of this conversation. We proposed that our department add female authors that other core text programs include, like Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, and Christine de Pizan. Our colleagues pushed back by asking the following questions: Have these women been "game changers" in the great conversation? Have they offered anything to the conversation substantial enough to merit our including them? They have certainly used the images and ideas of the great conversation to create something, but has that new creation in turn significantly shaped the next generation of thinkers? Has it led in identifiable ways into the next texts in our curriculum? Did enough people read Julian that she had the chance to shape the great conversation? If not, isn't this reason to exclude her from the curriculum?

This kind of conversation, of course, begs the question: Is there merit in including an author who does not change the game and does not write a literary masterpiece but does offer a particularly adept social commentary? I'm thinking of someone like Christine de Pizan. Do we include other outliers simply because what they are doing is so noteworthy or creative or illuminating?

What I have realized is that it really does come down to the criteria that each program has for deciding which books to include in its curriculum. And that, I think, is one of the biggest issues on the table when we talk about tradition and renewal, continuity and change. Do we need to change our criteria? We certainly need to clarify it.

Overall, I think our goal is for students to become conversant in "the good, the true, and the beautiful." And with that in mind, I want to make a pitch for St. Thérèse of Lisieux's *The Story of a Soul.* One of four female doctors of the church, Thérèse was a Carmelite nun who lived during the end of the nineteenth century in France. She was the youngest in a family of five daughters, all of whom became nuns. She wrote her autobiography at the request of her prioress around 1895, and this book became one of the most popular spiritual texts of the twentieth century. It has been translated from French into thirty-eight languages.

The Story of a Soul is a simple text, and Thérèse thinks of herself as a simple person. She calls herself "the little flower" and thinks of herself as a plaything for the child Jesus (111–12). Even her acts of piety are simple. For example, she talks about being really annoyed with some of the nuns that she lives with. In order to deal with her own annoyance, she decides to force herself to be especially kind to the nun whom she finds *most* annoying and then to offer this as a gift to Jesus. Toward the end of her life, she remarks about the fact that some saints have "left nothing behind them, not the smallest souvenir or a scrap of writing," while other saints, "like our Mother St. Teresa [her namesake]… have enriched the Church by their teaching" (112). "Which kind of life," asks Thérèse, "is most pleasing to Our Lord?" And then she answers her own question: "I think both are equally acceptable."

It is *this* response that communicates to me the reason that Thérèse's autobiography belongs on the core text list. Too many students leave our programs with a relatively uncritical stance on greatness. They read books by great philosophers, they read the greatest of Russian novels, they discuss the great religions and the greatest of political thought. Those whose programs have included the Christian gospel texts hear Jesus say things like, "The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted," but this critique of greatness is not generally continued in the theological texts we read (Matt. 23: 11–12). It is simply not a focus of most of the texts that make the cut.

Many of our students end up graduating from our programs with the assumption that they must do "something great." They must "change the world." And then, when these students get an average job or get married and settle down to an average life, they feel—at least some of them feel—like they have failed the vision of greatness that their "great books" program communicated to them.

Adding *The Story of a Soul* to our curriculum could help with this problem. Thérèse recasts greatness as an attribute of the soul, rather than as an accomplishment. Early in her life, she wants to do great and mighty acts for God. She struggles with how she is doing nothing significant like the great saints, martyrs, and missionaries of the faith. But at the end of her life, she finally concludes, "Jesus does not demand great deeds. All He wants is self-surrender and gratitude" (156). After years of struggling with how to understand her vocation, she realizes, "My vocation is love!" (161). She no longer worries about doing great things. Instead, she dedicates herself to small sacrifices, done in love. An example of this is when she discovers that one of the sisters has taken her lamp. Instead of making a big fuss, she just does her chores in darkness. She decides to view the situation as an opportunity to deny herself, to extend the vow of poverty that she took when she became a Carmelite. Another day, while chanting the liturgy, she finds herself growing more and more annoyed by one of the sisters who fidgets during the entire service. She feels her blood starting to boil with annoyance, but then she realizes it is another opportunity to deny herself. So, she decides to actually focus her listening ear *on* the fidgety sister and to hear the fidgeting as if it were the most beautiful of music. Choosing to deny herself in these ways and to transform her emotion from annoyance to enjoyment is the way that Thérèse gives "flowers" to Jesus. She says that "the science of love . . . it is the only the thing I want to know," and she decides that these small, daily acts of self-denial are, in fact, not small at all. If they are done in love, they are the greatest of acts (156–61).

In casting greatness as an attribute of the soul, rather than in mighty deeds, Thérèse is like Plato, with the obvious exception that she believes her femininity is just as capable of achieving greatness as masculinity would be. Thérèse presents us with a life—a *female* life, which I think is significant—lived in search of greatness. As a young girl, she actually said to herself, "Someday, I'm going to be a saint." And yet, she pursued greatness through the simplest of channels. She became a nun and sought to live in accord with the other nuns around her.

Thérèse narrates her life with honesty, clarity, and accessibility. In that, *The*

Story of a Soul is similar to Augustine's *Confessions.* As with *Confessions,* we see the inner workings of Thérèse's soul. Nothing is hidden from our view. We watch her struggle, strive, and grow. And we—even if occasionally put off by her sappy language—find ourselves drawn in to her journey. Again, as with *Confessions,* we find that some of her questions are our questions. She wants to know why "God does not give equal glory in heaven to all His chosen" and how suffering can be a gift (20, 60). Her answers to these questions dovetail with so many of the theological books in our canon. And her life offers evidence of that great quote from Wendell Berry's *Jayber Crow*: "You have been given questions to which you cannot be given answers. You will have to live them out—perhaps a little at a time" (54).

In *The Story of a Soul,* as in *Confessions,* we watch Thérèse live out her questions. And it is that "living out," I would argue, that is so helpful for our students. Our conference theme this year asks us, "What kind of understanding of core texts will be required to rejuvenate and to reshape the next generation's core text, liberal arts education?" In this paper, I have tried to draw attention to three things: 1. We will need texts that address what it looks like to "live out" our questions. 2. We need to include more texts that explicitly offer women's perspectives on the elements of the great conversation, and 3. We need texts that help students problematize greatness. Thérèse's of Lisieux's *The Story of a Soul* does all these things, which is why I highly recommend it.

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Encountering the Biosphere Through Core Texts: Thoreau's Faith in a Seed

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Why are Thoreau's late writings a core text in ecology, the science of the structure and function of the biosphere? The answer lies in his emerging scientific perspective on life coupled with his sense of our transcendent experience of the world.

The text I give to my students to introduce Thoreau's ecological thinking is a selection of natural history writings from his late unpublished manuscripts. In the foreword to the book (Thoreau, *Faith* xii), G. P. Nabhan notes that Thoreau did not treat art and science as separate, a point also made by R. D. Richardson in the introduction (6–7). For Thoreau, nature's power of endless regeneration is embodied in seeds, and their role in nature is intelligible to us through both scientific investigation and direct intuition.

As an ecologist, Thoreau recognizes the preponderance of small things in the working of the biosphere. His opening paragraphs of both "Dispersion of Seeds" and "Wild Fruits" critique prevailing conceptions of the important things of the world (*Faith* 23, 177–79). He refuses to apologize for concerning himself with seeds, things so insignificant that many actually doubt whether they are even necessary to the springing up of a forest (*Faith* 23). The idea that trees may simply be spontaneous productions of nature is not entirely absurd, given our Judeo-Christian ideas about God's creative power, Aristotle's teachings about spontaneous generation, and our romantic admiration of spontaneous creativity. But in this case, these ideas simply do not accord with observable fact.

We too often overlook the small beginnings of things. Even though we hear that mighty oaks from little acorns grow, our semantic categories seem to place plants

and seeds in different realms. Sometimes my ecology students will write a whole essay on a particular family of plants without ever mentioning the importance of the seeds. I find it necessary to remind them that a seed possesses adaptations as complex and essential as a fully grown tree.

Thoreau attempts to remedy this blind spot in our grasp of the living world. Take a single example: Drawing on the observations in his journals, he gives detailed accounts of the way in which the seeds of pitch pine are dispersed and the pattern of seedlings, saplings, and mature trees that results. He gives minutely detailed and quantitative observations of the structure of the cones, the timing of their opening to shed the seed, and the manner in which squirrels disassemble the tough, prickly scales to get the seed (*Faith* 24–34).

In describing the regeneration of oaks, Thoreau's field observations and his use of the literature are exemplary, certainly as good as a lot of later ecological research. He is willing to learn from others, but also to question their results (*Faith* 121–25). All these phenomena can be observed by the students on our campus and are probably vaguely familiar to most of them, but in Thoreau they find these casual observations being transformed into a powerful account of where trees come from.

Thoreau understands the importance of time. He points out that oaks and pines, unlike garden peas, need not set seed every year in order to survive, and that this is a hedge against the unpredictability of the environment, whether it be drought or cold or hungry squirrels. The descriptions of the pitch-pine plains also raise questions of ecological history: these same sites were once fields, some known to have been cultivated by the Native American inhabitants of Concord. The pine's association with light sandy soils and probably also fire is apparent, even though these processes were not operating in Thoreau's time. The rapid changes that were occurring in the ecology of New England from 1820 to 1860 no doubt helped Thoreau, thanks to his close observation and careful records, to appreciate the fluid character of the ecological communities that surrounded him, even over his rather brief lifetime (*Faith* 157). On a longer time scale, his observations have become extremely valuable in enabling scientists today to assess the impacts of climate change (Primack 2014 *passim*).

Thoreau carefully observes the processes going on within the living world of Concord that are not at all directed by humans, but at the same time he recognizes the anthropogenic character of the Concord landscape (*Faith* 165–73). This is also an important lesson for the student of ecology. We tend to place tremendous value on the wilderness, not merely wild, but, as we say, untouched by man. Too much of ecology, both academic and popular, is focused on idealized landscapes in which humans play little role, or where we are seen largely as despoilers. The truly wild places of the earth are of inestimable value, but the fact is that most of the earth's surface is now occupied by ecosystems in which humans have a large influence, often a dominant one (Ellis 2015 *passim*). Thoreau is certainly attracted to the sublimity of wild landscapes, so much a part of romantic sensibility, as in his *Maine Woods*; but his major efforts are to understand the ecology of his own community, not that of remote regions. If the human species is to prosper in the increasingly uncertain future, it will need to be willing to pay attention to the details of the landscapes we inhabit,

not the exotic destinations of the affluent eco-tourist. Thoreau is the beginning point for living locally.

Thoreau is not a data-obsessed analyst, debunking popular myths or building up ever more minute accounts for their own sake. As the editor of these papers and others have pointed out, he is striving to observe these details and discover the true account of things without losing sight of the greater value of knowing. In the treatise on fruits, Thoreau begins with a discourse on the merits of the wild fruits of Concord over exotic imports. His point has to do with all the ways that you develop yourself by searching for and gathering fruit in your own home range. By finding sustenance in the woods, you become a member of that ecological community, whose full interconnections you can learn to understand over time, unlike a shopper in the market (Faith 177–81). As one of my students observed about Thoreau's beautiful evocation of the experience of eating ripe highbush blueberries in the swamp where they grow (Faith 198): "This is the beginning of the transcendence of self."

What is the nature of this better fruit that is acquired through exploration of one's own home? Is it the discovery of the divine immanent in both nature and the self? The effort Thoreau is making, and that he is encouraging his reader to make, is to focus not on himself but on the logic of nature. Keeping a detailed journal can seem at times like mere data collecting, but it is a fundamental philosophical struggle, one that leads to the nourishing fruit rather than to the dry and empty husk. He expresses his faith that where a seed is present, wonders will follow (*Excursions* 158). This is science as science but also as metaphor, which are at last the same thing, as is the study of nature and yourself (Emerson 83).

In studying life on earth—the biosphere—through core texts, Stockton first-year students encounter continuity and change on several levels. They directly observe nature during a series of field walks, which they record in their journals, and they engage with core texts that discuss the living world, from Heraclitus and Theophrastus to Darwin and Vernadsky. In Thoreau, they read reflections on connection, continuity, and change of someone who observed an environment very similar to the one they visit and who studied many of the same texts. As Thoreau says, "We find ourselves in a world already planted, but it is also being replanted as at first" (*Faith* 101). Thoreau's writings are the seeds from which will develop new understanding of ecology in the students of this generation.

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Teaching in America and Asia

How Humanists Can Use Their Expertise to Teach Core Science Texts

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"Exploration and Discovery," the core texts–based freshman seminar at Lewis and Clark College, was originally designed to include science professors and science texts alongside humanities professors and humanistic texts. And yet over the years the humanists have chafed at having to teach texts that did not seem amenable to the sorts of interpretive unpacking used in their research and teaching. Every year there is more and more pressure to exclude science and include more twentieth-century literary works. My suspicion is that the same issues are faced in many other introductory core-text programs.

In this paper I hope to show, using examples from texts by Galileo Galilei (1569–1642), that humanistic tools honed over years of practice are precisely designed to unpack core science texts. Furthermore, in the unpacking, one finds thoughtful reflections on questions like: In what ways does a symbolic system resemble reality? What can human beings actually know? What is truth? And how should human beings behave toward one another? That is, in core science texts we find sophisticated treatments of questions asked by humanists.

For instance, we can use our humanistic perspectives to look at several pieces of Galileo's reasoning style to see what his method really is. In "Starry Messenger" (1610), he looks at the moon with a telescope and writes of being the first to see "spots that are smaller in size but so numerous as to occur all over the lunar surface, and especially the lighter part" (Galileo 31). What does Galileo make of these spots? Since scientific opinion in 1610 was that the moon, as a heavenly body, was essentially different from the earth, one would expect Galileo to consider carefully a

number of possible explanations consonant with contemporary science. But Galileo considers only one explanation:

> I have been led to the opinion and conviction that the surface of the moon is not smooth, uniform, and precisely spherical as a great number of philosophers believe . . . but is . . . like the face of the earth, relieved by mountains and deep valleys. (31)

Galileo immediately jumps to an analogy, surprising in his day: the moon is just like the earth. Galileo seems to have known where he was going all along. But never does he claim to actually observe mountains on the moon. In fact, because even the edge of the moon's disk appears smoothly round in the telescope, he has to describe how the mountains behind fill in the clefts between the peaks of those in front so that only a smooth edge is seen. Galileo's discovery of mountains on the moon depends on reasoning by analogy. That is, in Galileo's hands the philosophical assumption that the moon (and heavenly bodies in general) is different from the earth is subtly replaced by the assumption that the moon is the same as the earth by making an analogy that depends on the new assumption in order to be valid.

The analytic methods of the humanities are well prepared to taking apart arguments such as this one. Humanists are adept at unpacking analogies. When Shakespeare says, "All the world's a stage," we know what to do. When John Donne claims, "No man is an island," or when Plato says, in "The Allegory of the Cave," that "the light of the fire is the sun," we know how to help students unpack these analogies. Unfortunately, when confronted by Galileo's claim that there are mountains on the moon, many humanists are stopped, because we "know" that there are indeed mountains on the moon. In the folklore of today's academy, the Church erred when it condemned Galileo for publishing an indirect, but obvious, defense of Copernican astronomy. Furthermore, at times Galileo uses mathematics to support his analogies, and humanists often have a hard time looking past the mathematics to find what they can understand even better than scientists can: figures of speech. Galileo was right, today's humanists suppose, and it seems fruitless to examine his reasoning closely.

But in fact, reasoning by analogy is dangerous, as any good humanities scholar knows, so studying Galileo's use of this shaky method and the ways that his theoretical commitments allowed him to use it provides good fodder for student discussion of other forms of reasoning by analogy. And if this were the only purpose served by discussing Galileo's approach, it would still be useful. But interestingly, Galileo uses other analogies to challenge the method of reasoning by analogy itself.

In "The Assayer," his opponent, pen-named Sarsi, has claimed, accurately, that comets exist beyond the moon, while Galileo wants to show (falsely, but following Aristotle) that they are meteorological phenomena in the earth's atmosphere. Galileo writes: "I want to teach Sarsi a method of representing a reflection very like a comet" (Galileo, 260). Galileo goes on to say that if you smear grease on a carafe and shine candlelight through the smear, the candlelight will have a tail, just like a comet.

> But if you ever suggest this little game to Sarsi, and if he protests at great length, then I beg Your Excellency to tell him that I do not mean to imply by this that there is in the sky a great carafe, and someone oiling it with his finger, thus forming a comet; I merely offer this as an example of Nature's bounty and the variety of methods for

> producing her effects. I could offer many, and doubtless there are still others that we cannot imagine. (261)

Reflecting on the ways that appearances deceive us, Galileo continues:

> Assuming that what Sarsi sees in his mirror is not a true and real man at all, but just an image like those which the rest of us see there, I should like to know the visual differences by which he so readily distinguishes the real from the spurious. I have often been in some room with closed shutters and seen on the wall a reflection of sunlight coming through some tiny hole; and so far as vision could determine, it seemed a star no less bright than Venus. . . . If simple appearance can determine the essence of a thing, Sarsi must believe that the sun, the moon, and the stars seen in still water are true suns, real moons, and veritable stars. (255–56)

Here Galileo himself is led astray, using an obviously false analogy (comets seem to be like a smear on a carafe) to demonstrate sarcastically that an accurate explanation is false. How might a humanist approach Galileo's two different uses of analogy: one to prove a point (mountains on the moon), the other to ridicule a point (comets are beyond the moon)? What might students ask?

Why is the moon-earth analogy persuasive while the carafe-comet analogy is not? Why could not the phenomena observed on the moon be another example of "Nature's bounty and variety of methods for producing her effects?" When is reasoning by analogy acceptable? When is it not? What steps should we take to ensure that our analogies are not misleading? How can we use reason to distinguish between "the real and the spurious"? What is Galileo's method in "Starry Messenger"? And this latter point is crucial, because ultimately we can learn a great deal about the nature of science today if we hold Galileo's feet to the fire.

Why is the first analogy, the moon is like the earth, persuasive to Galileo? To give a brief answer, Galileo has become a Copernican. Copernicus, a Renaissance Neo-Platonist, argued that the sun deserved to be at the center of the universe because of its light.

For Copernicus, the sun was perhaps the seat of God, and the center of the universe was much more worthy of being the seat of heaven than of being the seat of Satan. Galileo, also a Neoplatonist (Bowler and Morus 7), was thus convinced that the earth, like the moon, was a moving heavenly body. Neither Galileo nor Copernicus could find a more persuasive reason, although Copernicus appealed to heliocentric ancients and argued that for reasons of simplicity and symmetry, the heliocentric system was more worthy. Galileo desperately (and unpersuasively) tried to explain the tides as a result of the earth's motion, dismissing Kepler's better idea that the tides were due to the moon. But actual observational proof of the earth's motion was to await Bessel's 1838 discovery of stellar parallax.

In fact, one of the most striking developments of the era we call the "Scientific Revolution" was the conviction by the new natural philosophers (scientists in today's terminology) that Nature had a structure that could be discovered by a combination of observation, mathematical reasoning, and experiment. Science is based on the idea that mathematical ideas exist in nature independent of time, space, and culture. Another way of saying this is that scientists are convinced that there is some version of Platonic forms that can be found using scientific methods.

In short, for natural philosophers like Galileo, there is mathematical Truth to be discovered. This is a new suggestion, in contrast with the late medieval and Renaissance scholastic scientists' notion (following Aristotle) that mathematics can never be true, but only convenient (Bowler and Morus 27). In fact, leaders of the church had told Galileo that he could teach Copernican doctrine if he said it was a useful, but not true, theory (Galileo 163). Their attitude toward mathematical models might seem to approach a postmodern approach in which all ideas are human constructions.

We can see Galileo's ideas about mathematical truth by comparing a section of "The Assayer" (1623) with a section of the "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" (1615), both found with "The Starry Messenger" in the collection *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*. In "The Assayer" Galileo writes:

> Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it. (237–38)

Ten years earlier in "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" he wrote:

> [T]he Holy Bible can never speak untruth—whenever its true meaning is understood. But I believe nobody will deny that it is often very abstruse, and may say things that are quite different from what its bare words signify . . . if one were always to confine oneself to the unadorned grammatical meaning, one might fall into error. (181–82)

And finally, moving back to "The Assayer," we find, "such is the strength of men's passion that they failed to notice how the contradiction of geometry is a bald denial of truth" (231–32).

Again, the tools of the humanist can tell us things about Galileo's approach that other tools cannot. Galileo, that master of metaphor, tells us that God wrote two books: the *Book of Nature* and the *Bible*. Both are written in different languages that obscure their meaning to all but the most adept.

What does the metaphor "Nature is a book" imply? Who can we trust as we attempt to read this "other book"? If "denial of geometry" is denial of truth, what does this say about theologians who can't do math? Just as theologians ignore laypeople who express novel opinions about the meaning of Biblical passages, can natural philosophers (scientists) ignore theologians who offer opinions about the workings of nature? What are the larger implications of Galileo's reading of Nature in "Starry Messenger"? In fact, I would argue that one of the most important characteristics of the physical sciences as developed in the Scientific Revolution is the idea that when we use mathematics to understand the actions of physical bodies, we are finding out the Truth. Galileo's claim that "The Book of Nature . . . is written in mathematics" continues to stimulate the approaches of physicists today.

In *The Copernican Revolution*, Thomas Kuhn quotes John Donne to show at least one poet's idea about the impact of the Galilean worldview on human relationships. Donne begins his assessment with "[The] new philosophy calls all in doubt" and ends:

> 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
> All just supply and all relation:
> Prince Subject, Father, Son are things forgot,
> For every man alone thinks he hath got
> To be a Phoenix, and that then can be
> None of that kind, of which he is, but he. (Kuhn, 194)

In short, for Donne the cosmos of the new science—bits of matter moving and interacting in a sun-centered universe—implies the destruction of social relationships and the rise of individualism. If we pay attention as we read Galileo, we, too, can glimpse the implications of Galileo's new reasoning.

Today we see Galileo use words as he challenges the idea that we can know God, or Truth, through words. The idea that the book of nature is written in mathematics is a metaphor as suggestive as the idea that the world is a stage and human beings are players. Galileo challenges language-based religion, as many understand that enterprise. But he also challenges the postmodern idea that there is no truth, that human beings within human culture create everything. Galileo claims that we *can* know God's thoughts (today we can substitute "the structure of the universe" for "God's thoughts") in the face of the seventeenth-century Catholic Inquisition and in the face of twenty-first-century relativism. He is square in the middle of our discussions about what a human being is and what we can know. How can we not use our analytical tools to test his ideas against our own?

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Aspirational Ladders: Core Texts in the Era of Professional Education

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In a brief survey I distribute each term to my classes in Temple University's two-semester core texts program, Intellectual Heritage, I ask students to "describe how our work across the term and the specific texts we read in this course are helping prepare you for your life as a citizen outside of Temple." In response to one of these surveys, a student wrote the following: "If Intellectual Heritage was a class that was taken seriously by students, then I think it would be instrumental in preparing young adults for life in the 'real world.' The work being done in Intellectual Heritage can easily be accessed on the internet for free without having to pay $7,000.00 in tuition [to take] a class that can be found online." So, Intellectual Heritage, according to this student, is not taken seriously by the students who take it—but if it were, it might actually make a difference. (It is not clear whether this student believes himself or herself to have taken the course seriously.) This student also believes that internet searches and independent reading would be equivalent to the classroom experience, saving the $7,000 per-course price tag. Many students who responded to this question were more positive about the connections between the work of Intellectual Heritage and what Martha Nussbaum (2010) has described as the important task of liberal learning and core curricula like that of Intellectual Heritage to "develop the capacity for genuine concern for others, both near and distant" (45). But this student's comment is a good place to begin a discussion of how and why we teach core texts, such as Jane Jacobs's groundbreaking analysis of urban life in the United States, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, to which I will turn my attention shortly.

First, let me provide a brief sketch of the Intellectual Heritage Program at Tem-

ple and the kind of students who enter our classrooms. The interdisciplinary courses in the two-semester sequence allow instructors the flexibility to choose most course texts from interdisciplinary lists for both Intellectual Heritage I: The Good Life and Intellectual Heritage II: The Common Good. Intellectual Heritage I's official course description says that

> students will read important works of world literature, philosophy, and religion, from ancient epics to graphic novels, with a focus on individual well-being. We will ask questions like: What do we value, and why? What makes for happiness? What's right and wrong? How is what's good for me defined by my relation to others? What is the purpose of life?

Texts for Intellectual Heritage I are selected across cultures, histories, and disciplines. They include both canonical works of Western literature (e.g., Homer's *Iliad*, Sophocles's *Antigone*) and contemporary texts that respond to the thematic orientation of the course (e.g., Camus's *The Plague* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*), though selections tend to be weighted heavily toward pre-Enlightenment writings.

Intellectual Heritage II turns its attention more fully to questions of

> social, political, and scientific thought, with a focus on well-being for societies. We will ask questions like: Where does society come from? How do we balance individual liberty and the public good? What behaviors and practices perpetuate injustice? Can we create a better society? How do power and privilege define our capacity to make change? How do we find truth? Can facts be detached from cultural contexts?<

With readings that can include Herodotus's *The Histories*, Karl Marx's *Capital*, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Intellectual Heritage II draws on political and politicized texts with much more emphasis on post-Enlightenment thinkers and contemporary touchstones. While students can take either half of the Intellectual Heritage sequence at any time during their academic careers at Temple and in any order, the text selection for each half of Intellectual Heritage is meant to correspond roughly to a chronological separation of Intellectual Heritage I as pre-Modern (1500 CE and earlier) and Intellectual Heritage II as Modern (post-1500 CE).

Since all faculty in Intellectual Heritage teach both courses, our work seems to combine two models described by Brian Rourke, Nathaniel Bray, and C. Christopher Horton in their article, "Approaches to the Core Curriculum: An Exploratory Analysis of Top Liberal Arts and Doctoral-Granting Institutions" (2009)—those of the Great Books and the Effective Citizen Models of general education curricula. They define the Great Books model as one that "posits that the best mode of providing for intellectual breadth and student development is through a historical review of the most seminal works, rather than learning the latest cutting edge research" (223). The Effective Citizen Model suggests that "students are best served by intellectual bases in areas that will serve them well in the twenty-first century rather than nostalgic looks back or disciplinary fragmentation" (223). While, arguably, some students tend to regard the work in the first half of the Intellectual Heritage sequence as "nostalgic looks back" because of the emphasis on ancient texts, many students instead focus on learning to appreciate and understand different cultural contexts, different ways

of viewing otherness; in short, how to learn, as Nussbaum (2010) puts it, "real and true things about other groups (racial, religious and sexual minorities; people with disabilities) so as to counter stereotypes and the disgust that often goes with them" (45). This work that Nussbaum describes should be increasingly core to educating good citizens in the twenty-first century.

Temple's own history also seems to demand this model of teaching, just as it invites intentionally a certain kind of learner who must be persuaded of the value of the project. As an urban university with a long history of providing an affordable public education to a broad spectrum of students and for making possible the kind of "aspirational ladders" that serve as the title of this paper, Temple draws heavily on a population that seeks higher education with a professional purpose. Most of the students who populate general education courses are not at Temple for humanities study but for degrees they see as directly connected to employment after graduation. The figures reported by Temple to the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for degrees conferred by area of study only confirm this. Out of a total of 6,267 bachelor's degrees given for the 2016–17 academic year, here are some representative totals: the field of Business Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services had the largest number of degrees conferred (1,562), followed by Communication and Journalism (798), Visual and Performing Arts—relying mostly on cinematography/film and video production (455), Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies (434), Psychology (385), Health Professions (344), Engineering and Engineering-Related Fields (273),and Education (248). The lowest numbers of degrees conferred remain in humanities-related disciplines of English Language and Literature (105), History (58), and Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies, and Humanities (8).

This breakdown—in concert with the realities of the curricular requirements of each of those degrees—makes clear that Intellectual Heritage faculty's desire to broaden the intellectual reach of their students through intensive readings of humanities-based texts is regularly met by classrooms of students whose overarching goal is a useful, professional education that will result in employment and, often, class transformation thanks to an urban university like Temple dedicated to that purpose. This tension, then, results in students and faculty meeting in classrooms with differing goals and concepts of what Karl Marx in *Capital* would term the "use-value" of a liberal education—while both students and faculty truly share a common purpose.

Exploring this common purpose through a text like Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (2010) demonstrates the need—and the limitations as well—of a core text program like Intellectual Heritage. Beyond the professional foci of our students, Intellectual Heritage faculty today also face a student population drawn heavily from the state of Pennsylvania (79 percent in 2018), of which 29 percent are from Philadelphia proper, and wherein all of the top-ten sending high schools are within a fifty-mile radius of the university (*Temple University Fact Book 2017–2018, Common Data Set 2017–2018)*. In addition, as figures from the National Center for Education Statistics reveal, since 1994 Temple has increased its white undergraduate population from 8,893 in 1994 to 16,326 in 2018, while the African American undergraduate population has increased only marginally, from 3,419 in 1994 to 3,667 in 2018.

These numbers should somewhat complicate our understanding of what it means to teach Jacobs's text at Temple today. With the majority of Temple's undergraduate population falling in the overlapping demographics of white and suburban, Jacobs's text offers a valuable introduction to the lenses through which to view city life. However, without some additional correctives, the conversation stops in Jacobs's 1950s New York and remains dominated by the power-laden narratives of gentrification for the sake of diversity and the betterment of "underserved" communities. In predominantly white classrooms, disrupting that narrative can be hard enough, but it must be done for students on all sides of the urban conversation—including one African American student I had in a recent semester who found his feet in our course in working with gentrification in the neighborhoods one block west of campus. What space would he have found in a room that never brought Jacobs in or that stopped at her sense of the city, one whose definition of diversity is largely limited to the ethnic mix of Italian, Irish, and Jewish populations represented in Jacobs's narrative?

While Jacobs's discussion of urban life arguably no longer represents the cutting edge of urban planning and sociological inquiry into contemporary urban spaces, the version of the city that she presents in her book has one immediate and important effect: it forces students, no matter their racial/ethnic background or economic status, to confront their own, often unarticulated assumptions about cities and the people who live in them. For those not familiar with Jacobs's work in this text, hers was a radically dissenting voice that sought to dismantle what she refers to as "the pseudoscience of city planning and its companion, the art of city design, [that] have not yet broken with the specious comfort of wishes, familiar superstitions, over-simplifications and symbols" (13). In a series of chapters written in distinctly nonacademic prose, Jacobs puts forth a view of the city that investigates basic questions of urban life: What are the uses of sidewalks, neighborhood parks, and city neighborhoods? How is safety established—and lost—in the urban environment? And, as Jacobs says it: "How can cities generate enough mixtures among uses—enough diversity—throughout enough of their territories, to sustain their own civilization?" (144). As a mode of inquiry, Jacobs's hands-on, experiential and anecdotal approach to the questions of city life seems unremarkable to most of my students at first, even repetitive and commonsensical in many of its overarching claims. It is only when they start to apply Jacobs's squarely un-academic narrative of urban spaces to their own experiences that the radical ingenuity of Jacobs's approach starts to make larger sense.

Inhabiting the questions posed by Jacobs is the task I set for my students in an exercise I have them do early in the term. This past spring, I asked my students to gather in preselected groups of three or four and engage in what I call a "Jacobs Walk-About" in and around the campus of Temple. Using terms drawn directly from Jacobs—for example, her "eyes on the street" concept that argues for "proprietors of the street" to protect residents and strangers alike with their vigilance—students had one class period to conduct their own field research in communities where they learned to interrogate such concepts as "contact," "safety," and "public space" vs. "private space" by applying the lens of Jacobs's text to the practical realities of a shared urban space. I say shared because one of the recognitions that students most often make in the course of this work is how their own identities are implicated in

and complicated by what they see and how they see it. In effect, students begin to interrogate the relationship between their own cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds—and the prejudices and assumptions that can arise from them.

Following their group observations, each student was responsible for writing up his/her own reactions and responses in a one-to-two-page narrative. These narratives were often surprising in the acuity of responsiveness that students demonstrated in relation to their own subject position as, first, Temple students and, second, as outsiders to the communities and neighborhoods they traveled through in the course of completing this assignment. One student described the difference between a block on the edge of campus, dominated by student housing, and another farther away from Temple in these terms:

> The modern students' apartments are almost identical and very generic looking, whereas the community houses had somewhat of a personality that was clearly influenced by the occupier. The other side of Girard, the one further from Temple's campus, is completely different, however, as it is not occupied by students. There, it appears the community is more close-knit and life is completely different in terms of communications and surroundings.

This student's narrative connects in noteworthy ways the appearance of "generic looking" student housing and the lack of "personality" that accompanies such and the communities that actually look like communities, at least through an outsider's perspective.

Still another student observed the ways in which boundaries get established, not just between Temple and the surrounding communities but also between different identity groupings that establish zones of contact *and* separation within the same neighborhood:

A mural on Diamond Street shows and gives the impression that the area is majority African-American. A little further up on Diamond Street is a Hispanic community. These two groups in the U.S. are obviously minorities, and although it can't be deciphered from mere observing how this came to be, we can gather that this isn't one of the things that Jacobs would be happy about, or better still what she was warning against.

This student's comments formed a useful bridge between Jacobs's depiction of her West Village community in New York in the 1950s as one in which such separations often went unnoted and the more clearly demarcated physical spaces that this student saw as integral to the identity of the neighborhood she observed—an identity that rests between two different communities.

In responding to the issue of safety, which occupies a central place in the early chapters of Jacobs's narrative, many students who had not grown up in Philadelphia (or any other urban space, for that matter) went out expecting to find those streets that seemed uncared for or dirty and littered the least safe and those that appeared well-tended, tree-lined, and so on the more safe. But as one student recognized in a light bulb moment of putting theory into practice, that the opposite proved to be the case:

> As we approached Poplar Street and noticed the decaying sidewalks and increase in abandoned buildings, we were sure we were approaching impoverished territory. We were shocked to find the inverse of this proved to be true. When we arrived at Girard

> Avenue and Poplar Street, we were struck by the amount of cul-de-sacs, community centers, and people on the streets. Rather than apartment buildings, the homes were primarily houses that were recently built with decorated front yards. Every two blocks there was a community park, recreation center, or church. Although there were abandoned buildings and factories scattered amongst the houses, the area felt open and verging on suburban.

In reality, what this student observed seemed both a refutation of Jacobs's larger claim that the problems of a city "cannot be solved . . . by trading the characteristics of cities for the characteristics of suburbs" and a distilled moment of gentrification in progress (32). The surprise for this student came in his seeing that an area that otherwise looked neglected could also possess street scenes resembling those of a more familiar suburban housing development, even as it abutted abandoned lots and former factory buildings awaiting conversion to residences and retail establishments. It is important to note here that in this student's response, suburban equates with safety, and impoverishment means urban and unsafe, a set of associations not uncommon among my students.

For those students who stayed close to campus for this assignment, there was an increased sense that Jacobs's observations on the connection between safety and busy sidewalks related to the presence of other members of the Temple student community who provided reassurance and familiarity in an otherwise uncertain city environment. As one student described her experience of observing activity on Cecil B. Moore Avenue, the main east-west artery that runs through campus: "Beside unfamiliar strangers, there were also college students, Temple escorts, and police officers on the sidewalk. Even though it was dark, I felt safe walking home because of the constant movement of people on the street." Significantly for this student, the presence of "unfamiliar strangers" is offset by the presence of students, along with various members of Temple's campus police and official student escorts. Without commenting on this reality directly, this student offers a glimpse into the ways in which Jacobs's analysis of interactions in a city, what she also terms "contact," is further complicated by the tension between a university community of students, faculty, service workers, and security personnel and the surrounding community of residents who so often remain strangers to those living and working on the other side of that divide.

Ultimately, it is through doing this work with Jacobs that students gain an awareness that one's identity is locational, provisional, and shaped by the discourses of race, class, and gender that are not always confronted in their professional courses but are the heart and soul of courses like Intellectual Heritage. As one student reflected, "It is important to consider the impact and biases our places of birth and upbringing placed on the work we did for this assignment." This tension, between students' own assumed, if unstated, identities and the accompanying necessity for inspection of attitudes and assumptions that are the basis of these identities, is at the heart of an assignment like this one. Moreover, the concept of community itself comes into question, as students begin to recognize and ask other questions: Whose community is it? Where does one community end and another begin? What do the boundaries between one community and another look like? For the student who saw "college

students, Temple escorts, and police officers" on Cecil B. Moore Avenue as elements of city life in movement around her, it is important to note, as she didn't in her narrative description, how the presence of members of a community she already felt a part of created safety. For this student these groups in motion around her formed the "ballet of the good city sidewalk" described by Jacobs (50) and provided as well the student's sense of belonging in this urban setting not normally her home. That grounding set of perceptions is one that all my students grapple with in the course of their work on this assignment. Indeed, one of the unstated aspirations of students confronting the city as they did in this work is to locate whom they are in relation to among the multiple sites of contact and diversity proposed by Jacobs in her work from more than sixty years ago.

I started this discussion with an anecdote about a student who seemed to see little value in Intellectual Heritage—at least nothing that could not be gotten online for free. Perhaps this student will never see the cultural or intellectual value of a course that offers a revisionary remapping of Andrew Carnegie's early-twentieth-century model of liberal education that sought to "place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise" (quoted in Harpham [2011], 56). At the same time, this student's resistance—unremarkable as it is—demonstrates the compelling need for pedagogical approaches and course curricula that give students the intellectual tools they need to really change the world in the professions they want to pursue. It is books like *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and pedagogies like those outlined here that guide students through the practical application of ideas and spaces of value-testing that can really deliver the education that students need alongside the education they want.

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The Ring of Gyges in Touchstones Discussions

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A significant change during the life of ACTC is the increase in international students in the United States, from 453,000 in 1994 to 975,000 today (IIE web). Given a choice, few international undergraduates opt to study core texts or courses. Conducting Touchstones Discussions with these students would not only draw them out of silence in their classes, but also awaken them to the pleasures of reading and talking about core texts. I speak from holding Touchstones Discussions in Yangon (Rangoon), Myanmar, with twelve cohorts of Burmese students in the pre-collegiate program who then entered over sixty different liberal arts colleges, spread from Bates to St. John's in Santa Fe, from Davidson to St. Olaf. This paper first illustrates the Touchstones approach to the Ring of Gyges by giving excerpts from three class discussions by Burmese students. The core of the paper explains the Touchstones process and its results. The concluding paragraph mentions a collaboration to explore using Touchstones Discussions to help international undergraduates to open their minds to humanities texts.

Rarely when teaching the *Republic* do we give ourselves the luxury of spending a whole class period on Glaucon's story of the Ring of Gyges. Much as we might regret slighting this transition from the disputation with Thrasymachus on whether might makes right to the tale of a shepherd who took a ring from the corpse of a giant, we hurry on. The Touchstones Discussions Project, founded by three faculty members of St. John's College in Annapolis, MD, uses Gyges as one of the many forty-five-minute lessons to empower students. At the pre-collegiate program, our purpose for using Touchstones since 2003 is to turn around students who have dwelt

for ten years in rote memorization toward the light of a liberal education.

Perhaps your tendency in a discussion of the Ring of Gyges is similar to my former approach, to go straight for the heart by taking up Glaucon's assertion that if a just man and an unjust man each had a ring with the power of invisibility, they would similarly steal and despoil. However, the *Touchstones Teacher's Guide* for Volume A stated the purpose of the lesson by setting a large context: "Students will discuss the difference between public and private behavior and what motivates people to be good" (Zeiderman 147). The structure of every Touchstones lesson relates the central theme of the text to the students' own experiences. Here Touchstones plays with the notion of invisibility by requiring students to reflect on a mode of visibility that everyone experiences. Even before reading the one-page text, students jot down their own answers to the question: What will you normally avoid doing in front of your parents, grandparents, or teachers?

Since Burmese families are strong, students see their grandparents frequently. Youth culture there is changing fast, due in part to Facebook and YouTube, but they mention that they would not leave their grandparents' home without kneeling in front of them to receive a Buddhist blessing. The students' realization of ways they modify their actions in the presence of a respected audience welcomes them to say frankly—first in a small group, then with the whole class—what they would do if they were invisible.

"When I was a kid, if I had been invisible, I would have picked a fight."

"I would have liked to slip away to the playground instead of doing my homework."

A young woman asserted, "You don't need to think of doing only bad things if you are invisible. You might want to do something good and not be known."

A snappy challenge from another woman: "Like what?"

She improvised, "Uhh, like kill a bad person."

A teacher knows that it is time to toss out a fresh question. The *Touchstones Teacher's Guide* is packed with possible questions to use. A fundamental question the guide suggests for the Ring of Gyges is "Would most people take money left on a table?" Here I am recalling a discussion about three months into the school year in 2003. A sixteen-year-old said approximately the following: "Our family leaves money lying around on the table at home all the time. Of course, my younger brother and I never take it. Even during some days when workmen came to repair the electric system, the money was still there when they left."

"Maybe the workmen didn't bother because it was a small amount."

"Maybe they did not take it because they had pride in being honest."

All the other exchanges recounted in this paper come from notes I took in February 2016 in two classes at the Connect Institute, a new school preparing students to transfer as juniors to American universities. In both the first and second class, I tossed out questions, as is appropriate in the first weeks of a Touchstones group learning how to take charge of running their discussions. In the first class this view was asserted early in a derisive tone by a woman of twenty: "Of course, most people would take money lying on the table."

"Yes, it is not a good idea to leave money living around."

"I think most people would not take a small amount of money, but if the opportunity came to take $5,000,000, they would take it."

"You have to consider the situation of the person. We are students and do not need money."

"I think that no one can love someone more than you love yourself. If necessary, a person will take the money."

"If you took the money no matter whether people saw you or not, you would know that you had taken it."

"Some people have fear of karma, and that is why they do not take money. Your karma will follow you."

Almost at the end of class time, the same woman who set the cynical tone asserted, "Everyone is greedy. I would take the money because I would do something good with it. Otherwise, someone else who takes it might do something bad with it."

There was a quick retort: "That is just an excuse for taking the money. Everyone knows that stealing is bad." Immediately another student spoke. "What if a child is taught by his parents that stealing it good?" I did not intervene but ended the discussion after the next remark. "If you steal, you will worry about getting caught."

In the second class, the first comment in the large group came from a man of nineteen. "I hate stealing. When I was a child my parents were very strict and did not permit me to eat candy, and so I stole chocolate every time I could." That discussion degenerated into opposing blunt assertions. "Our character is shaped by how our parents raise us since childhood."

"No, our character is shaped by how we shape it ourselves."

"Our character is shaped by our education."

"Everyone is intelligent enough to know the best course of action is not to steal."

"You should think about the people in war-torn Iraq. They know that they need to steal to keep alive. They have brains, just like other people."

"You are trying to judge that those people are different. Are you saying that they have less education than you?"

The young man who brought up Iraq did not have an opportunity to answer because another blurted out, "Generals and cronies are smart, but they are not educated. The generals might have sacrificed themselves on the frontlines for the country when they were young, but now they are corrupt." Near the end of the class a man of seventeen observed, "If you take money that is not yours, it will not feel good. Easy money is boring. You have to work hard for it." A woman of eighteen continued in that direction to talk about Thailand, the historic enemy of Burma. "Getting money dishonestly affects some people differently from the way it affects others. When I was a student in Bangkok, I left my mobile phone in a cab. The driver went to a lot of trouble to return it. He called the first number and found out who I was and carried the phone to my home."

"That's amazing. My father's friend is a taxi driver. He gets about four mobile phones each month because customers forget them. He does not bother to try to return them."

I ended the discussion after that comment in order to let the ethical Thai taxi driver stand in contrast to the Burmese driver.

These discussions follow four guidelines to enable the students take responsibility for the dynamics of their discussions:

- Read the Text Carefully.
- Speak Clearly.
- Listen to What Others Say and Don't Interrupt.
- Give Others Your Respect.

The five phases of a Touchstones class begin as the teacher reads the text aloud while the students read silently. Second is individual work as students re-read the text and think about two initial questions that apply the central idea of the text to their lives, thus empowering students to speak as authorities on their own experiences. Third is the small-group discussion when students in groups of four discuss their answers to the two initial questions. Classmates listen to their peers. Thus, in their small groups they solicit a variety of views and discover different interpretations of the theme. Fourth is the large-group discussion by the whole class, except for two students who are observers. Here the teacher can deepen the discussion, for instance, in connection with the Ring of Gyges by asking students to come up with an acquaintance who would definitely refrain from taking money lying on a table and why. The fifth phrase is when the two observers report back to the class their comments on the class dynamics in running a shared discussion.

Finally, students know about the goals of learning from Touchstones discussions. They include eleven specific ones:

1. listen better to what others say
2. explain your own ideas
3. speak and work with others whether you know them or not
4. receive correction and criticism from others
5. ask about what you don't understand
6. admit when you're wrong
7. think about questions for which the answers are uncertain
8. learn from others
9. teach others
10. teach yourself and
11. become more aware of how others see you.

As we examine the goals, we note that points 1 and 2 form a pair. Listening and explaining better enabled the vast majority of my pre-collegiate students to achieve point 5, ask about what you don't understand. They typically mastered that essential skill by midyear, but it never surfaced in the two sessions at Connect Institute. Achieving points 4 and 6 is difficult in any classroom. Receiving correction and criticism did not occur in the snappy accusation against the woman asserting she would use the lost money beneficially.

Point 7, thinking about questions for which the answers are uncertain, is such a strongly practiced skill in Touchstones Discussions that pre-collegiate students eagerly deal with questions leading to other questions in all of their classes.

Point 8. Probably the most learning from each that occurred in the two quoted discussions was the young woman's account of the Bangkok taxi driver returning her mobile phone. The students' context is that the historic hatred still taught in the government curriculum between Myanmar and Thailand is deeper than the historic French and German animosity. I noted the wide-open eyes in the circle.

Points 9 and 10—teach others and teach yourself—are achieved first in the small groups and then in the large group when the teacher lets the group take responsibility for the quality of the discussion.

Point 11, becoming aware of how others see you, is augmented by the teacher's ending the discussion to allow a five-minute feedback report on the dynamics of the large-group discussion by the two student observers. They use a checklist to evaluate the actions of the students and the teacher in creating a good discussion.

In coming to Point 3 last—speak and work with others whether you know them or not—I can say that Touchstones Discussions achieves it superbly. From the start of the program, we held Saturday outreach sessions using a Touchstones format. Current students came for the fun of sharing points of view and to make new friends.

The resistance of international college students to engaging core texts can be overcome through appropriate use of Touchstones Discussions. Since Touchstones Discussions have no homework and deal with interesting topics, international students at college can find immediate satisfaction in taking it as a noncredit course meeting once a week. At the University of Virginia at Wise, Sanders Huguenin, the provost, and the author are collaborating to develop a program of Touchstones Discussions for international students at U.S. colleges.

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Attending to the Immanence of Hope in the Core Texts Classroom

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On March 10, 2016, all faculty and staff of the Chinese University of Hong Kong received an email from Pro-Vice-Chancellors Michael Hui and Fanny Cheung. The email opened by registering a phenomenon in Hong Kong: "The recent wave of university students, including ours, taking their lives." It went on to call for everyone to "go an extra mile in staying alert to any signs of inner turmoil from those around [us] or in [our] charge: Students who have been absent for some time? Not ventured outside their hostel room? Poor grades? Emotional disturbance? These may be signs of desperation." These unfortunate circumstances coincide with my thinking on hope and its place in the core texts classroom, which began several years ago when student remarks tinged with a sense of future foreclosed kept coming up in their writings and tutorial discussions. The remarks sounded as if there were no end to the competition for high grades, no choice in what courses students could take other than those serving the needs of the job market, and no alternative but to let the salary they get determine their worth as a full person with a potential only beginning to unfold.

For me, these remarks are calls for response to both opportunity and challenge—opportunity, for their awareness of needing to make sense of their life larger than schooling can provide; and challenge, for their needing support to disentangle the unresolved relation they have had with their life of learning in the past. Their prior knowledge has brought them to the security of a university place, but only to show them a future they have no claim to. At least this is how things are perceived to be. This relation with what learning is for is likely to lead them farther and farther away from the joy of learning in itself. As a teacher of general education, I wondered if I

could reprioritize what and how I teach in the classroom so that students could become conscious of the possibilities in building a different relationship with learning. Were I to stick with the primary and generic mandate to rely on the liberating power of knowledge, I would not have been able to address their needs arising out of the times—the need to first trust that there is indeed a power in learning and to know that could be acquired by habit, and that this habit could coexist with other habitual needs compelling their attention. For knowledge to be received well, for its liberating potential to overpower its potential to frustrate, I wondered if I could give hope a chance in the classroom—hope that hinges not on the future as already established, calling for us to adapt to its demand, but a competing kind of hope that would redistribute the weight of the past and the present so the students' future has a chance to be liberated. My assumption is that while trust might be helpful for coping with temporary uncertainties, it is hope that would prepare us for responding to enduring ones.

To be sure, to propose that hope be attended to in the classroom sounds redundant and obscure. Redundant, for teaching is in itself a hopeful enterprise, and it seems impossible without it to even talk about teaching as a purposeful profession. Obscure, for the idea of hope seems at once so mushy and so personal that it offers little material for understanding what is teachable. In response to its apparent obscurity, I only have this much to claim—my argument is not that we can teach hope in the classroom, but that not being able to teach it does not offer adequate reason for teachers to ignore it or treat it as if it would naturally prevail. Hence, the more redundant it seems, the stronger the reason for teachers to make it explicit so that hope would not only be the good for those who can already access it, but for everyone. My understanding of hope is the ability to actively keep a momentum arising out of our presently shared lives that is open to possibilities. It is to have the equal opportunity to be assured of a sense of future that is made out of the present of which we are all a part. Hope, in this sense, is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It is something our cognitive activities are immersed in and work with. Knowledge alone cannot provide the kind of motivation needed for students to strive for a good life. It is hope that prepares for the good learning of knowledge.

I come from the General Education Foundation (GEF) Program, the core texts program at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. GEF is comprised of two courses, "In Dialogue with Humanity" and "In Dialogue with Nature," and students have to complete both of them by the end of the first semester in their second year of study as prerequisites for other general education courses. The common aim of GEF is that we learn values together by considering ideas from classics. One way of understanding the syllabus of the "In Dialogue with Humanity" course that I teach is that all ideas are treated as having the potential to offer valid choices of good life and good society. In this sense, each of them is an object of hope first. Regarded as such, the syllabus as a whole is a competing set of objects of hope, open to challenge, deliberation, and refusal. This approach encourages appreciation and critical evaluation and reflective judgment; this is the plan.

However, as always, students subvert our plan. When the core texts are regarded as objects of hope in the manner of retrospective contemplation, comparable to the way thinkers produce these objects of hope as a result of contemplation, obstacles

start up in the students' minds. On the one hand, students may experience euphoria as a result of having the chance to be respected as thinkers wrestling with great minds from ancient and modern times. On the other hand, there may also be frustration in not finding answers to their personal problems or problems of their contemporary world from those who are commonly received as established authorities. In face of the complexity of understanding the broad notion of relevance—which is often reduced by students into a matter of "application"—and in the face of the open-endedness of perennial questions regarding humanity, students tend to make a swift choice for certainty and jump to the conclusion that the thinkers' ideas as objects of hope are the result of their idealism. Without discerning the difference between idealism as a position and a manner, and idealization as an intellectual exercise that routinely takes place in theoretical thinking, students may also jump to the overly simplistic and moralizing conclusion that the thinkers are motivated by their "personal agenda" and additionally tinged with popular cynicism. The modern formula for talking ourselves out of listening to others is complete. As teachers, we are certainly responsible for insisting on the importance of teaching cognitive complexity by contemplating knowledge, so that students would change their habits of jumping to conclusions that only suit their needs but not the project of pursuing the truth.

But there are also limits to prioritizing this as a good choice for teaching what learning is for. I am inspired by Hirokazu Miyazaki's analysis of hope as a method to think of this problem of learning in a general way, as a "problem of the incongruity between the direction of philosophy and that of hope" (11)—that is, the activity of philosophizing as contemplation is retrospective in manner and therefore consistently fails to grasp the power of hope as a "prospective momentum" (14). Is learning to understand knowledge retrospectively adequate to motivate students to make claims for a future not yet?

Miyazaki's insight makes it possible for me to reflect on my teaching:

1. In my effort to encourage students to reason with the classics as competing objects of hope, have I overly sidelined the possibilities for students to access them as other kinds of meaning-making processes that reasoning does not excel in registering?
2. In my effort to encourage cognitive complexity as a goal, have I adequately prepared students for it by facilitating supporting conditions that bring out their resilience to the challenges of intellectual adventures?
3. Am I creating adequate opportunities for the core texts to put hope to work in the students' lives, just as the thinkers have in their lives in order to make their work possible?

As teachers, we cannot make students hopeful, but we can model hope in the way the thinkers do, and we can model hope by aiming to have a grasp of it that may arise at any moment, in the momentum of the classroom discussion. Knowledge alone cannot be relied upon to prepare for the reflection on what knowledge itself is for. But when there is encouragement for hope to be discerned, there is a better chance that thinking not only serves knowledge,[1] but also prepares for the possibility of stum-

bling and failing, and everything else that life may turn out to be. In the second part of this paper, I would like to report on my experimentation in discerning hope with the works by Karl Marx and Huang Zongxi in the classroom.

It was four semesters ago that I started teaching Karl Marx's "Estranged Labor" as the first text in the course rather than the last, where it was originally designed for. Bringing up Marx in the syllabus enables the following processes in my teaching: (1) distancing our understanding of the text from discipline-specific questions by loosening its link with Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations,* so that it is less likely for students to regard Marx's ideas as limited to the economic life of human beings; (2) addressing the core nexus of our program by taking Marx's contextualization of labor in the species-being of humans seriously; (3) opening up a language of individual awareness of freedom—activities of making and creating that are principled on laws of beauty and spontaneity; (4) acknowledging the role of emotions such as anger in public reasoning so that what is commonly regarded as negative emotions would be regarded as central to the activity of thinking as involving moral undertaking in itself. This last point of engagement is the most relevant to my thinking about hope, for it is with the confidence in human potential that hope in the present could be registered. This shift of attention from anger to hope may also help prevent students' red-flag listening: Marx's pointed, at times scathing, remarks have often led students to jump to the conclusion that his ideas are personal opinion. When they do so, their listening and thinking stop. On the contrary, when personal conviction is set up not in opposition but as contributing to rigorous and objective analysis, and when analysis is discussed not only for internal consistency but also as driven by personal meaning, there is a higher possibility that hope could be discerned.

The second text with which I have been experimenting for hope is Huang Zongxi's *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince.* The preface exudes a mood of uncertainty and sensuousness, showing the personal circumstances Huang was immersed in when thinking through political reform in Ming dynasty China. "I have often wondered about Mencius' saying" (89)—thus he begins by acknowledging his intellectual debts. Then, for the first and only time in our syllabus, hope is directly addressed: "Hope is not lost for a revival of the glories of the Three Dynasties" (89). Considering how brief the preface is, the kind of hope Huang mentions without explanation may lead readers to think of the Three Dynasties as what he is hoping for: a return to the distant past. However, it is also possible to argue that the ancient Three Dynasties are a theoretical construct on which his critique of the disorder of the principles of governance is based. My interest here is not in the validity of these competing interpretations, but in how he coins hope as one driving agent of his intellectual inquiry and then moves onto his personal memories—his manuscripts' remaining intact despite a fire, his son's words of encouragement, rain tapping on the window as he wrote, and, finally, his aging. As the reader remembers with him, she encounters a different kind of hope in the process. Hope becomes the undertone of his argument; it is part of the affective fabric of his writing—implicit but immanent. The uncertainty of what would become of his work and the certainty of old age does not point to any particular object of hope in future, but they activate his present, conditioned by moments of disclosure and engagement. A moment of undertaking—both personally

meaningful and politically urgent—becomes alive. In my classes, the preface is not the focal point of the tutorial discussion. But as an anecdote, it has the potential of activating the connection between his past and our present.

When hope is explicitly sought out, different possibilities of learning from the two texts arise. First, the recognition of an affective fabric woven into the reasoning of visions of social and political change opens up questions of the role of emotions in public reasoning, and in human decision-making in general. Second, the nuances and ardor in the formation of a philosophical work are engaged with as being equally important as the ideas that result, often a tentative result. The texts become not only repositories of finished ideas but also a part of the continuous process of thinking that involves struggling. Here, process isn't defined as one event after another, eventually accumulating such effects to join and form a unified whole. Process here emphasizes the generative nature of thinking as constituted in the making and not just the presentation of result. When great books are shown to be fragments of larger processes—and processes that are not always up to the thinkers—they become less daunting as complete, even perfect. Helping students empathize with the precariousness of thinking through the possibility of change makes it more likely that hope can be identified, for students are invited to hope with the thinkers, to call upon their own capacity to do so, at the moment of reading and understanding. While it may be challenging to find empirical evidence of hope in the classroom, I wonder if helping students to see themselves as hopeful subjects would contribute to the general education project. The hopeful subject offers a competing figure alongside the victimized subject who attains freedom by antagonism and through agonizing struggles. The hopeful subject takes the potential of that subject as capable of breaking away from victimization more seriously and with more confidence; it shakes up the hold of the victimizing position on the imagination by giving time for what is possible. The hopeful subject is not primarily the contemplative subject. She orients herself not only to contemplating knowledge, which is retrospective in character, but also the subject of hope with a prospective orientation (Miyazaki 10).

Last semester, something happened. For the first time in my six years of teaching this course, a student shared the inspiration she got from the Daoist thinker Zhuangzi. "Everything has its inner glory," she said during a tutorial discussion. I was profoundly moved by how she saw what Zhuangzi sees, with hope in the invisible but immanent Dao, in the possibility of finding equanimity. To me, the general education teacher's work is to let light into students' rooms—not the kind of light that brightens up everything through an act of flooding but an ecology of light that creates shadows and flickering shelters, so that students find it safe to explore further and, when they are tired of brain wrestling, may find a place to nap and rest. We cannot teach hope, but we can take hope as a process immanently present, waiting to be activated, diminishing the hold of as many barriers as we possibly can. We can support an environment structured in such a way that we take small and consistent actions to regulate ourselves to put hope to work, actively and alongside the prioritized activity of philosophizing. When we are sensitive to hope in its momentum, the world opens.

This reflection on hope has been bringing me back to the idea of the dialogue that frames our program. The dialogue is itself a project of hope for encouraging

the prospective momentum of understanding in the making. It is always already immersed in the spontaneity of the human capacity to improvise, the trust that such activities and manner of carrying them out will enable but not guarantee something of value to happen. The dialogue is not only a tool through which ideas are wrestled with and understood together; it is also a rite of passage for the students as young thinkers. A dialogue begins and ends. A good dialogue begins and begins again and does not end; it endures, each time in a different light.

Note

1. On Miyazaki's analysis of Ernst Bloch confronting the limits of philosophy as being retrospective, hence its incapacity to comprehend hope, see Miyazaki 12–16.

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Closing Reflections

Tocqueville and Higher Education as an American Counterculture

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It is a pleasure to talk to the countercultural professors who believe that teaching should be all about core texts. What they all believe is that at least a portion of higher education in America should really be higher education!

Now the author of the best book ever written on America, and the best book ever written on democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, claimed to see almost no higher education in America. I think Tocqueville exaggerated a bit in his day, and he would also be exaggerating—but only exaggerating—in ours. You might object that unlike in Tocqueville's time, the median nineteen-year-old in our country today is in some college or university somewhere. He or she is surely pursuing a higher education: see *The Chronicle of Higher Education*! But as I tell my students, if it is all about textbooks, PowerPoint, standardized tests, and group projects, then it is not higher education in Tocqueville's sense.

Higher education is about studying the best that has been thought and said in the languages it has been written, theoretical more than experimental physics (and the other natural sciences), and the art and music that graces what is called high culture. There is still some of that going on. But it's also true that many liberal-arts general education programs are being emptied out; many of our colleges that retain the liberal brand are surrendering the traditional substance of higher education; and the percentage of students majoring in history, physics, philosophy, literature, and such is on the decline.

Let me explain why there is little more counter-cultural in our middle-class democracy than genuinely higher education.

With some conspicuous exceptions, Tocqueville saw all Americans as middle class. Being middle class has little to do with how much money and stuff you have right now, and a middle-class country has huge and often rapidly shifting inequalities in the wealth of its citizens.

To be middle class is simply to understand yourself, and everybody else, as basically a free being who works. A middle-class society, in that sense, is a classless society. And middle-class morality aspires to be universal. From Tocqueville's view, being middle class is finding yourself somewhere in between aristocrats and slaves or servants of old. The good news is you're free like an aristocrat. The bad news is you have to work like a slave. But a second piece of good news is you get to keep what you earn or make. You work for yourself and your own, even when you're employed by someone else. I work for you, and you give me money. The way we both stay free is by not making the mistake of believing that there's more to our relationship than there really is. A middle-class democracy is very short on paternalism. Even your actual father and mother have very little authority over you once you grow up, unless they have money enough to reliably control your behavior with, say, the prospect of a generous inheritance.

In other words, everyone needs and loves money in a middle-class country. Aristocrats at least faked not caring about money; their story was that they are better than that, and they stuck with it. Slaves or servants did not care much about money because they did not think they would have much. There was little mobility among classes. To be in the middle is to be loud and proud about loving your money—and being on the make to get some more. There is a lot of good about the universal love of money. One, of course, is unprecedented productivity and prosperity: the result of everyone having and wanting to work hard. Another is the justice of equality of opportunity and a meritocracy largely based on productivity. People tend to get what they deserve, which is this or that amount of money. Even Karl Marx thought that capitalists under capitalism got nothing more than they deserved. When it comes to prosperity, technology, and a kind of individualistic justice, you cannot beat middle-class democracy.

But Tocqueville also observed that middle-class democracy is really bad for free thought. He noticed that the Americans all have basically the same opinions about religion, politics, morality, the point of work, and so forth and so on. The trouble with the universality of middle-class thought and behavior is that it's about impossible to find a point of view by which to dissent, to be genuinely countercultural. Americans, for example, are all very judgmental about work. They think people who do not work are lazy and that there is no excuse for unproductive behavior. The Americans do not buy the baloney that leisure is the basis of culture, partly because they see culture as one industry among many. What you do with your free time is up to you, and you can use your money to gratify your preferences, whatever they may be.

Hence, the key middle-class distinction is not between work and leisure, where the point of work is to support a vision of human excellence or greatness that has nothing to do with money. Rather, it is the distinction between work and recreation, and those in the service industry are about giving those with money what amenities they want, in return for some of their money.

Consider for a moment how amenity-laden even our so-called institutions of higher learning have become. Education has become pretty much the same everywhere—all about the learning outcomes of competency and diversity—and so the discerning educational consumer chooses a health-club gym, hotel-style dorms, gourmet food in the cafeteria, luxurious study-abroad opportunities, student-affairs concierges that save students from the dread disease of boredom, wellness centers that alert you to risk factors that might otherwise elude your attention, and D-3 athletics programs that feature lots of participation and don't depend on exceptional athletic prowess. College has become really expensive—although thinking, books, and philosophy professors remain really cheap—as a burgeoning part of the service industry.

It is instructive exaggeration to say that colleges are becoming about the same everywhere. They are being nudged along by the standardizing pressures of the market and government bureaucracies; by Silicon Valley–funded foundations driven by the principle that education can be delivered in roughly the same way as electricity; and by the administrative class of higher education itself that dominates the increasingly intrusive accrediting associations. All of these basically middle-class or techno-vocational standardizing pressures have a big negative effective on genuine diversity—moral, religious, and intellectual—on our campuses. The pressure here, I want to emphasize, does not mainly come from old-fashioned tenured radicals. For one thing, the percentage of tenured faculty is dropping like a rock. Nor does it come all that much from the most recent wave of campus protestors. It comes from the corporate and administrative agenda that's about purging all that is not middle-class or all that is incompatible with the dynamism of the twenty-first century's global competitive marketplace. We see, better than ever, the threat that the universality of middle-class thinking has on freedom of thought.

Although I am a scandal to the fashionable conformism of higher education because I typically vote Republican and am not in the closet about it, I admit the imposition of the middle-class or techno-vocational, techno-enthusiastic tyranny over higher education has been a theme less of Democratic than of Republican politicians such as Scott Walker and Marco Rubio. Rubio's theme, that we need more welders and fewer philosophers, was an assault on free thought, insofar as it might be good for welders to know some philosophy just to live in the light of the truth. And one American ideal should be the philosopher welder, given that we have no work at all for philosopher kings. I will even add that Republican and especially libertarian proponents of the so-called creative disruption of the whole of American higher education are overhyping the destructive effects of the rather moronic demands of the campus protestors of our time. Those Republican innovators even seem to hope that the displacement of liberal education by diversity requirements will make it clear to all that there's no need to bemoan the disappearance of the humanities and all that. They've committed suicide!

I also add that the replacement of liberal education with diversity requirements grounded in programs ending in "studies" really does undermine higher education in America. It is not that sensitivity to diversity or being animated by social justice are not admirable. It is just that those outcomes have always been served best by

the liberal education that is the proper antidote to our country's understandable and beneficial techno-enthusiasm.

I actually have more sympathy for Bernie Sanders' call for free higher education for everyone. Sanders is thinking about the City College of New York in the 1950s, staffed by mostly leftist emigrés who taught the Great Books as if they really mattered to New Yorkers of all races, classes, and religions. In his imagination, we should be perfectly free to be either philosopher or welder or some combination of both. It is true that Sanders' solution would not work today, mainly because all public higher education is marked by so much less freedom than it was in the 1950s. And the effectual truth of his solution would starve what moral and intellectual diversity we have left in mostly private colleges. Still, I hope the appeal of Sanders to the young is all about his calling out the corporate technocratic elitism that dominates both parties, and that he is defending intellectual freedom against the middle-class tendency to sacrifice controversy to public relations, which is the same as the libertarian economist's tendency to sacrifice controversy to the imperatives of productivity. I will never vote for Bernie Sanders, although I might vote for the old socialists Irving Howe and Michael Harrington for college president over most of the professors and especially administrators we have in the social scientists and the humanities today.

It is true that in a free country, an individual is officially free to do and think what he pleases. But Tocqueville adds that typically he does not really have the choice not to work, for reasons of both bodily subsistence and personal dignity. As middle-class democracy progresses, we can see now, there is less and less room for voluntary caregiving.

The individual also finds it harder and harder to really think for himself or herself. Middle-class thought may begin with the proud realization that "nobody is better than me." But then comes the humbling awareness that "I'm not better than anyone else." Can I exempt myself by right from the sea of public opinion that surrounds me? And submitting to public opinion—which comes from no one in particular—is not obviously undemocratic or inegalitarian. We can all submit together to a force beyond our control and comprehension. It is true, too, that we keep telling students "Think critically! Think for yourself! Be creative and innovative!" But our students should whine in response, "With what?" They may not even know enough to know they should whine if too many professors lead them to confuse being critical with grabbing on to the latest version of sophisticated common sense that is allegedly on the right side of history.

What about all the technological creativity we see around us? At my college, for instance, we have a new major in "creative technologies," and those students are making some cool stuff that I, for one, have never seen before. Tocqueville explains that one democratic dogma among many is to reduce science to technology, and so to divert creativity in the direction of producing labor-saving, comfort-producing, life-extending, and war-winning machines and devices, not to mention game-playing and porn-viewing ones. All in all, we tend to view real creative freedom—as opposed to the fashionable conformism that we call the "humanities"—as in the service of technological progress. Who can deny that the most brilliantly creative Americans now reside in Silicon Valley, and even that we receive their powerfully dazzling techno-

creativity as magic? We owe more and more to understand less and less about the wizards behind what we see on our sundry screens.

Tocqueville does not deny the reality of or the beneficial significance of technological creativity. His only objection is to the middle-class tendency to reduce all education to technology—to techno-vocationalism. It amazed him to see an unprecedented universal literacy in America. You have to able to read and write, and have solid computational skills, to be able to work for yourself. He was just as amazed to see almost no higher education: that is, no education tied to the thought that work is for leisure, that the body is for the soul, that technology serves distinctively human purposes, that the world is the home of the human mind, that there is no reliable route to feeling good except being good, and that seeking and searching should occupy all of our lives. The Americans, Tocqueville noticed, are always in a hurry, constantly restless in the midst of their prosperity. Americans are happy enough with generalizations that work well enough, whether or not they are actually true. Americans do not take the time to linger over strange and wonderful particular details. Nature and even other people are only real to the extent that they can be exploited or readily comprehended and controlled. They are better at obsessing over the future and even being more sentimental over the past than they are in being loved in the present. The democrats skim rather than really read, and they suffer from the ADHD that fuels productivity.

So, it seems to me that the real division in American higher education is not between liberals and conservatives or the scientist and the humanists, but between the quick and the slow. The quick are all about easily measurable achievable learning outcomes, competence (as good enough) rather than excellence, and privilege sensitivity to diversity (that facilitates consumer satisfaction by stifling genuinely critical thought) over the joyful sharing of the truth. For the quick, preparing students for lifelong learning means fitting them to be abstracted role players with flexible skills that can be constantly adjusted to the changing demands of the global competitive marketplace. For the slow, preparing students for lifelong learning means giving them the taste for books and questions and longings that demand lifelong attention. There's always more to see and more to know; but there's also the kind of confidence that's not complacency, that comes when we see more clearly who we are and what we're supposed to do, when each of us finds the cure for being abstracted by discovering our place in the world with others.

Tocqueville argued that higher education is countercultural in a democracy because it is basically aristocratic; and in this context all that "aristocratic" means is having a high opinion of yourself as more than a free being that works. High education gives privilege to the truth about the human soul, and to the cosmos over the kind of utility that chains philosophy and science to economics, politics, and medicine. Higher education, from a democratic view, can be regarded as inconsiderate and sterile. Nothing ever gets done! The time for talk is over, and the time for action is now, say both the social justice warriors and the disruptive innovators.

As Neil deGrasse Tyson says, what time do we have for philosophy and theory when we have to be able to fend off the asteroids threatening to pulverize our planet? And then there is the darn climate always threatening to change enough to make hu-

man flourishing, or even human life, impossible to sustain on our planet.

There is no time to raise the merely theoretical question of the meaning of climate change. or to wonder whether there's a lot more than we often realize to our occasional paranoid preoccupation with the extinction of life or of our species. And there are our transhumanists who are spending so much time and treasure trying to deploy technology to fend off their own personal extinctions. One's own biological death, they think, is no longer a reality that we accept in order to live well and be happy; death has become a problem to be solved. Each of them believes that if "I" am extinguished, then Being itself is extinguished. Then the real point of all human effort should be to keep "me" around.

From the point of view of higher education, the dominant view of the Great Books across the ages is that philosophy is learning how to die, to get over obsessing about your personal significance. "Being" itself is not in our hands, and it's the fate of persons to be extinguished, unless there is a personal and loving God willing to save us. Some raging against the dying of the light is to be expected and can even be the source of great words and deeds that stand the test of time. But do not forget that the light is being extinguished, no matter what you may do.

The dissident philosopher-novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, one of the most courageous persons of the twentieth century, wrote that what is wrong with Americans is their lack of a clear and calm attitude toward death. That is one reason he heard, beneath the surface of our happy-talk pragmatism, the howl of existentialism. The middle-class response is that this is what is right about the Americans. They are all about being agents of change, about bringing the future under our rational control. But if the point of life is to extend one's own being through rational control, then there's very little place for real higher education. That might be the main reason that what remains of liberal education in our country is under siege.

But liberal education is not only coming to terms with death. It is all about birth, too: about the irreducible significance of each particular person. It is about keeping the person—the particular being with a singular destiny—from being dissolved by all the forces that surround him or her. As Tocqueville says, liberal education is also about learning how to rule ourselves and others, to discover both the privileges we've been given and the corresponding responsibilities. In this sense, higher education is about the greatness of human individuality, and especially about all that we really can do that can stand the test of time.

So higher education, in our time, is understanding the gift of technology as an intricate trial of our free will. Our challenge is resist being the distracted playthings of technological manipulation, but to deploy technological progress in the service of what Solzhenitsyn rightly calls the one true progress, which is the progress toward wisdom and virtue over a particular life—the life of a being born to know, love, and die, a personal being who has more than a merely biological destiny shared with the other mammals.

The countercultural mission of higher education in America, Tocqueville reminds us, has the indispensable resource of religion, and it is our biblical religion that is the source of the view that some higher education is for everyone. There were, Tocqueville observes, two sources of the American dedication to education for ev-

eryone. The first was middle-class techno-vocationalism. The second was the Puritan determination that every creature be able to read the Bible, both a great and a good book, for himself and herself. St. Augustine said that some lives are mainly devoted to contemplation, others mainly to action. But none of us is too good to work; too good to perform loving acts of charity. And none of us should be so enslaved to work as to have no time to contemplate about who he or she is and what he or she is supposed to do as a creature of God. The biblical Sabbath, from the beginning, is less a day of rest than a day of reflection for those made in the image and likeness of God. What was wrong with Socrates, from this view, is that he thought he was too good to work. And we middle-class Americans are right to criticize him for confusing work with leisure. But what is wrong with middle-class Americans who are untouched by religion, philosophy, or poetry is that they think they aren't good enough for contemplation.

One of the most countercultural moments in American educational history, our neo-puritanical author Marilynne Robinson reminds us, was the antebellum, Calvinist, sort-of neo-puritanical Oberlin College, where everyone, including the professors, worked; and everyone, including women and blacks, received a liberal education, which included the Bible but was about so much more. We can see a variant of that moment in our great tradition of Catholic parochial schools, which extended to nonselective colleges requiring multiple classes in theology and philosophy for everyone

In the end, it is true that our colleges and universities should be about preparing people for worthwhile work well done, but they should also have plenty of safe spaces for countercultural thought, for higher education. There is, in fact, no other point for the residential college these days, except to open students to thoughts and experiences they would not pick up on our middle-class streets.

Confessions of an ACTC President

Richard Kamber
The College of New Jersey

One of the duties of an ACTC president is to give a plenary talk each year. I have already had the honor of giving seven such talks, and now am giving an eighth.

- 2009 Memphis: "Whither Philosophy?"
- 2010 New Brunswick: "Fate, Hope, and Clarity"
- 2011 New Haven: "Core Texts in Existential Perspective"
- 2012 Milwaukee: "Can Aristotle Speak to Art in Our Time?"
- 2013 Ottawa: "Can a Liberal Arts Education Really Make Us Better?"
- 2014 Los Angeles: "Under Plato's Pillow"
- 2015 Plymouth Harbor: "Do We Have the Courage to Change the Mission of the Arts and Sciences in Undergraduate Education?"
- 2016 Atlanta: "Confessions of an ACTC President"

We have all heard it said that "confession is good for the soul," but the original proverb begins with the word "open." It declares: "*Open* confession is good for the soul." St. Augustine understood the importance of openness in confession. Although his *Confessions* is addressed to God, he published the book for his friends and enemies to read. They continue to fascinate 1,600 years later: we are still reading them today. Of course, not all confessions are equally interesting. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen once remarked, "Hearing the confessions of nuns is like being stoned to death with popcorn." I hope the confessions I am going to make today have more punch than popcorn.

When I accepted the presidency of ACTC seven years ago, I promised Scott Lee that I would spend as much time and energy as the job required. "In for a penny, in for a pound," I told him. Now that I am approaching the end of my seventh and

final year in office, I can tell you candidly that it is taken more pounds than pennies to keep that promise. Most of those pounds have been spent working directly with Scott. I have known him for nearly twenty-five years, but the past seven years have given me the privilege to work with him on countless projects, both large and small. Scarcely a week goes by when we are not on the phone together: planning, plotting, or troubleshooting.

During our preliminary chats about the presidency of ACTC, Scott warned me that he could be "intense." I recall thinking at the time that "intense" was an odd word and probably a euphemism for something more challenging. Now, after seven years of close collaboration with Scott, I am ready to spill the beans. Describing Scott as "intense" is like describing Einstein as "clever." In truth, Scott is *passionate* about his work for ACTC. He cares, cares, cares about every detail and pursues each task with boundless energy. Working with this human dynamo can sometimes be exhausting, but it is never dull. I have come to appreciate the keenness of his intellect and the breadth of his organizational abilities. I consider myself fortunate to have shared a portion of his day-to-day exertions on behalf of ACTC.

I am also grateful for having had the privilege of working closely with members of ACTC whose generous contributions of *their* time and talent have enabled our association to flourish. We are in the strongest sense of the word a *voluntary* organization. We have no endowment, no government subsidies, and no tuition income. We depend on the kindness of friends and on their fidelity to our mission. Our governing board, institute board, volunteers, and loyal members are the indispensable benefactors of ACTC.

Since this is a confession, I want to avow my complicity in ACTC's brazen defense of the best traditions in liberal arts education. At a time when most colleges and universities are rewarding faculty for being specialists in increasingly narrow fields and promote programs that are single-mindedly vocational, ACTC has had the temerity to insist that students graduate from their alma maters as broadly educated men and women. More galling still, we defend the substance of liberal arts education—its texts and ideas—as well as the skills it enables student to develop. Indulgent critics might concede that the education we champion can work for a small cohort of exceptional students—the "Johnnies," for example—but we rebuff their indulgence by insisting that core texts and core programs exemplify values to which all undergraduate education should aspire. We are so persnickety that we think that some texts are better than others and that faculty from diverse disciplines should talk to one another about these texts with an eye to bringing back fresh insights to their classrooms.

We even lack the humility to confine our advocacy to the shores of North America. We have made common cause with like-minded educators in China, Europe, and Central America. So cheeky is our dissent that we practice what we preach at our meetings. Instead of talking about administrative strategies and pedagogical methodologies, we talk about books and how to teach them. Rather than valorizing narrowness of focus, we celebrate breadth of vision. We shamelessly bring together scientists, philosophers, historians, and teachers of literature to talk about Dante or Darwin. To all of these transgressions, I plead guilty as charged. I am, to put it blunt-

ly, a liberal arts pusher.

Many years ago, I had a colleague who started his classes each year by welcoming students to join him in *his* education. Although I have never said this to my students, I have in fact used my classes as opportunities for furthering my own education. The same is true of ACTC meetings. Long before I became president, I came to ACTC meetings to hear insightful discussions of texts of major cultural significance. Some of these were texts that I knew well and had taught in the classroom. Others were works with which I had only passing familiarity, or no familiarity at all. Accustomed as I was to professional meetings dominated by scholarly swagger and disciplinary oneupmanship, I was surprised by the candor and courtesy of ACTC panels and plenary sessions. The emphasis at ACTC was on sharing insights and learning from one another. Although I contributed what I could, I invariably carried away more than I brought.

Old habits die hard, or not at all. Going back to the list at the beginning, my presidential addresses at ACTC have been a thinly disguised effort to further my own education. I may be an unusually slow learner, but I find myself returning to familiar topics and texts over and over again. I recently exchanged emails with a student I had taught forty years ago. She asked me when I planned to retire. I told her I planned to keep teaching until I got it right.

As the titles of my presidential addresses suggest, I find myself drawn in three directions. First, I am drawn to the classics and other works of major cultural significance (including works of art, mathematics, and science) because they represent the best that has been thought, wrought, and said. They exemplify the power and poetry of human minds at their best. Secondly, I am also drawn to pursue, insofar as my modest talents permit, a few of the tasks these works undertake. Since I am a philosopher by trade, I show my respect for thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and Hume, not only by reading and teaching their works, but also by striving to solve some of the problems that interested them. Thirdly, I am drawn to investigate and comment on the institutions and practices that make up higher education.

Technological advances have made it easier today than at any time in human history to acquire, advance, and share knowledge. We have at our fingertips access to more texts, data, and opinions than scholars could have been dreamt of fifty years ago. These advances could have been used to underwrite a renaissance of liberal arts education, but that has not happened. Instead, undergraduate students are prematurely directed into narrow areas of study designed (often poorly) to make them employable in the current job market (though perhaps not the future one). I have spoken of this often at ACTC meetings and encouraged our members to be outspoken advocates as well as dedicated practitioners of the kind of education that is conducive to equipping free men and women with the habits of mind and heart they will need to achieve flourishing lives.

I remain optimistic, and I am deeply grateful for having had the pleasure and privilege of serving as the third president of ACTC.

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