

Volume V, Issue I – Spring 2021

MENTOR

JOHN ADAMS ACADEMY FACULTY ACADEMIC JOURNAL



High Standards of Academic Excellence

John Adams 
ACADEMY[®]

MENTOR is the faculty journal of John Adams Academy. The purpose of this journal is to uncover the alliance between the enduring pathways of Classical curricula and the timeless guideposts of our Ten Core Values. As educators and members of intellectual community that inherits and relates a legacy of truth, wisdom, and beauty, we perceive the abundance in each contribution to the Great Conversation.

We take our name from the complementary sources of the Latin word *mens*, and *mentis* (mind, thought, intention) and the Homeric character Mentor (Μέντωρ), to whom great Odysseus entrusted care of his home and family, and in the guise of whom the goddess Athena gave counsel to the young Telemachus. The former origin recalls our human tradition of sentience, the latter our divine duties of love and loyalty. Taken together, the essence of mentoring is sharing with others the beauty and truth that has fallen to us.

Each issue, *Mentor* invites all John Adams Academy faculty to examine how particular Core Values, on a rotating basis, are expressed within the very texts, histories, artifacts, mathematics, sciences, etc. that we uncover with our scholars. Whether the themes be humble, aimed for the heart of the youngest child, or rich and complex and intended for the minds of the mature and wise, the legacy of the classics and the presence of Ten Core Values offer invaluable insight into life.

John Adams Academies are TK-12th Grade, TUITION-FREE public charter schools open to all, currently operating campuses in El Dorado Hills, Lincoln, and Roseville, California, and offering our unique American Classical Leadership Education™ model

John Adams Academy is restoring America's heritage by developing servant-leaders who are keepers and defenders of the principles of freedom for which our Founding Fathers pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. By combining classical education with servant leadership training and core values, John Adams Academy develops scholars who are leaders in their homes, communities, and country. Through classics, mentoring, and modeling, scholars are inspired to prepare for their unique missions and will naturally hunger for oncoming responsibilities and future contributions to society.

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10th Anniversary Spotlights

John Adams Academy has grown considerably in its first decade of operation. Opening with only 500 scholars and one building, the Academy has expanded to nearly 4000 scholars and three campuses. Much of its growth is undeniably attributable to key people who have dedicated much of their lives to make the Academy a success. Some of those people have moved on to other opportunities, but many have remained with the school, to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude. In partial fulfillment of that debt, several administrators, teachers, and staff members who have been with the Academy since its conception have agreed to share some stories and insights from their time here. We thank them for their dedication to the Academy these past ten years and for the legacy they pass on to us as we continue the work of American classical leadership education.

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy?

12 years ago I heard about this crazy idea called John Adams Academy. I attended a lot of events, some of them were parent interest events, some of them were staff training events, and I went through the interview and hiring process and starting working with the school. But we didn't have a facility so it took us a few years to get off the ground, and it took a lot of hard work and dedication of so many parents to get us here. It was hard, but it was good. The first day of school, I remember looking from my classroom into my colleague's classroom, and you could still see some electrical wires hanging from the ceiling. We had a permit, so we were safe, but there were wires hanging from the ceiling! Our school supplies were those that we could buy at the one-dollar paper sale at Staples because our funding was low because we were just beginning the school. Our curriculum was limited to some teachers with tremendous hearts and passion and some great, great books, and some paper, and pencils, and notebooks. It was hard. And I thought I knew what "hard" meant that first year as we built this dream and vision and passion for John Adams



**Heather
Brown**

Former Head Master
of Elementary

Roseville

Academy, but I can tell you that over the past ten years since the day we opened the door it has all been hard, but it has been very good.

Question #2: Why did you want to work for the school?

I love simplicity. I love the simplicity of a beautiful book and three children on my lap. Or a conversation in the carpool line, or a mom who just wants to stop and hug me and tell me their child mastered a math test or finished a book for the first time. Those are simple things and yet those are the most important things. I love the quote by Laura Ingalls Wilder, “I am beginning to learn that it is the sweet, simple things of life which are the real ones after all.” The simplicity of the education and the beauty of the relationships that I have experienced here at John Adams Academy have changed me greatly, and unfortunately the complexity, which we often love and enjoy, takes that away. And so when I leave John Adams Academy one of the things that has changed in me is to treasure and value those simple things and not forget them. And sometimes not to walk past them in my business and complexity, but stop and notice, and value them.

Question #3: What is the role of mentoring at John Adams Academy?

We talk so much about mentors and classics. We say it so much that it rolls off our tongues almost as an honor and a badge of who we are and what we do. And that’s not bad—it is important to have an identity as a school and we should know what we stand for. But sometimes, the poster on the wall and the words we recite at flag ceremony cause us to forget what is behind them. I’ve been changed here at John Adams Academy because of the “who” behind the mentors; that is, the actual people who fill the formal mentoring roles. The “who” behind the mentor is often the teacher greeting the child in the classroom, or a PSO leader, or board member, or committee chair. Whoever it is, *who* that person is is far more important to me than the act of mentoring itself because *who* they are is the mentoring. And so this is hard for me, because this is where I could list so many people who have changed me and mentored me. Whether it be board members, the PSO members who dress me in a Mary Poppins’s costume and ask me to jump off a roof with an umbrella, whether it is the teachers who have sat in my office and cried with me, or staff members who have admonished me. And I learn from your children, because the children are also the who in the mentor. And I don’t ever want to lose sight of that.

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy?

I was working at a little elementary school during the day and teaching Greek in the afternoons/evenings. I was then the director of the Greek language program. Then, one day, one of the mommies from the school, who had just gotten her credential approached me and told me about this new school which hadn't opened yet. That mommy was Heather Brown. She encouraged me to look into it. She said she thought I'd be perfect. Out of curiosity, I looked at the website and knew it was for me. Those core values were what was lacking in my current position, and teaching classically was what I did. Not only that, but the thought of possibly being able to teach Greek as well, was beyond my imagination, so I decided to contact Dr. Forman. I wrote him a little essay on our Founding Fathers and their education. I also included that if he wanted to have a classical school, he needed to include Greek and Latin – which, by the way, I could help him out with the Greek part. He introduced me to Nathan Rose, our first principal, and the rest is history.



**Becky
Yerocostas**

Dean of Elementary
Roseville

Question #2: Why did you want to work for the school?

We all started this school because we truly believed in the vision/mission of this academy and believed in the core values—and that's what got us through those first few years. Ten years later, everything we do and say is still linked to our core values. In order to work here, you need to understand what those core values mean and to be able to embody them and uphold them. We talk to families and incoming scholars about our core values. They need to know that that's what we are all about. It is such a huge part of who we are. When looking at schools, people look at the CAASPP scores and all of that, but how do we measure our core values, which is our character building piece? We aren't trying to just get kids to college. We are developing servant leaders.

Question #3: What is the purpose of classical education?

With our classical leadership education, we are training thinkers and doers, not followers. This fits in with Fostering Creativity and Entrepreneurial Spirit. America is an idea,

not a location. Entrepreneurs are thinkers, leaders and statesmen that know how to solve problems and improve the world around them. We want our scholars to be creative and independent. This is what we strive for not only for our scholars, but for our parents and ourselves.



**Jennifer
Wilson**

Elementary EL
Development Teacher

Roseville

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy?

I first learned about John Adams Academy on EDJoin. I was applying for teaching positions and came across their postings. That was a year before we opened. Through emails from Nathan Rose (the principal), we were told the school's opening was being postponed a year and that if I was interested there would be a few opportunities throughout the year to learn more about the school and a classical education. I attended everything I could.

Question #2: Why did you want to work for the school?

Originally it was because this was the first place I could get my foot in a door and start building time working in a school. In addition, I liked what I was hearing and learning about the academy and what they wanted to do. It aligned with what I felt school should be. I have chosen to stay because I feel happy here. I have grown an attachment to many people, the school itself, and the core beliefs that we share here at the academy. Being one of the original staff I think gives a sense of loyalty and desire to see it continue to thrive and remain true to its origins. I truly believe in what we are trying to do here and I still want to be a part of it.

As teachers, staff, and families come and go, the one thing I hear most is that there is something about this place that you don't find anywhere else. It's a feeling, a sense of community, and a place where everyone really cares and I'm told that it's hard to find that somewhere else. We are valued from the bottom of the totem pole to the top and that is special. Together we make this place great.

Question #3: What has been the school's greatest challenge and what has been its greatest success?

I feel that one of our biggest challenges, to a degree, is one of our greatest successes—our quick growth. When they had their very first meeting with prospective families before the school was even open, they had a few hundred more people show up than they expected. When we opened our doors we opened with more scholars than they originally had hoped for. Each year we grew and then we had a couple of opportunities to expand our size in Roseville and eventually out to other campuses. While this was great success, and to know that we still have long wait lists is wonderful, it has also been a challenge in making sure we serve all of our populations the best we can, both with staff and scholars. We are still learning the best way to do that and catching up more and more. We are still a young academy and we will have many more successes and challenges to come.

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy?

Our family first learned about John Adams Academy through Jennilyn Dumm. She was our neighbor and we were considering moving out of the area so our children would not have to attend public school. She encouraged us to attend a meeting about the school to learn the vision of the founder, Dean Foreman.

Question #2: Why did you want to work for the school?

We attended the first meeting with Jennilyn so we wouldn't offend her, because she was so emphatic that we would love the school—just being honest. We did not have any aspirations that we would actually bring our children to the school. To say that we were skeptical would be an understatement. But we decided to allow our child to attend John Adams Academy after meeting with Dr. Foreman. During that meeting we heard a lot of focus on History and Culture, building a Culture of Greatness, and the phrase “How to think, not what to think.” We have always told our children to trust adults, but always verify and to investigate themselves; to come to their own decisions on the topic. Dr. Foreman recommended Oliver DeMille's book *The Student Whisperer* to us that day to get a better idea of his focus on the educational system he had envisioned for the school. After some awful experiences with the public school system, Oliver DeMille was mind



**Tammy
Mendoza**

Elementary
Instructional Aide
Roseville

blowing! He had written what I personally felt about children. His statement that “all children are little geniuses, waiting to be inspired” really resonated with me. This was a foreign thought in my educational background, but this is definitely what an educator should think when working with their scholars! This is why I began to work at John Adams Academy, to see if they truly believed this, and if so, how they implemented these concepts into a class of thirty scholars.

Question #3: What is your favorite memory from working at the academy?

As a teacher, the times when one of my scholars has an “aha” moment are my favorite. I love when one of our “littles” come to me, even years later, and are excited that they have succeeded in something they found hard, and that they want to share their experiences with me. As a parent, one of my favorite memories is from the first few days of the school’s opening. My first grader was very upset about something and did not want to go to school that day. He was giving me a hard time and talking back to me. An older scholar overheard my son and turned to him and said, “Hey, man, that is your mom. You should not be treating her that way!” My son immediately stopped and changed his behavior. This is the culture of our school.



**Betsy
Stenklyft**

Elementary Reading
Intervention
Specialist

Roseville

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy?

At the end of my first year of retirement, after teaching for 27 years in the Roseville City School District, my neighbor told me about this new school that was starting that had a second grade position they were interviewing for. Things moved quickly: my friend told me about the job on Tuesday, I interviewed and hired on Thursday, and our first activity was on Saturday with the pancake breakfast for all the new families. It was a very exciting thing to be a part of. When they dedicated the school and they had a Catholic priest say a prayer over it I knew I was in the right spot. After years of being in the public school district where anybody of a conservative bent was really discouraged from speaking out or acting out or doing anything, it was very pleasant to come to a place where I didn’t feel like I had to hide who I was. I loved everywhere I taught previously and I loved all the teachers, but there is a difference here in that we are freer to be who we are.

Question #2: Why did you want to work for the school?

I love our mission statement. There is a focus on getting back to real education, really thought provoking, logic inducing work. I remember a student in my past, a 5th grader, who came up to me one day with a pencil with lead that had broken. He brought it up to me and held it in my face and said, “My pencil is broken.” I looked at him and said, “Well what are you going to do about that?” and he honestly couldn’t tell me. He was unable to think of a solution. That bothered me, so I started taking classes on critical thinking at Sonoma State where they have a critical thinking conference. I would go to that every year and I’ve had a couple things published by them as well. Then I started getting interested in the brain and what we know about the brain and how to apply that to our classroom and teaching and I started doing a lot of teaching in-service training in brain development. I eventually taught a brain based class at Sac State at the graduate level just because I really wanted kids to learn to think. So, one reason why I wanted to work at this school is there is more of an emphasis here on independent thinking with our Socratic dialogues and even the way we teach comprehension, asking scholars questions about how they can verify ideas and find where they are in the books they read. Those were things that were never discussed in all my years in all the districts that I’ve been in. So, it was very exciting to be a part of it all here.

Question #3: What was the first year of teaching like at the school?

Our first year, which was really a joyful year, was also a very hard year. We had no curriculum. We had not supplies. We didn’t have pencils. I would go buy a package of colored construction paper for art and they always have that sheet on the top with the label and the back of that was white and I saved all of those. We used every one of them. The twelve of us teachers came together as a staff like you cannot believe. And even though it was a lot of work it was always joyful. We were always so excited to be here and to be doing it. I’ve never experienced anything like that and I’ve opened other schools. In Roseville I opened two schools, one of them had very little in the way of materials, but it was nothing like here and there were still expectations, like, “I’m not doing that, the custodians need to do that.” But here, Bobby was our custodian, that was it and he couldn’t do it all, so we all did it together. It was really cool.



**Kendra
Lamboy**

Elementary Mentor
Teacher

Roseville

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy?

I learned about the academy through Heather Brown. She contacted me about a year before the academy started. She told me about the mission and vision of the school, but what I was really drawn to was the idea of Classical education. It was just an idea at the time and I didn't realize it was a whole philosophy of education. I'll never forget, it was my 40th birthday when I attended a discussion that was being led by Dr. Forman explaining his experience with classical education and from then on I was onboard.

So that year while they were finding the facility, I was engaged in dialogue with the school leaders and tracking with what was happening and began teaching when the school opened.

Question #2: Why did you want to work for the school?

I worked at another charter school before, but it wasn't the right fit. It was a charter that focused on tests and standards and, after coming from a homeschooling background, it just didn't feel right. I didn't know why, but it didn't feel right, especially for the little ones being in the lower elementary. So, when I learned about John Adams, it felt like a better fit.

Question #3: What did you know about classical education before joining the academy and what has been your experience teaching and learning classically?

I had homeschooled two students using Susan Wise Bauer, who is classics based, so I was familiar with classical education in terms of two students, but not in a full classroom of thirty. So that has been new, developing a program that is classical with thirty students. It can be done, but it is definitely not easy. It is a lot easier to have a good discussion with a small classroom, especially with the little ones. Luckily they give us teacher aides to help with that teacher-to-student ratio. But when we do have a good discussion, the kids love it. That's one thing I love about classical education: when you bring in truth and they discover it themselves. They are unabashed in what they say and don't filter the truth, which has made it a fun ten years.

When I was in the environment at the other school it was literally a cycle of test the kids, grade the Scantron, fix the corrections, test the kids, grade the Scantron. It really did not feel right. It did not feel like that is what I was called as a teacher to do. So being here to have that liberty to draw out the unique gift of every student and not worry so much about the test, that has been so life giving for me. Some scholars are more gifted in the arts and music; they're not gifted in the ability to take a test, and I feel like that pressure is gone. Not to say that tests aren't important, but that is not all that is driving us. What is driving us is those great books that lead us to wonderful discussions.



Bobby Deland

Facilities Manager

Roseville

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy and why did you want to work for the school?

Nathan Rose is my cousin and he was the principle at the start of the Academy. He talked to me in the spring prior to opening this school and he was excited about the academy opening up and he explained a little bit about what the academy was about. I was living in Hermosa Beach at the time working in facilities at another school overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and it was gorgeous. But there was emptiness there. There was no sense of purpose and value, and just seeing the culture for what it was, it was not something that my spirit was yearning for. It was mainly for that purpose that I moved here. I had the perfect life down there. I was three blocks from the beach with a house, I had everything, but there was a big emptiness, a void, and that was the calling and I knew right when I came up here, I knew this was where we needed to be. All my life, I wanted to be part of something special so I could look back and say I made a difference. I wanted to leave a thumbprint on life, something of value, and this academy turned on for me like a light bulb and I understood right away that this was one way I could fill the void I felt.

What is your interaction like with the scholars and the faculty?

My favorite part of working here has been when we used to have the mentoring program on Fridays and I taught a class on stock market and day trading. Troy Henke and I did it together and it was so much fun to interact with the scholars. I also like to interact with the scholars who

are having issues. When they get in trouble I pull them aside and I say, “Don't waste this opportunity, this is a chance of a life time, you're at a school where there is no bullying, where you don't have to worry about peers coming down on you. So enjoy the comradery and the learning structure we've set up for you.” I think it is especially important with the 7th and 8th graders that they understand what we're trying to prepare them for, because once these kids grasp it, it is going to help them later in life.



**Norman
Gonzales**

Director of Outreach
& Compliance

Question #1: How did you first learn about John Adams Academy?

I was working in the US House of Representatives as the Outreach Director for Congressman Tom McClintock (CA-4). I was having lunch with a friend who is an attorney. As we discussed the current state of government, politics, our communities, the conversation turned to charter schools as a means of improving people's lives. It turns out he was helping the Formans with the creation of the Academy and suggested working together on the effort. I met with Dr. Forman, who provided me a copy of *A Thomas Jefferson Education*. After reading that book and meeting with additional team members I fell in love with the vision and mission at the heart of this idea for a school. I went on to become a founding board member of the Academy.

Question #2: Why did you want to work for the school?

I thought the battle to restore America's heritage was taking place in the halls of Congress, but I quickly came to realize that the battle was actually taking place in education. The war had been raging since the '60s, but as a nation I don't think we were aware of that fact. It's important to note that you generally can't win the fights you don't know you are in. Now colleges, universities, and even K-12 schools are full of indoctrination, with children being told what to think instead of being taught how to think. One of the most attractive aspects of our program was helping scholars to identify and pursue the true, the good, and the beautiful. I was also very proud of the fact that America's founding principles that I had been working hard to

protect in the halls of Congress were woven into the Vision and Mission of the Academy. While other schools were embracing critical race theory, comprehensive sex education, and a litany of other challenging curriculums, John Adams Academy was creating a culture and an environment that protected the innocence of children and to take ownership of their own education.

After helping to open the Roseville campus and seeing the positive benefit to scholars and families, I took a position with the California Charter Schools Association as a School Development Manager helping people open new charter schools throughout the Central Valley and Northern California. Ultimately, I realized I didn't want to simply open any new charter school, but to open new John Adams Academies. I was blessed to be able to come on staff for John Adams Academy in September of 2015 as the Dean of Operations. As we have grown and redesigned our organization, I am currently serving as the Director of Outreach and Compliance. I haven't looked back since. A John Adams Academy American Classical Leadership Education is a critical component in preparing the current generation to fight for, protect, and hand on freedom to the next generation.

Question #3: What have been the most significant changes and challenge for the school in the past ten years?

One of the most significant changes for the Academy has been the growth. We opened our doors in Roseville in fall of 2011 serving 500 scholars in grades Kindergarten through 10. Now in 2021 we are celebrating our 10-year anniversary, we have three campuses; Roseville, Lincoln, and El Dorado Hills, we are approaching 4,000 enrolled scholars across our three campuses for next fall, and have over 4,000 applicants on our wait lists. This growth is a very good thing. It tells me that families are becoming aware of the beauty and importance of what we are providing to them, and it shows that we are continually improving upon our ability to serve more and more families. I have consistently said that you cannot restore America's heritage from Roseville, CA. In order to protect freedom, to restore America's heritage, we must be able to serve every family and every community that desires a John Adams Academy American Classical Leadership Education throughout the entire United States.

The Academy's greatest challenge is the California Legislature and the onslaught of negative legislation designed to eliminate school choice. It is a fundamental right of every person to choose how they are educated. While the Academy can educate families about what is

happening in the State, it is ultimately every parent's and every scholar's responsibility to stand up and fight for their right to choose the best educational options for their family. The first requirement of victory is showing up. If you show up and take a stand, you are well on your way to winning.

Core Value #6 – High Standards of Academic Excellence

(As a contextual preface to the following articles, the editors include this extended definition of the 6th core value as it appears on the official John Adams Academy website).

True academic excellence requires the focused application of both intellectual and moral discipline. It is at the intersection of virtue and intelligence where special excellence, or *arête*, is found and brilliance thrives. At the Academy, excellence is lauded and recognized as a mark of distinction which is a natural result of our diligent study. Good grades are only one measurement of this achievement. Scholars are given frequent opportunities to improve their academics by analyzing their work in relation to the truth, goodness, and beauty found through the classics. We see academic excellence displayed when a scholar, mentor, or staff member is inspired to innovate and to drive their own education. A question that reflects this attitude is “What more can I do?” The attainment of excellence involves constant improvement and is a life-long process.

Q&A With the Deans: Our Standards of Excellence

Though John Adams Academy is a relatively young school, the teachers and leaders it attracts are far from inexperienced. Polling just five of our deans and assistant deans from all three campuses (James Haskins, Zeta Cammarota, Josh Biedel, Carolyn Javier, and Vivian Bricksin), we find a team of administrators who bring more than 100 years of teaching experience to the academy. From inner city and large public schools to alternative charter and home schooling environments, these educators have taught nearly everywhere and are sources of great practical and theoretical knowledge when it comes to what academic excellence is and how we can help scholars achieve it in the classroom. In this article, these deans answer questions about the academy's core value on academic excellence and offer some suggestions on implementing it within our classical American leadership education model.

Question #1: What does the academy's core value "high standards of academic excellence" mean to you as a teacher and administrator?



James Haskins

Assistant Dean

Roseville, Secondary

There is the visual of setting the bar. If you set the bar at the midway point, then maybe kids will get to that, or maybe they will struggle and get below it. But if you set it much higher, then they will strive for better results and have higher expectations for themselves. Academic excellence comes out in the expectations we set. We set high expectations for the scholars and we try to lift the ones that are lower up to those expectations so that we are getting the best from them. To me that is what having a high standard means—we are always setting the bar high. And with our style of education, that is so heavy in the reading and the writing, I think that expectation alone sets a high bar for the scholars who come here, especially for those who are new to our style of education.

I can tell you what high standards of academic excellence is not. It is not just a grade. I think that is a very small portion of it. Good grades may be the fruit of excellence, but they are not the thing itself. When I think about high standards of academic excellence I think about a scholar who chooses to engage in literature, to engage in whatever he or she is studying. Someone who is proactive in learning. Someone who shares their thoughts, who shares their insights and provokes thought in others. Someone who asks questions that lead to a deeper understanding of what they are learning for the purpose of ultimately pursuing truth. I think it is important that high standards of academic excellence are embodied in the choices that the scholar makes with regards to what they are learning, and that the scholar seek after true, good, and beautiful things.



Carolyn Javier

Assistant Dean

Roseville, Secondary

Question #2: How do state and national academic standards impact—for better or worse—the school's classical curriculum, the teachers' expectations, and the students' experience?

They impact our scholars in a mostly negative way, although they mean well with them. My last school I worked at tailored EVERYTHING we ever taught or did or any worksheet or lesson to a state standard, in every class and subject. That's seemingly noble. However, the problem with that is the state standards do not take into account that our scholars have SOULS; they simply view them as agents to be acted upon and needing information to be poured into them. They have a utilitarian mindset, not a classical one. Classical education factors in the heart and the head and character/soul formation; the state focuses just on the head. Thus test scores and API is all that matters, rather than the students becoming better human beings. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "*Intelligence plus character—that is the true goal of education.*"



Josh Biedel

Assistant Dean

El Dorado Hills,
Secondary

Answer by Carolyn Javier: In modern progressive education we have to adhere to state standards because of the nature of public education. But that can put us in a precarious situation

as we are striving to teach the classical education methodology that focuses on developing the human soul as opposed to modern progressive methodology that is very skills based. Now, I don't know of very many teacher education programs that focus on developing the soul, so the majority of us teachers go through the modern progressive teaching credentialing program where we look at data and we have to meet certain standards that the state and nation give us. The data and standards are all very good to have, but the data and skill-based standards are not our ultimate goal. They are not our end. Rather if a teacher, an administrator, or a school focuses on the true standard of academic excellence, in developing a good soul, then the fruits of that will be that our scholars will have the skills to read, write, and do math because naturally all those things are going to come out in their study habits, in their motivation to do well, because it is the right thing to do and it becomes part of who they are.

Question #3: What are ways that you add rigor to your classroom instruction to challenge students?

Answer by James Haskins: A lot of the added rigor in my classroom is in getting the scholars to think. There is this idea that rigor translates into assigning more work. But that is not what rigor means. The work should be challenging and force the kids to talk and discuss and share opinions, but we don't let kids just write papers that are opinion-based, they have to defend their opinion and look at the other side by considering what an opposing opinion would be and how to reasonably account for the difference. We are teaching them how to think and how to argue and express their thoughts. That is what makes it rigorous. We aren't settling for them writing a five paragraph essay with an intro, three paragraphs, and a conclusion. They have to consider what proofs, counterproofs, and refutations are appropriate to their argument and structure it accordingly. And in order to do that they have to be thinking and have to be able to give reasons for their thoughts. We have miniature debates where they have to be able to argue both sides of the topic. In my government class for example, we were just talking about masks under Covid-19 regulations and one person had to argue they were an act of tyranny and another had to argue wearing them was patriotic and they had to be able to make either argument. This kind of rigorous argumentation gets them to think and it creates better learners.

Answer by Josh Biedel: A lot of teachers just think that throwing lots of busy work at scholars and piling on the workload means they're being rigorous. They're wrong. In my humble estimation, stretching the scholars with meaningful/worthwhile work is rigorous; ensuring that what they're learning sticks with them for LIFE is true rigor. Stressing kids out by dumping assignments and fast-forwarding due dates to seem like a rigorous class/teacher is asinine. Challenging them to be a better son, daughter, friend, human, sibling, etc., outside of class and within school—that's the best rigor and most effective way a teacher can challenge their students. Being an honest and virtuous person is a lifelong, rigorous endeavor; cramming for a test is a semester-long rigorous endeavor—which one's more important? Rigor is not meant just for Finals or for a teacher's self-esteem; it's meant for the long-haul of a scholar's life that they can recall the lessons/teachings/discoveries of your class—that's true RIGOR, the kind that lasts for years and with any luck, decades, because it's etched in the scholar's heart and mind and soul (not their short-term memory).

Answer by Carolyn Javier: I add rigor to my class by asking questions and not settling for an "I don't know" response. There are a lot of different ways to do that. When there is a definite answer and a scholar says, "I don't know," then you ask, "What don't you know." You probe by asking questions, which is a very natural way to learn, and adding an expectation that the scholars must answer the question, and if they don't know it then we are going to come to it together and I'm not going to let them off the hook. The next level of the rigor, once they know what they know, is how are they going to apply it and demonstrate it? And the next level of rigor is in how they are going to connect it to the outside world. How is it that what they read in literature connects to something they read in physics? Pushing the scholars to think beyond what they think their realm of knowledge is and letting them know that is the expectation is an important part of a rigorous classroom.

Question #4: What skills or practices do you feel are needed to be a successful teacher of classical education?



**Zeta
Cammarota**

Dean

El Dorado Hills,
Secondary

To be a successful classical education teacher one should first be an excellent teacher and there are many books written about that topic. To be an excellent classical teacher, however, requires a little more. I would say he or she must be a scholar of the classics. We have to model what we teach and model how to be a scholar by being one ourselves. So this means frequently engaging in reading the great works, discussing them with colleagues, and fine-tuning our thoughts in writing. And we need to do this in the right way, as seekers of truth. We can only be seekers of truth if we are purposefully and intentionally growing in the five habits of an excellent scholar as shared with us by Mr. Rummelsburg in the 2018 issue of *Mentor*:¹

1. Good Will
2. Engaged Attention
3. An Effort of Study
4. A Certain Kind of Faith
5. Docility

Unless we approach the great books with a heart of humility and an intellect desiring truth, we and our scholars are in danger of just having read the classics, but not being changed by them.

Answer by James Haskins: On a secondary level, teachers definitely need to have a sense of humility. Teachers are going to have some kids in their class who are extremely bright, who love reading and know more about a certain topic than they do—and that is great. A scholar may love battleships and airplanes and read all these extra books on them and he or she is going to know a few more things than I know when we come to the history of war, but a good teacher will foster that desire rather than stifle it. You have to look at our form of teaching as a mentorship as opposed to simply teaching. We are not necessarily teaching them; we are guiding them to their own education. A lot of our teachers are new to classical education and are new to the literature

¹ See Steven Rummelsburg, “Five Habits of a Scholar” *Mentor: Scholar Empowered Learning* vol. III, iss. 1 (2019): 75-82.

that the kids are reading in class and they are reading and learning along with them, which allows for a certain level of empathy for the amount of work and the kinds of questions that are being asked and it creates this environment of learning. We hope by doing this we are creating lifelong learners as they see the teachers learn right along with them and have their own epiphanies in class, and are sharing them with the scholars. I think it creates a good community of classical education learners that will hopefully achieve our mission of sending educated kids out into society who are making choices for our future that are based on logic and reason and not just passion and emotion.

Question #5: How are we as a school doing at setting and achieving high standards of academic excellence? How could we improve?

In *A Thomas Jefferson Education* by Oliver DeMille, it says that students have to educate themselves. Teachers inspire them, but unless they take responsibility for their own education they are not going to learn much. We can try and force feed them, but the philosophy here is that we want them to embrace their own education and follow their own path and get excited about learning. And one thing I've noticed in my years working here is that the longer a student is here the more that starts to happen for them. Such a wonderful thing happens with our eleventh and twelfth graders: there is this big jump from holding their hand and trying to cajole them into doing the work and engage them in reading and writing, and then all of a sudden they take over. I've had some of those types of seniors in the past. I would bring them in with my freshmen and eighth graders and have them lead discussions and have them bring their own copies of the book with annotations, and they were all excited, and they became leaders and teachers in the classroom, which makes me think something is being done correctly here. John Adams Academy is a new school in a sense, we are in our tenth year and we are getting out of that pioneering stage, but we've had students here long enough to see some really good results. I've been in education a long time and this is the best environment I've ever been a part of and I appreciate being here.



**Vivian
Bricksin**

Assistant Dean
Lincoln, Secondary

Socratic Method



**Dr. Dean
Forman**

Founder and
Chairman of the
Board of John Adams
Academy

(Editors' Note: This article is an excerpt from Dr. Forman's recently published book, John Adams Academy: Leading A Revolution in Education. The excerpt is published with his consent and is subject to copyright).

At the core of classical education stands Socrates. Gregory Vlastos, a scholar of Socrates and a professor of philosophy at Princeton, described Socrates' method of inquiry as "among the greatest achievements of humanity." Why? Because, he says, it makes philosophical inquiry a common human enterprise, open to every man. The Socratic Method calls for common sense and common speech. Additionally, it does not merely call for common sense but examines what common sense actually is. The Socratic Method asks: Does the common sense of our day offer us the greatest potential for self-

understanding and human excellence? Or is the prevailing common sense in fact a roadblock to realizing this potential?

The Socratic Method reveals people to themselves and makes them see what their opinions really amount to—their assumptions, biases, level of accuracy, effectiveness, etc. It is virtually impossible in many instances to know what we believe in daily life until we engage others in dialogue. Likewise, to discover our philosophical views, we must engage with ourselves, the lives we already lead. Our views form, change and evolve as we participate in this kind of ongoing dialogue.

There are no short-cuts in classical education; neither computers, calculators, audio-visual techniques nor even lectures can make us see the all-important truths that are in our minds and souls. A student may be able to take up technology in its latest form without having to go back to the first inventions and repeat all the labors of his ancestors. But this is not so in liberal education. We must start wisdom at the beginning, building block upon block. In this way classical learning is more like moral formation. Rote memorization gets us nowhere. We must

truly learn, deeply *think* and genuinely change. Our parents may be courageous and just, but we cannot simply take up where they left off; rather we must go through the whole experience of acquiring virtue as they did. Again, no short-cuts. So too in genuine education. We ourselves must do it from the bottom up. It is as basic and unchanging as human nature.

Over 2,000 years ago Socrates saw what was crucial to human learning. The most basic goal of Socrates' work as a philosopher and teacher was not, through questioning, to induce a person to realize a particular fact or to cause a person to rethink an idea. For Socrates, the Socratic Method was just a means to an end. The end that Socrates sought and that we seek for our students at John Adams Academy is the *excellence of human character*. Excellence of character and the *quality of living that results from good character* was the holy grail of Socrates' quest.

Socrates believed that a continuous journey of self-improvement was essential for every person. He believed that this self-improvement is to be realized through the acquisition of knowledge. Not the quickly-forgotten, shallow knowledge of rote memorization for a test, but rather the meaningful, lasting knowledge gained only by truly deep and continual thinking. It is the fundamental goal of the Socratic Teacher to improve the character of his or her students. This is done by making them more receptive to and effective in the process of acquiring knowledge and increasing their understanding (Max Maxwell, Socratic Method Research Portal, socraticmethod.net).

The Socratic Temperament

To be effective at using the Socratic Method, the Socratic Teacher must be able to live and model positive attitudes regarding the discipline of inquiry and must also be experienced in the practice of his or her own self-examination. A teacher who is completely lacking in what Max Maxwell (Socratic Method Research Portal) calls "Socratic Temperament," will have a difficult time bringing the Socratic Method to life in the classroom.

Vital characteristics of the Socratic Temperament include the following:

1. The Socratic Teacher loves to discover his/her own errors.

2. The Socratic Teacher is in touch with his/her own ignorance.
3. The Socratic Teacher models the joy of hard work in the quest for knowledge.
4. The Socratic Teacher experiences deep curiosity and the desire for self-improvement.

Maxwell goes on to say, “The failure of a teacher to be alive to her own journey of growth in life will completely destroy the very best she has to offer her students. When a teacher has a well-developed Socratic Temperament and uses the Socratic Method, this combination brings an extraordinary power of inspiration to the classroom. Without true Socratic Temperament, the Socratic Method can easily become an exercise in shallow manipulation that lacks the power to inspire.

“When a teacher uses methods that have the power to bring the process of learning alive in the minds of her students, this very important awakening must be conducted with humility and grace. If you always need to be the one who is right, always think of yourself in terms of what you know and have achieved, are lazy about the acquisition of new knowledge in your own life, have no curiosity and no desire for self-improvement, then you will never be able to use the Socratic Method. The first step in learning the Socratic Method is to open yourself to the task of developing your own Socratic Temperament.”

To cultivate the Socratic Temperament in the students is to establish the ultimate foundation for the development of superior critical thinking later in life. Deep curiosity, fearless questioning, productive critical thinking and a lifelong quest for self-improvement are the fruits of the Socratic Temperament. The opportunity to develop your own Socratic Temperament (remembering, as Oliver DeMille teaches, that your education is about “You, not Them”) is the finest gift a teacher can give to students. As Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Perhaps Socrates’ most important point in *The Republic* is the concept of the special excellence or *arête* within each individual, and how the state (or school; read JAA) must discern that excellence, nurture it and nourish it to produce a good society. It is a good society because each individual is good; each individual has achieved, for himself or herself, what he or she can do best. The society then uses that quality of excellence. The state is a moral state, precisely because it elicits that moral quality of excellence within each individual. This is the crux of Socrates’ argument.

It is also the ideal at John Adams Academy—drawing out the best of the individual. The Socratic Method is precisely that. We look to that model. And even though we may not be able to fully achieve it at all times, we strive to approximate it—the model of right conduct in the teacher, to reach into each student’s character and help that student define what he is at his best. The model of the teacher is then to elicit the special excellence. This is the academic artist’s main purpose at John Adams Academy.

Paradigm Shift – The Cave

To excel in classical education, teachers at John Adams Academy must have the experience of “The Cave,” as described in *The Republic*. Socrates tells the story while talking to a young follower of his, named Glaucon, and his purpose in recounting this fable is to illustrate what it is like to be a philosopher—a lover of wisdom. Most people, including most of us today, live in a world of relative ignorance. We are even comfortable with that ignorance because it is all we know. When we first start facing truth, the process may be frightening, and many people run back to their old lives. But if you continue to seek truth, beauty and goodness, you will eventually be able to handle it better. In fact, you will want more of it. Once you recognize and taste the truth, you can identify beauty and use those gifts to do good for others. You won’t ever want to go back to being unenlightened.

In the allegory, Plato describes metaphorically the predicament in which mankind finds itself, the question of who should rule, and he proposes a solution to that question that entails discipline and rigorous education. As you remember this allegory think of all your previous “training” to get a degree. Socrates says:

“Here, my friends, is a parable; a parable to illustrate the degrees in which our nature may be enlightened or unenlightened. Imagine the condition of men living in a sort of cavernous chamber underground, with an entrance open to the light, and a long passage all down the cave. Here they have been from childhood, chained by the leg and also by the neck, so that they cannot move and can see only what is in front of them because the chains will not let them turn their heads. It’s a strange picture, and a strange sort of prisoners. Like ourselves, though, for in the first place, prisoners so confined would have seen really nothing of substantial value of

themselves or of one another, except the shadows thrown by the firelight on the wall of the cave facing them. Isn't that true, Glaucon?"

Glaucon agrees, he grasps it. Do we? Picture the scene. We, in a darkened room, cannot even see one another. We're fixed in our minds entirely on that wall of the cave. There is a fire in the back, Socrates says, well beyond the long entrance that leads to the sunlight. But the fire manages to cast on the wall of the cave only faint shadows. As we look at that wall, we see only appearance on the wall, yet we think we are seeing reality. We don't have a sense of being chained, so we don't even realize that we cannot see the people next to us. We have only a sense that security and truth are there on the wall of the cave, which we've seen all of our lives.

Consider the scene more deeply:

- There are prisoners that live chained (uneducated) in a cave.
- Socrates asks if it isn't reasonable that for the prisoners the shadows are truth.
- We wonder how the prisoners would respond if they were released from their bonds and cured of their ignorance.
- We realize that the prisoners would walk away and be confused as to what is real.
- If one were forcibly dragged into the sunlight, wouldn't he feel pained and irritated?
- Wouldn't he also require additional time to let his eyes adjust to the sun, leaving his mind in a fog? Indeed, at times our confusion or lack of clarity may be an indication that one is on the verge of insight or enlightenment, or it may be an indication that one is regressing in some way.
- It would not be until after the freed prisoner had studied his new reality—the earth, moon, sun and seasons—that he would begin to understand more truth.

Socrates then asks Glaucon to ponder a series of questions and consider the condition of this man or woman now newly freed from the cave and educated about reality:

- How would he relate to the prisoners still in the cave, and they to him?
- Recalling his first home and what passed for wisdom there, would not the freed man consider himself happy and his former fellow prisoners pitiable?

- If returned to the cave and allowed to interact with other prisoners, would the man find the remaining prisoners skeptical of his claims of knowledge that resulted from his trip upward?

Socrates concludes that the others would want to kill such a man. (For those who have left the state bureaucracy and traditional public system, this typically elicits a bit of ironic laughter. If you have experienced this, have you witnessed any negatives from other administrators or teachers when you moved to a classical model? “Killing” in this situation is now seen by all as an extreme response in our time, but that is precisely what they did to Socrates. Socrates managed to “get out of the cave” through education. He later returned, to try and help others get the same kind of learning. Not understanding, and upset by his words, they sentenced him to drink hemlock in 399 B.C.)

- The prisoner learns that education can only occur when freed from the chains that bind him and forced to turn to the light, and likewise forced to accept things as they truly are rather than as one perceives them.

Good education, Socrates maintains, has the purpose and objective of making this turning around process as effective and efficient as possible. Ultimately, Socrates uses the “Allegory of the Cave” as his means of justifying his assertion that only the well-educated, the virtuous, the true philosophers are suited to fulfill the larger purpose of leadership outlined in *The Republic*. For this reason, Socrates concludes:

“The human race will have no respite from evils until those who are really and truly philosophers acquire political power or until through some divine dispensation, those who rule and have political authorities in cities become real philosophers.”

I think Plato is saying that the fundamental purpose of education is not to instill knowledge but to change people’s understanding, behavior and desires. By changing these things, Plato argues, people can reverse their tendency and preference to pursue the various distractions they incorrectly believe to be happiness and instead seek true happiness—the pursuit of virtue and wisdom. He outlines the situation this way:

- The prisoners in the cave have no education or training (or the wrong training). They function only in the secular here and now.

- As a result, their thoughts and perceptions are shaped by “unnecessary appetitive desires.”
- Hence, the prisoners mistake the shadows of things for the things themselves.
- In the second stage, once they have been appropriately educated, they are freed from the bonds of appetite-driven desires and motivated by better things.
- This education includes instruction in a craft, music, poetry and physical training, as Socrates outlines, helping the newly freed prisoners see things as they truly are, rather than as images and shadows.
- Some of the prisoners are further educated in mathematics, science and higher philosophy, which releases them from the realm of necessary desires, leaving them limited only by more spiritual striving.

As a result:

- These potential future “guardians,” or leaders, are allowed to escape the cave and to see things for themselves.
- While these potential guardians may see things for themselves, their limited education may result in frequent failure to grasp the totality and reality of everything about their present situation.
- It is only later, and only through education in dialectics, philosophy and governance that some of the potential future guardians are able to transcend their appetitive desires and to be motivated by their rational desires (reason).
- As a fruit of their education the resulting “philosopher-kings” understand that “the greatest object of study...is the good itself.” They are able to associate this understanding to “the cause of all the other things they have seen.”
- But not everyone is willing or able to make all of these transitions. Some take longer, and some never do make the change—at each stage some of the prisoners’ appetites are too strong, too dear to their hearts, and they refuse further learning and progress.

A few important conclusions are in order here, and very relevant to the state of modern education:

Real knowledge is the key to family, financial, business, spiritual, emotional and social success and progress.

For the person living outside “the cave,” the intellectual life and the moral life are one.

Ultimately the truly educated must return to “the cave” and work to free those who remain, for among them are the future leaders.

Knowledge cannot be merely transferred from teacher to student, rather the teacher must help direct the student’s minds toward discovering for themselves what is true, real and important (JAA philosophy of education).

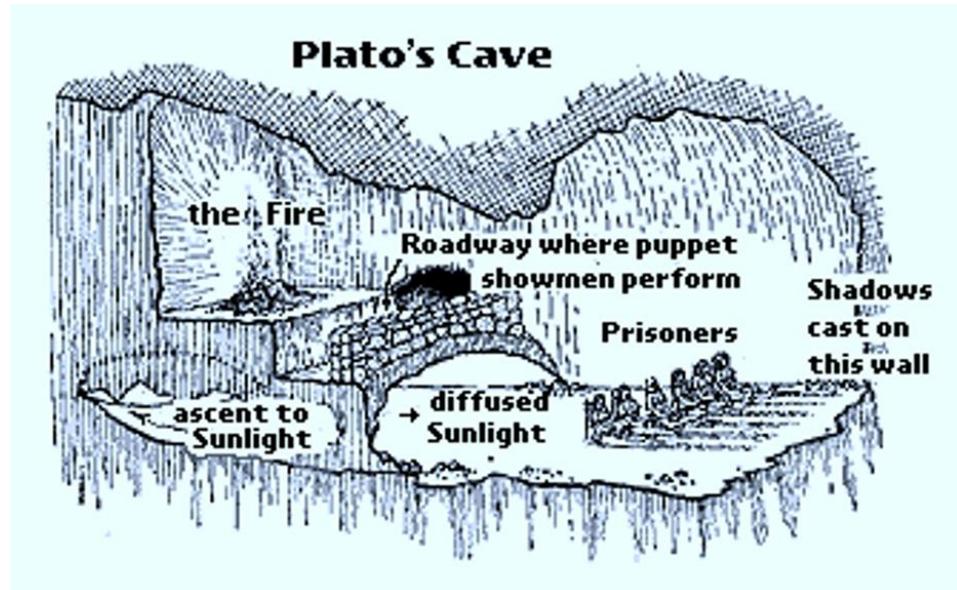
Plato remains convinced that the best leaders are so suited not only because of their education, experience and wisdom but also because they would prefer not to rule.

Socratic Implementation

Our current crisis in modern education has as much to do with *how* we teach as *what* we teach. We must move away from rote-fact-memorization-driven-lecture-dominated education and experimental programs and move back to Plato’s discovery-guided learning. Education is the means of bettering one’s perspective in the sense of getting closer to reality—or narrowing the gap between perspective and reality. Both Socrates and Plato, as well as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, were correct in their belief that governing is hampered when controlled by those motivated by, and with a love for, avarice and ambition for power. Today’s “career politicians” (from all political parties) unequivocally demonstrate this phenomenon.

As I have repeatedly told our teachers at JAA, our best prospect of raising up a new generation of servant leaders is to follow Socrates’ prescription:

1. We must force ourselves out of the cave of ignorance through an appropriate classical curriculum and an effective and efficient educational system here at John Adams Academy.
2. As Sarah Langan put it: “We must complement the resulting lifetime love of learning with dedicated service to others.”



This—the cave and experiences outside the cave—is the underlying parable or birthplace of classical education. Sharing this allegory with teachers, administrators and scholars helps all of us understand our purpose and our challenge. It also beautifully and effectively outlines what we are about. To those who are building schools in our modern world, it is well worth asking yourself the following questions:

- How does this allegory apply to you?
- Your scholars?
- Your community?
- Your school?
- What is your reality?
- Where do you feel you are in the stages of the allegory?
- What illusions do you think you have?
- What things hold back your mind?
- What sort of things shackle your mind? (Lack of experience, too much of the wrong sort of experience, fears, distractions, etc.)
- Are these shackles internal or external to the mind itself?

- How do you get free? (This may depend on what shackles you. Socrates suggests that freedom comes only through an encounter with something outside of ourselves. A teacher? A mentor?)
- How do you identify the real thing when it comes?
- How will you know it when it finds you?
- Why would you go back into the cave?

Consider how some of the symbols might apply in our modern situation:

- Dark cave – Contemporary world of ignorance (society). Everyone starts here.
- Darkness – Our own limited understanding.
- Chained People – Uneducated or undereducated people (pressure, authority figures, peers, etc.).
- Raised Walls – Limitations of our thinking (blindly accept).
- Shadow/Sensory perception/Illusion – Reality is somewhere else, false ideas.
- Chains – Limitations in the material world.
- Rocky Ascent – Path to enlightenment is difficult.
- Outer World of Light (Sun) – Spiritual reality which we achieve by breaking chains, complete knowledge, wisdom, ultimate truth and power, eternal good, overcoming problems.
- Dazzling of Eyes – Difficulty of denying material world, problems, mediocrity, etc.
- 2nd Time Dazzling – Difficulty in accepting ignorance after knowing reality.
- Other Symbols?

The purpose of education is to elevate us from false appearances (self-deception) to things as they are (nature, reality), then to things as they may ideally be (correct forms, noble goals). In order to be educated, we must turn away from misconceptions and achieve personal transformation by coming to understand things more nearly as they are. This can be a painful process. Each of us must personally answer these questions:

- What can the “Allegory of the Cave” help me understand about myself?
- Is Plato’s allegory the story of my education? Or will it be?
- Am I still arranging the shadows on the wall, or am I striving toward the light?

At JAA we are still toiling up the rocky path, but as we ask ourselves the hard questions, challenge self and move up the difficult ascent, we are helping our students on their path to education, learning and ultimately *becoming*. That is what John Adams Academy is about, for all of us, teachers and scholars, finding our special excellence and becoming what we were meant to be.

As always, it is our purpose to inspire servant leaders who are virtuous, who will be keepers and defenders of the principles of freedom in our nation because they have discovered their own special excellence. And before we can lead others in this, we must have attained it for ourselves. Each of us must exercise that talent which is particular to us as individuals, for the purposes most needed in the world around us, and at the school you are building, or plan to build. This path adds value to the lives of others and to humanity as a whole.

The inspiration for this chapter and the creation of John Adams Academy was *A Thomas Jefferson Education* by Oliver DeMille. All parents and teachers at JAA receive a copy of this book, so they understand the type of education we offer and the outcome we seek. Linda and I believe the “Allegory of the Cave” was a great inspiration to illustrate the principles of a classical leadership home education and applied it on a grand or larger public scale to charter schools. Those principles are classics, mentors, simulations, Providence and mission. The idea of Providence was an American founding term used to suggest divine intervention or destiny, one’s true purpose in life—that each of us has *arête* or a special excellence to contribute to society.

Contemplation and Community: A Conversation On Individual and Collective Excellence

Horatio: Thank you all for coming. Last year, a couple of staff members got together to have a conversation about our fifth core value “Fostering Creativity and Entrepreneurial Spirit”. That conversation was very informative and we transcribed it and published it in the faculty journal, *Mentor*, to model the core educational tool of the Socratic discussion. We want to capture the genius and fruit of conversation again this year for the journal, and the specific subject of conversation is the Socratic method itself and its relation to academic excellence. Dr. Forman has given us a text to help us think about the Socratic method and how we implement it in our classrooms and our task now is to think about what he has written, discuss it, and come to some greater understanding together. With that introduction, I'll open it up for thoughts or questions.

M. Bienvenu: I would like to start by reading a portion of Dr. Forman’s article and pose a question about the nature of knowledge. Dr. Forman states that “Socrates believed that a continuous journey of self-improvement was essential for every person. He believed that this self-improvement is to be realized through the acquisition of knowledge.” This knowledge, Dr. Forman suggests, is not simply rote memorization, but knowledge gained from deep and continual thinking. Then he says, “I think Plato is saying that the fundamental purpose of education is not to instill knowledge but to change people’s understanding, behavior and desires.” So, my question is three fold: What is meant by knowledge? What kind of knowledge do we get from Socratic discussion? And what kind of knowledge is important for us to be wise and successful in life?

Thales: What do you think wisdom is?

M. Bienvenu: I think wisdom comes from experience and having a sense of what should be done.

Editors’ note: In an effort to model what they teach, a few staff members read and discussed in Junto fashion the previous article “Socratic Method” by Dr. Dean Forman. This article is a transcription of that discussion. Compared to a formal essay, Socratic discussions are a more open-ended way of discovering what is true, and are an important element in classical education. Names of individuals have been changed to maintain the openness of the conversation.

Thales: So, wisdom is about how to do things?

M. Bienvenu: I think so, though I have not thought very deeply about it.

Titania: Wouldn't that be practical wisdom or prudence, which has a more direct need to act? But true wisdom seems to be something a bit more abstract or not as practical at least.

Thales: That is at the heart of this, I think. We are supposed to be educating classically and the end of education is supposed to be this pursuit of wisdom. So, if wisdom is what our end is, it is really important to spend some time asking what wisdom is. I think Titania's distinction should be dwelt upon for a moment. There is practical wisdom. Classically that is referred to as prudence. And there is wisdom that is classically considered not a practical virtue but a speculative virtue. So there is wisdom and prudence, classically there is a difference between them. And wisdom, I think, has to do with a familiarity with the ultimate causes of reality and the ability to organize everything accordingly. Practical wisdom has to do with how do we get things done well. Wisdom apprehends the order of a reality that we have not produced. Prudence gives order to the things we do. Those are two different things.

M. Bienvenu: So, are you saying wisdom is an understanding of the deeper causes? Basically, the way things really work on a deeper layer?

Thales: Yes, wisdom is a study of the ultimate causes: the causes of natural motions, the causes of quantity, the causes of existences. For Plato, it is a matter of knowing and being familiar with the eternal forms of things, and the ultimate eternal form for Plato was goodness. So being familiar with, contemplating and knowing those eternal forms—that's wisdom for Plato. But for the Theist or the Christian, natural wisdom is a contemplation of God, a knowing of God's existence and an apprehension of the order of the universe in light of Him as its ultimate cause. Wisdom is not primarily a practical thing. We don't pursue wisdom so that we can build a house, for example. We pursue natural wisdom because understanding things through their ultimate cause perfects the mind and human nature.

M. Bienvenu: Is it possible that what you are calling wisdom could be mere knowledge if it is learned in a different way? In other words, if I check out a book about Socrates and read Socratic philosophy and say, "Now I understand the good," is that wisdom?

Thales: That's good; let's think about it.

M. Bienvenu: From what I understand, you are saying that contemplating ultimate causes, whether that be the good or God, is wisdom rather than just the knowing of it?

Claudius: But contemplating is knowing.

Thales: There is a process, there is a moving of the mind, a reflecting upon the truth of something, that is contemplation. When we contemplate, we are holding before our mind everything that is necessary to see that something is true. That is contemplation. If I just tell you a story, "Mary had a little lamb whose fleece was white as snow," you've heard the story, but do you know the story is true? The answer is no. You've heard the story, but in order for you to know it, you have to go through a certain process of reflecting upon your experience and understanding and calling to mind everything that you need to see that it's true. That's contemplation. So if I pick up a book and read something, I don't know anything. I know what someone has written on a page. That's not wisdom. In order to have knowledge, I have to work through all of the things that bring my mind into conformity with something that is real. Reading a book is just part of it, a very small part, I might add.

M. Bienvenu: So, if I'm understanding correctly, it would not be wisdom if you learned a bunch of theories and could repeat those theories, maybe even explain the theories, but they didn't factor into the way that you understand reality at all. And that is the difference?

Thales: Yes. I can sit and read volumes about atomic structure, I can read volumes about the connections between the various species of animals, but if I don't have experience of those things I have not gained true knowledge or wisdom.

M. Bienvenu: By experience do you mean experience contemplating it?

Thales: No. For example, there's a series of experiments that leads us to an understanding of the atomic structure and I have to actually go out and struggle with nature and make nature reveal herself to me so that I can say, "Yes, there are reasons for thinking there are protons, neutrons, and electrons, and these are the experiments, the real experiments of nature that lead me to understand that that's the way things really are." That's not what you get out of a book. You have to actually engage reality to have that kind of knowledge.

M. Bienvenu: But you're not suggesting you have to have physical experience with something in order for you to have wisdom in relation to it?

Thales: Yep, I am. You have to live to gain wisdom.

Mark Twain: Could that struggle of knowledge to gain the wisdom happen in some level in a Socratic discussion? Because when I read a book I feel like I'm getting one level of understanding, but when I write about it and talk about the truths from that book, I feel like I'm gaining deeper understanding.

Thales: But your deeper understanding arises from two sources: first your experience of reality and second the conversation you're having about that reality. If we don't experience the reality, then we don't know anything. At the end of the day, our knowledge has to be connected to the real. So the reason Socratic discussion works is because we have humans with a plethora of experience and everybody is bringing to bear their experience and calling to mind in one another their experiences so that the ideas that are latent in those experiences can become manifest to us. Right? So if you don't have the experience then it's just talk. It has nothing to do with reality.

M. Bienvenu: Don't we gain a kind of experience when we're reading a novel? Can't we vicariously experience things?

Thales: Not if you don't have experience. Isn't it true that the amount you get out of that novel is the amount of experience you have?

Titania: Yes, if you have a ten-year-old reading a novel about the ins and outs of marriage, they will get something out of it, but nothing compared to the person who has experienced marriage.

Thales: Right, they'll get out of it the same thing our scholars get when we tell them the story of the atomic structure. We can tell them that every atom has protons, neutrons, and electrons, which are composed in orbitals, but do they know that's true?

Titania: I think they are trusting you.

Thales: Yes, they're trusting me. And so when I read a book without experience, I'm trusting that whatever the author is selling is of value.

Titania: I suppose we have to trust on a number of things because none of us can take the time to individually figure out everything. I'm largely trusting in the atomic structure because I've never personally gone to a particle collider and done the equations, but I trust the earth is round and all of these things because it has been decently shown to me.

Thales: But do you know it?

M. Bienvenu: But is it fair to say that you don't have any wisdom or understanding about the earth being round or subatomic particles just because you haven't done the actual experiments?

Thales: Yep.

Claudius: While I don't disagree with what Thales is saying, I think experiential reality is reality so far as we participate in it and that we actually have to live in and experience it. But it is important to realize that we rely on knowledge we haven't obtained for ourselves. I've never been to Antarctica but I have a reason to believe it is there, not through direct experience, but through the guided mentorship of people that I trust. In the same way, I think we see farther and more deeply and can experience not only the things which are practical but also eternal by relationship building. In fact, as we read *The Republic* we see people in a dialogue, not in a didactic relationship. The people who are chained in the cave and being told what to think are liberated from their chains by what Dr. Forman calls a new model of education that invites people to think about and talk through and ask questions about their thoughts with others, and in those situations you come to trust the authority of your companions in the same way I've come to trust the authority of my mom, who bless her heart, has given me confidence that Antarctica exists though she nor I may ever see it. It is through those trusted guides, through their love, whether it's just the maternal instinct, or the contemplation of the eternal which has filled him with the good that he is now willing to share with those who would rather not hear it. So I really do feel we can begin to receive a knowledge of reality without experiencing it, but perhaps it then requires us to go further to experience it.

Thales: But is that kind of knowledge wisdom?

Titania: How precise are we being with wisdom? Can you have parts of wisdom and not have other parts? Can there be close-enough-for-jazz wisdom? We call the table in front of us smooth and to our intents and purposes it is smooth, but of course if you zoom down to an atomic level it

is not smooth at all. It is extremely jagged. Technically, in atomic terms, it is mostly not there; it is mostly empty space. But of course, on our level it is both solid and smooth and I don't think it is false to say that, but we don't mean the absolute smoothness that can exist abstractly. So there is this question, can there be a real human wisdom that we acknowledge is not complete or perfect knowledge?

Thales: I'm not saying you have to have complete experience with everything coupled with complete contemplation. What I'm saying is wisdom has to be born out of it. In the classical tradition there was an order to education, the very last thing you studied was the metaphysics, which is considered natural wisdom. Education started with the liberal arts of the Trivium and Quadrivium. The Trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric are the tools of learning. The Quadrivium are mathematical disciplines, accessible to the young mind, that introduce the scholar to the intellectual life. Then they studied natural science, followed by ethics and the political sciences. The very last thing that they studied was metaphysics, which is natural wisdom. The reason metaphysics was last is because it requires the greatest experience. It requires the most of a person. It requires one to be most fully engaged with reality. It also requires great preparation. There is no easy path to natural wisdom.

M. Bienvenu: So I think there is a discrepancy in the way we have defined wisdom. I think I'm talking about an everyman sort of wisdom and I would say that young children have a form of wisdom otherwise how would they know the right thing to do? I don't think they are just following their parents all the time. I think they are coming to some sort of moral judgment on the things that they do. It is not the high level of perfected moral judgment that you're pointing to, but it is a level of wisdom.

Thales: Do you see that there might be a difference between prudence and wisdom?

M. Bienvenu: It's a difference in perfection I suppose. It's a difference in maturity.

Titania: A difference in focus it seems like. You can have someone who goes to their grave: their entire life, they are a prudent individual, but they are never contemplative. And some people have lived good lives that way, and it seems like some of our more mature scholars are achieving a pretty decent prudence at this point for their age.

M. Bienvenu: But you're not only contemplative when you are studying metaphysics right? You can have a contemplative child.

Thales: Contemplation is the activity. I can contemplate Euclid's elements, or the structure of the atom, or the ultimate cause of reality. Contemplation is the activity of holding before your mind and turning over in your mind all the experience and understanding necessary to see that something is true. And that activity should be part of everybody's life.

M. Bienvenu: So when you've gone through this Aristotelian regime, then your contemplation is at a much higher level and that is what you would call wisdom.

Thales: No. We can contemplate anything. But the question is whether wisdom is the contemplation of just anything or the contemplation of the highest things?

John Adams: What if we move on to where application comes into all of this? What's the point of knowledge? I come out of the cave and I see all the light and I think, "Wow, I thought I had knowledge, now I have new knowledge." What then is the point when I decide to turn around and go back in to tell people what I've observed and explain what I've seen and what I think is real? Do we arrive at wisdom at some point along that spectrum?

Thales: Well, based on that description, you seem to have two activities: 1) You are going out and beholding what's real, which is contemplation. And 2) I am going to bring others to this. And that is the division of the human intellectual life. One is contemplative and one is practical. He goes out and beholds what is true, works it over in his mind and brings to bear all the experience he needs to make sense of it and he's delighted by it. Knowing is both speculative and practical. The beholding of the form and reflecting and contemplating that form, that's what the person freed from the cave enjoys. But then he is compelled back into the cave to bring others out, because, at the end of the day, this is about the formation of a republic. Once you are enlightened by that wisdom, you want to bring others to it. And then you can become an evangelist. But you only have something to evangelize and you are only an effective evangelist if you are enlightened by something worthy of evangelizing.

Mark Twain: I think that's the true genius of being a mentor at John Adams Academy. We are encouraged as mentors to find that enlightenment in ourselves. We are encouraged to learn and discover and gain our own wisdom, and once we have it, it's hard not to turn around and share it

with the scholars—that is what makes teaching delightful. We are so encouraged in our own self-discovery that we want and feel a need to go back and teach the scholars.

Thales: And I think the point is, when we look at the beautiful sunset or rainbow or beauty of nature, we don't ask, "What good is this?" We just delight in it. And delighting in the ultimate truths of reality is happiness.

Titania: That's why Plato says that there are the people who leave the cave and stay out all the time and those are the philosopher kings, but then they take turns doing the rough work of governing. But the first state is the necessary and supreme thing which they are aiming at.

Claudius: Bear with me because this is all hypothetical, but it seems that when we're talking about these things that are eternal we are speaking of the good, which is roughly synonymous with God. For Plato, there is the idea of the good, but there is this thing that is the source of our intellectual desire, and it is different. So there is the sensual that we can touch, and taste, and smell, and then there is the intellectual that we share with the divine, using a Christian or religious term. And insofar as the good and God are synonymous, it is important to remember that we are sharing in the attributes, perhaps growing more into the divine or toward the good insofar as we are contemplative. Then, being good we create what is good. And that is what we've seen in history. We've come down this long river of time with man and the contemplation of the good, and have they died alone? No. Did they just go and help the polis? No. They have created a humanity, this mighty river, unstoppable, through which we all flow in wonder and awe and through which we are welcome as we turn and gaze with them and consider not just the good but those media through which it has come: the men and women and philosophers and artists, these mentors to help us to become good or, again, divine. I feel it is a powerful idea.

Thales: Do you think there is a difference between goodness and truth?

Claudius: So here I speak with faith and not by knowledge, but I feel there are things like goodness and truth and love which are all certain aspects of one thing, which I would call God and others may have a different name. But those are all very synonymous and tightly woven.

Thales: I see. I struggle with the notion. I think somebody already pointed out that we know and we desire. What we know is the truth. What we desire is the good. And since knowing and desiring are different from each other that makes me think that the truth and the good are in some

way different. And I wonder at the end of the day, you are right, ultimately they are the same thing, but to us there has to be a difference. So when I think of wisdom, I think of beholding the ultimate truth, which is an intellectual activity. And when I think of goodness I think of the perfection of our appetites and desires, which is a moral excellence. So we're perfected morally in one way and we're perfected intellectually in another. Plato seemed to think if you really know the good you're going to do the good, but in my experiencing I can know the good but very often I don't do it. Knowing and wanting to do it are not the same in me all the time. And so it seems to be a difference between what knowing the truth and wanting to do the good is.

M. Bienvenu: Is it the difference between human knowledge and God's character and knowledge? We're saying truth and goodness is one in God but not one in humans because we aren't perfect? And that brings us to something that I've been thinking. John Adams was asking about what point in the allegory of the cave we arrive at wisdom, and I have a problem with that. I'm not confident enough to say that I've ever arrived into the sunshine and can now see everything the way it is. And Socrates, in his *Apology*, seems to come to the same conclusion. So I think sometimes we are coming out of the cave and we find ourselves in another cave. I don't know if the cave analogy was ever meant to be a model for us saying that we've come out of a cave in life and now we are enlightened people and now we go back and tell people how things are. I don't think it was meant to say that. I think it was meant to say that we are striving for entirely coming out of the cave, and I think we are always going back and trying to help people up to the things that we've learned, but I don't think we can ever see things that God does. I don't think we can ever see things the way they ultimately are. Maybe that's an unpopular thing to say. I think we can approach and should strive for what is true and good, but we are not going to totally arrive at ultimate Truth and Goodness.

Thales: Isn't that the case? Isn't that something? I think classically the image of the Trivium and the Quadrivium were roads, and those are important images. Roads are things that are bringing you somewhere. And this pursuit is the pursuit of wisdom. I think you put it beautifully. It would be pretty arrogant to say, "I'm wise now. Here I am, enlightened." It is truer to say, "I am on the road to wisdom."

M. Bienvenu: Yes, it's a direction, like a road. And if we are further along the road than someone else, like us and our scholars for instance, then we are in a position to go and teach them.

Claudius: So I think we've introduced the fact that we are different than the Divine. And Thales was willing to concede that the good and the truth are one. And for humanity and humans it is a mixed bag, we struggle to do what is good and true, and that is very true. But can't we at least take a step away from avarice and other sins and mistakes and errors by truly being contemplative of what is good? I just wonder in what ways we can see the good or truth we've achieved and in what ways we are still bound like those in the cave. I love your humility and I'm there with you. I feel half the time I'm in the chains and I take off the shackles and take a step up the road, and then I'm stuck again.

M. Bienvenu: I don't think it would be prideful for me to say I am wiser than my scholars. But it would be prideful to say that I've arrived at wisdom. That's the distinction I'm making. It's a road—like Thales said. John Adams was asking at what point along that road we can call it wisdom when we can go back and help other people, and I guess wisdom means that you are further along the road than the other person. That is what makes the mentor-mentee relationships.

Mark Twain: I think that is what we strive for. I look back at college and I realize that I didn't have that mentor relationship with most of my teachers because they taught me from textbooks and gave me their interpretations. Even in the best discussions in my philosophy class that I loved, I didn't get Plato's words, I got my teacher's interpretation of somebody's interpretation of Plato's words. And when I came here and read Plato's words I felt like I now know more than my professors because I could actually see the words and come to my own understanding. And I think in that case my teacher wasn't on the right road, but if he had had us read the original text we would have been in a much better spot in coming to our own understanding.

Thales: Why would you have been better off reading *The Republic* instead of having read a second or third interpretation of it?

Mark Twain: Because I don't want someone else's interpretation of Plato, I want Plato.

Thales: Right, we turn to the classics because they're our mentors. We don't depend on someone else's interpretation of Plato, I want Plato to speak to me. So we read Plato so that Plato is speaking. That's the beauty of the written word. Dr. Forman speaks to us when we read his book. Plato is speaking to us when we read *The Republic*. That is a mentor.

Mark Twain: So the role of the mentor or teacher is to introduce scholars to classics so the classics can speak and we can learn from them.

Titania: That is very much what Adler says in his book *How to Read a Book*, classics are the dead teachers, we're the living teachers. We're just the emissaries for the dead teachers because they can't speak for themselves except through the books that have already been written. We still need to explain things and make them accessible, but we are directing them to the original.

M. Bienvenu: So, when I'm looking at Dr. Forman's writings, it does seem more focused on building character and creating the kind of scholars that will act in certain ways in life. But I've also heard it said that the purpose of education is to understand and delight in it, which seems different. So this is back to the paragraph in the text where Dr. Forman claims that the “fundamental purpose of education is not to instill knowledge, but to change people's understanding, behavior, and desires. By changing these things, Plato argues, people can reverse their tendencies and preference to pursue the various distractions they believe to be happiness and instead seek true happiness, the pursuit of virtue and wisdom.”

Thales: When he says virtue *and* wisdom, that's awesome. Virtue is moral excellence; wisdom is intellectual excellence. The end of education is to help scholars in their life long pursuit of both intellectual and moral excellence.

Claudius: So far we've been discussing a man or how any of this would come into a single vessel. We use the word human to describe that vessel. But I would suggest that you can't have human without humanity, and it becomes an absurdity to speak about virtue or wisdom without reference to others. What then is the project of wisdom or the application of virtue but to help and serve others? Aren't *we* more important than *I*?

Thales: I don't think you can have virtue without others. Justice is how we interact with others. And just because you know more than others doesn't mean you will be better than others. Knowledge doesn't make you good.

M. Bienvenu: That was my question too. Can you contemplate and be delighted by wisdom and still not act virtuously or morally? Does delighting in wisdom automatically mean you will follow that over to acting morally?

Thales: I would say, "Clearly not."

Titania: But it would seem you could have moments when contemplation utterly changes your character.

Thales: Contemplation should inspire you to be good, but we know that it doesn't always happen. And that is why education is twofold: we have to form our appetites and engage in the intellectual life. Education is character formation and intellectual formation in the formation of the person.

M. Bienvenu: So they are both necessary?

Thales: Yes.

M. Bienvenu: And you can't just say, if you form wisdom, character will follow?

Thales: Plato would say if you pursued wisdom, character would follow. Because I think that for Plato that if you really understood something, then you'd do it. There may be truth in that.

Claudius: He had to compel people to first get out of their chains, and take them up to the light, but then they had to be dragged back.

Titania: Well, they weren't dragged back, they walked back.

Claudius: Wasn't there a compulsion, because otherwise they would want to stay up there?

Titania: It was more like a compulsion of duty, a compelling within themselves. They are compelled out of the cave, but they know they must go back in because you acknowledge that there are those who are not enjoying the good.

M. Bienvenu: So, with wisdom comes duty? The excellence you experience in going out into the light includes a sense of duty to go back into the cave to reach other people?

Titania: Yes. Because that would be the moral thing to do.

Thales: Can we split some hairs here? Some of the excellence that we behold when contemplating that light would include, "Gosh, we have to bring our fellows together with us. This is what we all should be doing." When I see a beautiful sunset, I say, "Honey, get out here, come look at this sunset." But delighting in that sunset is that for the sake of which we are

calling people out, and that for the sake of which is the greater good. If delighting in the sunset were not the greater good, then why the heck am I dragging people out here? The reason we are dragging is because that is the greater good.

M. Bienvenu: But that doesn't necessarily follow because I can't count the number of times when I've known what I ought to do but I haven't done it.

Titania: It doesn't necessarily follow that you will try to drag others out, and that is why in another part of *The Republic* that only worthy societies will have these philosopher kings who will necessarily go back with duty. In most societies philosophers live in little enclaves trying to be left alone because they are more likely to be killed when they go back down into the cave. It is easy in some cases to be so consumed with the sunset, but then the sunset is over and you are like, "O, I should probably have shared this with somebody." That is a reaction that happens with some philosophers and it is not the most perfect reaction. The most perfect reaction in understanding its goodness is also to understand your duties to others.

Claudius: I can't say it any clearer than this: we are good insofar as we share what we know and multiply it. The philosopher is a seed that is barren if he doesn't invest himself in others. He is a man and we are human. It's a project of real human beings that are the concern of the man. And if he is just a man and he is wise and does not share his wisdom, he is a barren seed. But insofar as he is able to share he is good, and that's why we feel guilty when our wife is not at the sunset and it pains us when our friend is not there at the football game. We just know that it is the good insofar as we share it and multiply it in this collective beautiful project of humanity. We are not a lone wolf, we are a hive, a community creating a honey of some kind called wisdom.

Mark Twain: I agree with that. Once we obtain virtue and wisdom, our pursuit is not over and I think at that point our pursuit is bringing others to the light. Even if we've obtained ultimate enlightenment and know and understand and can live everything, we still have that obligation to pursue to bring others, otherwise we are just stagnant and we've lost growth.

M. Bienvenu: I have to agree with both of you. I think Claudius said it well. What Plato is describing in his philosopher king is not just someone who contemplates wisdom all day, but someone who has the moral excellence as well, who cares about other people and wants to share that wisdom. I've been someone who loves ideas and contemplates ideas but doesn't go out and

help other people. I'm not always improving the world, whereas a philosopher king would be an altruistic person and someone who would use the knowledge he has found of how things really work to bring a greater good to the people and to bring the world more in line with the forms of the good.

Thales: So, knowledge is only of value if it can be applied? I don't think that's true.

Horatio: I don't know if application is what they are getting at. Is sharing application? What they seem to be saying is that the Socratic temperament is simply the desire to share in the pleasure and awe of contemplating and recognizing what is good. I don't think sharing is a matter of practical application so much as it's just sharing.

Claudius: I think unless there's the mentoring or the person returning to the cave, everything is just ending.

Thales: But there is an individual delighting in the ultimate truths of reality. That's a beautiful thing.

Claudius: But what about the best a humanity can be?

Thales: But that's the best that a human being can do.

Claudius: Well, you say we are good insofar as we share what we know and that we are barren if we do not share. That's kind of harsh, isn't it? Sharing is good only when you have something good to share. A truly wise person contemplates the ultimate causes of things and seeks perfect union with the ultimate cause. This is good and beautiful in itself. It is one of the ways that we give glory to God.

Thales: No, it has to start with the individual. You said the contemplative life is barren. That is kind of harsh. Is it a dead seed? No. The truly contemplative person is in perfect connection with the ultimate reality. That's a beautiful thing. That's the way in which the person gives glory to God.

Claudius: But if all philosophers were to only contemplate and to never share their wisdom and knowledge then every one of them would be barren. They must be willing to somehow leave a trail to their knowledge, otherwise we are left without that knowledge and that which they had is with them in the grave.

Titania: Yes, and it takes a very rare person to leave the cave on their own. A question that scholars ask me every year is, “How did the first person get out of the cave?” Plato doesn't say. Was it an extraordinary person? Was there some divine intervention? We don't know, but the path that Plato gives us is that of a teacher that is to lead the students out. Can someone do it without a teacher? I don't think that it is likely.

Thales: Yes, clearly we stand on the shoulders of giants, and sometimes we stand and fall off. We need our community. The fact that we communicate with each other is a sign of our political nature. And so, our pursuit of wisdom is a communal activity and the truth we seek is the ultimate common good. I agree that truth is not a private good to be hoarded. Pizza is a private good, when I consume pizza it's gone, and I consume a lot of pizza. Private goods are diminished by sharing them. But when we share truth, far from being diminished, it grows. Our conversations deepen our understanding. It is the essence of a common good that it can be shared without being diminished. Truth, love, real friendship: those are common goods. And as you pointed out, the common good is a greater good than the private good.

John Adams: I like what Claudius was saying, that wisdom, or knowledge, or the application of knowledge to virtuous end, if kept to oneself, never has the ability to multiply and produce. One could argue the ultimate end of wisdom is to benefit humanity.

Claudius: Yes, we have a collective memory, whether it's a cultural memory as Americans, or an intellectual memory of these deep thinkers, the music that we've come to love, these are all things that are common and shared and deeply entrenched in us. And when we leave this earth, that is what will remain. Humanity is not eternal, but we are going on and on, and that continuing part of humanity is the most beautiful and important thing. That's why parents rejoice when they reproduce, and that is why we delight when a child in our classroom takes up the torch that we pass to them. We never ask why, but I think it is because there is this divine project working through us to bless one another with this wisdom and with the good. I know those words can be said better and there may be challenges to parts of it, but I feel that humans are more important than a single human.

Thales: This is also a question of how the human species gives glory. How does the plant partake in the eternal? Well, it produces seed so that its species is maintained as long as it possibly can. How does that plan give glory? Think of the lilies of the field. Flowers give glory by their

beauty. How does humanity give glory? By using the best things in us, our minds and hearts, in the best way – by using our minds to pursue truth and our hearts to become good. And how is that done in the most fruitful way? When we share truth and goodness with others. For me, human perfection consists of beholding what's ultimately real, and sharing it with others. Beholding reality is wisdom, living wisely is prudence, and sharing wisdom is the highest form of friendship.

The Female Influence on Societal Virtue

Who sets the course of a culture? Societies throughout time have accepted certain forms of behavior and conventions as proper. These are instilled in a people and often continued through many generations. Those who live up to these ideals are considered to be virtuous and held in high esteem by others in their society. But who creates and maintains these standards? Great works of literature, specifically *Pride and Prejudice*, *Little Women*, and *My Ántonia*, consistently demonstrate that women, as the gatekeepers of men's desires, regulate the expected virtue of men and therefore influence virtue in their societies.

Jane Austen's 1797 novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, contrasts virtuous and unvirtuous people in her society, particularly women. It tells the love story of Elizabeth Bennet, a woman from a middle-class, land owning family of five daughters, and Mr. Darcy, "a single man in possession of a good fortune," whose social status is significantly above hers.² While Elizabeth's father and sister Jane are respected, her mother and two youngest sisters fail to conform to the social conventions of the time and tarnish the family reputation to some extent. This adds to the social division between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. Less than a century later in 1868, Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women* which tells the story of the four March sisters growing up in Concord, Massachusetts. The story is built around the March sister's friendship with Theodore "Laurie" Lawrence, a neighbor boy who is inclined to be mischievous. As the relationships between sisters and friends develop, the significance of influence becomes apparent. Similarly, in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918),



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² Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: CRW Publishing Limited, 2003), 11.

Jim Burden, an orphan from Virginia, moves to Nebraska with his grandparents and meets a Bohemian immigrant girl, Antonia Shimerda, and her family. The story revolves around the friendship built between the two and Jim's love for Antonia. Strong themes of virtue and influence are prevalent throughout the book.

In each of these classics, the authors portray women who set high standards for their society which positively affects their own lives and the lives of those around them. Each of the three heroines rejects a suitor based on the fact that he does not meet the standard she has set for a romantic relationship. Some might claim that men can make their own decisions and guide their own actions according to their own preferences, but the books demonstrate that the women's standards consistently regulate the virtue of societies because men can only pursue their preferences in response to these standards.

Women influence virtue in society through the standards they set for men. Men will complete the required minimum work to meet a woman's standards in order to gain her honor, validation, and romantic interest. Women, in the way they hold other women to the societal standard, directly affect the standard that men are expected to meet as a whole in a society. Women, through motherhood, model the behavior daughters and sons will imitate and come to expect.

Men Will Work for Validation

In order to gain the honor of a woman, to win her validation, or romantic interest, a man will need to complete the required work to meet a woman's standards. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy is disliked as soon as he is introduced. Austen relates the reaction of the Hertfordshire community: "His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again."³ At a local ball where gentlemen were expected to dance, Mr. Darcy merits a general dislike when he dances only briefly with one woman instead of politely dancing with many ladies. This directly contradicts the conventions of the time and he portrays himself as proud and pretentious. When his charming friend, Mr. Bingley, suggests that he dance with Elizabeth Bennet, Darcy rudely responds, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me."⁴ Elizabeth overhears this comment and

³ Austen, 22.

⁴ Austen, 23.

subsequently refuses his company because of his lack of respect and virtue. While his initial impression of Elizabeth Bennet is one of seeming indifference, he comes to respect her character and her expectations that he show virtue. As Elizabeth's disdain toward Darcy increases, he begins to fall in love with her for her strong mind and honest opinions. After she turns down Darcy's offer to dance at another gathering, his thoughts are summarized as follows, "Her resistance had not injured her with the gentleman, and he was thinking of her with some complacency."⁵ The tension between the two continues to grow over the course of the book and reaches a summit when Mr. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth and she brutally refuses.

Mr. Darcy, after being rejected by Elizabeth Bennet and hearing how she despises his character, changes his ways in an attempt to win her affection. After his proposal, she refuses on the grounds of his treatment of his family's servant's son, Mr. Wickham, as well as the pattern of unvirtuous character traits he has previously portrayed, saying,

You have reduced [Mr. Wickham] to his present state of poverty... You have withheld the advantages which you must know to have been designed for him... from the first moment of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike.⁶

When he hears these words from the woman he loves, Darcy is troubled. Shortly after, Darcy writes Elizabeth a letter in which he narrates the true story of his dealings with Mr. Wickham in order to win her approval. He writes, "the effort which the formation and the perusal of this letter must occasion, should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read."⁷ In this letter, Darcy relates many personal details of his life that are uncomfortable to share and, under any other circumstance, he would have kept to himself. Though Darcy does not win over Elizabeth immediately, he strives to prove himself of upstanding character in her eyes. He does not only write this letter, but he reforms his actions and begins to act in a virtuous manner. At the end of the book, when the two are engaged, Darcy tells Elizabeth,

As a child...I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit...Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but

⁵ Austen, 41.

⁶ Austen, 135.

⁷ Austen, 137.

for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you... You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased.⁸

Because of the high standards Elizabeth set, Mr. Darcy reforms his character to win her affection, and ultimately succeeds.

In *My Antonia*, Jim strives for much of his early life to be seen as an equal by Antonia. She holds a high standard for him and he constantly strives to meet and exceed this standard to make her proud and secure her affection. Towards the beginning of their friendship, Jim resents Antonia for viewing him as a lesser and constantly tries to prove that he is equal to his older comrade. One day when the two are looking at snake holes, Antonia is terrified when she comes face to face with an enormous rattlesnake. After hearing his friend scream in terror, Jim faces the serpent head on. He recalls, "I ran up and drove at his head with my spade, struck him fairly across the neck, and in a minute he was all about my feet in wavy loops."⁹ After seeing Jim's bravery, Antonia praises her friend and makes him feel as if he is on top of the world. Jim says, "Her exaltation was contagious. The great land had never looked to me so big and free."¹⁰ After waiting so long to earn her approval, Jim recognizes that his actions have merited this respect from Antonia. He says, "I had killed a big snake -- I was now a big fellow."¹¹ He knows that he earned this validation through his actions which met a certain standard of manhood in Antonia's eyes.

Even after both have grown significantly in life and Jim is approaching his high school graduation, Antonia's pride in him makes him happier than anyone else's. She tells him, "You're not going to sit around here and whittle store-boxes and tell stories all your life. You are going away to school and make something of yourself. I'm just awful proud of you."¹² After all of his hard work, Antonia's complement and expectation fills Jim with a sense of confidence and he says,

If she was proud of me, I was so proud that I carried my head high as I emerged from the dark cedars... Her warm, sweet face, her kind arms, and the true heart in her; she was, oh, she was still my Antonia!... I knew where the real women were, though I was only a boy; and I would not be afraid of them either.¹³

⁸ Austen, 259.

⁹ Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (Boston: Dover Publications, 1994), 25.

¹⁰ Cather, 26.

¹¹ Cather, 27.

¹² Cather, 109.

¹³ Cather, 109.

While other women compliment him for similar successes, *Ántonia's* validation has a greater impact on him due to the fact that she has set a higher standard for him as well as the fact that he likes her. When he hears this affirmation, he has a faint hope that she might change her mind about their relationship and says, "I don't care anything about any of them but you...And you'll always treat me like a kid, I suppose."¹⁴ While he knows, in the back of his mind, that she sees him like a brother, Jim still hopes that his efforts will win her romantic interest. When he tells *Ántonia* that his commencement speech was inspired by and dedicated to her father, she cries and Jim relates to the reader: "I have had no other success that pulled at my heartstrings like that one."¹⁵ As Jim attends college and furthers his education, he dedicates himself to his work and lives up to the expectations that *Ántonia* has set. He describes his first summer in college, saying, "I did not go home for my first summer vacation, but stayed in Lincoln, working off a year's Greek."¹⁶ *Ántonia* has played a pivotal and immensely influential role in Jim's life and he tells her years later, "The idea of you is part of my mind, you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don't realize it. You really are a part of me."¹⁷ Even though he knows that she is not romantically interested in him, Jim strives to live up to *Ántonia's* standards and make her proud which shapes the rest of his life.

From the moment he meets the March family, Theodore "Laurie" Lawrence is greatly influenced by the level of virtue these women expect from him. While he had previously avoided his studies and played the role of a bored and lonely teenager, Laurie lives up to the expectations of the March women after meeting them. Alcott describes his transformation subtly, saying, "Laurie did his best, and sang delightfully, being in a particularly lively humor, for to the Marches he seldom showed the moody side of his character."¹⁸ While they all enjoy playing together and having fun, the March girls challenge him to be more than his flaws. One day after Meg instructs him to be more kind to his tutor, Laurie is upset and the two briefly quarrel. Almost instantly, however, Laurie composes himself and says, "I'm the one to be forgiven. I'm cross and have been out of sorts all day. I like to have you tell me my faults and be sisterly, so don't mind if I am grumpy sometimes. I thank you all the same."¹⁹ Meg's relationship to Laurie

¹⁴ Cather, 109.

¹⁵ Cather, 112.

¹⁶ Cather, 123.

¹⁷ Cather, 152

¹⁸ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 75.

¹⁹ Alcott, 147.

is one of an advising friend and he respects her immensely. On Meg's wedding day, Laurie comments, "I don't care for [wine], but when a pretty girl offers it one doesn't like to refuse, you see."²⁰ Meg immediately responds, "But you will... Come, Laurie, promise, and give me one more reason to call this the happiest day of my life."²¹ Alcott goes on to say, "Meg knew that if he gave the promise he would keep it at all costs, and feeling her power, used it as a woman may for her friend's good."²² Meg expects virtue from Laurie and recognizes the influence she has over him. She uses this influence to better him.

Laurie matures as he grows older and, though he disliked his schooling as a child, Alcott describes his college life, saying, "Whatever his motive might have been, Laurie studied to some purpose that year, for he graduated with honor."²³ Jo March is a very influential figure in Laurie's life because of his romantic interest in her. He proposes to her after his college graduation and says, in part, "I worked hard to please you, and I gave up billiards and everything you didn't like, and waited and never complained, for I hoped you'd love me, though I'm not half good enough."²⁴ Though Jo does not see Laurie in this way, it is apparent that she has had a profound impact on his life and pursuit of virtue. After accepting the fact that Jo will not marry him, Laurie crosses paths with Amy March a year later. He has not handled his heartbreak well and she calls him out for his laziness. She tells him, "[W]ith every chance for being good, useful, and happy, you are faulty, lazy, and miserable... I'm not at all satisfied with you. Here you have been abroad nearly six months, and done nothing but waste time and money and disappoint your friends."²⁵ Though Laurie would not like to admit his faults, he is challenged by Amy's words and begins to repair his character. He writes her a brief note, saying, "[E]xult within yourself, for 'Lazy Laurence' has gone to his grandpa, like the best of boys."²⁶ Laurie is influenced by all these women and, when given a challenge, he lives up to the virtue expected of him.

²⁰ Alcott, 248.

²¹ Alcott, 248.

²² Alcott, 248.

²³ Alcott, 350.

²⁴ Alcott, 352.

²⁵ Alcott, 394.

²⁶ Alcott, 399.

Female Accountability

Women, in the way they hold their female peers to the societal standard, directly affect the standard that men are expected to meet as a whole in a society. When women stand together in their expectations, men have no other option but to meet those standards. Women tend to gravitate their individual standards toward the standards of the women who surround them. When a woman fails to conform, she will either feel the pressure from her peers to do so or be verbally criticized. The modern culture would most likely describe the practice of calling out another woman for immoral behavior as ‘shaming.’ In some circumstances, this would be a suitable term to describe an uncharitable act of a woman shunning her peer for subpar actions. However, the practice of holding other women accountable can be done in a supportive and positive manner without judging another woman or shunning her, but simply encouraging her to adhere to a standard of virtue. Drawing attention to this seemingly natural occurrence is not an endorsement of the ‘shaming’ that does occur, but merely an observance of the phenomenon and a demonstration of how it leads women to strive to live up to the virtue expected of them.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Hertfordshire community consistently shuns women who don’t conform to the societal standards. When Mrs. Bennet consistently speaks with a total lack of manners and decorum, women around her show their disgust and her family suffers with embarrassment. As two wealthy bachelors, Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, move into the neighborhood, Mrs. Bennet showcases her indifference to societal conventions when she abandons the expected manners and speaks freely of their income. As a guest in Mr. Bingley’s home, Mrs. Bennet attempts to prove to Mr. Darcy that his preference of city life is inferior to her own preference for the country. Even when Elizabeth changes the subject to an inquiry regarding a family friend, Sir William, Mrs. Bennet directs a rude comment toward Mr. Darcy again, saying, “*That* is my idea of good breeding; and those persons who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter.”²⁷ Elizabeth is mortified by her mother’s comments and when a moment of silence is found later in the conversation, Austen narrates, “[A]nd the general pause which ensued made Elizabeth tremble lest her mother should be exposing herself again.”²⁸ Even though no one vocally reprimands Mrs. Bennet, she is viewed by her daughter, and likely the rest of the company, in a negative light.

²⁷ Austen, 63.

²⁸ Austen, 64.

This criticism of behavior reaches an ultimate extreme when Lydia Bennet elopes with Mr. Wickham and women of virtue or significant social standing in the community effectively renounce her as a member of their society. A man and woman living together out of wedlock in this era was social suicide. It went against every moral code surrounding matrimony and merited significant disgrace. Those who highly valued standards of virtue refused to be associated with a woman who had so deeply betrayed societal expectations. In looking down on Lydia, they not only call her out for her actions, but discourage similar behavior in other women. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a figure of high social status, sends her disgust by means of a letter written by Mr. Collins to the Bennet family. He writes in part, “The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this.”²⁹ This extreme language, though insensitive to a grieving family, reflects the common feelings toward a woman who stepped outside of the standards of a society by committing such scandalous actions. Jane and Elizabeth, Lydia’s mature older sisters, recognize the gravity of her actions and know it will have consequences for the entire family because it will lead to the community questioning their own standards and morals.

After telling the affair to Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth believes that he will never want to be associated with her. Austen comments on her thoughts, saying, “Elizabeth felt how improbable it was that they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality... Be that as it may, she saw him go with regret; and in this early example of what Lydia’s infamy must produce, found additional anguish as she reflected on that wretched business.”³⁰ In her reckless actions, Lydia not only brings ruin on herself, but on her sisters as well. The actions of women directly affect one another and those who demonstrate lack of virtue are shunned by their communities.

When *Ántonia* moves from the country into town in *My Ántonia*, her initially high standards are lowered because she becomes close friends with girls who do not prioritize virtue. While her friendship with Jim seems to proceed somewhat unchanged, her expectations of the other men in the town drop to the level her friends have set. When Mrs. Harling, her employer, observes this, she tells *Ántonia*, “You’ve been going with girls who have a reputation for being free and easy, and now you’ve got the same reputation.”³¹ Even after being called out by a superior to correct her actions, *Ántonia* is more influenced by her friendships and does not take

²⁹ Austen, 367.

³⁰ Austen, 347.

³¹ Cather, 100.

Mrs. Harling's warning to heart. She begins to go to dances all the time and give attention to men who are not deserving. While she continues to hold Jim to a high standard, she begins to spend time with Larry Donovan who is not held to these same standards. It is obvious that the other girls have had an effect on *Ántonia* when she tells Mrs. Harling, "A girl like me has got to take her good times when she can. Maybe there won't be any tent next year. I guess I want to have my fling, like the other girls,"³² After Jim moves away, he learns that Larry has treated *Ántonia* horribly. Jim hears from his grandmother that, "*Ántonia* went away to marry Larry Donovan at some place where he was working; that he had deserted her, and that there was now a baby."³³ Jim is heartbroken because she has lowered her virtue and accepted being treated like any other girl in town; she has accepted something she never would have allowed from Jim. While *Ántonia* initially held high standards for the men around her, the influence of the girls in town degraded her moral compass and she came to accept a lower level of virtue from the men in her life, particularly Larry Donovan.

In *Little Women*, the March women hold each other accountable to a certain level of virtue. Meg, as the oldest, takes the responsibility of correcting her sisters and encouraging them to act in a manner becoming of virtuous women. She is described as having, "a sweet and pious nature, which unconsciously influenced her sisters, especially Jo, who loved her very tenderly, and obeyed her because her advice was so gently given."³⁴ While Jo prefers to be wild and more careless in her actions, she conforms to Meg's standard. When the two attend a Christmas party, Meg instructs Jo to behave in a manner becoming of a woman in their society. She tells her sister, "I'll lift my eyebrows if anything is wrong, and nod if you are all right. Now hold your shoulder straight, and take short steps, and don't shake hands if you are introduced to anyone. It isn't the thing."³⁵ Though she prefers to be free from societal rules, the urgings Jo receives from her sister prompt her to adhere to social conventions. While at the party, Jo explains to Laurie that she cannot dance because the back of her dress is burned. She tells him, "I can't, for I told Meg I wouldn't...I burn my frocks, and I scorched this one, and though it's nicely mended, it shows, and Meg told me to keep still so no one would see it."³⁶ Jo's actions are directly

³² Cather, 101.

³³ Cather, 141.

³⁴ Alcott, 21.

³⁵ Alcott, 34.

³⁶ Alcott, 37.

correlated to the standards that Meg has encouraged her to meet. Meg also corrects her youngest sister, Amy, saying lovingly, “[Y]ou are altogether too particular and prim. Your airs are funny now, but you’ll grow up an affected little goose, if you don’t take care.”³⁷ Meg’s criticisms are taken well by her sisters because they are bestowed with charity, not shame. Later on in life, Jo similarly challenges Amy to hold the men in her life to a standard of virtue, saying, “I think girls ought to show when they disapprove of young men... there are many little ways in which I can influence [Laurie] without a word, and I say we *ought* to do it to others if we can.”³⁸ Jo shows Amy that, as women, they can help the men to achieve virtue by showing their disapproval or acceptance in response to men’s actions.

Beth sets an example of humility for her sisters in her sweet and virtuous nature. When Beth becomes gravely ill with scarlet fever, Jo cries, “Beth is my conscience, and I *can’t* give her up. I can’t! I can’t!”³⁹ Beth’s influence is also felt by Amy when the latter writes a will for fun and then hears from Laurie that, “[Beth] fell so ill one day that she told Jo she wanted to give her piano to Meg, her cats to you, and the poor old doll to Jo... She was sorry she had so little to give, and left locks of hair to the rest of us, and her best love to Grandpa.”⁴⁰ Amy feels ashamed of her own will because it looks silly in comparison to the simplicity of her sister’s gifts. Laurie “did not look up till a great tear dropped on the paper. Amy’s face was full of trouble; but she only said, ‘...I wish all my curls cut off, and given round to my friends.’”⁴¹ This was a great gesture on Amy’s part because she took great pride in her hair. Beth’s subtle influence, however, allowed her to let go of one of her greatest vanities in that moment.

Amy is again encouraged in virtue by her sisters and mother when she is improperly treated by her peers at a fair where she displayed her artwork. After recounting the injuries she suffered, Mrs. March tells her daughter, “[A] kiss for a blow is always best, though it’s not very easy to give it sometimes.”⁴² Amy heeds her mother’s words when she returns to the fair the next day. Alcott relates, “In spite of various very natural temptations to resent and retaliate, Amy

³⁷ Alcott, 13.

³⁸ Alcott, 289-290.

³⁹ Alcott, 183.

⁴⁰ Alcott, 194.

⁴¹ Alcott, 194.

⁴² Alcott, 295.

adhered to her resolution all the next day, bent on conquering her enemy by kindness.”⁴³ Amy is able to overcome a vice with encouragement from her female family members.

This accountability women build with each other sets a common standard of virtue which directly affects the standards men are challenged with and expected to meet.

Motherhood

Women, through motherhood, model the behavior their daughters and sons will imitate or come to expect in life. A mother is the most influential woman in a child’s life whether this is for the better or worse. She sets the very first standard of womanhood for her daughters to imitate and they will hold men to the same standard that their mother has taught them. Mothers hold their sons to a standard and set the level of virtue sons come to expect in the women they pursue. Motherhood and fatherhood are separate in this regard of influence. Fathers set an example of the standards of men for their children in a way that is different from a mother's influence.

In *Little Women*, Mrs. March sets an example of high virtue and holds her daughters to this standard. Throughout the novel, she constantly encourages each of her daughters to overcome their faults and be women of virtue. The March sisters play a game called “Pilgrims Progress” in which they try to embody pilgrims who spend their lives carrying the burdens of their sins and striving to one day enter the Celestial City or heaven. Mrs. March encourages this game and tells her daughters,

Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City. Now my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get before Father comes home.⁴⁴

In moments like these, the beloved ‘Marmee’ fills her daughters with an awe of virtue and helps them want to do the right thing always. She has also developed a relationship with them that allows them to feel comfortable to tell her when they have failed.

After an argument between Jo and Amy escalates to a form of hatred, Jo doesn’t warn her sister of thin ice on a pond and Amy comes close to drowning. Feeling terrible, Jo tells her mother about her temper and asks for advice. While Marmee understands her struggle, she challenges her daughter saying, “I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned

⁴³ Alcott, 295.

⁴⁴ Alcott, 19.

not to show it, and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so.”⁴⁵ Marmee holds Jo to a level of virtue despite sharing a similar defect. She empathizes with a struggle but challenges Jo to be better than her temptations. Similarly, after Meg visits a wealthy friend and strays away from her own morals and comfort in poverty in an attempt to feel like she fits in with the other girls, she comes home and is ready to confess to her mother. Meg has pretended to be a wealthy girl and let the other girls dress her up like a doll. Mrs. March does not berate her for her mistake but reminds her of who she is and who she should strive to be. She says to Meg and Jo,

My dear girls, I *am* ambitious for you, but not to have you make a dash in the world -- marry rich men merely because they are rich, or have splendid houses, who are not homes because love is wanting... I'd rather see you poor men's wives, if you were happy, beloved, contented, than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace.⁴⁶

This advice from their mother encourages the March sisters to pursue virtue in their lives and relationships instead of material success. They know that they are to be respected, loved, and treated well by any man who comes to pursue a relationship with them. Meg very obviously does not marry for money when she marries John Brooke. When her wealthy aunt expresses her concerns with the match, Meg responds, “My John wouldn't marry for money, any more than I would. We are willing to work, and we mean to wait. I'm not afraid of being poor, for I've been happy so far, and I know I shall be with him because he loves me.”⁴⁷ It is clear that the March sisters heed the words of their mother in the choices they make.

When Amy is in France, she comes very close to marrying a rich man, Fred Vaughn, who shows interest in her. When Laurie visits her, he inquires about the relationship and is surprised by Amy's acceptance of a man who she is not necessarily interested in. He asks if she's in love with Fred: “‘I could be, if I tried...He is rich, a gentleman, and has delightful manners,’ began Amy, trying to be quite cool and dignified, but feeling a little ashamed of herself, in spite of the sincerity of her intentions.”⁴⁸ Amy is reminded that she should not marry for social status or money and therefore breaks off her relationship with Fred. She later marries Laurie after the two fall in love. Jo similarly rejects Laurie's romantic advances and marries a man whose ambitions are more suited to her own. Meg, Jo, and Amy March all marry well, not necessarily financially

⁴⁵ Alcott, 83.

⁴⁶ Alcott, 99-100.

⁴⁷ Alcott, 225.

⁴⁸ Alcott, 392.

speaking, but in terms of their happiness and virtue. The influence of a mother like Mrs. March on daughters directly impacts not only their own virtue, but the virtue they come to expect of other women and of men.

Throughout *My Ántonia*, Mrs. Burden, Jim's grandmother, sets an example of virtue for her grandson throughout his childhood and expects him to live up to this standard throughout his life. Because his mother has died, Jim sees Mrs. Burden as his mother-figure. After the Burdens and Shimerdas have struggled adjusting to their new lives in Nebraska, the Burdens obviously acclimate to their new life more quickly than the immigrant family. Mrs. Burden helps out her neighbors when they are struggling without any question or ceremony. She does it because it is the right thing to do and Jim sees this generosity as a way of life, not an unusual circumstance. After a visit to the Shimerdas to give them supplies, comfort, and advice, Jim relates a conversation his grandmother had with a farm helper, saying, "All the way home grandmother and Jake talked about how easily good Christian people could forget they were their brothers' keepers."⁴⁹ Mrs. Burden views her actions as the only right thing to do and as if there were no other option than to help those around her who were in need. As Jim grows, his grandmother holds him to a standard of virtue and expects him to treat others well.

After the Burdens have moved to town and Ántonia is employed by the Cutters, Ántonia comes to Mrs. Burden with her anxiety about a questionable duty she has been given by Mr. Cutter. The Cutters were to be leaving town for a few days and Ántonia was strictly instructed by Mr. Cutter to stay alone at the house every night. She says, "I feel as if he is up to some of his tricks again, and is going to try to scare me somehow."⁵⁰ Mrs. Burden is immediately apprehensive.⁵¹ She wants to make sure Ántonia's duties are fulfilled in order for promises to be kept, but she does not want Ántonia to be left alone in the Cutter's house. She says, "Maybe Jim would be willing to go over there and sleep, and you could come here nights. I'd feel safer, knowing you were under my own roof."⁵² While Jim is not excited about staying the night at the Cutters' house, he sees the fear in Ántonia and fulfills his grandmother's wishes. He knows from Mrs. Burden that women should be treated well and her encouragement and rearing of him has led him to do the right thing, even when it is uncomfortable. In the introduction of the novel, his

⁴⁹ Cather, 119.

⁵⁰ Cather, 119.

⁵¹ Cather, 119.

⁵² Cather, 119.

friend describes Jim's adulthood, saying "Though he is over forty now, he meets new people and new enterprises with the impulsiveness by which his boyhood friends remember him. He never seems to me to grow older."⁵³ He has the generosity of spirit that his grandmother modeled for him. Jim's successes don't end when his grandmother passes away. He is ingrained with the virtues, habits, and Mrs. Burden's influence which lead Jim to be a virtuous and productive member of society.

Mrs. Bennet sets a negative example for her daughters throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen narrates the pinnacle of Mrs. Bennet's existence, saying, "The business of her life was to get her daughters married."⁵⁴ Instead of holding her daughters to a level of virtue, she encourages them to seek after any man who is sufficiently wealthy and will marry them. With this as the standard, Kitty and Lydia are perfect children. These youngest two daughters emulate the behavior Mrs. Bennet has modeled and have no concern for social conventions. They are overly flirtatious and fail to pursue virtue in any of their actions. Lydia especially disregards social cues and asks impertinent questions. When the sisters are visiting the Bingley's home with their mother to inquire after Jane's health, Mrs. Bennet finds herself in a passive-aggressive argument with Mr. Darcy, her host's best friend and guest. Lydia follows her mother's impropriety with a 'sudden attack'⁵⁵ on Mr. Bingley. Austen says, "She was very equal therefore to address Mr. Bingley on the subject of the ball, and abruptly reminded him of his promise; adding, that it would be the most shameful thing in the world if he did not keep it."⁵⁶ This comment was beyond rude and required a complete indifference to any social convention.

While Lydia and Kitty follow in their mother's footsteps, Elizabeth and Jane resist their mother's influence. Though they are more heavily influenced by their more virtuous father, they are still negatively impacted by their mother's example. Even when a child recognizes that one of her parents is failing to exemplify virtue, she will continue to be influenced even when trying to fight against it, for the model is deeply ingrained in her. Elizabeth shares her mother's trait of judging others and harboring prejudice. Holding grudges, both the mother and Elizabeth struggle with pride. For a majority of the book, Elizabeth does not give Darcy a chance to prove his virtue because her first impression of him was negative and she cannot accept that he may have better

⁵³ Cather, 2.

⁵⁴ Austen, 14.

⁵⁵ Austen, 65.

⁵⁶ Austen, 65.

qualities she has not noticed. Mrs. Bennet similarly dislikes many characters, assumes unvirtuous motives, and gossips. When one of her daughters suggests that Mrs. Long will introduce them to Mr. Bingley, she bitterly responds, “I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her.”⁵⁷ Though Elizabeth is able to recognize that her mother’s habits are improper and looked down upon, she succumbs to prejudice and pride as seen when she comments, “I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*.”⁵⁸ While Elizabeth often demonstrates extraordinary virtue, she still suffers from the effects of a foolish mother.

Similarly, Jane displays much more virtue than her notorious mother, but is negatively affected by this detrimental influence. In her inordinately optimistic view of the world, Jane seems to overcompensate for her mother’s lack of empathy and compassion. Jane is unable to grasp and believe hard truths and tends to gravitate toward wishful thinking. Elizabeth tells her older sister,

You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life...With your good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others... to take the good of everybody’s character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad -- belongs to you alone.⁵⁹

While this generosity of spirit seems to be a positive character trait, Jane practices the virtue to an excess. Even when presented with clear facts of Wickham's despicable character, Jane struggles to believe that he could truly be so bad. Austen relates, “What a stroke was this for poor Jane! who would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind, as was here collected in one individual... Most earnestly did she labour to prove the probability of error.”⁶⁰ Jane is a virtuous woman and rightfully refuses to assume defects in her peers and acquaintances but lacks the ability to face and accept difficult realities. This seems to be overcompensation for her mother’s rudeness and habit of jumping to conclusions about others. Lacking the virtuous behavior that daughters should be able to follow, Mrs. Bennet harms her daughters and contributes to the decline of virtue in her society.

⁵⁷ Austen, 15.

⁵⁸ Austen, 33.

⁵⁹ Austen, 26.

⁶⁰ Austen, 285.

Masculine Free Will

A point of opposition to the view that women influence virtue in societies is that women simply do not influence the actions of men. Men are capable of making their own decisions and living up to standards of virtue through exercising their free will. The idea that a person or group of people, in this case women, should hold some responsibility for influencing the actions of men is unreasonable and inaccurate.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the antagonist, Wickham, spends a good deal of time with Elizabeth, a woman of high virtue and standards, and yet goes on to conduct himself in a manner completely lacking in virtue. When the two first meet, they very quickly fall into easy conversation. Austen narrates, “Mr. Wickham was therefore at leisure to talk to Elizabeth and she very willing to hear him.”⁶¹ He shares intimate details of his life with her and though she has set a high standard for the men in her life and attempts to hold them to a level of virtue, Wickham seems unaffected by her example and leads a life of sin and scandal. When his true character is brought to light, Wickham is described, “He was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman’s family.”⁶² With the given timeline, it seems that Wickham was involved in this unvirtuous behavior while he was friends with Elizabeth, which shows that any effect she could possibly have had on the man was completely and easily ignored. Wickham uses his free will to act just as he chooses, and the influence of virtuous women like Elizabeth is easily disregarded and powerless.

Again in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy is pressured by his aunt to pursue an advantageous marriage over one that is grounded in virtue. The notorious aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, has arranged for Mr. Darcy to marry her own daughter because she sees this as a more appropriate union than one with a woman of lower social class or reputation. Lady Catherine attempts to manipulate and intimidate those around her yet Mr. Darcy chooses his own path and pursues a woman of his own choosing. He is not overcome by the influence of his aunt and exercises his free will in choosing a virtuous partner in Elizabeth instead of one who will match his socioeconomic status. When Lady Catherine hears their engagement rumored, she visits Elizabeth to tell the young woman that she is not worthy of Mr. Darcy. She even claims

⁶¹ Austen, 104.

⁶² Austen, 365.

that Elizabeth's reputation will ruin her nephew, saying, "You have no regard, then, for the honor and credit of my nephew!"⁶³ Even when Mr. Darcy hears of Lady Catherine's threats toward the woman he loves, he is determined to pursue Elizabeth to the altar. Threats from a woman of her standing were not inconsequential and many would shrink in fear of Lady Catherine's power, but Darcy is not changed by her influence. After meeting with Elizabeth, Lady Catherine similarly confronts her nephew and urges him to promise that he will not enter into an engagement with Elizabeth.⁶⁴ Mr. Darcy, however, does not shrink before the expectations of his aunt. He acts in favor of virtue instead of pursuing his aunt's motives of material success and social status.

As these oppositions are further examined, however, it is clear that while men, just like women, are able to exercise their own free will, the influence of women often guides the actions and decisions of men. This influence does not guarantee perfect men, but encourages more virtuous behavior in them. However, men must choose to pursue virtue; if they have no concern for morality, there are easy ways to superficially fulfill their desires. Wickham's notorious character is not developed from a lack of positive influences, but from the choices Wickham has made in his life. It is more likely that he was manipulating Elizabeth than pursuing a wholesome and virtuous friendship with her. He has chosen to ignore the positive influences in his life and it is interesting to note that he pursues a military career in which there is an inherent lack of female influence. Austen portrays multiple characters in the militia who share Wickham's lack of propriety and who also tend to succumb to flirtation and shallow relationships. While he is around Elizabeth, Wickham behaves in a way that she will approve of and continually attempts to charm her, but ultimately, he sinks to the lowest level of virtue allowed of him. This is found in Elizabeth's youngest sister who agrees to elope with him. While he never demonstrates his many character flaws in front of Elizabeth, when he is away from her he sinks to the level that is accepted by other women.

While Mr. Darcy's resistance to the manipulations of his calculating aunt is admirable, it does not deny that women do hold some influence in his decisions and actions. Prior to meeting Elizabeth Bennet, Mr. Darcy would likely have settled for the marriage that was prescribed for him. The influence of Elizabeth has guided his actions to a virtuous end because he is seeking to

⁶³ Austen, 445.

⁶⁴ Austen, 456.

meet her standard and ultimately win her heart. Mr. Darcy is seemingly unaffected by Lady Catherine's influence because Elizabeth's influence is so much stronger. He does have free will and is able to discern what voices he will listen to and act in accordance with. Darcy tells Elizabeth, "You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled."⁶⁵ Darcy clearly recognizes the influence that Elizabeth has had on his life and character. This influence is stronger than any plea his aunt might give in attempts to have him marry a girl of status and fortune.

Women Manipulate

While some hold the belief that women use their influence for the better, it can be easily seen that women manipulate the actions of men in whatever way best suits their own desires. They enjoy this power and their ability to direct the actions of men. Throughout *My Ántonia*, Lena flirts and uses her beauty and charm to win the affection of men around her without any concern for the feelings of those around her or the virtue of those involved. She enjoys having the ability to turn the head of any man she chooses. She likes the power she holds over men. As a young woman, Lena knows that she has no intention of marrying and she says, "I've seen a good deal of married life and I don't care for it. I want to be so I can help my mother and the children and home, and not have to ask lief of anybody."⁶⁶ When Cather first introduces Lena, she alludes to the notoriety the young woman has already procured for herself. A mysterious story circulates the small town regarding Lena manipulating a married man, Ole Benson. While she denies seducing him, she makes no effort to dissuade his interest. She tells Mrs. Shimerda, "I can't help it if he hangs around, and I can't order him off. It ain't my prairie."⁶⁷ Many believed that Lena had in some way manipulated Ole considering the fact that he eventually killed himself because of his attraction to her.⁶⁸ Lena's indifferent attitude toward the whole situation is juxtaposed to what was expected of a woman in her society.

Lena is often sought after by men and, though she never seems to have any interest in her suitors, she lets them continue their advances. When visiting Jim in college, she teasingly tells

⁶⁵ Austen, 460.

⁶⁶ Cather, 80.

⁶⁷ Cather, 83.

⁶⁸ Cather, 87.

him, “Come and see me sometimes when you’re lonesome.”⁶⁹ At this point in the novel, Jim begins to be romantically interested in Lena. Lena continues to hold the position that she has no wish to be married but again makes no effort to deter the compliments and attention of the men pursuing her. Jim says, “I could sit idle all through a Sunday morning and look at her. Old Benson’s behavior was now no mystery to me.”⁷⁰ Lena’s relationship with Jim was not harmless to the young man and Jim recounts, “I was drifting. Lena had broken up my serious mood. I wasn’t interested in my classes.”⁷¹ Lena recognizes that men are interested in her but holds her opinion that, “Men are all right for friends, but as soon as you marry them they turn into cranky old fathers, even the wild ones.”⁷² Jim is surprised by this and questions her intentions with him. Lena tells Jim, “I guess I’ve always been a little foolish about you. I don’t know what first put it into my head, unless it was *Ántonia*, always telling me I mustn’t be up to any of my nonsense with you.”⁷³ Even though she knows she is not interested in Jim, Lena seems to want to show *Ántonia* and others that she can do whatever she likes. Lena enjoys the power of feeling that she is not held back by anyone around her, but hurts others in the process with no thought of supporting virtuous behavior.

Meg March, in dealing with men in her life, recognizes the power she has over them and takes pleasure in using it. Even Meg, who is usually quite virtuous, takes advantage of her power and manipulates the men around her. When John Brooke proposes to her and asks her to choose to love him, Meg decides to exercise advice from a friend instead of sharing her true feelings and reservations with Brooke. Alcott narrates,

Annie Moffat’s foolish lessons in coquetry came into [Meg’s] mind, and the love of power, which sleeps in the bosoms of the best of little women, woke up all of a sudden and took possession of her. She felt excited and strange, and not knowing what else to do, followed a capricious impulse, and, withdrawing her hands, said petulantly, ‘*I don’t choose. Please go away and let me be!*’⁷⁴

When Brooke is surprised by this comment and attitude, Alcott relates Meg’s next words, saying, “Don’t think of me at all. I’d rather you wouldn’t,” said Meg, taking a naughty satisfaction in

⁶⁹ Cather, 129.

⁷⁰ Cather, 134.

⁷¹ Cather, 137.

⁷² Cather, 140.

⁷³ Cather, 140.

⁷⁴ Alcott, 223.

trying her lover's patience and her own power.”⁷⁵ Even Meg, a usually virtuous and conscientious woman, enjoys using her power to manipulate the emotions of men around her. On her wedding day, she knows that Laurie will promise her anything because of the occasion. She is described, “Meg knew that if he gave the promise he would keep it at all costs, and feeling her power, used it as a woman may for her friend’s good. She did not speak, but she looked up at him with a face made very eloquent by happiness, and a smile that said, ‘No one can refuse me anything today.’”⁷⁶ Meg loves the power she has over certain men and, when she wishes to get a reaction or favor, uses this power for her own good.

While there are instances of manipulative women acting to enjoy their own power, this is not a universal motive. It is more often seen that the general influence of women in a society, not the seductions of rare individuals, suggest a pattern of acceptable behavior, not a forceful inducement of it. Because women are the gatekeepers of the desires of men, (e.g. honor, validation, romantic interests) they hold a certain amount of power or influence in a society. Their positive influence is not an inherent quality of womanhood but a choice that they must choose to make for the betterment of their society. Not all women consistently make this choice. Individuals may counteract the social conventions without drastically shifting the direction of a culture. Lena has failed to set any standard for the men in her life because she has no desire to marry and does not value virtue as much as other characters. With no standard or challenge to meet, men easily fall to vice. Lena’s ambiguity leads men astray, especially Jim who was accustomed to *Ántonia*’s high expectations. While Lena enjoys the power she has over Jim, she does not control him and the influence of Mrs. Burden and *Ántonia* seems to eventually have a greater effect on him. These women do not attempt to control or manipulate him but have set expectations that he chooses to meet. After his ‘relationship’ with Lena, Jim returns to his home town and tells *Ántonia*, “Do you know, *Ántonia*, since I’ve been away, I think of you more often than of any one else in this part of the world... The idea of you is a part of my mind; you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don’t realize it. You really are a part of me.”⁷⁷ While Lena’s manipulations temporarily entranced him, Jim is more

⁷⁵ Alcott, 223.

⁷⁶ Alcott, 248.

⁷⁷ Cather, 152.

consistently and effectively influenced by *Ántonia* who has set a standard of virtue he is expected to meet.

In a few instances, Meg March consciously chooses to use her power to toy with the emotions of men in her life. While these moments are outside of her habitual character, they seem to prove the point that women's influence is not a subtle urging but a controlling manipulation of power. However, Meg is not controlling the men in her life. In her relationship with John Brooke, Meg is unsure of her feelings and has trouble voicing her thoughts. In the moment, it seems easier to take the advice of a friend than to vocalize her feelings. However, when her intrusive aunt voices strong opposition to the marriage due to Brooke's financial situation, Meg quickly realizes that she loves Brooke and tells him, "I didn't realize how much till she abused you."⁷⁸ Meg had no intentions of manipulating John Brooke, but for a moment she succumbed to silly advice from a friend. On her wedding day, Meg's interaction with Laurie is not a manipulation for her own benefit. The promise Laurie makes to her is a genuine promise for his betterment. Meg does not want Laurie to be the prey of 'pretty women' and instructs him to refuse alcohol from them.⁷⁹ Alcott recounts the promise and alludes to the fact that this is another instance of the March sisters being a positive influence on Laurie, saying, "So the toast was drunk, the pledge made and loyally kept in spite of many temptations, for with instinctive wisdom, the girls had seized a happy moment to do their friend a service, for which he thanked them all his life."⁸⁰ Meg is not revelling in the power she holds over men, but allowing her influence to challenge a friend to a higher level of virtue. Meg does not seek after power, but encourages virtue in her relationships with men.

Conclusion

Throughout time, the female mind and will has driven virtue in her society through the standards she sets for men. When pursuing honor, validation, or romantic interest from a woman, a man will meet any virtue or standard she sets for him. Women similarly set standards among their female counterparts to hold a general level of virtue that all men in their society are expected to meet. Women are either first held to this standard by their mothers or are failed in

⁷⁸ Alcott, 226.

⁷⁹ Alcott, 248.

⁸⁰ Alcott, 248.

childhood by their maternal guardian. These principles are obvious in *Little Women*, *My Ántonia*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, three novels written in three different centuries, yet women today seem to have forgotten the immensely powerful role that they intrinsically wield. They accept declining levels of virtue in their male counterparts. As the message of the modern world says that women should strive to be equal to men, women should instead challenge each other and men to a higher level of virtue. Women have the ability to set the course of their society by expecting virtue from men. Why would a woman strive to be equal to a man when she could challenge men to be equal to any standard of her choosing? The delicate power of female influence on a society is beautiful and should be practiced and protected.

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Academic Excellence in Longinus' *On the Sublime*



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Among the few consensus of the origins of the Greek 1st century A.D. treatise *Περὶ ὕψους*,¹ found in English today as *On the Sublime*,² is that it was written by a human and not a baboon. By which person and for which purpose remain matters of speculation however, for the shadow of time has thickly obscured, as often it does, the origins of an ancient text. A certain Cassius Longinus³ is usually awarded authorship, but only through an educated guess. There are other interpretive challenges: the work ends abruptly—suggesting missing pages⁴—and a solid working definition of the Sublime, the very subject at hand, though pledged in the opening lines,⁵ never quite arrives as promised. Yet the gentle reader is not abandoned. If not to solid definitions or to a rugged thesis, the author does at least gesture her to the outlines of a certain project by posing a salient question, one sidestepped in an earlier inquiry into the matter,⁶ of “how we might be able to exalt our own genius to a certain degree of progress in sublimity.”

The purpose then, whether whole or part, for the author of the *Sublime*, was academic: are there some things common to the great authors that we can identify and imitate for our own and others' excellence? As we read, the answer takes shape gradually in the affirmative, less by

¹ (“concerning the lofty/profound”)

²its title borrows from the Latin version, *de sublimitate*, which was prior to the English but subsequent to the Greek original.

³ Roberts, W. R. (n.d.). Longinus on the Sublime: THE GREEK TEXT EDITED AFTER THE PARIS MANUSCRIPT: WITH INTRODUCTION, TRANSLATION, FASCIMILES, AND APPENDICES. 2nd Edition. 1907.17 (and throughout the Introduction). According to Roberts, Cassius Longinus or Dionysius of Halicarnassus are possible authors, though neither are certain and many are possible. The work is usually credited to Longinus.

⁴ *ibidem* :perhaps one-third of the original text is missing

⁵ Longinus, Cassius. *On the Sublime*. Translated by H.L. Havell. London. Macmillan & Co. and New York. 1890. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17957/17957-h/17957-h.htm>. I. “There are two things essential to a technical treatise: *the first is to define the subject*; the second (I mean second in order, as it is by much the first in importance) to point out how and by what methods we may become masters of it ourselves.” [emphasis added]

⁶ Roberts. 17. There was an earlier *on the Sublime*, by a certain Caecilius of Calacte; it is unfortunately no longer extant.

structured argument than by demonstration: by Longinus leading us into the gallery of literature, so to speak, wherein he patiently teaches us how sublime passages surpass the ordinary. Like the docent who guides our eyes to see the daring brushstrokes, the bold choices of perspective and the brilliancies of light in this painting or that, he unfolds for us the perfections or deficiencies of various authors with such skill and patience that we gradually develop our own expertise of how texts are sublime or how bereft. The charm of this tour is strengthened by the epistolary nature of the writing. For the most part, Longinus pens the *Sublime* in an expository third person, but he deftly weaves in a number of intimate second person addresses to a certain Terentian, who was quite possibly a close friend⁷ and by every account a man he deeply respected as an aesthete and critic,⁸ and, it would seem, the very man who got Longinus to embark on his treatise.⁹ As readers we get to eavesdrop upon one scholar contemplating sublimity with another, and so feel ourselves invited but not confronted, swept up along in a museum of knowledge where we are free to learn and think and wonder, but with no need to accept every premise or to learn everything at once.

Though Longinus shies away from assigning a concrete definition to the Sublime, owing, perhaps, to its obviousness to Terentian, a man “accomplished in literature,”¹⁰ he does remind him and us that “the Sublime, wherever it occurs, consists in a certain loftiness and excellence of language.”¹¹ He also observes that it is of another league entirely than the canons generally prized in rhetoric. These five canons (parts) of the persuasive act had been foundational to all ancient rhetorical training and fully set in stone by Cicero:¹² *inventio* (“discovery,” but more broadly what is said), *dispositio* (arrangement), *ēlocūtio* (fitness and style), *memōria* (memory), and *prōnuntiātiō* (delivery),—the first three of which were concerns for writing, the last two properly belonging only to oratory. Longinus saw how these first three canons, though as key to persuasion as the sun is to life, are in a way outshone when sublimity arises:

⁷ Terms of endearment are common to the genre (the literary epistle,) and so may be merely, if effusive, formalities, but when T is addressed it is always affectionate: “dear Terentian” or “my dear friend.”

⁸ Longinus I: “such is my confidence in your abilities, [to critique my own critiques] and such the part which becomes you;” “[And you are a]... sympathising and discerning critic;” [and] so accomplished in literature [etc.]

⁹ *idem* “...you [Terentian,] have bidden me also to put together, if only for your entertainment, a few notes on the subject of the Sublime...”

¹⁰ *ibidem*

¹¹ *ibidem*

¹² Cicero. *de Inventione*. VII

Skill in invention [*inventio*], lucid arrangement [*dispositio*] and disposition of facts [*ēlocūtio*], are appreciated not by one passage, or by two, but gradually manifest themselves in the general structure of a work; but a sublime thought, if happily timed, illumines an entire subject with the vividness of a lightning-flash, and exhibits the whole power of the orator in a moment of time.

In addition to being illuminating and succinct, Longinus finds that the Sublime confounds judgement, transcends that which is merely reasonable and agreeable, and acts with an imperious force.¹³ We should, of course, recognize that each of these qualities are super, *i.e. beyond* the rational, and therefore of the same nature as the internal and external powers which man knows to be beyond his conscious self, for example his emotion, his sub-conscious, his soul and spirit and heart, and indeed, for we of faith, the host of “powers and principalities” that encompass even God himself. Now anyone who has suffered so much as a change of their emotions knows that our super-rational powers can be either kind or cruel, but Longinus believes the Sublime is always charitable: “It is natural to us to feel our souls lifted up by the true Sublime, and conceiving a sort of generous exultation to be filled with joy and pride, as though we had ourselves originated the ideas which we read.”¹⁴ Here, then, Longinus has managed to identify a useful marker, for whenever the reader is experiencing a generous exultation, which, as we have seen, is close to her soul and thereby felt “with the love of the heart” and not “the cold gaze of reason,”¹⁵ she may know the Sublime is present. What is more, Longinus teaches, she is not alone. The Sublime is not subjective, hinging, like a taste or loathing for this food or the other, on individual preference, but remains in transcendence, unbound from chains of time and vagaries of opinion, for “we may regard those words as truly noble and sublime which always please and please all¹⁶ readers.”

In the craft of writing, Longinus continues, there are five main areas of sublimity: grandeur of thought, a vigorous and spirited treatment of the passions, the art of figures of thought and figures of speech, dignified expression, and finally, majesty and elevation of

¹³ Longinus. I

¹⁴ Longinus.VII

¹⁵ Pöschl, Viktor. *The Art of Vergil* (Michigan:University of Michigan Press, 1962) 5

¹⁶ Let the reader be generous and understand that “all” here is not a fixed logical category but a flexible qualifier referring to those of *all* (different) times, backgrounds, pursuits etc. Longinus here is effectively providing a working definition, long before the term was used (appx. the 1610’s, according to the Online Etymological Dictionary), of what constitutes a *classic*. While a few, through obstinacy, ignorance, and even, though very rarely, through, or rather, despite informed opinion, may find this or that classic lacking, in general, all readers at all times perceive a sublimity.

structure.¹⁷ While we have discussed how as readers we experience the Sublime passively, “feeling our souls lifted up,” we learn here that to produce sublimity as writers we must strive for academic excellence. Longinus finds that a great portion of genius is “natural, rather than acquired,”¹⁸ particularly the first two sources of sublimity,¹⁹ but he also perceives that the nature of the Sublime is relational, pursuing our love, and entirely good, so that, as we emulate it, the excellence we obtain by our efforts is not only academic²⁰ but moral: “[therefore] it will be well for us in this instance also to train up our souls to sublimity, and make them as it were ever big with noble thoughts.”²¹

Since we may be unsure of where to begin our study of excellence, Longinus takes us by the hand. Having outlined for us what the Sublime does, what it consists of, and how its study elevates and ennobles us, he finally begins our tour into the vast galleries of literature. There, as we stand with him before certain passages, he articulates how this one or that possesses or wants true sublimity. Though all the usual suspects earn his praise, Longinus pays no regard to rank or station, censuring even such luminaries as Hesiod and Plato wherever they fall short. The former, for example, he faults for his (alleged²²) description of a heavenly horse with a runny nose, contrasting this with Homer’s dignified and elevating simile:

“As far as lies his airy ken, who sits
On some tall crag, and scans the wine-dark sea:
So far extends the heavenly coursers’ stride.”

Longinus, no doubt emboldened by Plato’s censure of poetry in the *Republic*,²³ finds even grand old Homer guilty of cheating the Sublime with his quite colorful but impious imagining of the celestials. He commends the poet for creating “sublime images” in what he

¹⁷ Longinus VIII

¹⁸ *idem* IX

¹⁹ *i.e.* grandeur of thought, and [the ability to make] a vigorous and spirited treatment of the passions.

²⁰ *i.e.* merely acquisitional or performative: heaping up knowledge or showing it off.

²¹ *ibidem*; *c.f.* Phillipians 4:8 “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

²² *ibidem* Longinus quotes from *The Shield*, a work believed in antiquity to have been Hesiodic, though even here Longinus is somewhat skeptical, wondering “if *The Shield* is indeed one of his works.”

²³ Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vols. 5 & 6*. translated by Paul Shorey. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969) II, III, X. Plato’s main criticism was Homer’s misrepresentations of the divine.

otherwise dubs a “terrible” and “hurly-burly” description of the battle of the gods,²⁴ but suggests that “far to be preferred to this description...are those passages which exhibit the divine nature in its true light, as something spotless, great, and pure.”²⁵ He then directs our eyes to a solemn description of the sea-god Poseidon:

“Mountain and wood and solitary peak,
The ships Achaian, and the towers of Troy
Trembled beneath the god’s immortal feet.”

Quite surprisingly, given the early date of this text’s composure, but well in line with his yoking of sublimity to morality, Longinus turns from Homer to the Book of Genesis, where he lauds the “lawgiver of the Jews,” that is, Moses, for “having formed an adequate conception of the Supreme Being and having lent it “adequate expression” via the stately and sublime:

“God said ‘let there be light,’ and there was light,
‘Let there be land,’ and there was.”

Besides misrepresenting the divine, and so by proxy, the Sublime, Longinus reveals a host of other faults that authors commit, most springing, he reasons, from a desire for novelty²⁶ rather than a passion for emulation. This observation not only exposes stylistic flaws, but it pinpoints the deviancy, here in the 1st century A.D. a cancer in its very infancy, away from the classical love of emulation, for “not allowing something once found to be great and true to disappear.”²⁷ In exposing the flaws of innovation, Longinus invites our imitation of the classical forms. To clarify, he writes, “Now what I am speaking of is not plagiarism, but resembles the process of copying from fair forms or statues or works of skilled labour.”²⁸ Just as the apprentice trains his hands and eyes through emulating a master craftsman, we as writers will do well, particularly “when we are labouring on some subject which demands a lofty and majestic style, to imagine to ourselves how Homer might have expressed this or that, or how Plato or Demosthenes would have clothed it with sublimity.”²⁹ By emulation, Longinus knows, we will learn the lesson twice: first by becoming discerning and critical readers who can see, in a forest

²⁴ Homer. *Iliad* 20

²⁵ Longinus IX

²⁶ *idem* V: “Now all these glaring improprieties of language may be traced to one common root—the pursuit of novelty in thought...”

²⁷ Poschl p.8

²⁸ *idem* XIII

²⁹ *idem* XIV

of words, the wellsprings of greatest majesty, and second, through our labor and industry, by developing ways we may produce the fountains ourselves. Both lessons are academic,³⁰ both lead on to excellence.

Besides novelty, Longinus lists several other errors and shortcomings which plague writing generally and which, more painfully, detract from what is otherwise standing on the doorstep of sublimity. He names four as most harming: bombast (empty inflation), puerility (boyishness), false sentiment, and frigidity.³¹ Of the causes of sublimity, by contrast, he names and examines many, most of which are well known rhetorical figures: antithesis, asyndeton, hyperbaton *et cetera*, “All those which...help to render a style more energetic and impassioned.”³² But in the end, Longinus observes, it is energy and passion,³³ first and forever, that tends to sublimity, for the writer who aims low tries for harmlessness, while the elevated realms of the sublime is entered only by those who trust their wings to flight. “Is it not by risking nothing,” Longinus cries, “by never aiming high, that a writer of low or middling powers keeps generally clear of faults and secure of blame? whereas the loftier walks of literature are by their very loftiness perilous?”³⁴

Whether all who shoot for the moon end up in the stars is incidental. We have seen that the academic excellence that the Sublime offers ennobles all who encounter it and allows those who study and emulate it to train up their souls to sublimity. Academic excellence offers humanity to humans so that they may pass it on. It is not a mastery of data, a worship of equality, or a well-trodden corridor to success—whatever that hollow and selfish word means. It is not even, despite its often extending its form to the literature of its disciples, simply a mere eloquence of language. No, rather, it can only be, as Longinus took great pains to illuminate, something wholly transcendent and interminable,³⁵ “a mastery and power...from the highest of sources.”³⁶ In pursuing it, therefore, man wrests his eyes from what is material and passing away

³⁰ Merriam-Webster, particularly definition 4: conforming to the traditions or rules of a school (as of literature or art)...

³¹ Longinus III

³² *idem* XXIX

³³ *idem* VIII: “a kind of ‘fine madness’”

³⁴ *idem* XXXIII

³⁵ *idem* XIV: [the] ripe perfection which alone can win the applause of ages to come...

³⁶ *idem* XXXIV

toward what is divine and imperishable, perhaps to be convinced, as I am, of the limit of human ambition and the infinite beauty of God.

When we survey the whole circle of life,
and see it abounding everywhere
in what is elegant, grand, and beautiful,
we learn at once
what is the true end of man's being.³⁷

³⁷ *idem* XXXV

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Academic Excellence: A Matter of the Heart



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There is a temptation when thinking about academic excellence to define it in terms of perfect test scores and high grade point averages. In this view, academic excellence is seen simply as correct knowledge or skill measured by quantifiable objective standards. Of course, finding the correct answer to a math equation or accurately recounting a historical event are essential parts of academic excellence—no one would argue otherwise. But it seems that mere academic correctness can be attained without achieving true excellence; Siri and Alexa can provide correct answers to most questions, but we appropriately call these machines artificial intelligence and do not attribute academic excellence to their responses. True academic excellence, it seems, is not just a precise function of the mind, but a matter of the heart as well, requiring a certain kind of feeling—even affection—for the material or activity as well as an intellectual mastery of it. One may be able to prove the Pythagorean Theorem or explain the facts of the Louisiana Purchase, but to achieve true excellence one must feel a sense of awe for the elegance of the geometrical proof and the weighty significance of America’s western expansion.

This relationship between affection and academic excellence is explored by literary figures like John Steinbeck and Fyodor Dostoevsky in their fiction. In his short story “Junius Maltby,” Steinbeck portrays the story’s namesake as an intelligent man—an accountant—who is forced to the country to improve his poor health where he pursues a more leisurely life of reading books and conversing with people about the things he finds most interesting and dear to him. Junius’ love for the things of the mind helps readers understand the value of immaterial goods, but he is also fatally flawed because his love does not fully translate into responsible action. In contrast to Junius is Dostoevsky’s character Ivan Karamazov. This highly intellectual young man impresses others with his logical mind, cutting through arguments to the truth of the matter with great precision. Yet Ivan’s intellect disconcerts others as well because they sense that while he is able to demonstrate the truth, he does not accept, love, or live by the truth himself.

A detailed analysis of Junius Maltby and Ivan Karamazov will show that love of knowledge and its pursuit is necessary to be truly excellent in academics. It is necessary because proficiency without love is a heartless and therefore meaningless act, which inevitably affects the quality of the performance. To achieve academic excellence, which is the combination of correct understanding and affection for the discipline, adhering to high academic standards can be helpful inasmuch as one personalizes them to motivate and measure knowledge and performance. However, such standards can also lead to a diminished love for the subject when they are viewed as formulaic and compulsory. When and where affection for learning wanes, a liberal education, focused on reading, writing, and discussing the great ideas, is essential to rekindling that individual's affection and academic excellence.

Junius and Affectionate Learning

Those who have read Steinbeck's obscure short story "Junius Maltby" will wonder why I hold Junius up as a model of academic excellence. Junius, the reader learns early on, is "superbly lazy": after quitting his day job as an accountant in San Francisco to save his health, he moves to the country and abandons his shoes, razor, and work, to devote himself to his leisure instead.¹ All he does is loaf about dangling his feet in the stream while reading his favorite books. His neighbors hate "his idleness and his complete lack of pride," and consider him to be reproachfully neglectful and essentially a romantic daydreamer with his thoughts too high in the clouds to care about anything practically significant.² With this unflattering introduction of Junius, I must admit that I do not embrace or recommend the apparent flaws in this literary character. Junius himself recognizes his own shortcomings at various times throughout the story and is sorry for them.³ But what I do embrace and recommend in Junius' character is his love of learning, his prioritization of contemplation, his joy in reading and discussing great ideas rather than worrying about the material cares of the world. He may go too far in his rejection of worldly concerns, especially considering his failed duties as a husband and father, but in terms of a literary symbol, Junius serves an important purpose in showing readers the necessity of affection for truth and beauty as the animating, meaning-creating element of the learning process.

¹ John Steinbeck, "Junius Maltby" in *The Little Red Pony*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1988) 95.

² Steinbeck, 103.

³ Steinbeck, 100.

Junius is a thirty-five-year-old bachelor when he moves out of the city to a small mountain-valley community to restore his health. Junius has a congestive lung issue, which his doctor attributes to the San Francisco Bay's damp and foggy atmosphere, and advises him to relocate to a dry, warm climate. The name of his new home, the "Pastures of Heaven," is what initially attracts Junius to it, for "he felt that the name meant something personal to him, and he was very glad, because for ten years nothing in the world had been personal to him."⁴ His city life as an accountant had apparently been too impersonal and individually stifling, characterized by long work days and too short of evenings for Junius to pursue his true interests. This personal nature of his new life proves to be an important part of his newfound affection for life and the things in it, which is reasonable enough, for how can a person truly love something that they feel no personal interest in? Indeed, it seems to be a natural law of affection that it is impossible to love anything that is impersonal. In moving to the country, Junius does not know if he is going to die or recover, but one thing Junius is sure of is that he is glad of this medically prescribed, socially sanctioned excuse to "cut the strings he had been unable to sever for himself."⁵

Upon arrival to the Pastures of Heaven, Junius settles into country living—minus the associated work. He went to the country to improve his health or die, so Junius devotes himself to his leisure. But rather than idle away the time, Junius uses his leisure for what it is arguably intended for: reading.⁶ His preferred genre, coincidentally, is romantic literature, including Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels with A Donkey, Treasure Island, and Kidnapped*, Valasquez' *Cardinal*, and David Grayson's *Adventures in Contentment*.⁷ His love of reading makes him absent minded of everything else, and not always without consequence.

After regaining his health and living in the valley for a year, Junius marries his landlady, a widow with two sons; but rather than perform his duties as a husband and father, Junius continues reading his books as he had as a bachelor. One day, "when Mrs. Maltby put a hoe in his hand and set him to work in the vegetable garden, she found him...hours later, dangling his feet in the meadow stream and reading his pocket copy of *Kidnapped*. He was sorry; he did not know how it had happened. And that was the truth."⁸ However, Junius' neglect does not always

⁴ Steinbeck, 96.

⁵ Steinbeck, 95.

⁶ See, Josef Piper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009).

⁷ Steinbeck, 97.

⁸ Steinbeck, 97.

have such benign consequences. Several years later, when Mrs. Maltby is pregnant, she and her two sons come down with the Spanish flu, “perhaps because they were undernourished” in their impoverished state.⁹ As they lay dying, we are told how Junius tragically “wandered vaguely from one to the other of the dying children, and talked nonsense to them,” explaining to one boy how diamonds are made and reading *Treasure Island* to the other.¹⁰ In their final moments, Junius “brought out the only things he had and offered them, but they had not potency with death. He knew in advance they wouldn’t have, and that made it all the more terrible.”

Clearly, Junius’ affection for reading and thinking is imbalanced as it leads him to neglect the good and necessary duties of providing for his family. But as one reads this distressing scene, one gets the sense that Junius did not completely fail as a father. He is, for instance, not absent or callous at his family’s death. Quite the contrary, Junius does his best to ease their suffering and later confesses that “when the children died, I thought I had reached a peculiar high peak of horror...sorrow...[and] sadness,” showing that his sentiments are properly aligned even if his practical priorities are not.¹¹ Furthermore, one senses that there is something touching and valuable in what he offers his wife and stepchildren in their sickness, however inadequate it may be. He offers them true and beautiful things to know and think about in his telling them about how diamonds are made and reading to them from *Treasure Island*. These things could not cure his wife and children of the flu, or feed or clothe or shelter them, but they could nourish their minds and souls, which are just as vital parts of a person’s proper existence as the material aspects are. And in a world where the material is almost always prioritized, Junius’ extreme love and devotion to the immaterial goods of the mind and soul helps the reader better recognize these important immaterial dimensions of their own human existence. One should not ignore the material necessities, as Junius does, but one should not ignore immaterial necessities either that do not have such obvious and immediate consequences. Mental and spiritual atrophy are just as real as physical malnutrition and disease, and while Junius fails to provide the physical things his family needs to live, he does offer them words and ideas that could make what life they have meaningful.

⁹ Steinbeck, 98.

¹⁰ Steinbeck, 98.

¹¹ Steinbeck, 100.

After his wife and stepsons die, Junius is left alone with his newborn son whom his wife delivered just before she died. Junius names him Robert after his favorite author, Robert Louis Stevenson, calling him Robbie for short. Junius then hires a man named Jakob Stutz to tend to the farm. The three are an unproductive group, however, and Jakob and Junius forget about their work and simply sit “around the place together discussing things which interested and puzzled them—how colour comes to flowers—whether there is symbology in nature—where Atlantis lay—how Incas interred their dead.”¹² Robbie grows up alongside these two men, and adopts their mode of life as if it were the only way to live, and the two men welcome him in all their conversations, “if Robbie made an observation the two men listened courteously and included the remark in their conversation, or even used it as the germ of an investigation.”¹³ Thus, Robbie grows up contemplative and interested in knowing things for the joy of knowing them, asking questions and seeking out answers through discussion and frequent trips to Junius’ encyclopedia.¹⁴ Their curiosity and personal interests govern the events of each day, and together they are “gloriously happy.”¹⁵

Junius, Robbie, and Jakob’s love of learning does not stay isolated with them, however, for when Robbie turns six years old and the local community lays claim to his time for education, he exposes the local children to this affectionate way of learning. Robbie does not want to go to school at first, but after receiving several letters from the truancy officer, Junius insists Robbie attend, assuring him that they will teach him all sorts of things that he has forgotten. Robbie dutifully obeys, but his influence on the school is greater than its influence on him. All the children are intrigued by this boy in rags who speaks like a man and knows no children’s games, and soon the younger boys are copying his ragged fashion, tearing holes in their jeans and going barefoot.¹⁶ At lunch they listen to Robbie tell stories about his father, and “wished their fathers were lazy and gentle, too.”¹⁷ On Saturdays, sometimes the boys would disobey their parents by sneaking up to Junius’ place where they sat around listening to him “read *Treasure Island* to them, or [describe] the Gallic wars or the battle of Trafalgar.” A couple of months into the school year the teacher is impressed by the children’s academic progress,

¹² Steinbeck, 99-100.

¹³ Steinbeck, 101.

¹⁴ Steinbeck, 101.

¹⁵ Steinbeck, 103.

¹⁶ Steinbeck, 106-107.

¹⁷ Steinbeck, 106.

which is marked “by a growth in their vocabularies” and “piece[s] of astounding [historical] information,” which are traced back to their association with Robbie and Junius.¹⁸ Thus Junius’ affection for learning leads to increased academic achievement in the children, even if there is no conscious raising of academic standards, because they also become interested in learning for the joy of learning.

While this enlivening of the educational community is strong evidence of affection’s role in academic excellence, perhaps the most compelling example is when the school teacher, Miss Morgan, gives Robbie his first writing lesson. Miss Morgan discovers early on that while Robbie “could read perfectly and used a man’s vocabulary,” he could not write.¹⁹ To close this learning gap, Miss Morgan instructs Robbie to copy out some sentences. Robbie dutifully obeys, but in an unconventional way that teaches Miss Morgan a more powerful lesson than she teaches him. Rather than settle with a simple uninspiring phrase to write over and over again, after searching “his memory for something he *liked*,”²⁰ Robbie copies out the sentence, “There is nothing so monstrous but we can belief it of ourselves.”²¹ He chose the sentence because he “*loved* that [word] monstrous”, for it seemed to give “timber and profundity to the thing.” When Miss Morgan returns to see what Robbie has written, she is surprised and asks him about it. Robbie explains, “It’s from Stevenson, ma’am. My father knows it by *heart* almost.”²² Robbie’s act of copying out a phrase because he “liked” it is significant. Even more significant is the admission that he “loved” the word *monstrous*. But most significant is Robbie’s observation that his father knows the sentence, and the book it comes from, “by heart almost,” which apparently has transferred to Robbie as well.

What does it mean to know something by heart? This phrase we use almost unconsciously in our colloquial speech seems merely to suggest that a person has committed something to memory. But then, why do we not simply say, “I know it by memory?” Why invoke the heart in a matter that seems strictly a matter of the mind? One’s heart does not remember the words and their order, nor does it govern their oral expression through the manipulation of the tongue, teeth, lips and breath, nor their written expression through control of

¹⁸ Steinbeck, 110.

¹⁹ Steinbeck, 107.

²⁰ Steinbeck, 107. (My emphasis).

²¹ Original spelling.

²² Steinbeck, 107. (My emphasis).

the hand. How is the heart involved in this process of thinking and remembering? In a strictly scientific reality, the heart may simply be a vital organ that pumps blood and oxygen to the cells of our bodies, but in our poetic reality the heart has come to represent the symbolic center of human value and the metaphorical location of our interests and loyalties. Therefore, when the heart is invoked in prose or poetry, it points to those things which humans consider most precious, important, and loved. To know something by heart, then, means the person not only knows and can recall something intellectually, but that the person values it and loves it.

Junius Maltby loves the words of Robert Louis Stevenson. They are so valuable and important to him for their own sake that he contemplates them and knows them by heart, demonstrating how Junius and Robbie exhibit an essential element of academic excellence characterized by their heartfelt love and personal interest in the things they know. They not only know true and beautiful things—they love them as well.

Ivan and Knowledge Without Affection

Whatever Junius' moral failings are as a husband and father, the important lesson we learn from him is that affection for the truths one knows is an important element of academic excellence and a happy, meaningful life as well. This affection for truth is an essential component to academic excellence because without it one's knowledge leads to a sense of despair and meaninglessness, which will be shown by an analysis of Ivan Karamazov.

In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the reader is first introduced to Ivan as a young man who "began very early, almost in infancy..., to show some sort of unusual and brilliant aptitude for learning."²³ Indeed, he is the only brother of the three, Dimitri, Ivan, and Alyosha, who graduates from college and sets himself up independently through his frugality, tutoring, and writing. From the reader's initial introduction to the characters, Ivan is the brother who has it all together and is well on his way to living a meaningful and excellent life. But a shadow is first thrown over Ivan's character when he, his brothers, and his father go before a respected priest, Elder Zosima, to resolve a dispute between Dimitri and their father, Fyodor.

²³ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2002), 15.

In a discussion unrelated to the dispute in question, Ivan, Zosima, and some of the other priests in attendance talk about an article Ivan recently published in a magazine about the philosophical and political question of separating the church from the affairs of the state. It is a complex question, yet Ivan, in his article, treats it deftly, settling the debate decidedly for those involved in the discussion and impressing them with his logical ability. One sub-proof in Ivan's long argument is the assertion that "there is no virtue if there is no immortality" and that if mankind's belief in its immortality were destroyed, the world would essentially spiral into chaos.²⁴ Upon hearing this assertion, Zosima, who is a keen observer of mankind says, "You are blessed if you believe so, or else most unhappy!" Amused by Zosima's observation, Ivan asks, "Why unhappy?" to which Zosima responds, "Because in all likelihood you do not believe either in the immortality of your soul or even in what you have written about the Church and the Church question." Ivan is honest enough to admit that Zosima is right, but maintains that even if he does not believe in his own immortality or his answer to the Church question, his argument was not quite a joke. Zosima affirms this conclusion as well, saying, "you weren't quite joking, that is true. This idea is not yet resolved in your *heart* and torments it.... The question is not resolved in you, and there lies your great grief, for it urgently demands resolution."²⁵ Here again the heart is invoked as the center of meaning, belief, and value. Ivan is capable, with his superior intellect, to see the truth and express it in a logically convincing way, but something in his knowledge is apparently lacking and that is a belief in the truth he asserts.

Ivan broods over this torment of not believing or loving what he knows throughout the rest of the book. In one special meeting with his younger brother, Alyosha, Ivan articulates the struggle he is undergoing. Ivan confesses to Alyosha that in spite of all his sophisticated cynical notions about life and its meaning, "I want to live, and I do live, even if it be against logic. Though I do not believe in the order of things, still the sticky little leaves that come out in spring are dear to me, the blue sky is dear to me, some people are dear to me, whom one loves sometimes, would you believe it without even knowing why."²⁶ Alyosha responds exclaiming, "I'm terribly glad that you want so much to live," stating somewhat paradoxically that "everyone should love life before everything else in the world."²⁷ Ivan asks if he means even to love life

²⁴ Dostoevsky, 70.

²⁵ Dostoevsky, 70. (My emphasis)

²⁶ Dostoevsky, 230.

²⁷ Dostoevsky, 231.

more than its meaning, to which Alyosha responds, “Certainly, love it before logic...and only then will [you] also understand its meaning.” These are remarkable sentiments coming from a younger brother. Love something before one understands it? How is this practically possible? And why is loving it the only way to know its meaning? Anyone who has enjoyed and loved a great work of art, music, or literature will understand what Alyosha means. Speaking anecdotally, I, for instance, do not know the first thing about music composition, but when I hear Debussy’s “Clair de Lune” or Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” I feel a deep sense of aesthetic satisfaction that leads to gratitude and then affection for the music. I love the song before I understand it, and this love draws me back into it again and again. As I continue listening, my feelings of affection gradually develop into understanding of the music as its patterns and variations of patterns become clear in my mind, leading to an intellectual comprehension of the piece. This, in turn, leads to increased satisfaction and affection as the music unfolds itself through repeated and affectionate listening.

This process of being moved by something true or beautiful and then coming to comprehend it intellectually through continued exposure is what Alyosha means by loving life before understanding it in order to learn its meaning, but Ivan is not convinced by Alyosha’s argument. Proceeding with his confession (as he calls it), Ivan says he accepts the idea and existence of “God, not only willingly, but moreover I also accept his wisdom and his purpose...I believe in order, in the meaning of life, I believe in eternal harmony, in which we are all supposed to merge...and so on and so forth to infinity.”²⁸ But the catch is that Ivan does “not accept this world of God’s...It’s not God that I do not accept, you understand, it is this world of God’s.” The suffering, injustice, and the “whole offensive comedy of human contradictions” is too great a price for Ivan, and though he believes it will be absolved in some miraculous action of God, even then he explains that he will look and see it all as it is and “still...not accept it.”²⁹ Here, Ivan reveals his unique torment: his inability to love and accept the truth he sees. And the effect of his inability to love what he knows is a sense of meaninglessness and despair.³⁰

In Ivan’s case it is a metaphysical or spiritual truth that he is rejecting, but his attitude might be expressed from any lower level of intellectual or moral struggle. Whether our struggle

²⁸ Dostoevsky, 235.

²⁹ Dostoevsky, 236.

³⁰ Dostoevsky, 69.

is over the existence of God and objective morality or whether we are simply trying to understand our arithmetic lessons, the obligation to love the truths we come to understand is the same, and failure to do so leads always to a distressing sense of meaninglessness and despair. Anecdotally, I have personally seen this attitude at times in my students and, frighteningly, at times in myself. It manifests at cynical moments in life when one feels manipulated or coerced by others and sees through the facades of a system's respectability to the naked force that drives so much of life. Rather than rebel, one learns to "jump-through-the-hoops" and "play-the-game" by recognizing the truths each system values, becoming skilled at identifying and then telling those in authority what they want to hear. But this learning process is artificial, animated by a desire to beat the system at its own game rather than learn and love the truth; and the effect of such an education on an individual is deep cynicism.

This effect is tragically illustrated by Ivan as Dostoevsky pushes the logic of this educational paradigm to its ultimate conclusion, resulting in Ivan's apparent loss of his mental faculty. One of the major false epiphanies that Ivan has that leads him to his despairing attitude towards life is that because he rejects ultimate truth nothing really matters and everything is permissible; all judgements of value are morally relative and therefore irrelevant. But when Ivan is confronted with the very real and highly personal moral dilemma regarding his father's violent murder, Ivan is racked by the injustice of the situation and acts against his essence that nothing really matters in an attempt to do the right thing.³¹ His attempt seems at first a triumph, as it shows his recognition of fundamental values that are objectively true, which he apparently loves for their own sake, otherwise he would not have acted as he did. But the contradiction it represents to him proves too much for his mental faculty and he falls into a brain fever, which we do not know the resolution of.³² Ivan's end is a perplexing and foreboding reminder to anyone serious about academic excellence to beware of insincerity in the pursuit of truth; for one must stand by what one knows to be true, and love it for its own sake or face the sense of meaninglessness and despair that comes from seeing the truth and rejecting it.

³¹ Dostoevsky, 686.

³² Dostoevsky, 757.

The Role of Standards in Achieving Academic Excellence

Ivan and Junius are important literary figures in helping us understand the nature of academic excellence, demonstrating that it is not only a matter of right thinking but a matter of the right attitude and action as well. Neither character is perfectly exemplary according to this definition of academic excellence, but they do illustrate the fundamental importance of affection for the truth in living well. Now it is time to consider the practical methods of achieving right thinking, attitude, and action in education, and in human excellence more generally throughout life.

According to traditional and modern philosophies of education, academic standards play an essential practical role in motivating scholars to achieve excellence. Standards are necessary to achieve excellence because they orient a person to the desired goal and provide a structure by which to measure one's progress. A sports analogy might be helpful to illustrate. Almost every sport that I am aware of is organized around definable objective standards. In basketball, for example, we explicitly call the backboard, rim, and net a "standard," without which there would be no game. The athletes need an objective to work towards and without it there is no meaning to the ten players, the ball, and the fans. Similarly, in other team sports like football, soccer, and hockey—the goal posts organize and orient the players towards definable successful performance, giving a purpose for all the athleticism. Furthermore, in more individualized athletic competitions, standards are used to help athletes measure and progress towards peak performance. In high jumping or pole vaulting, for instance, if there were no bar or standard to jump over it would be very difficult to measure one's progress or success. An athlete could try jumping or vaulting themselves as high as they can over and over, but by having a bar to measure themselves against and systematically work to overcome, then raise, and overcome again, they have a structure that helps them to push themselves and excel. The same can be said of education. Like the sports team example, if one gets rid of standards or the aim of education there is little point to the teachers, the scholars, the books, and the assignments; and like the track and field example, when a scholar's progress towards an academic standard is broken down into measurable steps, excellence can be better achieved.

But what is the standard of education? Traditionally, the standard of education has simply been human excellence defined by a pursuit of everything true, beautiful, and good. In our modern moment of education, however, the standard in public education has shifted away from

the traditional objective, setting up college and career readiness as the aim of academic achievement. This shift in the academic standard is not without its consequences and it is important to compare these two different standard systems and their effect on academic excellence.

First to be considered is the traditional standard of education. In his book *The Great Conversation*, Robert Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago and dean of Yale law school, explains that the traditional aim of an academic education, as opposed to vocational training, is “human excellence, both private and public.”³³ This philosophy of education “regards man as an end, not as a means; and it regards the ends of life, and not the means to it.” Of course, such an educational system that regards human excellence and the ends or purpose of human life as its aim must necessarily grapple with hard questions regarding what it means to be an excellent human and what the purpose of life is. The traditional view of education does not shy away from these questions. It is so bold as to assert that an excellent human is one who lives an intellectually true, aesthetically beautiful, and morally good life by developing the traditional virtues that have been shared by religions and cultures throughout history, and that the purpose of life is to live in an intellectually and morally sincere manner. For this reason, traditional or liberal education “is the education of free men” as it furnishes them with the necessary attributes and aims a human needs to live a meaningful and liberating life.³⁴ When anyone learns anything that increases their understanding of what is true, beautiful, or good and strives for excellence in its application, they are working towards academic and human excellence.

As one pursues human excellence, which is a lofty but abstract standard, it is necessary to ground it or break it down into more understandable and measurable steps. For instance, excellence in writing occurs when a person uses words to say something true, good, and beautiful that they love and believe. But in order to achieve this goal, one must first learn to spell words correctly and follow the conventions of grammar, then combine words into sentences and paragraphs that logically develop a line of sound reasoning, and then use rhetorical and figurative devices to render the sentences and paragraphs aesthetically pleasing. Proper grammar, sound logic, and persuasive rhetoric are definitely lowercase truths, goods, and beauties, but they

³³ Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation*, 1952, accessed April 22, 2021 http://blogs.britannica.com/wp-content/pdf/The_Great_Conversation.pdf. (49)

³⁴ Hutchins, 49.

are necessary steps in the process of achieving excellence in writing uppercase Truths, Goods, and Beauties. Breaking down lofty standards to more specific and achievable goals helps people master them incrementally instead of being overwhelmed by the grand scope of them all at once.

However, in dividing and subdividing the aim of education into more manageable lowercase versions of the traditional standards, one must never divorce them from the lofty goal of human excellence. The uppercase Truths, Goods, and Beauties are what the scholar and mentor must be focused on continually and explicitly throughout the learning process; for they are the inspiring, noble ideas that make the tedium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric bearable and are the ideas worthy of our affection.

In our modern society, government and culture have taken a decidedly secular turn where questions of human excellence and the purpose of life have become somewhat taboo topics. This reluctance to take a stance or even grapple with traditional aims of education is perhaps a result of wanting to avoid contention in what is increasingly a multicultural and global society, leading educators to focus on the least controversial common denominators that unify humans—i.e. economic needs and desires. For this reason, it seems, the U.S. Department of Education and subsequent state departments of education have issued and adopted “common core standards” that reflect the shared social goals of education’s least controversial end: college and career readiness.

According to the federal Common Core website for English Language Arts, the modern set of K-12 academic standards issued in 2010 are explicitly “designed to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life.”³⁵ Common Core claims, “the skills and knowledge captured in the ELA/literacy standards are designed to prepare students for life outside the classroom,” and lays “out a vision of what it means to be a literate person who is prepared for success in the 21st century.” Similarly, on the state level, California’s modified version of the federal Common Core standards states that the standards fulfill “California’s vision that all students graduate from our public school system as lifelong learners and have the skills and knowledge necessary to be ready to assume their position in our global economy.”³⁶ Throughout both federal and state standards, the repeated purpose of developing knowledge or skill is to build “a foundation for

³⁵ “Common Core: English Language Arts,” accessed April 26, 2021. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>.

³⁶ “California Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts,” California State Board of Education, last modified March 2013, <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>. V.

college and career readiness,” a phrase repeated at least ten times throughout the document.³⁷ To accomplish this, Common Core has established general standards in English language arts and mathematics with these standards divided and subdivided into benchmarked standards appropriate for each grade level. With an average of thirty-one standards in math and seventy-five in ELA per grade level identifying the fundamentals to be mastered at each level, teachers and students have clear objectives to work towards throughout the year.

With these descriptions of two educational standards, it is important to consider what traditional and modern aims of education share in common and how they differ. To begin with, both share the goal of helping students become successful lifelong learners who can work productively and adapt to the difficulties of life. Traditional standards of academic excellence do not aim merely at making young people into contemplative Junius Maltbys, too busy with the things of the mind to do good work materially. “The liberally educated man is at home in the world of ideas and in the world of practical affairs,” Hutchins asserts, “because he understands the relation of the two.”³⁸ However, the purpose of knowledge and skill development seems to be the place of departure of traditional and modern aims. Contrary to Hutchins’ traditional view that human excellence is the good and proper end of education, modern education, with its preoccupation with college and career readiness, regards human excellence as a means to the end of material success. Where the traditional aim is to make students become lifelong learners in order to become true, good, and beautiful people, the aim of the modern educational standard is to develop lifelong learners merely to be effective and productive workers. To set up a person’s practical work and role in a global economy as the academic standard of education inappropriately narrows and lowers the purpose of education, thereby narrowing and lowering human purpose. It sends the explicit message that the purpose of an education is to work and produce, and the implicit message that human beings are merely material beings interested in material things. It suggests that the love of learning is derived from the love of earning, and relies on that assumption to inspire students in their studies. Under these standards, one pursues academic excellence in order to eventually receive an excellent salary rather than becoming an excellent human being. In this regard, modern educational standards are fundamentally problematic.

³⁷ California Common Core, 10, 20, 26, 31, 46, 55, 65, 70, 80, 85.

³⁸ Hutchins, 50.

Traditional versus Modern Standards: A False Dilemma?

However, in reading the characterization of traditional versus modern educational standards, one might reasonably object to the sense that they have to choose between the two. Can we not incorporate the best from both worlds, adhering to traditional wisdom of higher human ends while adopting new educational advances relating to the practical, material means of life? The overarching aims of modern standards may take a narrower view of human existence, but are the itemized standards really that far off from traditional ones? What, for instance, would traditional values have against first graders learning to “represent and solve [math] problems involving addition and subtraction” or “reason with [geometrical] shapes and [define] their attributes” or “tell and write time”?³⁹ And what would traditional values object to in having seventh graders learning to “write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence” or “analyze how a drama’s or poem’s form or structure...contributes to its meaning” or “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences from it?”⁴⁰ And is there anything traditionally unorthodox in suggesting eleventh graders read books like *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau or “Fallacy of Success” by G. K. Chesterton?⁴¹ If anything, these itemized standards seem to clarify the traditional standards and centralize them into one coherent document for teachers and scholars to look to in their pursuit of excellence.

Furthermore, even though Common Core does focus explicitly on college and career readiness, there is evidence in the document that suggests life is more than simply a game of getting and spending material goods. For instances, the introduction to California’s Common Core standards suggests that students who meet the standards will “actively seek wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and information texts” and will be able to “understand and enjoy complex works of literature,” suggesting there are some things worth knowing for their own sakes and not simply because they will be practically useful in a career.⁴² In the reading standards for high school, the Common Core standards also note that students

³⁹ “California Common Core State Standards: Math,” Accessed April 27, 2021 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/ccssmathstandarAug2013.pdf>, 15.

⁴⁰ California Common Core, ELA, 56, 47, 71.

⁴¹ California Common Core, ELA, 78.

⁴² California Common Core, ELA, 2.

should “grapple with the works of exceptional craft and thought” because “such works offer profound insights into the human condition and serve as models for students’ own thinking and writing...[which enables] students to gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images...; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts.”⁴³ Though the overarching emphasis may be college and career readiness, there is plenty of language in Common Core that points to the traditional standards of truth, goodness and beauty.

Considering this evidence, it seems that modern and traditional standards may have more in common than not. Where there are shared values and opportunity to unify and improve, I am generally in favor of marriage between the two. Traditional and modern educational proponents have a bad habit of throwing up artificial barriers between the two educational worlds to better distinguish the one from the other and give themselves a competitive advantage in the educational marketplace. We should do our best not to make that mistake here. However, I am hesitant to simply replace Common Core’s mantra of “college and career readiness” with “the true, good, and beautiful,” and adopt all the itemized standards wholesale. I am hesitant because, as with all systemized institutions, once the process of education is reduced to a long list of standards and formulas, it has the potential to drain all the joy from a naturally exciting activity.

Hutchins addresses this very issue when he calls attention to the “internal decay” of liberal education.⁴⁴ In his view, the abandonment of traditional standards of education is due in part to how the teachers teach: when they make the great books and ideas “the private domain of scholars” and reduce them to uninspiring “philological details” and formulaic exercises, they essentially destroy the thing they are meant to preserve and perpetuate. By making themselves the experts of the great books and reducing their disciplines to an overly standardized process, the liberating arts “degenerat[e] into meaningless drill” and what once was a fairly simple activity of reading, writing, and discussing great ideas is turned into an educational hydra of tasks. Hutchins asserts that those who approach education in such a way forget that “interest is essential in education” and are “depriving themselves of the reason for their existence:” to help scholars discover and love truths for themselves.⁴⁵

⁴³ California Common Core, ELA, 46.

⁴⁴ Hutchins, 58.

⁴⁵ Hutchins, 58.

To return to the sports analogy, the reason why people play is usually because they find a real personal pleasure in doing so. Parents do not usually have to force or bribe their children to play basketball or soccer, because playing is its own reward. However, tell the children that basketball or soccer is not about the thrill of chasing balls and scoring points, but about the dozens of rules and techniques they do not know yet and see if they will want to play. Understanding rules and technique will come in time, but if children are not allowed and encouraged to pursue sports or education for its own sake—for the sweet feeling of making the winning shot or sharing an epiphany with a mentor—they will come to see sports and education as miserable and meaningless pursuits. For this reason, sports were originally and strictly amateur activities. In the ancient Greek Olympics there were no professional athletes, only ordinary people who ran, or wrestled, or threw spears for the love of it.⁴⁶ In fact, the word “amateur” literally means in French “one who loves,” being derived from the Latin verb *amare* meaning “to love.”⁴⁷

Today we have largely professionalized sports and education, allowing people to pursue both with the eye to gain materially from them, and as a professional educator, I recognize my own complicity in this problem and do not pretend to have the solution. But inasmuch as I can nurture and develop Junius-like affection for learning in myself and my scholars and avoid the Ivan-like devotion to correct performance merely for materialistic gain, I will strive to do so by aiming explicitly for human excellence and adhering to the simple educational activities of reading, writing, and discussing great ideas.

Conclusion

What is needed in education today is a revitalization of the individual’s love of learning. For if one is able, like Junius Maltby, to develop affection for learning and knowing true and beautiful things, the academic life becomes enjoyable and truly meaningful, which will lead not only to academic correctness but excellence as well. Without this affection, one can achieve academic correctness and the material benefits of being correct, but one will be left, like Ivan Karamazov, with no true sense of meaning or purpose in their knowledge, work, and life. To

⁴⁶ Hugh Nibley, “The Day of the Amateur”, *Brother Brigham Challenges The Saints*, ed. by Don E. Norton and Shirley Ricks, (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1994). 301.

⁴⁷ “Amateur,” Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/amateur>.

rekindle this affection for academic pursuits, it is necessary to make a renewed and sustained emphasis on the traditional educational standard of human excellence while reducing the emphasis on individual, itemized standards. Shifting the pedagogical emphasis from one to the other will lead to true academic excellence because with the itemized standards properly subordinated to the true and inspiring goals of education, people will feel the natural and proper joys inherent in its pursuit. Only then will people recognize that true academic excellence is a matter of the heart and mind and see the dangers inherent in trying to separate the two.

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Contributions to the journal can take many forms, including research essays, book reviews, or creative writing pieces. All submissions should aim simply to explore the 7th Core Value of Modeling What We Teach.

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Articles: Write an essay of 1000-5000 words regarding some aspect of John Adams Academy's 7th Core Value, Modeling What We Teach, using classical texts to inform your analysis. Cite and credit all sources according to *Chicago Manual of Style*, including footnotes and bibliography. If citing sources is not your strength, please contact Ross Garner for assistance.

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MENTOR

JOHN ADAMS ACADEMY FACULTY ACADEMIC JOURNAL

VOLUME V, ISSUE I – SPRING 2021

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