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The Battle of the Gods and the Giants

Joe Sachs

*Dedicated to the memory of
J. Winfree Smith*

The difficulties that confront a reader of Aristotle's *Physics* begin with the title, and it is worth thinking about why. If you picked up for the first time a book that had the word mathematics in the title, and saw that it contained no algebraic equations, you might be surprised but you wouldn't be confused. You know that there is more than one kind of mathematics. You probably learned a lot of perfectly good arithmetic and geometry, perhaps even trigonometry, before you ever had to solve for an unknown. But when you pick up a book that claims to be about physics, and find no algebraic equations in it, you might wonder who is trying to kid you. Physics, after all, is the study of matter and energy, and these are only known through relations like "force equals mass times acceleration," or "the integral of force through distance is one-half the product of the mass and the square of the velocity." I have added nothing whatever to these two statements by saying them in words. I might have saved my breath by saying them in symbols, because the things I am talking about are not translatable into English, or any other language humans speak, but have their whole meaning within algebraic relations. But why should there be diverse kinds of mathematics, but only one thing that has a right to be called physics, and why is physics the narrower of the two?

These are not questions about how we use words, but about what we believe knowledge is, and what activities we recognize as instances of knowing. In the second Book of the *Physics*, just as also in the second Book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle has to explain why he is not going

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to treat his subject mathematically. His choice is not a matter of taste or preference, but a reasoned conclusion. We will consider his reasons in a few moments, but first let's think a bit about what mathematics is. You probably all know that in Greek *ta mathēmata* are the learnable things, and therefore the understandable things. In some eminent way, mathematics is the place where understanding is achieved and displayed. But what is it that gives mathematics this special position?

Descartes, in Part II of his *Discourse on Method*, gives an answer. Of all those who have ever sought for truth, he says, only the mathematicians have found any that was evident and certain, because only they have constructed methodical demonstrations. Start with truths that are simple and evident, proceed step-by-step with inferences that are certain, and everything knowable, however remote and obscure it may seem to begin with, will eventually be trapped in a net of certainty. Knowledge is built as are houses, streets, and cities, brick by brick, set parallel and at right angles, without choice, without flair, and without risk. How much of this Descartes really means is a question I can't help you with, and this is not going to be a lecture about Descartes. He has an ancient prototype, to whom I will soon turn. But if it is true that it is proof that makes mathematics what it is, what are we to say of the following example? In this century there was a mathematician named Ramanujan, who blossomed in India without benefit of an education. He was considered to have the highest mathematical genius and originality, but to have no idea of proof. How is such a thing possible?

The connection between knowledge and mathematics is artfully presented in Plato's *Theaetetus*. It is with mathematicians that Socrates asks the question, what is knowledge? And with the same art, Plato indicates that the question about knowledge is bound up with the question of what it is that makes mathematics the eminent example of knowledge. The latter question is never formulated in the dialogue, but it is put in front of us dramatically, in the two people, Theaetetus and Theodorus. The student and teacher are both mathematicians, but there is a world of difference between them, and the unanswered question about knowledge is reflected in that difference.

Theodorus once proved (147D) that if a square has an area of three square feet, its side is incommensurable in length with the foot. And he proved the same thing again about the square of five square feet, and again and again and again with six, seven, eight, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, and seventeen. This is a man who

believes in proofs. If one proof is good, twelve are better, because certainty is achieved every time. Theodorus is a man who doesn't like controversy. His strongest expression of feeling in the dialogue comes when Socrates asks him (170D) whether people disagree with all his opinions. He swears an oath to Zeus, quotes Homer, and says that tens of thousands of people always disagree with him, and surround him with troubles that are more than human beings can bear. In fact, in his younger days, Theodorus had turned away from philosophy and toward mathematics (165A). He says it was because philosophic talk consists of bare words, but what does he mean by bare? He shows immediately that he means that they are lacking in certainty; in one of his many refusals to take part in the discussion with Socrates, he says that he fears the shame of being overturned in argument. Mathematics is for Theodorus a haven of certainty. Because it has proofs, it is foolproof knowledge.

But the picture of Theodorus at work proving things contains a contrasting picture of Theaetetus at work seeing something. Dissatisfied with an infinitely repeatable procedure, Theaetetus looks for and finds a single image by which he can see at a glance whether any number of square feet will have a side that is incommensurable with the one-foot length: the image of the oblong rectangle. For any number, one need only see whether it can be produced by an equal times an equal; if it cannot, then as a square it will have a side that is neither any number of feet nor any fraction of a number. Theaetetus's proof of this is not given by Plato, but it appears in Euclid's proposition X, 9. It is roughly this: One shows first that the squares on any two commensurable lines have areas in the same ratio as some pair of square numbers. Then if any square does not have a number of square feet equal to a square number, it cannot be on a side commensurable with the foot. As a proof, it is not very interesting. As an insight it is remarkable, and Socrates calls it "most beautiful" (148A). This might remind us that Theodorus began the dialogue by telling Socrates that Theaetetus is not beautiful, in fear that someone might suspect that he loved him, but is so far from being beautiful that he resembles Socrates. Theodorus fears that the integrity of his judgment would be compromised if what is known as true is also lovable as beautiful.

Once one has noticed the picture Plato has drawn, it is unforgettable. What is the mathematician aiming at? Theodorus has found safety in certainty; Theaetetus stretches out to see the true in the beautiful. In the dialogue, Theaetetus repeatedly fails to see the image of knowing

in his own seeing, but he is miles ahead of Theodorus, who must be prodded, nagged, flattered, shamed, and roused to anger before he finally begins to take the risks that might lead to knowing. Mathematics is an example of knowing worthy of imitation not because it is so safe, but because it sees what it is thinking. In mathematics, things that are present to the intellect and understanding alone are present in such a way that the language of seeing must be used to describe it. I am sure you have all had the experience of learning a proof, but not seeing the conclusion. Was there ever a time after such an experience when you said, "Now I see"? If so, then you also see, now, what I mean. You see that in mathematics, a truth might be something that you not only think, not only understand, but encounter in the act of contemplation.

The answer to the question, what is knowledge?, is never formulated in words in the *Theaetetus*, but it is set in front of us, in pieces, to be seen. We are invited to recognize what knowledge is in such a way that by doing so we must enact it, engage in the act of knowing. Knowing resembles sense-perception in its immediacy, its first-hand, eyewitness character, but it cannot be sense-perception because the objects of the senses are fluctuating things that have no identity. Knowing must belong to some power of the soul other than sensing. But Theaetetus overshoots this other power when he calls it opinion. Socrates shows him that opinion is the residue that remains when thinking stops (190A). But the live thinking that permits the formation of an opinion might be the very activity of the soul that sees the evident intelligible things just as the eyes see the evident visual things. The last part of the dialogue, in which a *logos* is taken to mean an analysis into parts, keeps running into the difficulty that an intelligible whole must already be present as a whole before any analysis can be judged complete or correct. For example, in order to know that two times three is the same as four plus two, we must know six in some way that is independent of both analyses. In this humble example of knowing what six is, we can see the point that Theaetetus kept missing, just as he saw the point that Theodorus kept missing in his endless proofs about squares.

On this way of looking at things, the glory of mathematics is not its procedure, and certainly not its subject matter, but the fact that it makes the experience of contemplation readily available to us. The two authors with whom our math tutorial begins know this well. In I, 47, Euclid sets in front of us a construction in which almost everything that has preceded it is present in one image, and in Book XIII, in a five-fold

image, he achieves the feat of bringing together most of the most striking things that have been shown in the previous twelve books. Ptolemy also constructs the *Almagest* to lead up to a high moment of seeing, in Book XII, in his common, composite diagram, which shows how, on either of two hypotheses, a ratio produces the appearances of planetary retrogradation. It goes without saying that the same picture reveals the causes of planetary progression, so that one image lays bare the intelligible heart of the cosmos. When Ptolemy speaks of contemplating the things that are always as they are, he does not mean bending the neck backwards at night. These three examples of objects of contemplation are not meant to be flashes of intuition, but are prepared for by long and disciplined work. But in them, what thinking has encountered successively in time reassembles itself in simultaneous presence. Active thinking still has to be going on, or the object will collapse, but it is not one-thing-after-another thinking. It is the kind of thinking we intend when we speak not of propositions but of theorems. What is proposed must be judged, and is at best adopted as a secure opinion, but a theorem is beheld. It belongs to the theater of the intellect. In Greek, this contemplative activity is called *theoria*.

The examples I have given may make it seem that the theater of the intellect is the imagination, but this cannot be true. Just as the triangle drawn on the blackboard, on paper, or in the sand, serves only to direct the imagination to make a more adequate image, so the triangle in the imagination serves only to direct the intellect. Triangles are made of lines, and lines are breadthless, so anything we can see in the imagination cannot be the triangle about which we reason. But the picture in the imagination is a stepping-stone to seeing what is invisible. In the diagram of I, 47, the eye can follow an area between parallels to see it reappear in a different place and shape, yet as the same. The eye can do this because it is informed by the intellect that has learned the elementary properties of parallel lines in Book I. But just as the intellect can inform the eye, in this case the eye of imagination, the eye can supply content to the intellect. The lines that form one construction, present all at once, mark out also one complex of interrelated properties of the triangle, on which the gaze of the intellect itself can rest.

But does this mean that anything that is present in imagination can become content for the contemplation of the intellect? Aristotle says no. We might imagine that a human being is bigger than a city, or bigger than the universe, but nothing follows from that about what is true or even what is possible. This argument, at the end of Book III of

the *Physics*, applies directly to the proof Lucretius gives of the infinity of the world. Lucretius asks what would happen to a javelin thrown outward from the supposed edge of the world, and his fantasy supplies an answer. But I could make a counter-fantasy that preserves the finitude of the world: The thrower swings his arm in a mighty arc, and the javelin flies backward toward the earth. The imagination is compatible with two pictures that are not compatible with each other. Either one can provide content for an opinion, but contemplation can only be directed at what is true. So there are things in the imagination that cannot become present in any way in the intellect.

But suppose we ask the opposite question. Can everything that is in the intellect become present in imagination? It would seem that the highest, imageless kind of thinking must go beyond what the imagination is capable of, but Aristotle does not agree. In Book III, Chapter 8, of *De Anima*, Aristotle makes the surprising claims that whenever the intellect contemplates, it also beholds some image, and that, though the primary objects of the intellect are not themselves imaginable, they always have images. To understand what Aristotle is saying, one must distinguish the immediacy of contemplation from the successive making of connections. The kind of step-by-step thinking that we ordinarily do is obviously possible without images; we think, if all A is B, and all B is C, then all A must be C, and the necessity of the conclusion is only obscured by images. This kind of thinking is called *dianoia* in Greek, and proceeds by assertions and denials, which Aristotle explicitly rules out in the passage we are considering. It is only *nous*, the contemplative intellect, that is guaranteed to be imbedded in images.

But the necessity that every object of intellect have an image must have some cause. What can it be? I am sure that some of you are there ahead of me. After all, everyone knows that Aristotle rejected Plato's belief in separate forms, and taught that the universals that the intellect deals with are produced by the act of abstraction. If the universals came out of the sensible particulars in the first place, then the images of those particulars would also be images of the corresponding abstractions. There is only one problem with this solution. Like most of the things that everyone knows about Aristotle, this one is not true. It is not even close. It is so spectacularly wrong that it blocks the understanding of anything Aristotle thought. It is not a tenable doctrine in the first place, as I will try to show. But worse than that, the belief that Aristotle held such a view makes the *Physics* a closed book, and that in turn deprives us of the most powerful alternative we might consider to the physics

we are accustomed to. The idea of abstraction, as we use it and as we tend to impose it on Aristotle, abolishes the idea of nature.

What, then, do we mean by abstraction? On the first day of your freshman math tutorial, when you or someone else said that points and lines are abstractions, what did you or she or he mean? In your Plato seminars, when people called justice and beauty abstractions, what did they mean? We do not need to examine the immense and diverse medieval and modern philosophic literature about the topic to be sure of certain things. An abstraction is a second-class citizen in the realm of beings. The first-class citizen is whatever is not abstract but concrete. And what is concrete? Anything we can hold or touch is undeniable, genuine, and concrete. In Plato's *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger compares certain people to the mythical giants who tried to pull everything down to the earth (246A-B). These are people who aggressively insist that what is is always a body; when anyone says otherwise, they are contemptuous and won't listen. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates has called them the uninitiated, who believe that there is nothing except what they can clench in their hands (155E), but the word meaning uninitiated also means unsealed, leaky, or unsound, and suggests that the clenched fists of these hard-headed realists are really sieves, letting all sorts of things slip through. Socrates introduces these people as those who have not experienced wonder, and the Stranger places them among those whose way of talking is vague. They are comic characters, rigid in the way they hold their opinions but vague in the content of them, grasping things tightly while being slips through their fingers. Who are they? As Socrates tells Glaucon of the people in another strange image, they are like us.

I suspect that there is one of these giants in every one of us, who is uncomfortable with the possibility that anything invisible or intangible could be anything at all. But it is so obvious that such things must somehow be something, that we take the shortest route to make ourselves comfortable again and call them abstractions. We make them up, and they are only in the mind. But to be so appealing to us, the word abstract must mean a little something, and our other uses of the verb mean things like to boil down, to remove, to extract. So here, in two sentences, we have already found a self-contradiction. Abstraction was supposed to make the objects of thought unmysterious by producing them. But whatever the process of abstraction is, it cannot have any product that is not already present beforehand. If we are abstracting from tangible bodies, then they must in the first place be

made, in part, out of objects of thought. This is what I meant by saying that our usual idea of abstraction is not tenable. It makes the thinkable things unmysterious only by doing just the opposite to the visible things. It ends up claiming that our eyes see the invisible and our hands hold the intangible, because it tells us that when we think one of those invisible and intangible things, we have extracted it out of a body like a tooth. The idea of abstraction answers no question, but only goes around in a circle and gets dizzy. Anything it gives us, we already have; anything we don't already have, it can't give us.

So what about the well-known fact that Aristotle said the forms are only abstractions? The Greek word *aphairstes*, which is translated as abstraction, is the ordinary word for subtraction. It is used a few times in the *Physics*, and only in this ordinary sense. But the word does have our modern sense as well, and this is usually regarded as Aristotle's invention. This seems to me to be unlikely. I am aware of three places where Aristotle speaks of certain ideas as abstractions, and in two of the three he calls them the so-called abstractions. This use of the word is rare in Aristotle's works, and never, I repeat never, refers to anything but the objects of mathematics. In the *Metaphysics* (1061a28ff.), Aristotle says that what the mathematician does is peel away (*periairein*) all the sensory attributes of things, and contemplate the quantities that remain. In *De Anima* he says that the intellect thinks these so-called abstractions, such as straightness, as separated things, even though they are not separated (429b18-19, 431b16-18). In the *Posterior Analytics* he tells us what faculty these so-called abstractions actually depend on (81a40-b9), and I will return to this in a moment. In the *Physics*, Aristotle leaves out the word abstract, and simply uses the more revealing word separated.

In Book II, Chapter 2, of the *Physics*, Aristotle says that the mathematician treats as separate what is not separate. This does not make his conclusions false. In fact, as Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics* (1078a21-23), it is the best way to study anything. But they are not conclusions about nature. By separating the attributes of quantity and position from everything else, the mathematician loses nature, for three reasons. He leaves behind motion, material, and ends. Now you may not mind the loss of ends, and you may count it a gain to set aside the effects of material, such as friction, but the claim that mathematical abstraction gets rid of motion may seem puzzling. For Aristotle, though, this is the most emphatic reason for the unsuitability of a mathematical approach to nature. What does he mean?

First of all, Aristotle does not banish mathematics from physics when it has something to offer. Optics, for example, can recombine what it has separated, using the mathematical line only as a temporary detour toward understanding a natural path. And several important arguments throughout the *Physics* are entirely about ratios. And the most important of the branches of mathematics that Aristotle says surely belong to physics as well is astronomy, in which the whole point is to consider motions. But within mathematics, only one kind of motion is possible: change of position in a neutral, homogeneous, unlimited medium. We call it motion in space. According to Aristotle, such a thing never takes place in nature and never could.

One might be tempted to think that pure spatial motion does not occur in the world, just because it is pure. The paths things follow are not exactly straight lines or parabolas, and the things that move are not points or spheres, but still, behind all the qualifications and complexities, there is something clear and simple that we can focus our attention on. Descartes says that the mathematician knows motion better than anyone else (*Le Monde*, Ch. 7). Galileo tells us that the world is a book, written in mathematical characters; if we know how to read, we need not stare stupidly at marks on a page, but can grasp the meaning within (*The Assayer*). And most wonderfully of all, Newton says that everyone knows what time, space, and motion are, but the vulgar—that's us—have a prejudice that such things bear some relation to sensible bodies (*Principia*, scholium to definitions). These thinkers do not describe the world mathematically, they describe mathematics and say that it is the world. As their heirs, we now have not only the vulgar prejudices they attack: we have along with them a whole new array of sophisticated prejudices, at the center of which is the belief that we live and move in space.

The idea of space is so firmly embedded in our thinking that it is hard to see that there is any alternative to it. According to Aristotle, though, space is an idea that arises only by self-deception. Since bodies are extended, we can think of the extension without at the same time thinking of the bodies (211b16-19, 212b25-27). This is the separation or abstraction characteristic of mathematics, and Aristotle has no quarrel with it. But in order to get from mathematical extension to the idea of space, we have to pretend that what we abstracted was in the first place present in the world. We experience bodies, separate their extension from them, imagine it as space, and declare that it is the world. Now that we have invented space, we are free to put things into it, in our

imaginations, and set them moving along any path, at any speed that we please. Once we have replaced the world we live in with this invented world of space, this is in fact the only kind of motion possible, and we are apt to think that it really is all that motion could be.

This is the fork in the road. If we can set this idea of motion in space aside for a while, we can enter Aristotle's *Physics*. If we cannot, we might as well set the book aside, for the central topic of Aristotle's *Physics* is motion, and he means what he says when he tells us the mathematician must leave motion behind. Change of place is one of the kinds of motion Aristotle considers, but change of place presupposes places, and there are no places in space. Spaces are all alike and are all together infinite. How do I know? I consult my imagination. That ought to give me a clue as to what kind of thing I am talking about. What Lucretius presents as a proof of the infinity of the world is in fact only a proof of the infinity of space, and I know in the same way that no part of space has any power or potency that would make it any more or less appropriate than any other for any inhabitant. But the things we encounter all have places. Trees don't grow in the air, human beings don't breathe in the sea, and stars don't circle underground. When things change place, we can't understand what is going on unless we know what kind of thing is moving, and whether it is going toward, away from, or through a place in which it can remain and sustain itself. The placeless realm of mathematical physics already makes the natural kinds to which things belong invisible. It is a de-natured realm.

But the natures of things are not accessible to us through a simple turning to imagination. If we take Aristotle's road toward nature, on what power of knowing can we rely? I mentioned earlier that Aristotle does not say that we get at universal ideas by abstraction. The most important of those ideas, he says we get at by *epagōgē*. This is usually translated as "induction," but that is misleading. We use that word to refer to the process of generalizing from many examples. In many places, Aristotle says unmistakably that one example is sufficient to give us the universal present in the particular (e.g. *Posterior Analytics* 71a7-9, *Physics* 247b5-7). *Epagōgē* means "coming face-to-face with" something, and it belongs not to the *dianoia*, by which we make connections and figure things out, but to the *nous*, the contemplative intellect. The ultimate aim of the *Physics* is the contemplative knowledge of nature, and the inquiry depends all along on the presence of the contemplative faculty.

Aristotle describes completed knowledge as a contemplative insight into ultimate things, combined with reasoned conclusions from them. His word for this is *epistēmē*, which comes to us through its Latin equivalent as science, and most commentators call the *Physics* a science, the science of moving things. Nothing could be further from the truth. Like all Aristotle's books, the *Physics* ascends toward the ultimate source of the appearances it studies. The ultimate source of natural motion is only uncovered in the last pages of the book. Aristotle calls this order of inquiry dialectical. It begins with experience, seeks to uncover its universal character, and reasons from effects to causes with the aim of bringing into presence that which makes its subject whole. It begins and ends in the faculty of *nous*, and consists in the progressive unfolding of its contemplative activity. If this road toward knowledge sounds familiar to you, there is a good reason. In the *Meno*, Socrates uses the myth or metaphor of recollection to describe how inquiry is possible. In Book VII, Chapter 3, of the *Physics*, Aristotle says straightforwardly that knowledge cannot come into being in us because it has always already been present in us all along. Our thinking becomes knowing when it calms down out of its native disorder. The physics familiar to us does violence to nature, by experiments to be sure, but more deeply and radically by turning natural things into mathematical ones. The act of abstraction cuts nature down to a size we can handle. Aristotle, on the contrary, says that we can let nature remain intact and still come to know it, because we are already in a living relation with it.

We are finally in a position to see why the contemplative intellect always has images available to it. The object of *nous* has a name that will be familiar to you. Aristotle says it is the *eidos*. But he also says that nature is form. The nature of anything comes to it not from its material but from the internal activity that forms it, and it is this same activity that is at work upon the human intellect whenever it contemplates. The content of contemplation is given to it by the activities that are always at work, forming the things in the world. That is why each single object of sense-perception has its universal character immediately present in it. The universal in question is the *eidos* at work, holding it together as the thing that it is. The intellect is present in every act of perception, and the imagination is available to every act of the intellect, because all three faculties are directed at the same being. Aristotle agrees with Plato that the forms of things are not abstract ideas, but are beings. They are not dependent on us, but rather everything

that is is dependent on them.

The great fact, evident everywhere around us, is the continual emergence and re-emergence of things in accordance with kinds. Being is, first and last, living being. That is the meaning of Aristotle's claim that being is *energeia*, being-at-work, and always has the character of *entelecheia*, being-at-work-staying-itself. Everything that exists at all is or is part of some self-maintaining whole. Every living thing lives within the orderly and self-renewing whole that supplies its material needs, and everything that is not living has its nature within this organized cosmos. Does the rain fall so that crops may grow? (Bk. II, ch. 8). Not so that one man's crops may thrive while another man's wheat is spoiled on the threshing floor, but always, over and over, the waters that evaporate in the hot months return to earth in the cold months to sustain the earth not as a region of space but as a place in the cosmos appropriate to the life of plants and animals. When Aristotle says that nature acts for ends, he explains this by saying that the end is the form. Things have natures because they are formed into wholes. The claim is not that these natural wholes *have* purposes but that they *are* purposes. Every being is an end in itself, and the word *telos*, which we translate as end, means completion.

When we try to judge Aristotle's claim that nature acts for ends, we tend to confuse ourselves in two ways. First, we imagine that it must mean something deliberates and has purposes. Second and worse, we begin with our mathematically conceived universe, and can't find anything in it that looks like a directedness toward ends. But Aristotle indicates that it is just because ends are present in nature that a physicist cannot be a mathematician. We have seen that even change of place becomes impossible in mathematical space. But there are three other kinds of motion, from which the mathematician is even more hopelessly cut off, without which activity for the sake of ends would be impossible. Things in the world are born, develop, and grow. Genuine wholes, which are not random heaps, must be able to come into being, take on the qualities appropriate to their natures, and achieve a size at which they are complete. But mathematical objects can at most be combined, separated, and rearranged. If we have first committed ourselves to a view of the world as being extended lumps in a void, there is no way to get wholes or ends back into the world. That means in turn that the question of ends has to come first, before one permits any choice to be made that empties the world of possibilities.

Why are we so likely to adopt the picture of the world that

mathematical physics gives us, before even asking whether it requires us to give anything up? It is surely not a rational procedure to paint ourselves into a corner, and then ask whether there is someplace other than that corner that we really want to be. I think the answer to this question might emerge if we think about causes. The first thing Aristotle says in the *Physics*, which he says repeatedly in many other places as well, is that we do not know something until we know its cause. This may sound strange at first. I want to know one thing, and I am told that knowing it means knowing something else. But if I attach a predicate to a subject, I have at most made judgment or formed an opinion. If I can see through what, or on account of what, the predicate belongs to the subject, that third thing has given my thought a dimension of depth.

But something stranger still happens when the new physics of the seventeenth century takes shape. Galileo tells us that investigating the causes of natural motions would be a waste of time (*Two New Sciences*, NE p.202). Newton makes no hypotheses about the cause of the properties of gravitation, and says they would have no place in his science (*Principia*, general scholium). Descartes, as usual, gives us the clearest view of what is going on. He says that matter has no attributes that are not perfectly known to everyone. "You could not even pretend not to know it," he says. And "you must necessarily conceive of it or you can never imagine anything" (*Le Monde*, Ch. 6). Suddenly the world needs no explanation. Everything in it is pre-explained. To exhibit any of the properties of mathematized matter is to see through it all the way to the bottom, because it is conceived as having no properties other than the ones that are being exhibited.

We have already seen Aristotle's criticism of the idea of space. The extension of body is separated from body, and declared to exist by itself. The corresponding idea of matter depends upon it. It is filled space, the bearer of a few properties that are completely determined when they have been measured. Bodies, which had natures to begin with, were turned first into space and then into masses, and along the way the world became much easier to explain. Aristotle's approach to explanation is to let things be what they are, and inquire into the causes responsible for their being as they are. The alternative approach is to reduce the world to things that are so poor in properties and do so little that no explanation is required. In fact matter, understood as mass, doesn't do anything at all. It is the passive seat of motions that no more belong to it than do any other motions, or than to any other masses.

It is not only Newton's first law, but all three of his laws that say that matter is inert. In his *Opticks*, Newton calls them passive laws of motion that all result from a force of inactivity (Question 31). Aristotle says that being is being-at-work. Newton says that being is being so hard that nothing can cause it to change.

Just as motion in space is not the same as change of place, matter conceived of as inert masses bears no relation to what Aristotle called *bulē* or material. Nothing in the natural world is simply matter, but everything that is belongs to some living thing or to the organized whole of the cosmos. Everything is already formed in some way, and bursting with potency toward activity. Motion is understood by Aristotle always to be the result of the spilling over of the potentialities that belong to the material in any being. The opposite of activity, passivity or inertia, is not present anywhere in Aristotle's account of things. *Dunamis* is nascent activity, striving to emerge, or dormant activity, awaiting its moment in the rhythm of life. From the standpoint of mathematical physics, such potentialities are occult qualities, and are not permitted to exist. The dream of this physics is to give back all the appearances of the world as determined by mere mechanism.

Now the strangest fact is that this mechanistic approach to the world failed, and failed at the very moment that it was fully realized. The three laws of Newton's *Principia* embody and perfect the mechanistic picture of the world, but the *Principia* as a whole shows that the world does not fit into that picture. Masses are not just inert lumps that interact only when they happen to bump, but are sources of a mysterious gravitational pull, and the spaces between masses are not empty but in some way serve as the medium by which this attraction acts at a distance. The conception of matter and space produces a pleasing picture, in which the question, why?, need not ever be asked, but that picture does not account for any event. The inadequacy of the ideas of inert bodies and empty space surfaces again when light is shown to be wave motion, and then to be incapable of having any material medium for the waves to be in. Twentieth-century physics completes the destruction of the ideas that serve as its own foundation, when it shows that every particle of matter must also be an immaterial wave, and every wave must also be a particle. Not only can matter and space not give an account of anything, they cannot even hold on to the determinacy that makes them distinct from one another.

What makes this failure of mechanistic explanation so strange is the fact that its failure doesn't seem to be regarded as a flaw. Mechanism

continues as a dream, and as the guiding vision of an enterprise that keeps marching forward, producing ever more complex mathematical descriptions of events, and giving rise to ever more effective ways of controlling the world. It fails only as knowledge. The trouble is not that the mechanist account is incomplete. One cannot add a power of attraction to an inert mass, or tack a distribution of energies onto empty space. Things have to be conceived in the first place in such a way that they might intelligibly be the bearers of such active states. But the whole point of the ideas of matter and space is that they be devoid of all hidden powers. Many true conclusions might follow from a set of false premisses, and one might be content to live with a certain number of loose ends, but the human desire to know will ultimately have its way.

Some twentieth-century physicists have recognized the need to rethink the way the world is, from the bottom up. One has suggested that the true beings are potencies, of which particles and waves are only appearances (Heisenberg). Another has suggested that the world is a seamless whole, in which nothing exists in isolation (Bohm). A third has even studied Aristotle's definition of motion, in the hope that it might open some way out of the dead end of modern physics (von Weizsäcker). These issues are wide open. All that is agreed is that the physics of Galileo and Newton is "classical," which means untrue, and that current physics has found no way to articulate what it is talking about.

One source of trouble may be that the world cannot be understood from the bottom up. It may be that physicists are looking for the right way to understand points, so that they can put them together and make lines. Everywhere on a line one can find a point, but only if the line is first given as a whole. The central ideas of Aristotle's physics are wholeness and continuity. In the first chapter of Book I, he argues that we have nowhere to begin an inquiry except with the wholes we encounter in experience. The task is not to replace them but to understand them. Throughout the *Physics*, the picture of the world is of living things in a cosmos, as opposed to matter in space. And no genuine whole can be understood by reducing it to its parts. How can it be understood? We have come back to the question of cause.

Aristotle says that causes are of four kinds, and understanding anything requires knowing all four of its causes. But just as with the four kinds of motion, we have lost the meaning of three of the causes, and diminished the fourth beyond recognition. What we call the "efficient" cause makes some sense to us, because it corresponds to

the transferences of motion in a mechanical system. But Aristotle uses no word or phrase that could be translated as "efficient cause." The only cause external to a being that interests him is that which *originates* motion. By efficient cause, we mean some motion earlier in time, that results in another motion by way of a push or a pull. But Aristotle argues at the beginning of Book VIII that there can be no first motion in time, but before any motion some prior one was necessary. These sequences of events are infinite, are causal only in a derivative and incidental way, and explain nothing. But there is another kind of sequence, not of events but of beings, not backward in time but upward in responsibility, that Aristotle says leads from any motion to its origin.

He gives an example that is the same as that of a baseball flying off a bat (256a6-8). The origin of the motion is not the bat, but neither is it the hand or the arm, and it is certainly not the passage of an electron across a neural synapse. Only the human being as a whole can hit a baseball, and he does so as an origin of motion. The pitcher had to throw the ball first, but the batter does not re-act, as dead matter, but has to *act*, as a source with its own integrity, and can hold back from acting. The example illustrates two things that are at the heart of Aristotle's physics. First, the responsibility for any event has a place where it begins. Mechanical events form a homogeneous string of bumps and exchanges, but in the true, non-mathematical world, some events are incidental or instrumental, while others are causal because they are the sources of the rest. And second, the sources of motion are never themselves motions (257b9). Newton's third law says that motions are only caused by motions, but that means that the cause is always exactly the same kind of thing as the effect, and cannot provide an explanation of it. The corresponding principle in Aristotle's account is that where there is a motion, there is a being that is its origin. This means in turn that motion is never an explanation of anything, because it always leads back to something that is what it is not by motion but by activity. Mechanistic explanation starts at the bottom of things with inertia. Aristotelian explanation starts at the top of things with activity, *energeia*, being-at-work.

But being-at-work is what Aristotle says the form is, and the potency, or straining toward being-at-work, is the way he characterizes material. Finally, the end, or *telos*, of a natural thing is so inseparable from its being-at-work that Aristotle fuses the two names into one: *entelecheia*, being-at-work-staying-itself. That is, the three causes other than the external source of motion work in just the same way that it does, except

that they are all internal. The formal, material, and final causes are the what-it-is, of-what-it-is, and completeness-for-the-sake-of-which-it-is, which are responsible not only for motion but for any thing's being at all. If you have been thinking of them as a static blueprint, a heap of inert matter, and a distant, external purpose, you may be excused for wondering why they should be called causes. They are instead three ways of looking at the ceaseless working without which beings would indeed collapse into inertness. They are responsible for the motions that cannot be drawn on a blackboard, the birth, development, and growth to maturity of each being. More important still, the form, material, and end are responsible for the kind of rest into which the mature and complete being settles. This state of rest is not the cessation of motion, but the organization of motion into active equilibrium, the transformation of motion by which it is no longer change but just its opposite, stability.

Aristotelian physics is not about how bodies fall and collide, but how bodies *are*. Mathematical physics tries to look behind the world, to a realm where being is simply given. Aristotle looks *at* the world and sees that in it being is always an achievement. The simplest examples of being as being-at-work are eating and breathing. But beings do not simply survive. All of them are at work in the lives they live, and in which alone they are complete. My dog, for example, lives in and for the chase. I have no sheep for her to herd, and squirrels and cats are not very co-operative, but rubber balls and plastic frisbees are adequate substitutes, because the ever-renewed chase is an end in itself. How do I know this? I think it is by the power of *nous*, applied in an attentive and patient looking in which what is important becomes foreground, and what is incidental recedes into the background. Her *dunamis* is apparent in the tense and concentrated stance characteristic of border collies, her *eidos* is most evident in the swoop, capture, and return, and her *telos* is recognizable in the perfect fusion of desire and satisfaction in the same activity.

There are physicists of an Aristotelian kind around us today. They are called ethologists or animal behaviorists. Their activity seems to me to be contemplative, since a life must take shape and unfold before them. Another kind of biologist seeks to reduce living things to the behavior of DNA molecules, to make their study finally a branch of mathematical physics. But while DNA is certainly part of the material basis of life, it doesn't *explain* anything. Two thousand years or so of breeding were involved in getting my dog her DNA, but only as a

means to an end. All those breeders were looking at dogs at work. No account can begin with DNA. Even blue eyes can only be explained by someone who knows what eyes are and what blue is. Eyes live in the world and blue appears in the light, and no amount of inspection can find them in any molecule. One could imagine Theodorus contentedly working out genetic maps for species he had never seen, but Theaetetus would know something was missing.

We deliberately stupefy ourselves when we first cut off from the living world all traces of wholeness and activity, then declare that they are not present because we cannot find them in the residue. We feel driven to conclude that life is only an offshoot of blind chance and necessity, because we have reduced our field of view to one in which nature cannot enter. The crowning irony is that the matter-and-space explanation at which molecular biology aims has already failed in physics itself. Still worse, many people are groping to recapture an idea of nature, only to be frustrated by a misguided respect for mathematical physics. Respect for living things is not a sentimental attachment, undercut by the way things really are, and the desire to see the natural world less disfigured by human encroachments is not a nostalgic longing for a lost way of life. The idea of natures as active causes is a live alternative to mathematical physics. A first step toward re-opening ourselves to the question of how things are would be to see the mathematical reduction of the world as something that limits and falsifies it. Looking at the world that way reveals a lot of connections that help us manipulate things, but also conceals other things that might be at least equally important to us. Material might have an innate directedness toward certain complete wholes. Motion might be more than rearrangement of positions in a void.

Aristotle's *Physics* could teach us how to keep our eyes open to possibilities. It might even convince us that it is possible to know something without destroying it. Things might be more, not less, than they first appear to be, with an interior depth of activity and an exterior richness of connections, just in being what they are.

But most important of all, Aristotle might open our eyes to what knowing is. It is not a possession, but an activity. It is not a corporate activity of the human race, but yours alone, because no one can do it for you. Mathematics is one of its humbler manifestations, and all knowing is akin to mathematics in the sense that it is achieved when one beholds the way things are, together with its evidence, all at once in living thinking. But knowing is not limited to mathematics, or

dependent on it. And it is not subject to progress, apart from the progression of each person's learning. As contributions to that kind of progress, the most recent books and pronouncements might be the most stale and barren, and Aristotle's *Physics* might have the inexhaustible freshness of nature itself.

Foundations and the *Discourse on Method*

Pamela Kraus

For over three centuries, the *Discourse on Method* has warned readers about the dangers of accepting opinion unreflectively. Descartes directs us to a standpoint, a place from which we can avoid prejudice and seek truth with the hope of some success. This standpoint is commonly understood to be that of certainty, lodged in oneself. Thus Descartes becomes known as a "rationalist," by which is usually meant one for whom certitude in the mind is utterly primary and by whom experience of the world is either neglected or forced to conform to reason. For this we hear him occasionally extolled, but more often disdained or even slightly pitied.

Yet this judgment itself often has the status of unreflective opinion. We are so affected by his revolutionary stance, by the stature of indubitability, and by his dramatic first principle, that we forget to examine the way these things come to be prescribed and adopted. We become so engaged in his story that we examine neither the structure of that story nor what the story reveals about philosophy. You might be tempted to think that I am suggesting we apply to the Cartesian writings Descartes's asserted principle—accept as true only what is clear and evident. But while it is perhaps necessary to do this, it is not what I have in mind. In fact, I do not think we ought simply to adopt this as a working principle for two reasons. First, if used by itself, it obstructs rather than reveals what is before us. And, second, it is not what

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Descartes himself does in the writing. I propose to show this by examining Descartes's rationalism in two of its manifestations: a method that is universal in application, and an indubitable certitude with which one knows one's own existence. I will try as much as possible to confine myself to the *Discourse on Method*, since in that writing, more than in any other of his works, we see the whole of Cartesian philosophy. Because of the constraints of time, I will not address part three, except obliquely. I am also going to omit the theological issue for two reasons: first, because it is not so prominent in the *Discourse* as in the *Meditations*, and, secondly, because the *Discourse* shows best with what resources he goes to face that problem. Only by getting clear about that can you really see what is at stake in the *Meditations*.

In the *Discourse*, Descartes constructs a fable about himself. He tells the story of an intelligent, inquisitive young man who undergoes a very serious intellectual and moral crisis. He has lost confidence both in the learned tradition and in common opinions held most dear in his own time. At a certain point he announces a resolution: "... regarding all the opinions which up to this time I had embraced, I thought I could not do better than endeavor once for all to sweep them completely away, so that they might later be replaced when I had adjusted them to the level of reason" (*Discourse*, part 2). He wants to judge them according to undeniable evidence. The first result of the resolution is the adoption of a method. Other thinkers of his time claimed to have a method, but only he worked out a single method which combined mathematical procedures with a mathematical understanding of certitude and claimed that it was the reliable path to knowledge of all things. As a second result, he takes us with him through a skeptical onslaught, in which he cannot be sure the evidence from his own senses can be trusted. The extremity we are subjected to here intensifies the force of his solution: "I think, therefore I am" is the firm and unshakable first principle of philosophy, better known to us than what is right before our eyes.

Let us pause here and consider these results. We begin with method in part two of the *Discourse*. We commonly notice that the first rule of method lays down a criterion. It prohibits us from accepting anything which is not so clearly and distinctly presented to the mind that it cannot be doubted. The rules that follow apply to the solution of problems—how to divide them, how to ascend from the simplest to the more complex truths. You, of course, will have noticed some similarity

between these rules and the more ample treatment of the same in the early *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. But let us notice two other things. First, these are rules or laws for thinking; they are devised and then they are laid down or legislated. Part two opens with a reflection on perfection, and Descartes selects models for this legislative action: every example of perfection which he considers has to do with law, law as in governance (in Sparta or in God's rule over religion) or as in a plan for construction (architecture or city planning). He concludes his reflections by applying the example of these models to the use of his reason. That is, while avowing that we should be guided by reason alone, he is deciding that reason's own activity ought to imitate art.

To be more emphatic: in none of the models does he understand reason as he presents it in the first rule of method. As we go through the examples, we see that what qualifies them as examples of perfection is not clarity and distinctness, but, rather, autonomy—they are the work of one person—and orderliness or efficiency. For example, he criticizes ancient cities because of their “crooked and irregular” streets: it looks as though chance rather than “the will of men guided by reason” brought them about. And for this reason they are not as perfect as those designed by a single city planner. Seeking knowledge, he concludes, is like planning a structure—decide what you want, then do what most efficiently and effectively produces it.

This brings us to the second thing about method. The reason for adopting method is not that the rules are evident, nor is it evident that we ought adopt them. They are adopted because they fit some goal. Rules have some purpose. That goal for Descartes is scientific discovery or the solution of problems. The method is devised to solve problems in geometry first, and then to be applied to problems in physics. Certitude is chosen as rule one because Descartes judges it to be appropriate, not because he sees its appropriateness clearly and distinctly. He thinks such a criterion allows you to solve problems. Consequently, the rules themselves ultimately rest not on clarity and distinctness, but on the designing power of Descartes himself.

Now let us look briefly at the first principle of philosophy. Part four of the *Discourse* begins with a series of doubts. Why does he raise these doubts? He tells us right away it is in order to discover if “the foundations already laid are firm enough.” What are these “foundations already laid”? We think at first he must mean method itself, especially the first rule. Because we have read the *Meditations* we may assume he is concerned that the first rule is not really reliable. Descartes

moves through a series of doubts, then triumphantly announces the firm and unshakable first principle of philosophy, "I think, therefore I am." It is peculiar, however, that among the things doubted does not occur "the clear and distinctly present to mind," the criterion laid down by rule one. The senses are doubted. Memory is doubted—I could forget a demonstration I once knew or I could be foggy about the steps that led to the conclusion. The ability to make mistakes is acknowledged, as, for example, when I am careless, but clarity and distinctness itself is not doubted. Thus the first principle of philosophy, announced in the first paragraph of part four, does not overcome a weakness or problem within the first rule of method. It is first not because, or merely because, it is certain. In fact, two paragraphs later we are told that we know "I think, therefore I am" is certain because we see it clearly and distinctly, i.e., the criterion of clarity and distinctness underlies the first principle of philosophy. Thus, we wonder what foundation was not secure, and what makes this principle the first principle of philosophy—what does it secure?

We must interrupt here, for a moment, since surely you have recalled Descartes' s assertion at the end of part four: " . . . what I took just now as a rule, namely, that everything we conceive very clearly and very distinctly is true, is assured only for the reason that God is or exists, that he is a perfect being, and that everything in us comes from him." One may be tempted to assume that the first principle eventually does need the kind of foundation I am denying that it needs earlier. But notice how odd is Descartes's procedure. In the *Discourse*, unlike the *Meditations*, we are given no reason to doubt the principle of clarity and distinctness. No threat looms over our reliance on reason. Thus, in this writing, the first principle is secure, and God "solves" a non-problem.

Let me now return to our question and summarize. Certitude has a prominent position among the rules of method not because Descartes sees with certainty that it must be so, or because he prizes certitude for its own sake, but because it fits some purpose, i.e., the method he is seeking or, rather, the answers that such a method makes possible. And indubitability is not the shining, overwhelming reason why the first principle of philosophy is first, or secures the foundations already laid, since the criterion of clarity and distinctness does not seem to have needed foundation. Yet we suspect that method itself needs foundation nevertheless, otherwise why introduce part four at all? Just what does the first principle of philosophy secure? To begin to answer this we

must consider what each of these questions points us to—namely, purpose.

I said earlier that method is a set of rules for seeking knowledge of all things. "Knowledge" means discoveries in the sciences, or, to be more Cartesian, in science, since he thinks all sciences are interconnected. "Science" means for him the study of nature, and "nature" means primarily—as he tells us in *Le monde*, the earliest account of his physics—"not some goddess or any other sort of imaginary power," but matter itself and its qualities (chapter seven). But even here we are pointed away from knowledge simply for its own sake. Descartes envisions something further. Science itself has a purpose beyond itself. We find the most famous formulation of Descartes's ultimate goal in part six of the *Discourse*. That, instead of a "speculative" philosophy, his is a "practical" one, one that will render us "masters and possessors of nature," highlights in memorable Baconian formulation Descartes's conviction that knowledge is good not merely for its own sake, but for its effective power, for its use. It yields us knowledge how fire, water, air, the heavens, etc., behave, how they effect what they effect. This knowledge is beneficial, for we can use it to our own purposes—to make our lives on earth easier and happier. The chief good—chief because it is the essential condition for all others—is health. We need science because we are bodily and because "the mind depends so much on the temperament and disposition of the bodily organs that if it is possible to find some means of making men in general wiser and more skillful than they have been up to now, I believe we must look for it in medicine" (part six).

Health is indispensable for increasing wisdom, thus "health" here means not just absence of sickness. When Descartes speaks about wisdom, rarely in his writings, he means by it knowledge that is useful primarily for conduct: knowledge how we can choose well so we can live well. Thus the health to which he refers includes moral health. Medicine is necessary for moral health because the ability to choose well depends upon our ability to manage our passions. We get a sign of this at the end of part five. Most of the functions once attributed to the soul—life, motion, sensation, imagining, dreaming, passions—are explained wholly corporeally. In the sixth meditation, very shortly after asserting that body and soul are heterogeneous substances, he insists, just as he does in *Discourse* part five, that soul and body are united, since feelings like hunger and thirst are irrefutable signs of it. They signal that we need care or nutrient. Our passions are similar to these

feelings, except that passions like joy and anger are felt as if in the soul, and the soul is then disposed by them to want something. "The feeling of fear moves the soul to want to flee, that of courage to want to fight," Descartes tells us in his writing on the passions (Article 40). What we feel at what moment, and how intensely we feel it is at bottom the result not of habit but of bodiliness. All passions are the effect of corporeal motions. The motions themselves bear no information about good or bad, no judgment or assessment, no opinion; they are merely corporeal effects. The passions that follow on these motions, however, are ultimately motivations or directives felt by us, motivations toward some apparent benefit or away from some apparent harm. Yet they alone do not make us happy. A powerful feeling of anger not only is disturbing to our equanimity as we feel it, but, should we simply be carried away by it, may lead us to harm. Even pleasure is not simply reliable. One has to take the long view.

Descartes sometimes talks about the happy life as a life of tranquillity. He would have us be free from pain, suffering and toil; free from disturbing passions, especially those that gnaw at us. The technical progress he envisions advances this goal. Yet he does not equate tranquillity with absence of passion; happiness is enjoying passion. "The chief use of wisdom," he tells us at the end of the treatise on the passions, "is that we become masters of our passions, and control them with such skill that the evils which they cause are quite bearable, and they even become a source of joy" (Article 212). To learn to enjoy—this is why we need science and method.

These reflections on Descartes's goal point us back to his critique of the tradition in part one of the *Discourse*. The freedom that his goal promises is something we have heretofore failed at, not simply because of our lack of sophistication about machines, but because we have not been taught how to live. Descartes's is a moral goal. The desire for this moral goal is what draws him, what governs his steps all along the way from the beginning. He tells us in the *Discourse* that from his earliest youth he had an extreme desire to "acquire a clear and certain knowledge of all that is useful in life." His desire is that truth be put to some moral advantage: "It was always my extreme desire to learn to distinguish true from false in order to see clearly into my own actions and proceed with confidence in this life" (part one). *This* desire, not the allegiance to mathematical exactness, governs his criticism of the past and present and leads him to legislate rules of method.

Look now at how he approaches the two authorities that have a

claim to be repositories of wisdom, the learned institutions or Schools, and experience. The Schools represent themselves as transmitting knowledge in various disciplines. Only one among the disciplines he thinks can be classified as certain, and that is mathematics. According to Descartes this discipline has been thought to be useless but in fact is not. Its certitude is intact but insufficient. In contrast, knowledge that is supposed to be useful is really useless. He singles out moral writings of the ancients for special mention: they advance often vicious moral precepts on an insecure basis. He then widens his moral critique. Our judgment needs an arena larger than our own way of doing things—thus the profit in studying language and history—yet always it should be attuned to our own conditions and circumstances. We must adopt to our own age what we learn from prior ages. We must measure actions and deeds such as are recorded in histories and fables against a just estimation of our own power to achieve such things. We must not trust an art that neglects what is close at hand and is not fitted to innate or natural abilities.

Descartes's turn to experience, to the "great book of the world," appears promising at first, since to him the opinions of an ordinary person are more likely to be correct than those of the scholar, given an important condition, namely, that the former be judging about some matter of consequence for himself, in which he will feel painful effects from a mistake, and that the latter be speculating about matters of no practical consequence. The implication is that we all of us judge best about our own immediate benefit and harm. Descartes looks to the variety of customs and manners among us. He finds them utterly diverse and assumes that even ordinary persons forfeit their own judgment to these enshrined opinions. Thus, although customary practices and habits rest on no knowledge, they substitute for knowledge of what ought to be done. They substitute, that is, for one's own good judgment.

Notice that the critique of part one of the *Discourse* is an oblique attack. Descartes singles out no philosophic view to refute directly, but, rather, attacks his teachers as epigones: "They are like the ivy that never tries to mount above the trees which give it support," he tells us in part six. But of course he also suggests that ivy hides the tree. When he turns to experience, he addresses himself not to any wise practical decision or salutary belief, but only to the variety of customs and practices that prevail among peoples. Yet in pronouncing that both fail as guides, he wants us to leave behind us what may be genuine in

these sources. To extend his metaphor: he wants us to chop down the tree, even to unearth its stump, in order to get rid of the ivy. His is an appeal not to our reason, nor to our reasonability, not even to a genuine desire to know, much less to certitude, but to our prejudice in favor of ourselves, in favor of our own importance. He is here tacitly employing the principle with which the *Discourse* opens: All of us judge our own share of good sense to be so abundant that we do not want more of it than we assume we have.

The achievement of the goal desired by Descartes requires a turn away from these authorities both in their transmitted and in their original form. He attacks these only in their former guise, but wants us to make conclusions about the latter. Their science is unrelated to our happiness as men; their moral teachings are either erroneous or not fitted to our powers. Our customs and mores may be fitted to us as different peoples, but they do not address us in virtue of what is essential to us all as individual human beings. Descartes bids us look away from these authorities, who in his view claim but surely do not deserve our esteem, to a different authority. This standard must be scientific, stable, and secure, and yet not efface our practical concern. It must not be assented to as something apart from ourselves, something external to us that substitutes for or makes unnecessary our own judgment.

We must note that he turns away not only from Schools and experience, but also from nature itself, at least as nature is exemplified by these two authorities. When he unmask custom to reveal that it is not simply the way things are, Descartes would not have us be driven to mere immersion in our own desires and opinions. Nor would he have us look to some non-human standard. We should not look for nature apart from ourselves, or from our most pressing desires. On the brink of Descartes's turn toward a standard we may hear a Socratic echo. Socrates turned away from a study unrelated to human things and toward the human question. I am in jail, he tells us, not because of blood, sinews, and bone, but because of my desire and choice: I want the good. Were we to ask him how it is that he judges this to be good, he would give no answer save through conversation, through speech and reason with others, and that discussion might appeal to the laws of Athens, or perhaps ultimately to the Good itself, at the terminus of, or even beyond our knowledge. Descartes, however, will not look away from himself, from the natural power of reason united to a natural temperament and disposition. Thus, Descartes's turn is Stoic rather

than Socratic in this respect: he gradually eliminates everything which is not really within his power, and stands firm upon his own judgment. Unlike the Stoic, his judgment is not measured against a natural order superior to and overarching every human and non-human thing. Descartes turns instead to human achievement, the perfection of which is most visible in legislation and building. Whatever his natural powers, left to themselves they do not suffice. They must be employed as an artist employs his powers in order to achieve the philosophic goal. Thus there is a further difference from Stoic autonomy. In its practical bent, Cartesian philosophy does not and cannot determine any permanent boundary between what is and what is not in our power.

Consequently, it is not certitude as clear and distinct presence to mind that requires foundation, but, rather, the legislation that lays down the rules of method altogether. The standard of certitude, along with the rest of the rules of method, is a means chosen by Descartes to effect the goal he seeks, most immediately, as we have seen, the juncture of arithmetic, geometry, and algebra. With this in place, he can make possible the use of algebraic procedures in a science of physics, all with a view to that ultimate goal he promised in part six. As it stands in part two, however, the whole enterprise relies on his desire for such a goal, and on his decision to seek it, i.e., on desire and will. But is this a secure basis? Since neither of these is ordered to a supervening or overarching authority, one asks whether Cartesian philosophy can rest on these two without some deeper foundation. That it cannot is suggested by the following: Since wisdom must acknowledge the dependence of mind on body, and since that dependence is manifest in our desires, is philosophy merely an effect of powerful corporeal motions? Or, on the other hand, why should certitude, which, it could be said, claims our assent independently of any method or of any man's desire, assume a place within a procedure established because of the plans of a single man? Thus the issue of foundations with which part four begins.

"I think, therefore I am" is a proposition that provokes much discussion of many, many issues, especially issues related to its being first principle. What I will suggest here is, obviously, only a start on one of these issues. About it I want to make these points. First, it is unshakably certain. You cannot deny it without contradiction. It illustrates that independence of the world or of bodiliness which is so characteristic a component of Cartesian philosophy that it often gets taken for the whole of that philosophy. I can know that I am even

though I do not know any other thing. I do not need any knowledge, from the world or anywhere, as a condition of knowing this. All I need is that it be present to mind. Hence the autonomy of my knowledge of my own existence. Second, although other propositions may be evident in this way, for example, that those things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, only the first principle is linked to any existent. I may know the common notion about equals I just cited, but I do not know by examining it whether there exist any things at all—at least this is the view of Descartes. Still other propositions may link us to existence, but are not evident. Thus I may think, "M. Descartes is seated before the fire," but I am not certain that there exists either the man or the fire. Only the first principle combines evidence and existence: "I think, I am, I exist." Thirdly, this proposition shows that certitude has a place, that it is not simply free-floating, as in its independence of the world it might appear to be. Note that the existence which I know is not something other or beyond myself. Although independent of what is bodily, as I noted in the first point, it does not point away, but points to oneself. Indeed I do not know my existence as something considered or contemplated, but as something experienced. The place of certitude is first and foremost before an attentive human mind in its very activity of thinking. He wants to show us that the decision to adopt clear and distinct evidence as the test of what is knowable rests on what undeniably belongs to the human mind. The issue of rationalism as a foundation takes us ultimately to the issue of the human mind or soul.

But here, again, the soul cannot be understood merely as reason, as the power to know indubitable truths. Soul is human soul, with passions and appetites, with volitions as well as perceptions. This is not so evident in the *Discourse* as it is in the later *Meditations*. Note that Descartes spends about three paragraphs discussing the soul in the *Discourse*, and nine pages (in the critical edition) discussing the circulation of the blood. In the *Meditations* here is how he describes the soul or thinking thing: "It is a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels" (part two). Thinking somehow includes much more than the grasp of clear and distinct evidence.

The first principle of Cartesian philosophy is a terminus and a beginning. It brings to an end the gradual elimination of everything other than himself, a process begun on page one of the writing, and shows that the artisanship by which he would take up his goal, rests

on an unshakably known soul. But he has not justified the adoption of the goal in the first place, except implicitly. "I think, therefore I am" does not solve the problem of foundation. It points in the direction of a solution, or, I should say, an attempted solution. This solution must be sought in a full teaching about mind or soul, one which provides the needed account of autonomy or freedom. That account would have to relate the autonomous knowing power to an effective free will. Descartes addressed the issue of free will in part four of the *Meditations*, but did not try to explain its relation either to the autonomous knower or to the passions, which have their source in the body. This latter issue he tackled in his last writing, *The Passions of the Soul*, without clear success.

Descartes is not primarily a seeker of rigorous certitude, nor is he merely engaged in a project of "pure enquiry," as one prominent scholar has put it (Bernard Williams, *The Project of Pure Enquiry*). He is driven by a desire to know and to live the best life, a desire that links him to illustrious philosophical predecessors. Unlike virtually all of them, however, he understands the best life to be such that, if it is not available to all, at least it can benefit all in a humanitarian way. Like his predecessors, he thinks the most important questions are those about the human soul, about its desires and passions, powers and abilities, and its perfection. Yet he thinks both soul and body have been gravely misunderstood, and, as a consequence, that humankind has been misguided. He believes that his own philosophy has thought about the human soul, and so about philosophy and about its goal, more completely and more accurately than any before.

These reflections also indicate that philosophy makes its appearance in the *Discourse* not with part four, as we may think, but with the beginning of the work, with part one. Indeed, the whole work is filled with philosophic assertions—about what our knowledge must begin with, about what we seek, about why and how we seek. But all of this is presented in a non-philosophic guise, through an autobiography. This is not simply a concession to the popular audience for which it is intended, but it signifies the new understanding of philosophy which it inaugurates. This philosophy is not only beneficial and acceptable to the general public, but it has put behind it once for all the original impetus in wonder and the original reliance on nature as presented to us in our sensory experience.

Mozart's Tunes and the Comedy of Closure

Wye J. Allanbrook

One can't help being aware of the significance of the date on which we are speaking: after two hundred years a day of death turns into a celebration. Of course the desire on such a day is to avoid speaking trivially or partially—to attempt an all-embracing reading of the music that has been preoccupying us this year. Certainly one doesn't need a bicentennial in order to offer such a reading; others have preceded me in this activity over the past two centuries, and there have always been fads and fancies in Mozart interpretation. When I was first listening to music, Mozart was considered a delicate salon composer who must always yield to the heroic muscularity of Beethoven. But in general taking Mozart seriously seems to have meant taking him tragically—the concept of the “gloomy Mozart,” as Wolfgang Hildesheimer dubbed it in his 1977 biography.¹ In September, 1990, on the eve of this celebratory year, Richard Taruskin wrote a cautionary “kick-off” article in *The New York Times* entitled “Why Mozart Has Become an Icon for Today.” In it he suggested that we are afflicted with an attitude of uncritical sentimentality toward the composer; we have enshrined him as “our foundation stone, our icon, and our pedigree.” He contrasted to this the nineteenth-century literary cult of Mozart, which emphasized instead the composer's “violence, his sensuality, and his power to subvert.” In a section entitled “Deep Meaning?: Disintegra-

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tion and Malaise?" he reviewed the work of recent writers—notably Rose Subotnik, Susan McClary, and this conference's own Neal Zaslaw—who have tried to combat our sentimentality with an updated version of the nineteenth century's subversive Mozart—a reading that discerns in his music the signs of "stylistic, psychological, even social" disintegration. Taruskin closed this article on readings of Mozart's music with a praise of melancholy quoted from the performer-scholar Laurence Dreyfus: "the giant [performers] of our pantheon are great to the extent that they learn to represent the depths of melancholy, and melancholy, as Kant recognized, was a kind of secret key to the sublime."²

Certainly sentimental adoration has always been a strain in our responses to Mozart. But is it not equally naive and uncritical to exalt the dark and the troubled, especially at the expense of the context in which they reside? Melancholy is only one affect among many; when writers of the late eighteenth century praised the effect of *chiaroscuro* they did not see the "clear" as a mere foil for the "obscure," the light as a setting for the shade. Furthermore, Kant speaks of music in connection with the beautiful, as an exemplar of purposive patterning; the sublime, his second preoccupation in *The Critique of Judgment*, seems to be primarily a moral, and not an aesthetic, category, concerned with the philosophical implications of our confrontation with the imposing in nature.³ One must take care when citing Kant in urging the interpretation of the Gloomy Mozart.

It is a curious quirk of the psychology of our fallen nature that when we hear that a reading of a text or art work enshrines that fallen nature we feel better. A flippant remark to be sure, but it admits of translation into deeper terms: George Steiner, in his study of the centrality of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* to the history of modern consciousness, writes of the nature of philosophizing since the nineteenth century:

The major philosophical systems since the French Revolution have been tragic systems. They have metaphorized the theological premiss of the fall of man. . . . To philosophize after Rousseau and Kant, to find a normative, conceptual phrasing for the psychic, social, and historical condition of man, is to think "tragically."⁴

As in philosophy, so in aesthetics, but not always with the profundity of Kant or Heidegger. Our uncritical exaltation of Storm and Stress from a *topos* to a life style is perhaps one result of this profound shift in outlook that occurred in the transition to the nineteenth century. The "heavenly city" of the eighteenth-century philosophers stressed not

the fall of man but the possibility of redemption, and hence was essentially a comic notion. Early discussions of *commedia* as a genre were not concerned with the anatomy of humor; they spelled out the vision of the human estate that comedy by its nature represented. Dante defined a *commedia* as a work that "begins in adversity of a certain sort," but issues in a happy ending; tragedy, on the other hand, is "admirable and placid" at the start, but its end is "foul and horrible."⁵ Looking back to Dante for a gloss on an eighteenth-century composer is not an entirely arbitrary critical activity; as the historian Carl Becker once observed in a series of lectures on the Enlightenment:

There were. . . many differences between Voltaire and St. Thomas, but . . . they had in common. . . the profound conviction that their beliefs could be reasonably demonstrated. . . It may be said of the eighteenth century that it was an age of faith as well as of reason, and of the thirteenth century that it was an age of reason as well as of faith.⁶

The Enlightenment faith was, of course, a faith in universal reason and human perfectability, a faith in the possibility of discovering for society a model of the divine harmony of nature. It is with this faith that our modern impatience lies. The tragic outlook we acquired from the Romantics leads us to admire the loss of this faith as a sign of personal growth; the only politically correct position seems to be Falstaff's *Tutto declina*—"everything always gets worse." Now I am not a political Pollyanna; certainly in this century we are constantly assaulted with evidence supporting that motto. But I do think we are wrong to impose this attitude indiscriminately on previous eras. Becker observed trenchantly of our relation to the *philosophes*:

We agree with them more readily when they are witty and cynical than when they are wholly serious. Their negations rather than their affirmations enable us to treat them as kindred spirits.⁷

In what follows, I propose to see what happens if instead we take their affirmations seriously, no matter how alien the endeavor may seem.

The musical result of the pursuit of the Gloomy Mozart is an agenda that shapes a dangerous misconception of the conventions of the Classic style—a presumption that these conventions have somehow been imposed from without, by the Enlightenment's musical thought police, and that it is intellectual progress to grow away from them, even if in the process the individual becomes divided against himself. This division is forced by critics' convictions that they must distinguish

between Mozart's true voice and his conventional mask, that the authentic Mozart is to be discovered buried under a mound of sedimented conventions. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this search was motivated by psychological or aesthetic rather than by social concerns—the Romantic preference for self-expression over the shared communications of a common musical language. The Romantics exalted the pairing “original and dark” over that of “conventional and sunny.” They ignored the other piano concertos in their admiration for K. 466 in D Minor, and lopped the D-major Epilogue off *Don Giovanni* so that the opera could end in D-minor tragedy (an action, by the way, unfortunately emulated by the Washington Opera in its production of the opera last fall). Otto Jahn, the great nineteenth-century biographer of Mozart, stated baldly in connection with the D-Minor Concerto that “Mozart's compositions in the minor keys are his deepest and most important.”⁸ Only recently has a political or cultural critique of the Enlightenment become part of the search for Mozart's “true voice.” But whether this voice is seen as transcendent, in the Romantic perspective, or undermining, as in recent speculation, the elements presumed to mask it remain the same—tonality (notably the “stranglehold” of the major mode), the impulse to strong closure, and a value that I shall advance in what follows as the *comic variety of the surface*.

Let us look briefly at the contents of the recent critique. Its advocates⁹ see the tonal and formal procedures of the Classic style as rigid conventions imposed by a general “cultural viewpoint,” one that in enshrining the values of rationality and progress stifled individual autonomy.¹⁰ Occasionally, it is supposed, in works like the three late symphonies or the “Dissonant” Quartet,¹¹ Mozart managed to speak authentically despite the dead weight of this convention; he seeded those works with covert suggestions that undermine the illusions of his repressively optimistic society. So-called “sonata form” with its powerful tonal order is presumed to be the vehicle of this repression; these supposed conflicts and rebellions seethe beneath its archetypal and controlling surface.¹² Their vision of the individual's secret struggle for autonomy leads some proponents of this critique to revivify another Romantic shibboleth, one we have just begun to work free of: the notion that every great work of art possesses a deep-seated—underground—unity.¹³

But this strange bifurcation of the composer into cultural conformist and closet rebel¹⁴ stems from a fallacious assumption. To represent as

mere convention the ubiquity of the major mode in Mozart's works and the importance in them of the "sonata principle" is historically inaccurate. In the musical language Mozart inherited from his Baroque predecessors the prevalence of major keys and the so-called "sonata principle" appeared as two striking new tropes. For instance, a glance at Neal Zaslaw's recent book on Mozart's symphonies reveals that of the ninety-eight symphonies attributed to Mozart only five are set in a minor tonality, and two of those are not actually Mozart's compositions!¹⁵ Compare this startling ratio to the look of any list of works by a Baroque composer, where major and minor keys are distributed with relative indifference. As for "sonata form," I would prefer to characterize it as a gradually emerging compositional *process*, a new mode of taking tonality that reinforces dramatic continuity while admitting the new delight in contrast and counterstatement—in *chiaroscuro*, light and shadow. No longer should we devalue the brilliant surface variety of Mozart's instrumental works—the foreground play of musical style and topic across the background of harmonic process—the shifting lights of various kinds.¹⁶ I hesitate to suggest a source for these new tropes, though comic opera and popular dance music come to mind. But their relative novelty argues that they evolved not to repress a new musical impulse but to empower it, not to stifle this pleasure in expressive contrasts, but to guarantee it. Hence the new emphasis on the variety of the comic surface. Unity, says Charles Rosen—in a discussion, significantly enough, of the D-Minor Piano Concerto—unity is a quality that is characteristic of the tragic.¹⁷ The *commedia*, on the other hand, is a *speculum mundi*, a cosmic mirror that presents all species of things in their compelling diversity, and affirms their integration, however provisional at times, not into an organic oneness, but into an overarching communal hierarchy. It is this model, I would argue—the model of the *commedia*—that Mozart's compositional choices suggest.

On this memorial day I would like to celebrate this secular "divine comedy" of Mozart's by bringing to light a compositional habit of his that, while seemingly casual, exemplifies the dominance in his music of the comic mode. I do not offer this analysis in final refutation of the Gloomy Mozart; it would take far more than this paper to root out the ingrained assumption that profundity and melancholia always go hand in hand. And since I do not believe that a fleeting moment of counterpoint or a quirky modulation can be translated into a "life-style" or a "worldview," I am uncomfortable with reading musical

structures symbolically as political or philosophical positions.¹⁸ Hence I do not propose to offer a global counter-reading that views his compositional habits as evidence of Mozart the counterrevolutionary, or Mozart the *philosophe*. But I hope this modest illustration of the composer's ways of working may remind us of the vigor and significance of habits too easily spurned as mere convention, and may suggest the possibility of reintegrating the Gloomy Mozart with the other parts of his soul.

My subject is a *topos* that Mozart used from time to time at moments of closure. It is a humble *topos*, and appropriately so: remember Dante considered the vernacular—the famous *dolce stil nuovo* he appropriated for the *Commedia*—to be the proper language of comedy.¹⁹ I'll call this *topos* the "tune." In my private slang I dub it "the tune that sprouts from the top," but this is admittedly not a technical designation. It does, however, suggest one of the tune's striking features—its frequent descant-like quality: it often appears unexpectedly atop what had seemed to be the leading voice, like those lovely ornamental parts that suddenly soar over the melodic line of a familiar hymn. It also often "emerges from the top" rhythmically: it "rises," as it were, above the previous level of the beat, to mark out a more spacious temporal arch. The tune always consists of new material, not previously exposed. It seems to arise out of a sufficiency, to be an embarrassment of riches. But it always has a function—that of a clausal sign.

It may surprise you that I find the "tune" to be a special occurrence in Mozart's music; I should explain that I do not consider Mozart as generally a composer of tunes, nor indeed of melodies, except in an extended sense. In common parlance the word "melody" and even more the word "tune" suggest something singable, with sustained tones, simple smooth motions, and a sense of shapeliness and closure; when we hear a tune in this ordinary sense in Mozart's music, we know it. For like most late eighteenth-century composers Mozart tended to construct the bulk of his themes from melodic fragments—motives or figures—fragments not in themselves particularly tuneful or melodic, and often suggesting an instrumental rather than a vocal origin for the line they constitute.

A good example of such a tune occurs partway through the last movement of Mozart's "Dissonant" Quartet, K. 465 in C Major. It is a simple theme, characterized by sustained singable notes rather than by quick detachable motives, and with a strong sense of closure (**Ex. 1**). This tune makes book on its very "tunefulness." It seems to spring

from nowhere, and is not plundered to be developed later (although it is *repeated*, intact, at an analogous structural place later in the movement). With its sustained notes and its emphasis on the downbeat of the measure, it rises above the level of the previous rhythmic action; it "puts on the brakes." We are actually being teased by this particular tune, which, it turns out, is serving to stabilize fleetingly and falsely a plateau that is a harmonic over-reaching of the target key. The other tunes I will play are very like this one, but they will not be used to tease; they will all in some penultimate or antepenultimate way be working toward closure for a section, a movement, or, in a finale, for an entire work.

Example 1



I should say something about Mozart's usual modes of closure—how he customarily puts the period to a movement. In the music of the Classic style the sense of a just end—of a close that completes a dynamically balanced process—was important in a way it has not been in music before or since. The repetitive closing formulas at the ends of Beethoven's more grandly arched movements are sometimes the butt of knowing jokes, but, harmonic conservative that he was, he knew they were necessary to balance the radical upheavals he had engineered earlier on. Full closure in a Classic sonata movement comes in two or three waves; if we use closure as a measure, sonata form has two clear sections, a binary whole often followed by a brief coda, or "tailpiece." After establishing a tonal home base, the piece moves to a new harmonic plateau, and closes with a firm cadence, convincing enough that if you didn't remember you had just left home, you might think you could stop here. The task of the rest of the movement is to recast the new material in the old key—to reach a point where it will seem rhetorically convincing to close with this same cadential material, but in the old harmonic place: a musical "end rhyme."

Thus gestures of closure occur twice in this process, initially in the wrong key and ultimately in the right. The materials of these cadential

zones have their own habits. Two types are particularly familiar: one the solid, primarily harmonic closing formula, not elaborating particular thematic material, but exuding rhythmic and harmonic conviction; and the other a reflective, valedictory close, usually involving previous motivic fragments made end-oriented, often over a drone bass.²⁰ Either of these types can provide closure by itself; the first movement of the "Dissonant" Quartet strings them together one after the other (**Ex. 2**).

Example 2

The musical score for Example 2 consists of two systems, each with four staves. The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a tempo marking of 209. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. The second system continues the piece, ending with a final cadence. Dynamics like 'p' (piano) are indicated throughout.

But the close you just heard was not the final one; in this movement Mozart felt the need for a coda. Perhaps he felt that end rhyme alone would not suffice to bring to a close a movement that begins with a famously perplexing slow introduction.²¹ The coda evens the balance on the other end of the movement, and provides my first example of

a closural "tune that sprouts from the top," if I may seed your listening with my original metaphor. The cadence you just heard is undermined by a little bridge that leads into an intense rhythmic and harmonic play on the opening theme. Rising up out of this imbroglio comes a brief new tune, exuberant, articulate, and precise (**Ex. 3**). It adds the culminating comedic touch to a movement that began in purposeful rhythmic amorphousness and harmonic mystification.

Example 3



Sometimes the "tune" plays a more considerable role, providing not just a snatch of articulate melody, but a celebration of arrival that serves as the matter for the end rhyme itself. For example, in the last movement of the String Quartet in G Major, K. 387, a tune provides a welcome release from the tension generated at the outset by the opposition of a dense and labored fugal exposition with a frenetic contredanse—school counterpoint versus country fiddling. The tune—entirely new material—emerges on a new rhythmic level that is a mean between the two previous styles, and provides a spirited close, one so successful it is repeated, with ornaments (**Ex. 4**). It is penultimate; a little valedictory phrase develops out of it to pat the period home.

Example 4



Other tunes emerge like the one in the coda of the "Dissonant Quartet"—out of the blue in the final close; these tunes give the greatest sense of comic superfluity, of the overflow of celebration. One of my favorites occurs in the last movement of the difficult E-Flat-Major String Quartet K. 428, with its somber opening unison. The last movement is,

as is customary, a celebratory contredanse, but a sense of rhythmic tentativeness, of breathiness, marks the opening material (see **Ex. 5**, bottom line). At the close a tune emerges over a repetition of the theme, a true descant that smoothes out the theme's uncertainties, thus removing the last source of topical tension. The tune, a brief eight measures, occurs only once—antepenultimately (**Ex. 5**); but afterward the main theme returns over a drum bass, its restlessness now pinned to ground, so to speak. The last movement of the C-Major Quintet, K. 515, also sprouts much the same sort of tune: again it is penultimate,

Example 5



new, and comically exuberant, and here, to our satisfaction, it is repeated (**Ex. 6**). Finally—my last example from the chamber music—a brilliant tune occurs at the close of the Quintet in E-Flat Major, K. 614, a quintet with its first movement in hunt style. The second section ends

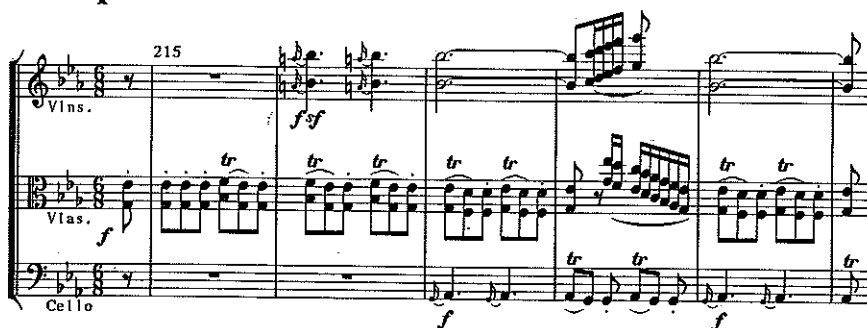
Example 6



inconclusively, with a half-cadence that sets the stage for the tune's bold peroration. Bagpipe grace notes on a higher rhythmic level strike a dense dissonance with the upper parts, one resolved by the first violin's upward flight and then exuberant descent to a cadence (**Ex. 7**). Again the material is new and unexpected, descant-like, and

penultimate. The movement closes with a valedictory comment on the hunt motif.

Example 7



My final example is one to which I have recurred several times in talks during this Mozart year; it has come to represent to me the crux of the issues I have been discussing today, and no wonder, for it has been an iconic piece for Mozartians since the nineteenth century. This is, unsurprisingly, the Piano Concerto in D Minor; its presence has already been felt in this talk.²³ As I said, this concerto was beloved of the Romantics, who had little traffic with the others: presumably its tragic mode expressed the "voice of the true Mozart." Perhaps with this sort of talk in mind, Charles Rosen called it "as much myth as work of art."²⁴ The first movement of the concerto is gripping in the monolithic force of its tragic stance. The finale opens with a turbulent D-minor theme, but its close has always disappointed: it ends in D *major*, with a gay penultimate tune and a sassy trumpet call (**Ex. 8**).²⁵ To proponents of the Gloomy Mozart this ending is a puzzlement: they reject it out of hand or strain to justify it. It will be clear to you by now,

Example 8



I hope, why to me it is not problematical. A good many of Mozart's darkest works in minor tonalities end in the major: the tragic close—the “dying fall”—is not the rule.²⁶ This is not, however, mere convention; the problem is ours for having such a difficult time accepting the comic as a meaningful premise. The happy endings of Mozart's *operas* are clearly a celebration of the social man, of reconciliation, and accommodation to the way things are—witness the D-Major Epilogue of *Don Giovanni*. I submit that Mozart's instrumental music maintains the same confidence in the social equilibrium; in almost every work it mirrors in the *chiaroscuro* of its surface the orderly diversity of humankind, and completes that motion out of adversity toward the happy ending that should grace the universal comic narrative. These cadential tunes may seem marginal, but when they occur they are so unmistakably joyous in their comic spontaneity that they can't help persuading us at least momentarily of the validity of the comic close. Today, two hundred years to the day after Mozart's death, let us celebrate the enduring affirmation of his *commedia per musica*.

Notes

1. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Mozart*, trans. Marion Faber (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982), 47.
2. Richard Taruskin, "Why Mozart Has Become an Icon for Today," *The New York Times*, Sunday, September 9, 1990. The studies to which Taruskin refers are: Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Evidence of a Critical World View in Mozart's Last Three Symphonies," in *Music and Civilization: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, ed. E. Strainchamps, M. R. Maniates, and C. Hatch (New York: Norton, 1984); Susan McClary, "A Musical Dialectic From the Enlightenment: Mozart's *Piano Concerto in G Major*, K. 453, Movement 2," *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986), 129-69; and Neal Zaslaw, *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practice, Reception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Dreyfus's remarks were delivered at a symposium at Berkeley entitled "The Early Music Debate: Ancients, Moderns, Post-moderns," and have since been published in *The Journal of Musicology* X [Winter 1992], 117).
3. The following passage from the *Critique of Judgment* states succinctly Kant's view of the difference between the beautiful and the sublime in this regard: "A feeling for the sublime in nature cannot well be thought without combining therewith a mental disposition which is akin to the moral. And although the immediate pleasure in the beautiful of nature likewise presupposes and cultivates a certain *liberality* in our mental attitude, . . . yet freedom is thus represented as in *play* rather than in that law-directed *occupation* which is the genuine characteristic of human morality, in which reason must exercise dominion over sensibility. But in aesthetical judgments upon the sublime this dominion is represented as exercised by the imagination, regarded as an instrument of reason" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard [New York: Macmillan, 1951], 109).
4. George Steiner, *Antigones: How the Antigone Legend Has Endured In Western Literature, Art, and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 2-3.
5. Dante, Epistola X, to Can Grande della Scala (trans. mine). "For this reason," Dante continues, "certain writers in their salutations are accustomed to say in the place of a greeting, 'May you have a tragic beginning and a comic ending.'"
6. Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), 8.
7. Becker, 30.
8. Otto Jahn, *Life of Mozart* [1891], trans. Pauline D. Townsend, 3 vols. (New York: Cooper Square, 1970), II, 476. Hildesheimer tries to be more evenhanded in his discussions of tonality: he speaks of his distrust of the conventional German fascination with Mozart's *Molleintrübung* ("darkening into the minor"), and criticizes Abert for his notion of Mozart's pessimism (45, 47, 200-201). But he twice admits that he too "automatically prick[s] up [his] ears at Mozart's use of the minor" (84, 163), and finds

the String Quintet in C Major, K. 515, profound because, although composed in the major mode, it mysteriously shares the tragic affect cast by its companion, the Quintet in G Minor, K. 516 (201-202).

9. See n. 2 for the three representative works cited by Taruskin. To this list I would add at least one other: Marshall Brown, "Mozart and After: The Revolution in Musical Consciousness," *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1986), 689-706.
10. For example, as Susan McClary puts it: "If Mozart was to communicate effectively. . . , his music had to shape itself in keeping with those premises. . . . His harmonic strategies ally him with beliefs in rationality, progress, and ceaseless, obsessive striving for goals" (135).
11. This is the piece Marshall Brown uses as his exemplar; see n. 7.
12. Subotnick, for example, sees sonata form as a form of "empty logic," almost non-musical in its representation of rationality; astonishingly, in her opinion it can be "adequately described with scarcely any reference to specific examples" (35). In her opinion the musical content resides beneath the surface of the form, in sensuous conflicts and discords that are Romantic rather than Classic in their nature.
13. That famous proponent of unity, Hans Keller, speaks of unity in the philosophical terms of the nineteenth century: "The oneness, the simultaneity is the inner reality, the Kantian thing-in-itself, the Schopenhauerian will, the Freudian unconscious (which is essentially timeless), while the temporal succession is its necessary appearance, the Schopenhauerian idea, the Freudian conscious. . . . *Variety is the necessary means of expressing a unity*" (Hans Keller, "The Chamber Music," in *The Mozart Companion*, ed. H. C. Robbins Landon and Donald Mitchell [New York: Norton, 1969], 116).

To Subotnik the sensuous Romantic elements in Mozart's last three symphonies create a subliminal web of reference across the movements that unites each work in a way that the "rational principles of connection as function" are powerless to achieve (39).

14. For example, Subotnik sees Mozart's nature as split into Classicist and Individual: "Mozart the Classicist crystalized the general stylistic language of eighteenth-century music into a conception of an encompassing, yet particular, universal structure, only to dissolve that structure simultaneously into an expression of individual style" (36).
15. Zaslaw, 545-49.
16. This would seem to be an appropriate moment to give proper credit to the work of Leonard G. Ratner, whose account of modes of expression in Classic music has irrevocably altered our hearing of it, and who is responsible for reintroducing the word *topos*, or "topic," into the discourse about musical rhetoric (Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* [New York: Schirmer Books, 1980]). Mention should also be made of another important study of this subject, from an overtly semiotic point of view, that has recently appeared: V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing With Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

17. Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York, Norton, 1971), 235.
18. Subotnik does not hesitate to read musical detail as directly symbolic of ideology: she asserts as her central hypothesis that Mozart's last three symphonies "give musical articulation to an incipient shift in philosophical outlook" (30). McClary sees in particular dispositions of soloist versus tutti in K. 453, II, "nothing less...at stake than the foundations of social order" (147), and entertains one reading of the concerto movement as promoting "the kind of argument that leads to politically motivated psychiatric treatment" (151). Zaslaw (543-44) ventures a symbolic reading of the coda to the Finale of the "Jupiter" Symphony: he suggests that the absence from the "final synthesis" of a brief scrap of a galant theme perhaps reminiscent of Salzburg and Leopold's domination could be a metaphor for "Mozart's dreaming of escaping his oppressive past and giving utterance to his fondest hopes and highest aspirations for the future."
19. Dante, Epistola X: "Tragedy and comedy differ likewise in their way of speaking: for tragedy is uplifted and sublime, while comedy is unstudied and humble." And later, on the style of the *Commedia* itself: "It is unstudied and humble, as it is in the diction of the vulgar tongue, in which even women communicate."
20. The drone, used as a closing gesture for its stabilizing effect, often bears with it a pastoral affect; a suggestion of Arcadia at the cadence is certainly appropriate to the comedic close.
21. Its confusions are the cause of at least one of those articles on Mozart's undermining of Enlightenment values, in fact, rather the best one (Brown, "Mozart and After"; cf. n. 9).
22. In the second movement of the C-Major Quintet (the Minuet and Trio) the moment of greatest articulation—and the comic celebration—occurs just off the center of the movement, at the end of the Trio. The Minuet itself is subdued and reflective. It seems to begin *in medias res* on its way to a cadence, with a sinuous, low-profile line. A tiny fragment of a waltz is grafted onto the second member of the phrase (mm. 7-10) to provide closure for a line that might otherwise have closed in anticlimax. The Trio also seems to begin *in medias res*, with a gesture that could appropriately be styled a "bridge passage," a gesture of pure expectation. Articulateness builds slowly. First comes another little waltz phrase, of a piece with that in the Minuet (mm. 57-64), and then finally out bursts the exuberant, regular, and high-pitched tune (mm. 65-72). It is utterly new and broadly arched—the measure becomes the beat. The first violin reaches up to the high E reached only once previously in the movement. This tune closes both the first and second sections of the Trio.
23. In the interests of time I omit one other example from the piano concertos. A charming descant-tune occurs at the end of the last movement of K. 459 in E-Flat Major; it takes off at the close of the cadenza, rising up over the complex of nervous rhythms that constitutes the rondo's main theme. Again just a melodic splinter, its unexpected arrival is *antepenultimate*. It stabilizes the situation for a *penultimate* pedal (mm. 470-86), and an

ultimate chattering cadential dialogue between soloist and orchestra that momentarily seems to be acting out Zeno's paradox—if you keep halving the unit can you cross the distance to your goal? Of course, just as in the paradox, the end has to be willed, and it is a masterly close.

24. Rosen, 228.

25. The treatment of this tune in the Rondo is more complex than a simple reference to it can suggest. It actually serves twice, both as the cadential tune to close major sections of the movement, like the tune in K. 387, IV, and as the coda tune, as in the majority of the other examples. It occurs first in F major (m. 140), to close the first run-through of the Rondo themes, and recurs in D minor in a second major cadential section just before the cadenza (m. 303). In the coda, however—the instance I just played—it is significantly changed. The opening theme, for piano alone just as the movement began, introduces the tune—in fact, is turned into its antecedent phrase, so that the tune seems to enter as its "answer." The tune itself is made more concisely complementary and cadential, its two four-measure lengths with half-cadence transformed into three two-measure units of dominant-tonic alternation. These three units pave the way for the introduction of a new fourth unit, the last word in periodicity—the sassy trumpet call:

shape of original tune: shape of coda tune:

meas. no:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
phrasing:	<u>1 2 3 4</u> <u>1 2 3 4</u>	<u>1 2</u> <u>1 2</u> <u>1 2</u> <u>1 2</u>
figures:	a b b c a b b' d	a b a c a b x! . . .
harmony:	V I V V V I V I	V I V I V I V I

The trumpet call is then detached (the Zeno's paradox effect again) to lead up to the final touch—an unexpected six-measure terraced build-up over the subdominant that provides an extraordinarily powerful "whiplash" effect to the final tonic chords. This brilliantly planned coda orchestrates the comic close in full serenity of purpose; it is difficult to see it, as many have, as an aberration or a torturous compromise.

26. Some minor-key works with finales that close in *minor* are the Piano Sonata in A Minor, K. 310/300d, and the Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 457; the Piano Concerto in C Minor, K. 491; and the two G-Minor Symphonies, the "Little," K. 183, and the "Great," K. 550. Among minor-key works that end in *major* are the Serenade for Wind Instruments in C Minor, K. 388 (rearranged as the String Quintet in C Minor, K. 406), the String Quartet in D Minor, K. 421 (which ends with a *tierce de picardie*), the Piano Quartet in G Minor, K. 478, and the String Quintet in G Minor, K. 516. Note that, with the addition of the D-Minor Piano Concerto, this list of Mozart's important minor-key instrumental works is nearly complete.

Frederick Douglass's Influence on the War Strategy of Abraham Lincoln

Edward C. Smith

The publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 ignited a firestorm of abolitionist fervor that quickly spread throughout the North. The novel achieved its objective (of exposing the dark side of the South) by pulling at the heart strings of the many Americans who knew virtually nothing about plantation life and could not begin to imagine the reality of the daily sufferings of millions of slaves.

Two years later in 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed. Its principle architect was U.S. Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. The act had the immediate effect of replacing the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which, though admitting Missouri into the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free state, excluded slavery from the vast northern regions of the Louisiana Purchase Territory. Now, with the passing of this act, a new formula for dealing with slavery came into being. Through the principle of "popular sovereignty" the people of each territory could choose to be either a free or a slave society. Until citizens of the regions voted on the issue, masters were free to take their slaves into most western territories. As a consequence of this new policy, a northern zone, presumed to be forever free, had become vulnerable to pro-slavery expansion.

From the beginning, most northern politicians saw the Kansas-

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Nebraska Act as a southern conspiracy to exploit the South's powerful presence in the nation's capital. After all, Washington, D.C., was a proud and distinctly southern city. Lest we forget, the Mason-Dixon Line separates Maryland from Pennsylvania. During the 1850s southerners were the most influential leaders in both houses of Congress. Also, the South dominated the White House; before the Civil War, nine of the nation's presidents were southerners, seven of them from the state of Virginia. Additionally, the South's special interests were well represented and protected in the judicial rulings of the southern dominated Supreme Court.

The issues surrounding the Kansas-Nebraska Act gave birth to the all-northern Republican party, which was committed to preventing the spread of slavery into the western territories. One of its earliest members was Abraham Lincoln, who eventually became the head of the new party in Illinois. Through his extensive readings of the writings of the founding fathers, Lincoln had convinced himself that although many of our nation's earliest leaders greatly benefited from the culture of "enlightened leisure" that slavery provided, they nonetheless disliked the institution and were working toward its gradual extinction. He saw evidence of this in the presence of the many free blacks living throughout the South who had achieved their freedom through the benign will of their magnanimous masters. In addition, he was deeply impressed by the fact that the nation's capital, founded in 1791, was co-designed by a brilliant free black inventor and surveyor from Maryland named Benjamin Banneker. Even though his law practice was thriving and he had earned the reputation of being a "lawyer's lawyer," the crises of the 1850s greatly disturbed Lincoln and he felt compelled to stake his political position so that there would be no doubt about where he stood on certain significant matters. Regarding the question of slavery, he became an uncompromising anti-extensionist.

During the 1960s it became fashionable among many civil rights and "black power" activists (and their white allies) to besmirch Lincoln's reputation as "The Great Emancipator." They argued that Lincoln freed the slaves only as a consequence of military necessity and that their liberation was not rooted in his respect for their inherent humanity. Nothing could be further from the truth. I recently discovered a speech he gave in Peoria, Illinois, shortly after joining the Republican party. In it he engaged the southern sympathizers in his audience through a rhetorical dialogue without faulting them for the origin or the continuation of slavery as an intrinsic institution protected by both state and

federal law. But he did appeal to their sense of decency, believing that, like him, they too felt that there was humanity in the Negro. He asked those gathered:

Do you deny this? Then why thirty-four years ago did you join the North in branding the African slave trade as an act of piracy punishable by death? You have amongst you a sneaking individual, of the class of native tyrants, known as the "SLAVEDEALER." He watches your necessities, and crawls up to buy your slave, at a speculating price. If you cannot help it, you sell to him; but if you can help it, you drive him from your door. You despise him utterly. You do not recognize him as a friend, or even as an honest man. Your children must not play with his; they may rollick freely with the little Negroes, but not with the "slavedealer's" children. If you are obliged to deal with him, you try to get through the job without so much as touching him. It is common with you to join hands with the men you meet; but with the "slavedealer" you avoid the ceremony—instinctively shrinking from the snaky contact.

He continues:

Now why is this? Is it not because your human sympathy tells you that the poor Negro has some natural right to himself, that those who deny it, and make mere merchandise of him, deserve kickings, contempt and death?

He concludes his remarks in a very dramatic manner:

Fellow countrymen, Americans south, as well as north, let us turn slavery from its claims of "moral right" back upon its existing legal right . . . and there let it rest in peace. Let us re-adopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it. Let north and south—let all Americans—let all lovers of liberty everywhere—join the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it, as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of the saving.

Lincoln discovered quickly that his appeals fell upon deaf ears. Most southerners who chose to speak out on the issue believed Negro bondage was sanctioned by the Bible and an expression of God's divine will. They contended, even though they saw free, hard-working, articulate, and law-abiding Negroes around them all the time, that somehow blacks were basically subhuman and belonged in chains as naturally as horses in stables and cows in pens.

In 1857 the pro-southern Supreme Court (presided over by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, a slave-owning aristocrat from Maryland)

handed down the infamous Dred Scott decision. The Court decreed that Negroes were inferior people who were not and never had been United States citizens and that the Constitution and Declaration of Independence were exclusively "whites-only" charters that were never intended to apply to them. More importantly as far as Lincoln was concerned, the Court's ruling clearly meant that neither Congress nor a territorial government could outlaw slavery in the national lands, because to do so would violate southern property rights as guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment. Republicans understood that the net effect of the ruling was to legalize slavery in all federal territories from Canada to Mexico.

In 1858, Lincoln and many of his fellow Republicans began to see a treacherous conspiracy at work in America—a plot on the part of southern leaders and their northern Democratic allies to reverse the whole course of modern history, to halt the progress of human liberty as other reactionary forces in the world were attempting to do, namely in Russia and certain areas of western Europe. For Lincoln, the Union had reached a crucible. If the future of a free America was to be saved so as to serve as a noble symbol to the world, it was imperative that he and his party marshal the necessary resources to stay the hand of the conspirators; at all costs slavery must not be allowed to expand onto the frontier.

Only four years after becoming a Republican, Abraham Lincoln challenges Stephen A. Douglas for his senate seat. He now has a forum whereby he can fiercely articulate his anti-slavery sentiments. He tells his audiences how much he hates the peculiar institution: "It is a vast moral evil because it violates America's 'central idea' . . . the idea of equality and the right to rise." Yet Lincoln, ever the pragmatic realist, clearly understood that no matter how evil slavery was, it could not be abolished in those states where it already existed.

There were seven Lincoln-Douglas debates and they all focused on one subject, slavery. Douglas countered Lincoln's posture by labeling him a "black Republican" and a member of a mob of radical abolitionists who were determined to impose their will upon the South. Additionally, Douglas, more so than Lincoln, understood the depth of anti-black feeling in Illinois and he masterfully played to these white racial fears. He warned his audiences, "Do you want Negroes to flood into our state and spread the prairies with black settlements, and eat, sleep, and marry white people? If you do, then vote for Mr. Lincoln and the 'black Republicans.'" Then he would frequently add, "But I

am against Negro citizenship, I want citizenship for whites only. I believe that this government was made by the white man, for the benefit of the white man, to be administered by the white man. I do not question Mr. Lincoln's conscientious belief that the Negro was made his equal, and hence his brother, but for my own part, I do not regard the Negro as my equal, and positively deny that he is my brother or any kin to me whatever."

Lincoln lost decisively to Douglas. His views on slavery were well beyond what the great majority of his fellow Illinoisans could tolerate. He even lost his "home base" constituencies of Springfield and Sangamon County.

In the year following the Great Debates, fire-eating abolitionist John Brown, with a small contingent of loyal supporters, attacked the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to launch a full-scale slave rebellion that would quickly spread throughout the state and into the lower south. The raid was quickly repulsed and Union soldiers, under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee, captured Brown, who was later tried and hanged for treason. For most southerners, John Brown's behavior was all they needed to convince themselves that the northern abolitionists, supported by the all-northern Republican party, wanted only to drown the South in a river of blood. Of course, Lincoln and his colleagues rushed to deny these hysterical accusations and argued that executing Brown was just conduct by the state because his actions were a clear violation of the law.

It is clear that Abraham Lincoln never coveted the presidency. He correctly saw the job for what it was then, purely administrative in nature. The president had clerks and subordinates to supervise, but he had no "peers" with whom to discuss and debate the great issues facing the nation. Lincoln wanted to be a United States senator, to be a part of a forum where the country's greatest orators wrestled against each other as in the days of republican Rome. But his loss to Douglas made him available to pursue the path to the White House and so he was nominated by his party to be its standard-bearer in the 1860 presidential election, with the mandate to campaign on a "free-soil, free-labor" platform. The time had come to see if those advanced social views of his that were soundly rejected in Illinois by those who knew him well, would be accepted by those in other states who knew him not at all.

Lincoln was an energetic and imaginative campaigner. Wherever he spoke he took firm stands that slavery was an evil and must be

contained in the South and yet he constantly reminded audiences that neither he nor his party would interfere with southern slavery; after all, they were restrained by law. The federal government had no constitutional authority (at least in peacetime) to tamper with a *state*-sanctioned institution, particularly one as volatile as slavery.

Most southerners in 1860 did not trust Lincoln to his word. In him they saw John Brown reincarnate and began to brace themselves for the inevitable invasion that many thought would be forthcoming if "the black-hearted abolitionist fanatic," as he was known throughout the South, were chosen to become the nation's sixteenth president.

Lincoln's election on November 6, 1860, sent southern leaders spiraling; their worst fears had come to fruition. Secessionist fire-eaters, who were a militant minority, rapidly rose to positions of prominence. Men like Robert Toombs, Howell Cobb, Robert Barnwell Rhett, and William Lowndes Yancey were eagerly sought after for guidance. "What should the South do?" the people asked. The fire-eaters' answer came in one word: "Secede, secede, secede!"

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina took the initiative, and soon other southern states would follow her lead into secession. While still living in Springfield, Illinois, as president-elect, Lincoln was outraged by this behavior. He could not understand why southerners were so incensed by his election. He had promised them in speech after speech that they had absolutely no reason for fearing him and his administration, that he would not disturb slavery; in fact he promised them that he would protect the institution, as long as it remained where it was and did not expand elsewhere.

In his inaugural address of March 4, 1861, Lincoln presented himself to his southern adversaries as a man of moderation, not a radical revolutionary. He reminded them that he approved the original Thirteenth Amendment, recently passed by Congress (but left unratified by the states because of the dismemberment of the Union), which explicitly guaranteed slavery in the southern states. He endorsed the amendment, not because he liked it (which he did not), but because he felt it to be wholly consistent with Republican party ideology with regard to the containment of slavery in the South. He concluded his speech with the following words:

I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriotic grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all

over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature.

The president was counting on southern unionists to rise to the ramparts and rebuff southern secessionists and return the rebellious states to their rightful places in the Union. His faith was sorely misplaced; moderation was a distinctly minority point of view in the South. On the eve of war radicalism reigned supreme.

South Carolina, the first state to secede, seized the opportunity to draw first fire as well. Its attack on the Union garrison at Fort Sumter on April 12 brought upon the nation the contest of arms that, in spite of the petulant bravado of both sides, no reasonable man or woman in either the North or the South had wanted. Now the president felt duty-bound to raise an army of 75,000 soldiers for ninety days of service to repress this reckless rebellion. To accomplish this task he needed a military leader of unassailable reputation, a commander universally respected for his courage, honor, loyalty, and commitment. Lincoln needed Lee. Had Lee not shown his courage and honor during the Mexican War, had he not shown his loyalty and commitment to the Union in capturing John Brown, preventing his rebellion from spreading? Clearly, Lee was the best man for the job and he lived just across the Potomac River on his 1100-acre estate at Arlington.

In reaction to Lincoln's call to arms, an ordinance of secession was introduced into the Virginia Convention on April 16. The following day Lee received a letter to report to the office of General Winfred Scott. However, Colonel Lee was the first to appear at the home of Francis P. Blair (now the Blair House), whose son, Montgomery Blair, was the attorney for Dred Scott during the litigation of his famous case and was a key presidential confidant.

Lee, a decorated hero of the Mexican War and former superintendent of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, was, in addition, an imposing knight-like scion of the celebrated Lee dynasty. His father, Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee, was one of General George Washington's principal subordinates during the Revolutionary War. Lee's wife, the former Mary Custis, was President Washington's step-great-granddaughter, and two of Lee's ancestors were signers of the Declaration of Independence. Thus everything in Robert E. Lee's long and illustrious military career—amounting to nearly thirty-five years of honorable service—had prepared him for the assumption of such authority.

On April 18, Francis Blair—authorized by President Lincoln to do

so—offered Colonel Lee the command of the new army that was being raised to crush the rebellion. Without hesitation, he responded to Blair: "Though opposed to secession and deprecating war, I could take no part in an invasion of the southern states." Upon leaving Blair, Lee went to see his mentor, General Winfred Scott, a fellow Virginian. Lee shared with the general the essence of his discussion with Blair, and Scott replied: "Lee, you have made the greatest mistake of your life, but I feared it would be so." It is interesting that throughout the former Confederate states, both during the war's immediate aftermath and through today, Lee continues to be lionized as "the South's favorite son," when in fact his loyalty was to Virginia, first and foremost. Indeed, for the duration of the war, he commanded only two battles outside of Virginia, one at Antietam, the other at Gettysburg, and both were pivotal defeats for the Confederacy.

On April 19, Lee learned that Virginia had voted to secede from the Union, but it had not yet decided to join the Confederacy. The following day, Colonel Lee went through the wrenching experience of writing and submitting his letter of resignation to General Scott. On April 24, Virginia consummated the act of secession by entering into a military alliance with the Confederacy which ultimately led to the state's formal incorporation into the Confederate States of America. This occurred exactly one month later, on May 24, when Virginia voters ratified the Ordinance of Secession.

Like the American Revolutionary War, the Civil War was a war of secession. The eleven Confederate states declared their independence from the federal union in a manner similar to the revolt of the thirteen colonies against the authority of England. Thus our victorious and beloved "Stars and Stripes" is as much a *rebel* flag as that of the defeated "Stars and Bars" of the lost cause of the Confederacy.

Interestingly, there are many other connections that link the colonial rebellion to the confederate rebellion. President Jefferson Davis was named in honor of President Thomas Jefferson. The Confederacy's Vice President was Alexander Hamilton Stevens, named in honor of Alexander Hamilton, principal co-author of the *Federalist Papers*. One of the South's leading generals, Joseph E. Johnston, was the grand-nephew of Patrick Henry. The Confederate Ambassador to England was James Mason, the grandson of Virginia statesman George Mason, and for a while the Confederacy's secretary of war was George Randolph, the grandson of Thomas Jefferson. Accompanying Lee at Appomattox Courthouse was Lt. Colonel Charles Marshall, the grand-

son of U. S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, who served in that office from 1801 to 1835, and who was also a colonel in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. There are many other intimate familial and philosophical associations that bind the two wars together.

In securing the services of Lee and the secession of Virginia, the Confederate rebellion attained a much needed "legitimacy," heretofore denied it. After all, four of the nation's first five presidents were slave-owning Virginians: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe. Soon the Confederate capital was moved from Montgomery, Alabama, to Richmond, Virginia, and, because of its strategic location, during the four years of war sixty percent of all the battles were fought on the blood-soaked soil of Virginia.

But Lincoln hardly had the time to bemoan the losses of Lee and Virginia. He now had to concentrate his attention on doing what, for him, was the most unpleasant thing imaginable, to wage war against one's fellow citizens.

At the time of his loss of Lee, Lincoln could not foresee that he would soon be gaining the loyal service of a different kind of "soldier," a warrior who graduated from the "academy" of adversity and who, like the president, had taught himself how to read and write with such eloquence that all who knew him stood in awe of his talents and tenacity. This man was none other than Frederick Douglass, the runaway slave who had become the leading black author and orator of his time. His personal demeanor and towering accomplishments were living proof of the absolute absurdity of the idea of racial inferiority.

The first major battle of the Civil War, the Battle of Bull Run, occurred on July 21, 1861, and was fought in Manassas, Virginia. The battle was a decisive Confederate victory. It served notice to the North that a long and costly war was ahead. It also raised from obscurity a little-known Virginia Military Institute instructor who would become a legend in his own lifetime, General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. The general acquired his nickname because of his performance in the battle and although Jackson would die during the mid-point of the war, in May, 1863, from wounds accidentally inflicted by his own men, he would become the South's second most celebrated soldier, Lee being unquestionably the first.

The following month, Frederick Douglass wrote an editorial entitled "Fighting Rebels With Only One Hand," which appeared in his own

periodical, *Douglass' Monthly*. In the article he chided the Union government for its absurd "white man's war only" posture:

What upon earth is the matter with the American government and people? Do they really covet the world's ridicule as well as their own social and political ruin? What are they thinking about, or don't they condescend to think at all? So, indeed, it would seem from their blindness in dealing with the tremendous issue now upon them.

He continued:

Our President, governors, generals are calling, with almost frantic vehemence, for men; "men! men! men! send us men!" they scream, or the cause of the Union is gone; . . . and yet these very officers, representing the people and government, steadily and persistently refuse to receive the very class of men which have a deeper interest in the defeat and humiliation of the rebels, than all others . . . Why does the government reject the Negro? Is he not a man? Can he not wield a sword, fire a gun, march and countermarch, and obey orders like any other?

He concluded his comments with the following remark:

If persons so humble as we can be allowed to speak to the President of the United States, we should ask him if this dark and terrible hour of the nation's extremity is a time for consulting a mere vulgar and unnatural prejudice? We would tell him that this is no time to fight with one hand, when both are needed; that this is no time to fight only with your white hand, and allow your black hand to remain tied. When the government continues to refuse the aid of colored men, thus alienating them from the national cause, and giving the rebels the advantage of them, it will not deserve better fortunes than it has thus far experienced.

On April 16, 1862, Congress abolished slavery in Washington, D. C. It was a great source of embarrassment, particularly for strident abolitionists, that for the first full year of the war, the nation's capital was a slave-holding community. Frederick Douglass seized the moment and constantly pressed the president to throw the full weight of his authority behind the idea that the war must be expanded beyond Lincoln's limitations. Douglass frequently grew frustrated by the president's cautiousness and in his annual Fourth of July Speech of 1862 he railed against Mr. Lincoln for refusing to take the bold step of saying that the principal war aim was not to reunite the Union but to destroy slavery. In that address he said:

Jefferson Davis is a powerful man, but Jefferson Davis has no such power to blast the hope and break down the strong heart of the nation, as that

possessed in exercised by Abraham Lincoln. We have a right to hold Abraham Lincoln sternly responsible for any disaster or failure attending to the suppression of this rebellion.

Lincoln was quick to react to Douglass's vituperation because he personally felt exactly the same passion but, unlike Douglass, he was an elected politician who was restrained by rules of law and the fear of losing his moderate constituency of supporters if he appeared to be the captive of the fire-eater abolitionist extremist element of his party. Nonetheless, on July 22, 1862, he presented to his cabinet a "secret" draft of a Proclamation of Emancipation.

Secretary of State Seward advised the president to wait for a major battlefield victory before announcing his intention to end slavery. This was very wise advice indeed, because in late August, 1862, the Confederates decisively defeated the Union Army at the Second Battle of Bull Run, paving the way for the South's first counter-invasion of the North, which would culminate at Sharpsburg, Maryland, at the Battle of Antietam.

The Davis Cabinet, and most members of his military high command, knew that the South's spirited resistance to northern assault could last only for so long, absent of foreign assistance. Both England and France, less dependent on southern cotton than the South thought, were being aggressively courted by the Confederacy to come to its aid. And in London and Paris the Union's Ambassador was trying to dissuade such intervention. Interestingly, the Union Ambassador to Great Britain was Charles Francis Adams, son of President John Quincy Adams. And, as stated earlier, his counterpart representing the interests of the Confederacy was Ambassador James Mason, grandson of the pre-eminent Virginia statesman, George Mason.

The South was convinced that a decisive Confederate victory in Maryland, so near Washington, D. C., would not only bring the state (with its many southern sympathizers) into the Confederacy, but would also earn the much-desired European recognition as well. Thus, on the morning of September 17, 1862, the Battle of Antietam began. At dusk the day ended with the final firing of shot and shell and is recorded as the single bloodiest day in all of American history. Nearly 30,000 soldiers fell. Many of the survivors were so badly wounded that they died only a few days later.

Technically speaking, the Battle of Antietam ended in a draw. Lee was able to retreat successfully across the Potomac with his army intact, and his adversary, George B. McClellan, chose not to follow in pursuit.

Had he done so, most students of the battle believe that Lee's army would have been caught and crushed and perhaps the war ended right then and there. As it was, Lee and his men would live on to fight for nearly three more long and bitter years.

As we have seen, President Lincoln was an astute politician, perhaps the finest this nation has ever produced. He saw the Battle of Antietam not as a "draw" but as a Union victory. And now he had the battlefield victory that Seward said he needed in order to free the slaves. Five days after Antietam, Lincoln refined his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and on September 22 he announced that it was designed to enter into effect on January 1, 1863. It soon became obvious that the Preliminary Proclamation contributed to a Republican party disaster at the polls in the fall elections of 1862. Democrats in the North were deeply disturbed by Lincoln's harsh war measures, especially his use of "unwarranted" martial law and military arrests and trials. However, black emancipation meant much more to them as an issue; it was simply too much for them to absorb and thus they campaigned tirelessly against the president and his party. They employed "Negro-phobia" without limit and frightened war-weary northerners with the notion that their region of the country would become saturated with black refugees once the war was over. As a consequence of this racially inflamed campaigning, the North's five most populous states—all of which had voted for Lincoln in 1860—now returned Democratic majorities to Capitol Hill. Although the Republican party retained control of Congress, the future looked bad for the upcoming presidential election in 1864.

Most Republicans, including the president himself, acknowledged that the Preliminary Proclamation was a significant factor in the massive Republican defeats. But Lincoln told a delegation from his home state of Kentucky that he would rather die than retract a single word in his Proclamation. Mr. Lincoln had greatly pleased his principal black ally. In a speech, Frederick Douglass said: "From a genuine abolition view, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country—a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult—he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined." Now the two men were as one and would proceed to fight the war together to its brutal and bitter end. On New Year's Day, 1863, the president officially signed the final Emancipation Proclamation in the White House. He informed everyone in attendance that he was completely confident in what he was doing. "If my name ever goes

into history," he said, "let it be for this act."

Clearly, Frederick Douglass had won his private "war" (which he had been waging from the beginning) against Lincoln's vacillations and trepidations and now he would employ all the resources at his command to help the president win the war against the South.

The Civil War can be divided into distinct halves. The first half, from April 12, 1861, until December 31, 1862, was the "reunification of the Union"; from January 1, 1863, through April 9, 1865, was the "crusade against slavery." Frederick Douglass, more so than any other American white or black, made the second half happen and it was during that period that the war was finally won. Douglass now set about traveling the countryside raising units of black soldiers to be trained to fight in the Union Army. Sumner and other abolitionists had joined in urging Lincoln to see the military reasons (to overcome the staggering Union manpower losses) and the morale reasons (to permit blacks to fight for their own freedom) for using black troops.

Douglass helped to raise the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first black Union unit. Two of his sons served in the regiment, which was commanded by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the son of a wealthy and politically well-connected abolitionist family from Boston. The 54th Massachusetts distinguished itself in the Battle of Fort Wagner on July 18, 1863, which saw the deaths of half the regiment including its courageous young commander. The movie *Glory* does an excellent job in memorializing this event. Earlier in the year, on May 1, 1863, the Confederate Congress declared that black men bearing Union arms and wearing Union uniforms, if captured, would be subject to the law of the state where they were caught and treated as insurrectionary slaves and would be punished by death. The same punishment would also apply to white officers of black units since they would be found guilty for inciting "insurrectionary rebellion." Frederick Douglass was loud in his denunciation of this latest expression of slaveholding barbarism and President Lincoln wanted to counter the Confederate move because he knew how difficult it would be for Douglass to recruit more black soldiers if it appeared that they would not be protected by the Union government. So, on July 30, 1863, Lincoln signed an order requiring that "for every soldier of the United States killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed."

The year 1863 represented a turning point in the war on all fronts. The twin Union victories at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, were devastating losses from which southern forces never

fully recovered. The following year on March 12, 1864, saw the ascendancy of General Ulysses S. Grant to the position of commander in chief of the Union Army in the field. Grant was no military romantic—to him war was hell. Grant's rise to leadership meant that whatever remained of chivalry would soon be replaced by a policy of "victory by any means necessary." Grant inaugurated a war of attrition. He frequently said, "Our side has more bodies than their side has bullets; my arithmetic says we will win." With this type of mentality, the list of casualties continued to grow at even higher rates. Most northerners were losing their morale and their will to win at any cost. "Was it worth it?" many asked. Some responded, "No, not at all." As a consequence, a northern "Peace Party" was formed to challenge Lincoln in the 1864 presidential election. The Peace Party's leader and presidential candidate was Lincoln's disgruntled former field commander, General McClellan.

The president, always a moody man, was easily prone to slip into deep depression and paralytic melancholy. He considered it a very good possibility that he would lose his bid for re-election. If so, what then would happen to his one single personal and professional triumph, the Emancipation Proclamation? Would his successor remove it? Would the war terminate with the Union permanently torn asunder? These grave matters prolonged the president's agony and despair.

Fortunately for Lincoln, Grant was a "fighting" general. Military pomp and pageantry was wasteful to him; war was an ugly business that had to be done quickly and completely, leaving the enemy no opportunity to recover. In May, 1864, Grant began his assault upon Richmond with the Battle of the Virginia Wilderness and the Battle of Cold Harbor fought in early June. By mid-June he was attacking the formidably fortified city of Petersburg, Virginia, the "shield" of the Confederate capital. Lee was a brilliant defensive commander, but he was desperate. He knew Grant would not retreat but would continue, regardless of his manpower losses, to press on and on until final victory was secured. Lee communicated his concerns to President Davis, attempting to prepare his commander in chief for the inevitable.

During the Spring of 1865, no major battles were fought. The whole South was reeling from military defeats, desertion, disease, and the impending sense of doom. The hundreds of thousands of homeless and dispossessed choked the roadways trying to find food, safety, and shelter amidst the scorched ruins of their own communities. Militarily, the Union's final focus was on the capture of Richmond; politically, the

Lincoln administration was beginning to develop policies for dealing with the ravaged and defeated South during the post-war period of Union military occupation and political and social reconstruction.

Grant's siege upon Petersburg, lasting for nearly a year, came to an end on April 2 when the South's last citadel finally fell. The following day, Richmond capitulated. Partly as a testament to Frederick Douglass's influence with the Lincoln administration (and because of their own stalwart sacrifices and service) black soldiers secured from their white officers the special privilege of being the first Union troops to enter the captured Confederate capital. The specific unit that led the entrance was the Fifth Massachusetts Calvary, commanded by Colonel Charles Francis Adams, who was a boyhood friend of Robert Gould Shaw and a member of the famous Adams family that had produced two presidents of the United States. In all, nearly 200,000 blacks served in the Union Army and approximately 40,000 were killed in battle. In only two years of fighting, twenty-eight black warriors won the nation's most coveted military tribute, the Congressional Medal of Honor, and many other black soldiers were awarded other combat decorations.

On April 9, 1865, certainly the most significant moment in all of American history, General Lee surrendered his troops to General Grant. Fortunately for the country, Lee and Grant—who had great respect for each other—were officers and gentlemen of the highest order. They intuitively knew that at Appomattox Courthouse they were truly functioning as the nation in small and thus they hoped that their fellow countrymen would follow their examples. The war of five Aprils had come to a costly end. Approximately 700,000 Americans had died in only four years. The North celebrated in wild jubilation while the South wept and reflected upon the finality of its failure to become an independent nation.

On April 14, while attending a performance of *Our American Cousin* at Washington's Ford's Theatre, the president was shot by an accomplished Shakespearean actor named John Wilkes Booth, who saw himself in the role of Cassius from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Hours before he murdered the president, he said to his fellow conspirators the famous line enunciated by Cassius after Caesar is slain:

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown.

In his perverted line of logic, Booth saw himself as a loyal southern patriot who had saved the nation from a tyrant. How could the man be a tyrant who ended his Second Inaugural Address (delivered only a few weeks before his assassination) with the soothing words, "Let there be malice toward none, charity for all"?

Frederick Douglass would live for thirty years beyond Lincoln's death. During that time he held several important positions in the federal government and in his retirement he was frequently invited to speak on his special relationship with Lincoln and his role in leading the Union to victory. Douglass took pride in saying that although he argued with and occasionally attacked the president, he never once considered abandoning him or his social agenda, even when Mr. Lincoln would articulate the idea, odious to most blacks, of returning them to Africa, feeling that their removal was the only real solution to resolving racial animosity. Of course Douglass would have none of this. He reminded Lincoln in stern language that this was "our country too. We've worked it, we love it, and we fought and died in the tens of thousands to save it."

On April 14, 1876, the eleventh anniversary of the president's assassination, a statue of Abraham Lincoln was unveiled in Lincoln Park in the nation's capital. The memorial's founder was Charlotte Scott, a former slave from Virginia who had donated five dollars from her first earnings as a free citizen to erect a monument to The Great Emancipator. The fitting featured speaker at the ceremony, who lived only a few blocks from the Lincoln Park, was Frederick Douglass. In attendance were President Grant, members of both houses of Congress, Supreme Court justices, and representatives from the diplomatic corps. As usual Douglass gave a stirring speech, recounting his association with the former president. It was a magnificent and masterly tribute. Later that evening, he mentioned to his daughter, Rosetta, that that day was the most important in his life. To be chosen to unveil the statue honoring the man who brought freedom to black people and victory to the Union was an honor Douglass felt he would never equal.

Frederick Douglass died in 1895 at the age of seventy-eight. The following year the U. S. Supreme Court, in its *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, upheld the "Jim Crow," separate but equal laws that had become commonplace throughout the de-militarized, post-reconstruction South. Had Douglass lived another year he would have been deeply pained by the decision but proud of Justice John Harlan's eloquent dissent:

There is no caste here. Our Constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens . . . the law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved.

This controversial ruling would not be reversed until 1954, the centennial year of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, when the Court decided in *Brown v. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*, that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

The *Brown* decision sired the "second" civil war, better known as the Civil Rights Movement, which would complete the task that the first Civil War had begun. The Frederick Douglass of the second civil war was Martin Luther King, a man of vision and valor, who often likened himself to his heroic forerunner. The golden moment of the Civil Rights Movement came when King gave his celebrated "I Have A Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, marking the hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Thus, the work that Frederick Douglass had begun a century before was slowly coming to fruition.

The Seal with Seven Books

Eva T. H. Brann

You have all heard of the book with seven seals. It is spoken of in the Book of the Apocalypse, or, as it is known in English, the Book of Revelation. Its authorship is attributed to St. John the Evangelist, who on Patmos had a vision, which he reports in obedience to a great voice behind him, that said: "What thou seest, write in a book." He turns and sees many amazing sights, but the climax of his vision is this: "And I saw," he says, "in the right hand of him that sat on the throne, a book written within and on the backside sealed with seven seals" (5: 1). And because no man in heaven or on earth can open the book, John weeps until he is told that the Lion of Juda, the Root of David, the Lamb of God, will open it. Unsealed, the book releases seven categories of catastrophe, a multitude of figures signifying a swarm of scourges presaging the redemption of the world. Among these figures are the infamous Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, symbolizing conquest, war, famine, and death. There also spill out seven trumpets, and from the sixth falls a little open book that John is bidden to eat, and "it is sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly." To my mind John's big sealed book is the great Book of History as it happens, while the little open book stands for all the books that are written about history and are pleasant to read but hard to digest.

The John who foresees history in the epoch we call the Christian era is also the apostle who wrote the gospel that begins "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God," the text on which so many sophomores and seniors write their essays. I have been

This is the Dean's Opening Lecture of the current academic year, delivered on the Annapolis campus on August 28, 1992.

paper advisor for enough students to have a sense of the reason for their choice. They hope that John's text will bring together for them the meaningful word, called in Greek *logos*, with the vision of God. (I want to interject here for our freshmen, to whom the first lecture of the year should speak most directly, that *logos*, a word that signifies both the thought and the speech it fathers, a word you will soon talk about in the language tutorial, is to my understanding the most important word in the tradition you are now setting out to study, the tradition of reason.)

This John who writes, sees, and eats books may, I am sorry to tell you, not be our John, the John of St. John's. In the last century people thought he was, because they thought our college had been named after St. John's College in Cambridge, which in turn was named after the Evangelist. In the previous century, however—you should realize that you have come to the third oldest post-Revolutionary school in the country—the students here thought that their John was St. John Chrysostom. Francis Scott Key, an alumnus of the class of 1796, in whose hall you are sitting and who, as you know, was to write the words to the Star-spangled Banner during the War of 1812, received in January 1807 a letter from another early alumnus. It said in part:

I am in great haste, and in no less of our Saint's assistance. . . . *O Sancte Chrysostome! ora pro nobis!* [O Saint Chrysostomos, pray for us.] I have examined the college library and find many valuable books in it. There is an edition of Chrysostom, in twelve volumes, three of which are wanting. . . (Fletcher, 43)

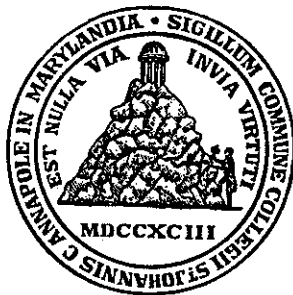
This Chrysostom, a Greek nickname that means "the golden-mouthed," lived in the fourth century. He was a preacher at Antioch and, very unwillingly, Archbishop of Constantinople. He appears to have been a very nice person who was continually in hot water with the establishment because he tried to get the rich to be more charitable—but his congregations loved him. He was a lively, humorous, humane, clear and pleasant speaker, as his name betokens. We still have a couple of volumes of a later edition of his homilies. I took out the volume that contains his commentary on the Gospel of St. John, and found in the second homily a wonderful commentary on a current mania. This mania is to explain or expose an author's opinion by reference to his social origin. John Chrysostom gives this nasty trick a new twist. He begins by chiding those who *won't* pay attention to the Evangelist's social and family origin. This son of Zebedec from Bethesda was an illiterate

barbarian, without learning, a man who fished not even the sea but only a small lake, a man poor and rural. How, John Chrysostom asks, could such a man have known why man exists and why the world exists, what vice is and what virtue is, matters about which even Plato and Pythagoras, who were better than other people, said the most ridiculous things? It is necessary, our saint concludes, to know a man's background to understand just *how little* it matters if only the spirit be upon him. That's a new twist to the current preoccupation.

The preacher then begins a line-by-line commentary on the gospel and raises a question none of my advisees ever thought of; nor had I, until now: Why does the evangelist pass over the Father in his opening line and go immediately to the Son, whom he calls the *Logos* or Word of God? If any students ever ask me again to help them with an essay on the fourth gospel, I shall surely send them to "our" saint, the Goldenmouth.

There is yet one more saint who is a candidate for being our name-saint. This is John the Baptist, who was from the Christian point of view the forerunner of Jesus, but from the Jewish point of view the last of the Jewish minor prophets. The Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote in the first century A. D., describes him as a sort of holy hippy, clothed in patches, eating fruits and nuts, and preaching freedom from all authority but that of God (*The Jewish War*, Appendix after I, 110).

Our connection with this John is established through our seal, the one that will appear on your diplomas four years in the future. This seal was adopted in 1793.



Seal of St. John's College
1793



Masonic Apron. Jacques Chailley,
The Magic Flute, Masonic Opera

Our former librarian, Miss Charlotte Fletcher, has interpreted its symbolism, which had long been identified as a Masonic figure. She did so in an issue of the *St. John's Review* devoted to her researches into the prehistory and early history of St. John's College. And she was able to do so by means of her participation in the St. John's program. She was preparing for the senior seminar, which opens with that novel of novels, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. She came on the description of the initiation into the rites and rituals of Masons that Pierre Bezuhov, the hero of the novel, undergoes. Tolstoy gives a description of secrets revealed to Pierre, a description that precisely corresponds to things seen in our seal (Vol. I, Bk. ii, 3).

You see a mound of stones in seven courses forming steps, leading up to a pillared temple. A person is climbing up the hill, carrying not, as you might think, a cross, but a T square, the symbol of the Masons. The temple is Solomon's Temple, the temple of wisdom. The steps leading to it represent the seven Masonic virtues, first of which is discretion, the keeping of secrets. You can see the theme in a Masonic apron of the nineteenth century as well. It appears that Tolstoy scorns the first virtue of Masonry, since he is evidently exposing the secret rituals of the order.

How did this college come to have a Masonic seal?

On December 16, 1784, the subscription list, the list of contributions necessary to make a beginning, was filled, and the draft of a plan for founding a college on the Western shore, on our side of Chesapeake Bay, was released. This college, together with Washington College on the Eastern shore, was to be the University of Maryland. So you see that you have actually come to the real University of Maryland. The committee that worked out this draft was headed by three clergymen, a Jesuit-trained priest, John Carroll, from the great Catholic Maryland family after which two of your dorms are named, William Smith, an Episcopalian and a Mason, and Patrick Allison, a Presbyterian.

Forgive me for injecting here an irrelevancy charming only to people who like birthdays. December 16 is a *dies mirabilis*, a day of wonders. Beethoven was born on December 16, 1770, Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, and St. John's was born on December 16, 1784. Make of it what you will.

In any case, Miss Fletcher thinks that the following is what happened. On December 16 the college was ready to go. Toward the end of the month George Washington, was here in Annapolis to negotiate

a fairly momentous agreement, the first post-Revolutionary cooperative legislation between two states of the United States, concerning the use of the Potomac. The bill was passed in the State house, across from us, on December 27. A great dinner was given to Washington who had resigned his commission as general before the Continental Congress right in that place a year and four days earlier. (The room in the Statehouse where he performed this, one of the momentous acts of history, when a man chose to be a citizen rather than a king, is still to be seen up on the other hill of Annapolis.) Now December 27 is the feast day of St. John the Evangelist, the patron saint of the Masons. And George Washington, himself a loyal Mason, may have thought of the dinner as a double celebration. When two days later the legislature chartered our school they named it in honor both of the event of having Washington back in town and of the feast day. Add to this circumstance that local freemasons had cooperated with local Catholics—a thing unthinkable in Europe—to establish this, one of the oldest non-sectarian schools in the country. The charter approved that day said:

... Youth of all religious denominations shall be freely and liberally admitted. . . according to their merit. . . without requiring or enforcing any religious or civil test, or urging their attendance upon any particular worship or service, other than what they have been educated in, or have the consent and approbation of their parents and guardians to attend. (*Charter*, Article II)

And that is how we got our Masonic seal of 1793. It is an emblem of the spirit of that year of the Treaty of Paris which ended the successful Revolution, an emblem of the spirit of religious pluralism, of the sects making room for each other. If Miss Fletcher's conjecture is right, the saint of the book of seven seals is ours after all.

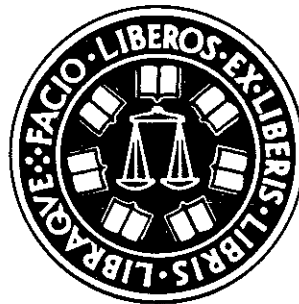
To me it seems, as I have said, that this book of seven seals is the book of history and of the terrors time releases. It is a book of catastrophes. This college, however, was founded at a felicitous moment when there was hope that a new order of centuries, one released from the doom of catastrophic history, could begin on this continent. And in its two hundred years (or three hundred if you include its predecessor, the King William School, with whose stock of professors and furniture St. John's opened) the college has seen many minor miseries but only one enormous catastrophe, the Civil War. This war was the only time when the school was closed and the campus became a military hospital—though even then one lone professor carried on a class, so as not to let the charter lapse.

On this continent history has, then, not been incessantly apocalyptic. But whether the great book of John of the Apocalypse has one or seven seals, it is not a book for reading. It is, as I said, the Book of History, of events, to be lived through, endured. It contains history before the fact. There are, of course, also books of history written after the fact, *ex post facto* history, the little open books. Those books are for reading and for study, but we do not read or study many of them here.

This little school that has endured through much great history, that has inspired four little books of its own, that bears witness to the past above ground, in its Colonial and post-Revolutionary buildings, and below, in its artifact-laden land (of which we may soon be doing an archeological survey)—this historical college harbors a program that excludes the study of history. I hope to tell you—I mean our freshmen—*why* we do not study history by telling you *what* we do study.

Underfoot, let into the same ground that probably contains pieces of pipes smoked by the gentlemen and "mechanicks" who made the Revolution and buttons of the tunics of Union soldiers wounded in the Civil War, there is a seal. You walk over it every day, when you descend the steps from the hill of McDowell Hall to the Francis Scott Key building. It is the reverse of the Johannine book of seven seals. It is a seal of seven books, seven books round about a scale.

This seal is not the historical and legal seal of your college chartered in Maryland, but a new design, which appears in the earliest catalogue of the present Program to which eventually two campuses would play host. It is the catalogue of 1937.



Seal of St. John's College,
1937

(Incidentally, many of you will in time give some thought to the differences between this college as it appears in Annapolis and the same college as it appears in Santa Fe. Well, one difference to consider is that in Annapolis the Program was fitted into the place while in Santa Fe the place was made for the Program.) The seal has a nice jingly saying in Latin: *Facio Liberos ex Liberis Libris Libraque*. No one seems to know what inspired punster made it up. It plays on the Latin root for "free," as in liberty, or in "liberal arts." On the seal the college announces that "I make freemen of children by books and a balance."

You have come to a school of the liberal arts. You will, if all goes well, participate in a liberal education. But to be a school that offers a liberal education is not at all the same as to be a school of the liberal arts. The difference is indicated by this fact: If you ask "What is a liberal education?" the answers lie on a continuous field whose axes are not easy to articulate. But if you ask "What are the liberal arts?" the answer is discrete and definite: There are traditionally seven in number and they are divided into two groups.

I should say that by tradition, a word that will occur often here, I mean that aspect of the past which is actively effective in the present. I also want to make a marginal remark here. In this school the Dean gets to talk to the whole college five times. This will be my third and middle time. I think of it as the central moment. On this occasion I really ought to talk about the arts that guide our curriculum.

The lower group is called the *trivium*, a Latin word meaning "three-way." These arts are traditionally:

Grammar,
Dialectic or Logic,
Rhetoric.

The upper group is called the *quadrivium*, or the *four-way*. These arts are traditionally:

Arithmetic,
Geometry,
Astronomy,
Music.

They are all traditionally studied from books. The first set of books is concerned with the arts by which human beings order and express their minds and hearts, that is, with language. The second set has to do with the arts by which people approach the learnable structures, abstracted or sensuous, of the world. A school that wanted to institute learning by means of the trivium and the quadrivium might well turn

out to have a language class and a mathematics class.

But not all that is to be learned is studied through written books. Just as history may be thought of—I don't know whether rightly—as a book that precedes the written history books, so the people, such as Galileo, who discovered what we now call science—the mathematical study of nature—thought that there was a book of nature whose decipherment preceded the writing of books of physics or biology. To read that material book, that book of reality, one had to look hard at the appearances, or, as the Greeks say, the phenomena. One has to engage in disciplined observation. Now the property that most consistently distinguishes the things of nature from the things of the mind is weight, heaviness—and all weighing involves a pair of scales reaching an equilibrium position. Therefore we have a scale, in Latin called *libra*, in our seal; unlike the scale of justice it is a scale in equilibrium. A school of the liberal arts should add an eighth, not so traditional, activity: science as done in the laboratory, by means of observation and measurement. The state of equilibrium, which a scale must reach if it is to measure anything precisely, and which is a crucial phenomenon in nature, will consequently occupy a large part of your first-year laboratory.

Let me expound, as succinctly as I am able, the subject matter of the seven old arts. But first let me say what is meant by calling them arts: They are skills, forms of know-how we get good at by practice, by doing problems, proofs, translations, analyses, regularly, several times a week. Consequently one understanding of the Latin word for arts, *artes*, was that it came from *arefē*, the Greek word for excellence. Another understanding comes from the fact that the compendia of the liberal arts from late antiquity on were collections—rather dreary ones, incidentally—of terms and rules. Hence the principal medieval writer on the trivium, John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon* (I, 12), suggests that the word *artes* comes from *artant*, meaning “they bind,” because the arts delimit, constrain, discipline us through their rules. These are both fanciful etymologies.

The “liberal” in “liberal arts” was, on the contrary, traditionally and rightly understood to refer to freedom in several ways. In a classical context the liberal arts rescue us from banal pursuits. In a religious context they deliver us from earthly bonds. And in a modern context they set us free from inherited prejudices. What appeals to me as revealing is John of Salisbury's implication that the liberal arts free us by binding us. For that is the nature of education in a nutshell: Education

forges the bonds of freedom. I won't leave that paradoxical epigram just hanging there; I'll return to it at the end, and we can talk about it in the important part of this evening, the question period.

To get back to the contents of the seven bookish arts. As I said, these arts were handed down in compendia that served both as the depositories of all knowledge and as course outlines. Cassiodorus, who wrote in the sixth century A. D. and seems to have been first to use the phrase "the seven liberal arts" (Kimball, 23), wrote one such handbook, which was in use for a millenium. Here is a sketch of the contents of the arts adapted and expanded from his pamphlet:

Grammar includes the kinds of subjects of which your Greek manual is full: the parts of speech and their syntactical features. Every modern language manual derives its terms and topics from this tradition.

Rhetoric includes everything having to do with verbal composition: the parts of a whole, the poetic figures that enhance it, the informal arguments that make it persuasive. These are matters you will take up often in the language tutorial. I might tell you that very recently rhetoric has again become a lively university subject.

Logic includes the study of the categories of knowledge and the types of inference, such as the various sorts of syllogism. These subjects too will turn up in the language tutorial.

Arithmetic deals with the nature of unity and the kinds of numbers and their ratio relations. You will get a taste of what is traditionally meant by arithmetic in the freshman mathematics tutorial when you study the seventh book of Euclid and when you read a book called *Introduction to Arithmetic* by Nicomachus. Nicomachus agreed with Plato that arithmetic is the root of *all* the sciences.

Geometry is the mathematics you will study more extensively here than any other liberal art whatsoever, and I'll come back to it in a moment.

Astronomy, which is, as we study it, geometry adapted to show the intelligibility of phenomenal motions in the heavens, is a liberal art you will study here through three years, and in various combinations of versions: geocentric and heliocentric, mathematical and dynamical.

Music, which is sometimes listed at the top of the liberal arts, is put by Cassiodorus right after number. For, taken as a liberal rather than a fine art, it begins with the study of the natural consonances and dissonances associated with numerical ratios, and with the modes and scales arising from the composition of these ratios. In your sophomore year you will study these rudimentary facts and much more: rhythm,

melody, and harmony, using modern examples complex beyond anything the ancient tradition imagined.

Each of the three trivial arts, grammar, logic, and rhetoric, has been in turn the leader. (Incidentally, the term "trivial," used as a contemporary reference to the trivium first as trite and soon as paltry, appears late in the sixteenth century.) In the days of early imperial Rome, rhetoric, oratory, public persuasion, was the all-encompassing art, for which the quadrivium was the preparation. This is what Quintilian says in his work on the *Education of an Orator* (I, 10), one of the great texts on education. In the earlier Middle Ages grammar, then interpreted as the reading of great literary texts, was valued above all (Paetow, 33). But with the rise of the universities and scholastic philosophy in the thirteenth century, dialectic drowned out all literary studies. They returned with the advent in the fifteenth century of the scholars who called themselves humanists because they studied the antique poets who cared about men rather than the medieval theologians who wrote of God. The trivium then became what we now call the "humanities," just as the quadrivium, on the whole neglected in the middle ages, returned as "science." In our day, rhetoric is making a serious bid not to replace but to be philosophy, as the art of the construal of texts. I want to warn you that this kind of flamboyant historical gesture drawing I have been engaging in is too crude to do events justice. In the age unjustly suspended by historians between antiquity and modernity many renaissances and returns took place, learning was preserved, and discoveries were made that set the stage for the great Renaissance. All I mean to do is to point out that, just as the learning of language is not an orderly linear progress but the simultaneous acquisition of various skills, so the trivium is not naturally ordered.

It is otherwise with the quadrivium, a much more ancient, and, moreover, an intrinsically ordered, set of studies. The word itself was a translation, made by Boethius in the early sixth century (I, i), of Nicomachus's term *tessares methodoi*, meaning the "four ways." The word trivium was a much later derivative. It is first known in the ninth century (Lutz 76). Both groupings of the arts are of course much older than their names.

The quadrivial studies will become known to the freshman as a course of education through the *Republic* of Plato, where the higher liberal arts curriculum of the West was first expounded. It is the higher learning because what we call literature, namely, poetry and drama (novels hadn't been invented yet), are used in the *Republic* for the

moral and civil training of children. But it is also not *the* highest, because for Plato dialectic is not mere logic but philosophy. And so dialectical inquiry is set above all mathematics, pure or physical.

Why those three and those four arts? Even if we grant that it makes sense that there be two kinds of study, those of sayable thoughts and those of learnable objects, yet why just seven and why just these? The tradition, which loves number magic, saw seven as the virgin number, called Minerva, the Latin name for Athena, because within the decad it is the only prime number that does not "beget," that is, act as a factor of, another number in the first ten. It is the sum of three, the male, and four, the female number, as Athena is a man-like woman. There are seven phases of the moon, seven planets, seven days of the week, and many more sevens including the seven openings of the human head (Stahl, 152-54). It was Martianus Capella who first fixed the number at seven (Lutz, 74). This is wild and woolly stuff, but perhaps we can do better.

The arts of speech are three because speech has three aspects. There are rational and empirical rules of language in general and of language in particular, of Language itself in the singular and of languages in the plural, such as English, Greek, and French, and these constitute grammar. Then there are formal structures of reason—of concepts, propositions, and rules of inference and these make up logic. And finally there are the precepts of persuasion, by which words grow—as Homer so beautifully says—wings. Winged words, *epea pteroenta*, are words that reach the hearer. Rhetoric is the art of making words fly. I think with a little trimming and shoving all language study (as distinct from studying languages) does fit under these headings.

The four arts of learnable objects, however, are ordered not as were the three aspects of one thing, speech, but as a dimensional development, as a genetic sequence leading to a complete object. At least that is how Socrates presents the quadrivium, or perhaps I should say the quintuvium, since he wants his philosopher kings to learn not about four but five mathematical subjects. I should say something here for the freshmen who have not yet read Plato's *Republic*, the book to which I am referring. It appears to be about the best political community, but turns out, at its center, to be a book about education, the program of philosophical learning that will educate those who might be fit to rule this polity.

These four or five studies are called *mathēmata*, which might be translated as "learnables." Mathematical studies are those which are

by their nature learnable. What is so learnable about mathematics? Well, partly it must be the fact that it is unlike language learning, which has no given natural order (which doesn't mean that it shouldn't be done in an orderly fashion, though the order will be conventional). Mathematical learning builds up systematically, just as mathematical objects can be ordered genetically. There are, of course, several other features that makes mathematics more learnable—and more teachable—than language, among them the clarity and distinctness of its objects. The truth of this claim will probably become clear when you compare your language and your mathematics tutorials.

Socrates begins with arithmetic (522c). Arithmetic is the study of the unit, the collection of units called *arithmoi*, numbers, and the study of calculation, the Greek word for which denotes the use of the reasoning power, *logistikē* (525b).

The unit is zero-dimensional; you will in fact find it defined as a point without position. Next the philosopher-kings-to-be are to study geometry, not only plane geometry, which deals with one-dimensional lines and two-dimensional surfaces, but also solid geometry, which rises to the third dimension, the dimension of depth. Next these geometrical solids are put in motion, and studied especially in the circular revolutions of the heavens. That is astronomy. Besides the visible geometrical figures of heavenly motion, there are also the audible progressions of numerical ratios. And that is harmonics or theoretical music. For Plato it is the crowning study of the quadrivium, especially insofar as the tones produced belong to the octave sounded by the heavenly spheres (617b). It is qualitative number moving in figures, or, you might say, rational bliss.

I should tell you that in accordance with the Platonic scheme, in the early days of our program books on physics such as you will be studying in your junior year, for instance books on the motions that produce light and sound, were to be found in the King William Room of our library under the heading "music." Those were the days!

You might well ask: With the enormous burgeoning of the sciences in the past two centuries, and particularly in the past half-century, does the quadrivial ordering still make sense or is it purely antiquarian? Of course there have always been subjects regarded either as too technical or as too advanced to fit in the quadrivium, such architecture, medicine, and jurisprudence. But though the number of descended specialties is now enough to swamp the originals, I can think of two ways in which the "four-way" still makes sense.

First, the ordering of mathematical and natural objects by dimension still yields a plausible progression. As you know, the basic quantities of science are called dimensions, meaning magnitudes that give scope to measurement. The fundamental physical quantities are the three dimensions of Space, which give the configurations of bodies, and then Time, which is the measure of bodies in motion, and finally Mass, to which bodies owe their sensory effects and which is in fact the magnitude measurable by the scale at the center of our seal. So we can still say that dimensional progression is an ordering principle of science, especially of physics. I should add here that there are other ways of organizing the quadrivium, by the discontinuous or continuous, for example, or the absolute or relative, the unmoved or moved character of the objects (Merlan, 89-91).

Second, you should realize that we carry on our studies in a way that makes the liberal arts especially fit for our use. This is our way: We do not present you with fields and subjects that we try to cover in an introductory sort of way. Our tutorials and laboratories are not introductory but elementary.

Here is what that distinction means. Introductions are overviews of extensive fields of information in which high points are presented in a cursory way with some explanations to hold things together. Introductions are of necessity superficial, but they are not necessarily elementary. On the other hand, Euclid's book on geometry, the one that you have begun to study, is called the *Elements*. Elements are that on which, and also out of which, learning is built. The elementary studies are usually both simple and profound, and they are not extensive bodies of information, but basic skills and practices. Dwelling on elements is different from getting on with it. Studying beginnings is different from being at the cutting edge. Advanced studies and breakthrough work are wonderful activities, good for graduate study. We, however, dwell on and in origins.

It is a wonder of human learning that these beginnings often have a special perfection and elegance. It could well be that first things are nondescript and insignificant and that only through progress does quality arise. For example, in the evolution of mammals, the scurrying *eobippus*, which means the "dawn-horse," is a little ugly thing and the galloping modern horse a large and noble being. But it is not so for the dawn of learning. First discoveries are often well-shaped and grand and make good paradigms and exemplars. And that is what we have decided to do: not to cover the field but to choose fine elementary

examples for study in our tutorials and laboratories. For that is what the liberal arts are: the basic skills of learning taught through the elementary but grand discoveries of the human intellect.

To return for one more minute to the *Republic*. We found laid out there the quadrivium in a plausible development. Can we find the trivium there as well? Yes, but divided and wrapped, so to speak, round about the quadrivium. The children's character is trained by means of poetry, by the same works, epic, tragedy, and odes, that will later afford the material for the trivial studies of grammar and rhetoric. Logic, called dialectic in the *Republic*, is not, however, a study for children. It is rather the high point of study for the young philosopher-kings-to-be. They take it up in their early thirties. Dialectic teaches the way of rational argument, not however as a formal science of the schemata of reason, but as a road to final knowledge, up to the highest structures of being and even beyond. Dialectic is for Socrates what we call philosophy.

I might say here that the project of tracing the uses and exchanges of the terms logic and dialectic, their fate in connoting the highest or meanest, the richest or driest of studies, is almost coextensive with the project of following the vicissitudes of learning and thinking in the West. You might want to write your senior essay on it. Let me just say here that dialectic is soon demoted to a mere counterpart of rhetoric—Cassiodorus, the author of the sixth century I mentioned before as writing one of the best known handbooks on the liberal arts tradition, says, borrowing from the Stoic Zeno (Stahl 95): "Dialectic and rhetoric are as with respect to a hand the contracted fist and the extended palm—the former completes its arguments in brief speech, the latter roams the fields of eloquence with abundant talk; the one abridges words, the other stretches them out" (Ch. III). Yet even when dialectic loses its grand sense, the liberal arts tradition steadfastly preserves the notion that the culmination of the liberal arts is philosophy: Cassiodorus says: Philosophy is *homoiosis theōi kata dynaton anthrōpōi*, "the assimilation to God as far as is possible for a human being" (1168).

One of my favorite writers on liberal learning is a monk of the twelfth century, Hugo of St. Victor, the director of his monastery's school, who wrote a book called "Manual on Learning Through Reading" (*Didascalicon de studio legendi*). I like him especially because he tells me, with modest clarity, things I have discovered and lived by over the years: That to study books you have to know which texts to read and in what order and how. That diligent study from books is quite different

from meditation, which is careful and repeated thinking through, and that meditation in turn differs from contemplation, which is a kind of collecting, comprehensive insight—and you have to do all three. That searching for wisdom is not the same as having it, wherefore we are to be called not *sapientes*, *sophai*, “wise people,” but *amatores sapientiae*, which is the Latin rendition of the Greek words *philoi sophiae*, philosophers, “lovers of wisdom.” That pursuing empty stuff strenuously is worse than plying good things negligently. That reading has three stages: the letter, or construing the grammar, the sense, or getting the first meaning, and the significance, or penetrating deeply. That the wisdom for which the soul burns is not in the first instance technical and good for accomplishing things in the world, but theoretical and good for illumining and bringing us back to ourselves. What gives me pleasure is that this experienced teacher can himself reach back over a millennium and a half, and say old truths with unselfconscious freshness.

Hugo holds that the seven arts are “indeed the best tools and beginnings by which to prepare the way for the mind to a full appreciation of philosophical truth” (III, 3).

It is in our seminar that we realize Hugo’s way. We read for the seminar and our trivial studies have prepared us to construe the sentences, to follow the logic, to appreciate the style, and to understand mathematical and scientific references. Together we try to work out the simple sense of the text, and to prepare for the deep interpretation that we search for later in meditative privacy. Sometimes we have sudden and encompassing insights right in the seminar room. Sometimes such insights come when we have withdrawn into ourselves. (I recall a sophomore who saw the One walking along College Creek.) We waste no study time on piffling books, since we have chosen to read only works that repay our efforts. We try to do it in the right order, keeping abreast of our authors. We try to have read some of the same books that have gone into the making of each book we come to.

Hugo would probably have been surprised at the capture of his monastic *studium legendi*, which might be translated as “book learning,” by the modes of participatory democracy in our seminar: by the relegation of the teachers to questioners-in-chief and by the encouragement of tentative offerings and trial balloons from all participants. I think he was the sort of man who, having seen us at work, might have been tempted to turn the monastery school at St. Victor in Paris into an early St. John’s. Of course, he might then have ended up in

the monastery scullery, for our questioning is almost routinely more radical than his community could have countenanced.

Our seminar, I am implying, is devoted to philosophy, and the tutorials, including the laboratory, are the preparation that should make the seminar conversation progressively at once more allusive and more coherent. In the seminar we follow wisdom more than technique. Some books are in fact quite directly concerned with the wisdom which Hugo calls *vivax mens et sola rerum primaeva ratio*: "living mind and the only primal principle of things." Proceeding through direct argument, these books are the ones usually called philosophical or theological. Others present their wisdom in more oblique ways, clothed in the many-colored coat of fiction. They have a relation to the philosophical books something like that of the open palm to the clenched fist. Recall that Cassiodorus had used that figure to distinguish rhetoric from dialectic. Those books, usually referred to as literature, are easier to read but often more demanding in discussion.

One of the beauties of our order of reading is that we do not preordain which is which, what books must be called philosophy and what books must be called fiction. For all our seminar list knows, Homer's *Iliad* is a work of philosophical theology and Newton's *Principia* a word of cosmological myth.

All the distinction we ever make is to assign some readings to the tutorials and others to the seminar. In the tutorials we use manuals, compendia, textbooks for guiding our demonstrations, and the prose selections and poems we read are chosen to be worked over—translated and analyzed. Euclid's *Elements*, for example, is a textbook, meant specifically to introduce students into the sciences of space and number in the most succinct and systematic way. And when we do a logical and rhetorical analysis we might use a question from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. I would sum up the work of tutorials and laboratories as dealing with the seven liberal arts. Here we use the best examples available and apply to them the terms and techniques of the basic skills for learning about words and things. And these terms and techniques are in turn taken from the best teaching texts we can find. Some know-how may even be best acquired in a form abstracted from all context and then compressed and reconstructed, like processed food. Sometimes manuals are just the thing.

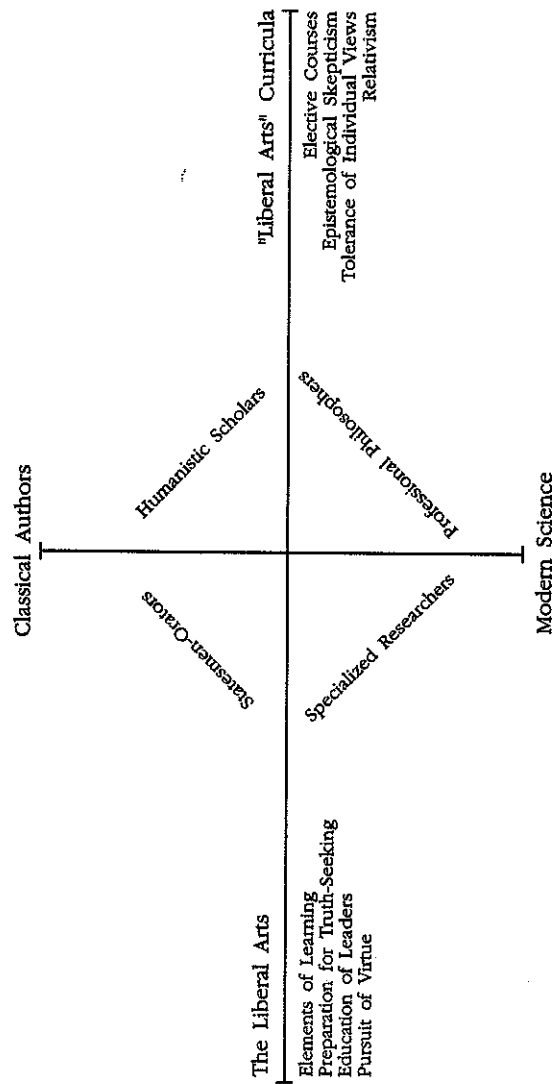
In the seminar, on the other hand, we read books, whole books as much as possible, or carefully—and reluctantly—selected parts. Here it is not arts and textbooks but authors and texts that we attend to. Here

we do not engage in exercises for acquiring the skills of learning, but we engage in liberal learning itself. We reflect on everything that we are and that the world holds, including the arts of learning themselves. The reason that the seminar is the place for integral texts by named authors is this. Since we use the seminar books above all to help our own thought, it is of the essence that we should be addressed by an original human voice and that we should hear it out.

I said earlier that whereas the liberal arts were quite definable, liberal education could mean practically anything. There is a book that tries to organize the chaos. It is with books as it is with children: We tend to have a special affection for other people's offspring if we have gotten to diaper them as babies, and we have a special esteem for books that we have been asked to read in manuscript. The book I am thinking of is by Bruce A. Kimball, and it is called *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*. It offers a typology, that is to say, a conceptual coordinate system, of the kinds of liberal education that the author has discerned. I have adapted it for this lecture. You will see by looking at the axes on your sheets what the most telling characteristics of the types are. The right-hand horizontal or major axis shows the spirit of liberal education prevalent in the best of secular American schools: "epistemological skepticism," that is to say, comprehensive questioning and tolerance of all views. The left side shows a diametrically opposed idea, that good citizens must be trained in a common set of virtues, which are often set out in great texts. You will find this spirit alive especially in the great Catholic schools. The minor axis opposes mathematics and sciences, the hard disciplines, at the bottom, to classical texts, the soft readings, at the top. I do think with a little patting and pushing, most colleges in this country fit into this coordinate system.

And now comes your own college, St. John's. Where does it go on the grid? Well, we study classical texts, many of them, and the best we can find, of all periods. Do we confine ourselves to one of the so-called "Two Cultures," the sciences or the humanities, at opposite ends of the vertical axis? No, everyone studies mathematics for four years and science for three, simple but real science, elementary but real mathematics. Yet, looking to the left of the horizontal axis, we certainly also think that our studies should make us better human beings, and we are deeply concerned with the civic effect of our education. Moreover we choose the texts we read because we think they contain worthy truths about moral and civic matters. And looking to the opposite right, we

Two Axes } of Liberal Education
Four Types



Derived from Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers*, p. 228

are inveterate askers of questions. Tolerating others' opinion isn't quite a sufficient description of the spirit of our classrooms: We try truly to hear what others say and, if we can, to appreciate their opinion rather than just to tolerate it. To us the verb "to question" does not mean "to attack" but "to elicit."

At this school we read classical texts but think that these include works of mathematics and science. We assume that moral civic and intellectual virtue may be acquired through attending to the teaching of our authors, but we think that there is no authority other than each thinking student. In short, we use classics to teach us science, and great books to help us reflect on large questions.

The founders and sustainers of this school, the generations of tutors and the fifty-one classes of students that have devised and confirmed this program since 1937, seem to have done a remarkable thing. Without much conscious reference to the historically discernible types of liberal education, they seem to have brought about a school that encompasses and reconciles all the major good purposes that the grand tradition of liberal education has over time included.

How have we done that? The St. John's program is materially exclusive and intellectually inclusive. By "materially exclusive" I mean that there are many subjects well worth knowing and many objects well worth accomplishing that we have excluded so as to able to require ourselves to study what we think is best and so as to study it together. By "intellectually inclusive" I mean that there is no mode of learning, knowing, and believing that we fail to acknowledge as worthy of serious attention. By "serious attention" I mean that in studying a book or listening to a person we hold open, somewhere in our thought, the possibility that what they say might be true and that we might want to live by it.

And *what* are we consequently? We are a college where learning is well-defined and question-asking unlimited, where study is selective and thought receptive, where opinions may be definite and minds yet open.

That is what our seal of seven book betokens. At the center of St. John's are the liberal arts and the books and instruments through which we study them. These arts are encompassed by an understanding of liberal education that the seal articulates in the surrounding work: "By books and a balance I make humanly free adults of legally free children." On the seal the college speaks to us and promises: "I forge for you the bonds of freedom."

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Two Sonnets About Bird Watching

Douglas Allanbrook

Birds sing during the day. Certain ones, however, certain special ones, sing during the night: loons, whippoorwills, nightingales, and sometimes more obscure unidentified birds. There is also the mockingbird, who can torture us with incessant imitations as he pursues his dreary course of love-making during the hot nights of July and August. Why take any note of these creatures? Why especially should they be written about in chiseled verse? A certain mockingbird kept me awake many nights and I finally resorted to the expedient of putting my faithful cat, Pearl, into the branches of the pear that grows outside my bedroom window, arising at two o'clock to accomplish this. It worked but I wrote no sonnets. The bird was, after all, a mockingbird, an ironic creature which nature had conserved and which may very well owe its existence to its ability to mimic. We might momentarily be entranced by it as it does, or at least seems to us to do, what we do all of our lives, endlessly imitate. The very name we give to it, the "mocking bird," labels the creature with our own human shabbiness.

The nightingale is famous. I am not going to say "justifiably famous," as that is what is being questioned and investigated. Its very name is beautiful in many different languages: "Nachtigal," "Nightingale," "Rossignol," "Usignuolo," "Bulbul." We are constantly told that its song is beautiful and easily apply our human word "song" to its nocturnal emissions. When I read to you Petrarch's nightingale sonnet, those of you who do not know Italian may find it beautiful and may even regret that I find it necessary to translate it into English prose.

Douglas Allanbrook, Tutor Emeritus at St. John's College, Annapolis, delivered this as a speech to the graduating seniors on Class Day last May.

After all, the nightingale's song doesn't mean anything. This sonnet's way of taking time—eight lines followed by six lines, a careful syllable count, and an established rhyme scheme—was fixed by Petrarch. It became a musical habit imitated by poets in a variety of languages.

"In Morte di Madonna Laura" —Petrarch

Quel rosignol, che sì soave piagne
 Forse suoi figli o sua cara consorte
 Di dolcezza empie il cielo e le campagne
 Con tante note sì pietose e scorte;
 E tutta notte par che m'accompagne
 E mi rammente la mia dura sorte;
 Ch'altri che me non ho di ch' i' mi lagne,
 Chè'n dee non credev' io regnasse Morte.
 Oh che lieve è ingannar chi s'assecura!
 Que'duo be' lumi, assai più che' l sol chiari,
 Chi pensò mai veder far terra oscura?
 Or cognosco io che mia fera ventura
 Vuol che vivendo e lagrimando impari
 Come nulla qua giù diletta e dura.

Let us translate it roughly for the sense of the thing:

That nightingale that is weeping so smoothly perhaps for
 his little ones or for his dear consort, with sweetness fills
 the night with so many notes both pitiful and accomplished.
 It is also my companion all night long, and reminds me of
 my own hard fate: I cannot blame anyone but myself for
 believing that she was a goddess and not subject to Death!
 Oh how easy it is to be secure in one's self-deceit! Who
 ever thought to see beneath the dark earth those two eyes
 clearer than the sun? But I recognize that my bitter path
 means living and crying at the same time, bitter and harsh
 as anything here below.

What has the nightingale to do with the life and death of Laura?
 Some have even doubted that the Lady Laura existed, though if she did
 she is nearly immortal in the countless songs written to her by Petrarch.
 In any case he is certainly immortalized by them. The fourteen-line

form set by him has almost always a particular subject matter. In its first eight lines, its octet, it pays attention to something in "nature." Its concluding six lines, the sextet, looks then at the writer or at all of us in contradistinction to "nature." This is the artifice or the "nature" of a sonnet. We are, in one important use of the word *nature*, as natural as the nightingale. But the nightingale is not self-conscious. It is perfectly clear to all of you that the word *nature* is a slippery word, easily becoming a red herring, a deception designed to lead us on some defiantly theoretical trip. Is it or is it not a fallacy to think of sympathy or even empathy between us and "nature"? Is nature our goddess? What about poor Lear on the heath buffeted by nature and his unnatural daughters? We also say that nature has its ways of taking time, summer-winter, spring-fall, and certainly the sun has its periods, as do our bodies and our periodic sentences and the entrancing completions of our rhyming lines. Does nature mock our symmetries or are we imitating her times and her comings to be and passings away? If she is eternal then indeed Laura's death is not consonant with her and the nightingale's courtship is indistinguishable from lament.

"On A Bird Singing in Its Sleep" —Robert Frost

A bird half wakened in the lunar noon
 Sang halfway through its little inborn tune.
 Partly because it sang but once all night
 And that from no especial bush's height,
 Partly because it sang ventriloquist
 And had the inspiration to desist
 Almost before the prick of hostile ears,
 It ventured less in peril than appears.
 It could not have come down to us so far,
 Through the interstices of things ajar
 On the long bead chain of repeated birth,
 To be a bird while we are men on earth,
 If singing out of sleep and dream that way
 Had made it much more easily a prey.

Here again is a bird singing at night, though it is an obscure bird, its species not identified. The moon is out, however, and he sings in the lunar noon. It is again a sonnet and sings its song through fourteen lines. The rhyme scheme is different and resounds with the close clang

of rhyming couplets: noon-tune, night-height, ventriloquist-desist, ears-appears, far-ajar, birth-earth, way-prey.

It is cast again in nature but the word "nature," if we employ it, is now enormously different. This is a modern sonnet, and nature and time give us pathos in another manner. We are nowadays beyond the old "modern" view of Pascal, who was terrified, as we all are, of the infinite spaces. We cannot, as he could not, conceive of a cosmos as a glorious ornament but are plunged far beyond him by our mathematical artifices into a numbing beginning of an explosion emanating from a near infinitesimal point, an explosion that coagulates into something which is no longer simply matter, as if we had ever known what that was. Black negativity reigns at the center of our galaxies and there are simply too many of them to imagine or to conceive. It is almost with a sense of relief that we turn from such matters and consider our men on the moon and their view of our blue and cloud-shrouded sphere, enveloped in its gaseous life-preserver. Back down on earth we have no choice but to accept being's timetable as established by Darwin and the geological record. Beneath our gaseous envelope something more remarkable than a miracle confronts us. We men on earth hear a bird singing in the night, and pay attention to it, having both of us emerged from the long bead chain of repeated birth. What a coincidence! It cannot have been planned. Frost's sonnet is full of this wonder, a memorial always present to those who do pay attention. It is also a cautionary sonnet. The bird would not be there if it had not sung discreetly, from a certain height, if it had not had the inspiration to desist before the onslaught of a fox or a marauding owl. All of our songs and sonnets are constructions, cages in which we place our nightingales. They are all cautionary tales in which we celebrate and lament our time-ridden lives, and in which we preserve for future generations our best-crafted observations, like insects preserved over millenia in Baltic amber. What we do when we are wide awake and fully human is to pay attention to what we are. These celebratory constructs are our perennial poems; they fix us with full self-consciousness in that moment of observation and pathos. They are the nearest thing we have to a definition of ourselves as we peer forth from this obscure suburb in an unimaginable universe, observing, wondering, and preserving.

Three Poems

Elliott Zuckerman

At One Sitting

Someone must sit for me, for I can't pose
The question with a plaster cast in mind.
I've tried it with an art-school Aphrodite,
A chaste Apollo with his features Greek
And give-away. Imaginings, I find,
Depend upon a blemish in the eye,
Feed on the variance of ear with brow,
Thrive on the dissonance of chin and cheek.
There must be something there that's almost mine,
Its nature specified by whether nose
Is oriental, pug, or aquiline.

Ready for fleshing from the loaded brush,
The lip should be the study of a wish
Picturable in private, the orange spot
In my Corot, the apricot
Amidst the greenery. Those handsome faces
Are all the same, like happy families.

Saga

The others headed straight for Paris, or
Were bound for balconies in Biarritz.
I found a northern road to the unknown,
A winter crossing to a crooked town,
My gateway to the continent. The streets
Had served as setting for *The Cabinet
Of Doctor Caligari*, led direct
To upstairs bedrooms piled, perhaps by gnomes,
With quilts and comforters. On the first day
The father of the family supervised
The challenges in orderly succession:
The sweet magenta soup, the glottal stop,
The attempts to swallow down a tumblerful
Of aquavit with equanimity.
Darkness arrived in early afternoon.
For evening's entertainment we strolled downhill
A block or two, to take in the display
In the crowded window of the candy shop:
Bananas, birds and bottles, sides of beef,
All made of marzipan.

Well before dawn,
Still dark or dark again, I took the train
With all the sleepy children to the school
Where they learned languages. Not allowed in,
I paced the frozen neighborhoods, to fill
The hours until, at recess, dressed like elves,
My hosts would bring me herring sandwiches.
They left me, an agoraphobic, at
The water's edge, alone.

To reach the wedding
We had to sail across the Kattegat.
The captain waved at Elsinore. They dwelt,
The cousins of the bride, far from the coast,
Remote, secure, provincial, polished, correct,
And self-contained. Lining the staircases
Were shelf upon shelf of Strindberg, still uncut.
A snapshot has been saved: I wear a vest,
Sport flowing locks among the slickly bald,
Seem confident at dinner. Who remembers
Which was the minister and which the groom?
Yet at the edge, just barely in the picture,
The pug-nosed red-head looks away, the one
Who babbled about vikings, vineleaves, truth,
Towers and tarantellas, the one who swore
Vows of eternal friendship but disappeared
As soon as from the woods the horn was heard.

That climactic horn, I thought, was all
I'd ever need to know, as though all stories
Marched toward their end, all music moved us more
As it moved on. But there are songs composed
Exclusively of moments, there are strands
Of story where the weight does not depend
On waiting. Is it finish, start, or middle,
To recognize that standing on the shore
Of the North Sea holds greater terror
Than sailing on the sea itself?

Lost and Found

The boys were always missing
This thing or that:
A book, a bat, a belt, a bugle.
The newcomer, who'd so far not
Done much but try to teach us all
His tuneless anthem, undertook
To clear the field of the unsightly pile
Of unclaimed articles.

He got a grapefruit crate, divided
By slats into two cubicles,
Then styled a pair of signs, one for each side,
The left-hand lettered LOST,
The right-hand FOUND, and placed
This offering to orderliness
Outside my office. At the box
I'd watch a boy with belt or book,
Bugle or bat stand poised
In dialectical perplexity.

Results of Crossword Number Three

The winners of the \$35 book tokens, redeemable at the St. John's College Bookstore, are:

John Bremer, Greenbelt, MD

James P. Craig, Havre de Grace, MD

The McClard family, Denver, CO

Solution to Crossword Number Three

1	H	I	2	E	R	3	A	R	C	4	H	Y		5	O	N	6	T	A	7	P
	O			L			M				E			V			R			E	
8	V	I	O	L	I	N				9	R	A	B	E	L	A	I	S			
	E		Q		S					C				R		U			T		
10	R	O	U	S	S		11	E	A	U				12	T	E	M	P	I		
			E				V			13	L	A	M	A		A				C	
14	C			N			E			E				K						I	
15	A	R	T	H		16	U	R	I	A	N		17	L	E	G		18	E	N	D
	T					N				N			E					L		E	
	H		19	H			20	W	I	D	E		A			E					
21	E	P	O	N	A					22	F	U	R		23	N	A	C	E	24	S
	D		R		S					F				O		T				T	
25	R	A	N	C	H	E	R	O				26	A	V	E	R	S	E			
	A		E		E			R				E		O					M		
27	L	U	T	E	D				28	S	T	A	R	L	I	N	G	S			

Notes to the solutions to Crossword Number Three

Across:

1. HI + E(lizabeth) R + ARCHY (cf. Don Marquis)
5. ON + TAP
8. Homonym: VILE INN
9. Anag.: BASE LIAR
10. TROUSSEAU - T
12. MET rev. + PI
13. L.A. MA
15. (Chester) ARTHUR + IAN + LEG-END
20. ID between West and East
21. Enclosure: keEP ON Asking
22. FUR + N. ACES
25. RAN + C + HERO
26. A.V. + ERSE
27. LUTE + D.
28. TAR in SLINGS

Down:

1. H + OVER
2. EL + O. + Q. + anag. TUNE
3. AMIS' S
4. Cf. end of Sophocles' play
5. VERT in OAK + middle of yEw
6. German dream = TRAUM + A
7. Anag. PETS + I.C. + IDE
11. EVE + R.
14. CAT-HEDRAL
16. ASH in UNWED
17. End of aLL + anag. ARE
18. ELECT RON
19. HORN + E.T.
23. N. + anag. LOVE
24. Two meanings

A Note on Crossword Number Four

In the last issue of the *Review*, the instructions to Crossword Number Four refer to "asterisked numbers." There were, as it happens, no such numbers. At the last minute, in order to save space, those numbers, to which no clues were attached, were omitted. Hence the first sentence of the instructions should have been changed to read simply that certain entries were unclued. It would have been very expensive to add an erratum slip to all the issues that were sent out. The Crossword Editor did, however, send a letter to all the people who had submitted solutions to earlier puzzles, assuming that they were most likely to attempt Number Four and encounter the error. Despite the error, a number of solutions have already been received at the time of this writing, and the Editor hopes that more will be submitted between now and the deadline, which has been extended to one month after the mailing of this issue.

Crossword Number Five: "Of Omission"

By Cassandra

Instructions: Answers to certain clues are to be suitably mistreated before entry into the diagram. The resulting entries form a thematic group.

Across

1. Often found near church, a tabloid engulfed in sin (8)
9. Like large part of church for main service (4)
10. Treasure individual in my embrace (5)
11. Characteristic of pronouns (objective) in German (6)
13. Unusual monarch with unusual ear (4)
14. Still, Bigfoot loses tail (3)
15. Ruffianly leader and sin-eater corrupted Lord's servants (9)
19. Capital punishment returned in heart of Texas (3)
21. 7 - 5 — understood? (4)
23. Device to propel boat backward with princess inside: it involves waves (5)
25. *Paradise Lost* as rewritten for pre-schoolers touches bottom (6)
26. Spoils sound for instruments (5)
27. The straying sheep leads the way to top English shepherd's home ground (7)

Down

1. Color of anthropoid ape with blue tail (6)
2. To be different, egg-producer drops goose-egg (4)
3. Ward off, but claim as true (5)
4. In former years, contents of pocket (3)
5. Topic in Apollonian Math 101 (4)
6. One sent out in maiden voyage (5)
7. Smart topless bar (5)
8. Baglike structure about messy sty (4)
12. Comparatively uninteresting doctor—that is right (5)
16. Actively use uprooted tree with unknown contents (5)
17. Invest with French in what is owed (5)
18. Accommodations for lusty Wagnerian lady not of the highest grade (6)
19. Measures of current (live, as an afterthought) (4)
20. Be up to no good (4)
21. Under earth, a bubbly liquid (4)
22. The main point on Soldier Street (4)
24. A weight borne by priests (3)

