THE GADFLY

St. John's College
Annapolis, Maryland

BACK TO SCHOOL SPECIAL

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Polity,

Welcome and welcome back!

As we all embark on this new academic year together, it's the sincere hope of mine that the Gadfly is able to serve as a worthy and exciting representation of the life, thought, and spirit of our College.

In the pursuit of this ideal, we've made some changes to the organization and publication of our content, which is always intended, as our Staff Handbook says, to "encourage discourse between all facets of our community." Most notable among these changes is the introduction of the Collegian, the Gadfly's new weekly newsletter which you've probably already seen around campus a couple of times by now. Spearheaded by our wonderful managing editor El'ad Nichols-Kaufman, the Collegian will help to more frequently and dynamically engage with our Polity in between the much more substantial issues of the Gadfly proper, which we're now intending to publish on a regular triweekly schedule. We've also adjusted the organization of content within each Gadfly issue itself: the Logos section will be more heavily emphasized overall, and the Symposium section will now be focused on writing of a definitely academic style, leaving more personal and purely introspective essays to the Polis section.

We hope that you enjoy our first issue of the year, and all issues to come!

Luke Briner,
Co-editor-in-chief

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LAYOUT BRIDGET MACE

New Year, New Dean

By LUKE BRINER

This July 1st, Susan Paalman succeeded Joseph Macfarland as dean of our undergraduate Program in Annapolis. Her first year as dean will mark her 26th overall at the College. Found below are several questions posed to her regarding her new position and her responses.

What was the process of becoming our new dean like?
It was like being initiated into the Mysteries... Ok, maybe not that dramatic. I shadowed Mr. Macfarland last semester, having been released from one teaching station (sorry, freshman lab! You know I love you). Ms. Demleitner and I met regularly also, and I attended the board meetings along with Mr. Macfarland. I attended lots of other meetings and got to know a bit more about what makes things tick at St. John's. Everyone was so very helpful to me. I'm especially grateful to Ms. Demleitner and Mr. Macfarland, who were both very generous with their time and advice.

What about your new position as dean excites you most?
St. John's has formed my adult life; I came here when I was 28 years old. I am more grateful than I can say that I am now in a position to be a leader at this place that has meant so much to me. So, just the fact that I am here in this role is very exciting to me.

What does it mean to be a good dean, and especially the dean of a college like St. John's?
Are there any colleges "like St. John's"? (Sorry, I couldn't resist.) A good dean needs to have some sense of what the good is, in general and for this community. She is a listener and a learner, especially at St. John's. A good dean takes what she has heard and learned and makes the decisions that need to be made, with the good of the community in mind. This takes a combination of pulling back, to take in what is happening in the community, and acting decisively, so things that need to be clear are clear. "The community" includes so many people in so many different worlds that a good dean needs to be able to hear everyone well: a staff member, a board member, a student, a tutor. She and the president need to work very well together. Eva Brann has a famous quote that maybe she never said, "The president attends to the existence of the college, the dean to the essence." What is our essence? How do the many individuals who make up the college come together to become one college? I think a lot about Socrates and his question in the Republic about how two ones come together to make one two. It's mysterious and beautiful.

What do you think the most pressing issues at St. John's that fall under your jurisdiction as dean are, and how do you intend to address them?
I've begun a conversation about a possible honor code. This is part of a larger conversation that Mr. Abbott has also been engaging in: how do we hold on to our humanity in the face of the technology that could threaten it. We have available to us aids and tools that, ironically, could cripple us if not considered wisely. St. John's is as vulnerable as anyone to this danger. We are also particularly well suited to examine this problem and take it on with thoughtfulness, care, and thumos [spiritedness].

Do you have any beginning-of-the-year message that you'd like to convey to the student body as a whole, and/or to freshmen in particular?
Dive into the program with spirit and help each other with kindness and grace!

Photo: Meliha Anthony

Registrar Resignation Leaves Students Spooked

By TAMAR PINSKY

Students received their much-awaited class schedules on the evening of Tuesday, August 22nd. Some of these schedules, however, were still subject to change. Some of the schedules contained groupings of students oddly familiar to those of previous years. . Other students reported experiences less extreme, yet still notable: a switched class, or a seminar resembling last year's.

Why did schedules come out so late? Why have there been so many last-minute fine tunings? Why have students been re-clustered into already used clusters? The absence of a registrar seems the popular scapegoat.

Many individual experiences are attributed to the lack of a registrar—whether correctly so or not. They add to the idea that the school has suffered due to the previous registrar's resignation, which is also not necessarily correct.

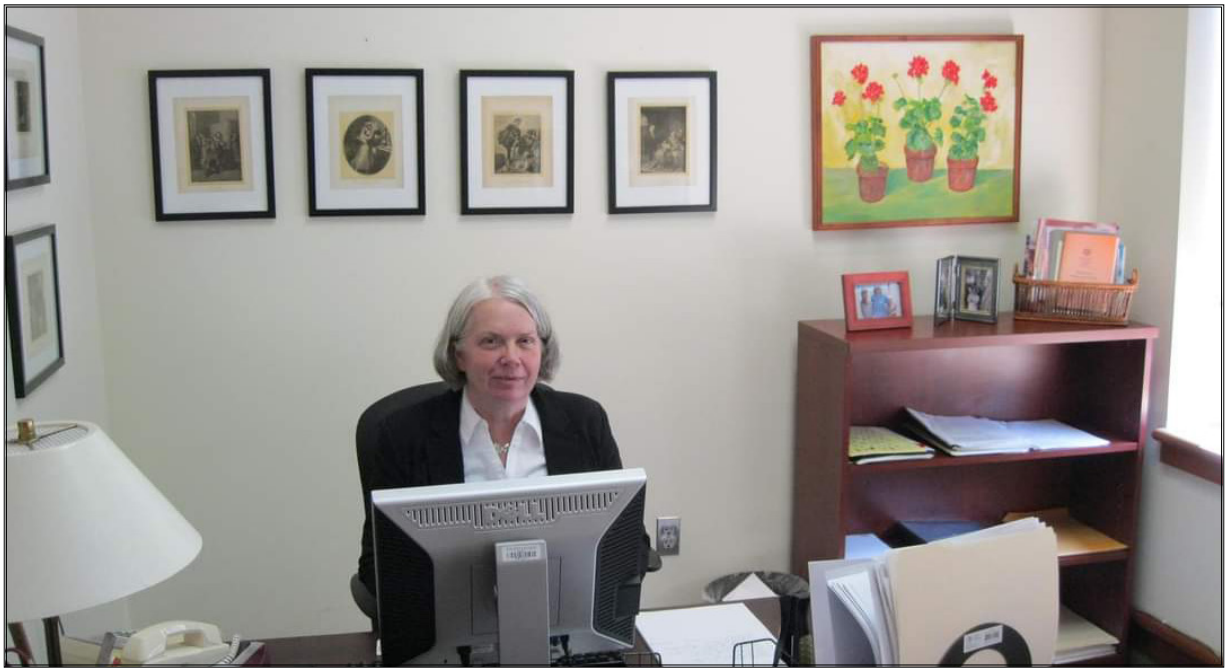
The previous registrar and the previous assistant registrar resigned in the beginning of the summer due to personal reasons. Because of the quantity and type of work that had to be done, however, they worked after hours as a contract employee. They were, however, not the only one who took on the laundry list of responsibilities: transcript requests, organizing convocation and graduation, arranging and adjusting tutor and student schedules, and arranging don rag and senior oral schedules.

The registrar's work was completed with the help of Ms. Latham, Ms. Stevens, Mr. Beall, Mr. Abbott, Ms. Lico, Ms. Waters, and Ms. Francis.

The work also could not have been done without the Santa Fe registrar and assistant registrar, Julie Romero and John Martinez. There is certain software and training vital to doing the registrar's work, and thus their specialty was much appreciated.

Normally, the registrar and assistant registrar would complete this work such that class schedules are done in early August. This year, because the work was thrust onto a multitude of faculty members, the first drafts were a couple of weeks late. However, they did not come out extremely late, for the school in fact prefers to send them out only a couple of days before classes start.

Creating class schedules is hard work—one must make sure that no one is in a core group with anyone in their previous core groups, that there is a reasonable gender balance, that each class contains only students from other



Jacki Thomas, previous registrar. Photo: Tamar Pinsky

core groups who were in none of their other classes, and that no student has a class with a tutor they previously had. Adjusting schedules is difficult too—sometimes classes must be moved due to conflicting schedules, and sometimes students request a class transfer—however, class transfers are not allowed in the first three weeks of classes.

Because of the difficulty of this work, there were cases in which not all these requirements were met regarding scheduling. For Sophomore Sophia Derico, several of these standards were not met. Her core group this year is identical to the one she had her first year, with the addition of two more students. However, she no longer shares music with these five students—she got switched into a different class, taught by her freshman Greek tutor. Meanwhile, her math class got moved back a day, because it had been scheduled to take place during the weekly Sicut Sing. And to top it all off, both her Greek and math classes this year are shared with another core group, so the same eleven students dominate both.

But not every case, such as simply having familiar faces in one's class, can be ascribed to the absence of the registrar. It is inevitable that there will be some repeated combinations of students year to year, given St. John's size.

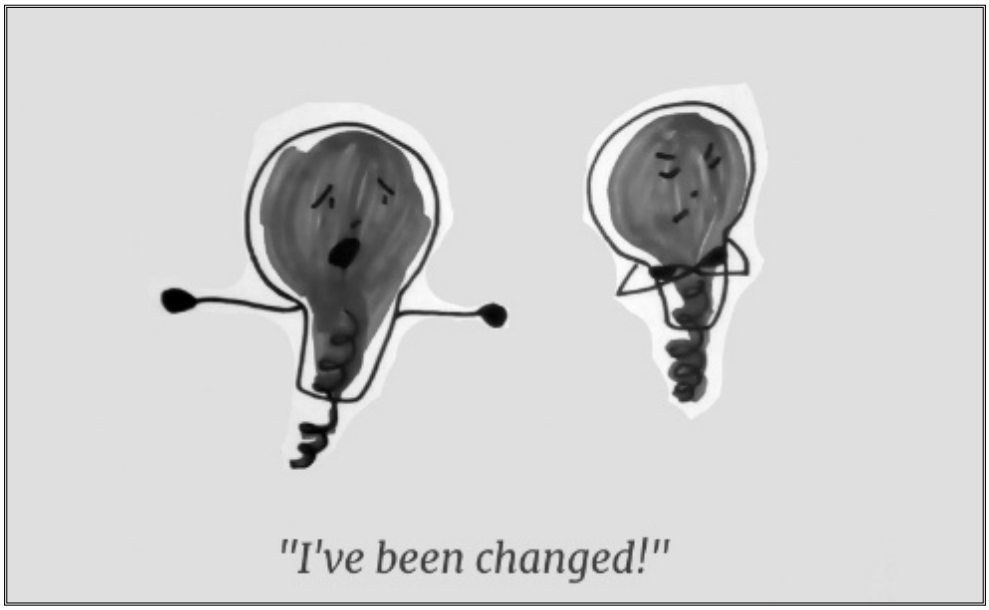
In other words, the schedules were affected by the absence of a registrar, but perhaps not as much as they might have seemed to be so.

The registrar's work also comes with certain legal requirements due to its confidential nature. Because the registrar is entrusted with dealing with students' personal information, not just anyone could take their place. Furthermore, it is ideal for the registrar to know the tutors and students to perform their role optimally—it is best if the registrar stays at the school for a long time.

Particularly at a school like St. John's, where the students do not register themselves for classes as they do at most colleges, the importance of the registrar is more apparent. Many universities rely almost entirely on machines for their registrar work, but perhaps that would not be fitting for St. John's. As Assistant Dean Mr. Abbott said, to think that the situation St. John's is facing might suggest the need for machines is the kind of thinking that makes "the world come to an end."

Instead of placing hope on machines, both the Dean and Assistant Dean have expressed hope that they will find a new registrar soon. It is hard to predict exactly when that will be, but they are optimistically searching.

Perhaps the registrar is of the sort that one does not realize how important they are until they are gone. They are the "nuts and bolts," as our Dean, Ms. Paalman called them, that Johnnies may neglect in the face of the contemplative, speculative questions they tend to focus on.



Cartoon: "Noodles," Tamar Pinsky

Housing Troubles

By VIVIAN MIYAKAWA

The sticky summer heat slowly gives way into fall, marking the beginning of a new school year. Groups of wide-eyed freshmen enter their residence halls for the first time, squaring their shoulders and preparing to live life with a roommate...or two?? Generally, freshmen at St. John's College live in doubles, with the occasional room built for a triple. However, this year brings a unique housing situation for most incoming freshmen. Campbell Hall, a dorm traditionally housing freshmen, has been under construction since the beginning of the summer, leaving less space for many incoming Johnnies. Situated in the midst of historic downtown Annapolis, St. John's isn't exactly known for its ample dorm space, so this ongoing building renovation forced freshmen into whatever housing happened to be available.

Unlike most years, every residence building on campus houses freshmen, and doubles have been converted to triples as dorms overflow with students. This unique situation adds even more change to the generally tumultuous beginnings of a school year. Curious to gauge the Polity's reactions to these developments, I interviewed a variety of students, asking them their opinions on the housing situation and recording their thoughts.

Humphrey's Hall is a freshman dorm generally known for its spacious rooms; a healthy mix of doubles and triples. This is perhaps the very trait that made it the prime candidate for stuffing even more freshmen into one residence hall. When interviewing students from different floors of this residence hall, most mentioned that they "expected smaller" and that they were "preparing for the worst" when they heard about this year's changes. Keeping your standards low is a surefire way to satisfaction, but unfortunately, not even the lowest of standards could make the Humphreys bathrooms seem appealing. With about one third more students than anticipated, the bathroom has truly become a "communal" space. The three showers and two bathrooms stalls are often crowded and dirty, and large globs of hair tend to block the drains. Work orders are plentiful as amenities such as soap, toilet paper, and paper towels are prone to running out within a few days. Luckily, as mentioned by more than one resident, including Ms. Greer, the Humphreys 2 RA, the mold on the shower curtains isn't the only thing "growing on them." A sort of begrudging fondness for this lively community has sprung from the less-than-ideal conditions. As put by Ms. Greer, "intentional community building and regular gatherings are crucial to fostering a sense of friendship and community," and the tighter spaces brought on by the housing changes certainly help facilitate that process.

Side View of Campbell Hall with Circular Window and Bushes

However, things look a bit different for the few freshmen living in typically upperclassmen dorms. Freshmen from Pinkney Hall experience a much smaller community, mentioning feeling as if they "don't know many of the people in their hall, and aside from the other freshmen on their floor and their RA, they "have no clue who is living with them in the biggest dorm on campus."

In a similar vein, Ms. Bain, the RA for the freshmen living in Chase-Stone, also noticed a sort of separation between the freshmen and upperclassmen, specifically in regards to the Chasement. In the past, it wasn't generally used as a place for study, but freshmen living there have "taken advantage of the blackboards and comfy couches, turning it into a standard common room." Ms. Bain mentions that even with the small amount of pushback from some upperclassmen, she believes that "having integrated dorm buildings is generally positive, it allows for the blending of all of the classes which is nice and good for our college community."

In the end, it is likely that housing will return to normal with the completion of the Campbell Hall remodel, and that nothing will fundamentally change, but hopefully this temporary diversion from normalcy has left a positive impact on the people it has affected.

Notes on Dialogue *(Selections)*

Stringfellow Barr

EDITOR'S NOTE:

"Notes on Dialogue," an essay written by one of our Program's founders, Stringfellow Barr, has become both a foundational text for gaining insight into the nature and intent of the College's educational model, and the subject of a contemporary controversy among students and faculty over exactly how present it should be in our academic lives at large. Central to this controversy is the fact that, while Summer Academy students and freshmen introduced to the College through the recently established Pritzker Program do read it, other incoming students do not. Why just them, and not the others? Should all incoming students be required to read it, or no one at all? In order to stimulate this debate, as well as to complement the two other similarly-themed essays featured in this issue's Symposium section, some of the most important sections of the essay are produced below.

—LB

Perhaps the first obstacle to writing even these random notes on dialogue is that the very word, dialogue, has been temporarily turned into a cliché. Everybody is loudly demanding dialogue, and there is not much evidence that most of us are prepared to carry one on. Indeed, to borrow a traditional phrase from professional diplomats, conversations have deteriorated. But both radio and television, whether public or commercial, remind us daily that a lonely crowd hungers for dialogue, not only for the dialogue of theatre but also for the dialogue of the discussion program.

* * *

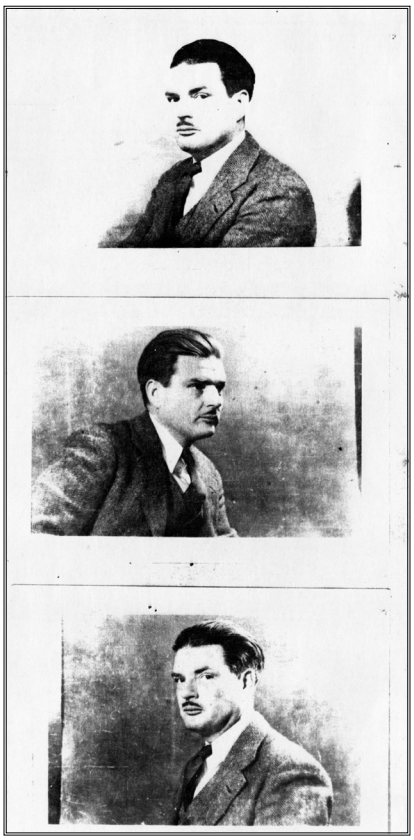
[B]abble is a ghost we cannot lay, the ghost of dialogue. We yearn, not always consciously, to commune with other persons, to learn with them by joint search. This joint labor to understand would be even more exciting than the multiplication of our gross national product or the improvement of our national defense or even than the elimination of war from the face of the earth. For we can never live wholly human lives without a genuine converse between men.

* * *

It seems possible that the most relevant sort of dialogue, though perhaps the most difficult[...]to achieve is the Socratic. For this difficult form of dialogue, there are luckily a number of models in Plato's Dialogues. To model [our] dialogues on those that Socrates incited and took part in is a dangerous counsel of something precious close to perfection. But I would merely urge that Socrates' behavior "in dialogue" is a good star to hitch one's wagon to. At the minimum, it is a good guide to the reefs on which most really good dialogues are wrecked. All these reefs welcome hungrily those who substitute the kind of discussion Socrates called "eristic" as a substitute for the kind he called "dialectic." In Book I of Plato's *Republic* Thrasymachus uses eristic; Socrates, dialectic. Thrasymachus' purpose is to win points and to win applause. The purpose of Socrates is to try, through dialectical discussion with Thrasymachus and others, to understand better the essential nature of justice. Each of the two men makes a choice of weapons appropriate to his purpose. The rising voice, the personal accusation, the withering scorn, the crushing sarcasm, the panic at the possibility of being out-maneuvered, the sweating, the unaccustomed blush of a normally unblushing champion sophist, the volubility that tries to shore up a crumbling argument and to ward off the disgrace of refutation, the love of one's own opinions precisely because they are one's own, the vanity that replaces love of truth with love for victory are all exemplified by Thrasymachus. What Socrates displays towards Thrasymachus is courtesy. He treats him not as an enemy, but as a valued colleague in the mutual search for understanding. Socrates is, as it were, the personification for purposes of discourse of the love for one's neighbor that Judaism and Christianity prescribe. And the same love sometimes infuses his courteous questions with irony, because such irony helpfully invited Thrasymachus to rid himself of the false opinions he harbored. So he is never fearful that he will

"lose," precisely because he is not trying to "win," and does not meet these flat opinions with other flat opinion, but with the ironical question.

Just as we are taught to hate not the sinner but the sin, especially if it is our own, so Socrates never attacks Thrasymachus. Indeed, he never attacks his ignorance and presumptuousness. He merely dissolves the opinions Thrasymachus spouts so loudly, so rapidly, and so volubly. That Thrasymachus recognizes the mortal danger in Socrates' questions and, indeed, that painful scalpel, irony, that Socrates uses on on his opinions (and consequently, given Thrasymachus' pride of authorship where his expressed opinions are concerned, on himself, his honor, and his fame as a sophist) comes out in Thrasymachus' sarcastic allusion to "your famous irony." That Socrates knew that his irony "put to the question," a euphemism the Spanish Inquisition would later in history use for the act of torturing the accused, is shown by his likening himself to a gadfly that stung the noble steed, the Athenian democracy. That the steed knew too is shown in Plato's Apology, where Socrates was sentenced to death for putting Athens to the question.



Portraits of Stringfellow Barr

The many dialectical conversations in Plato's Dialogues suggest several rules of thumb that might be profitably used by [students], or at least more frequently followed. One hesitates to suggest rules of thumb for a kind of discussion that is essentially spontaneous. But it is hard to see how these particular rules could stifle spontaneity:

The exchange of declarative monologues tends to be dialectically unproductive. The effort to be too complete is often self-defeating. An adumbration often contributes more to dialectic than a rotund speech. Brevity stimulates dialectic.

I take it that Herodotus' "anecdote" that the Persians deliberated while drunk and decided while sober implies that in the early stages of a dialectic exchange a "wild idea" is often more fruitful that a prematurely prudent opinion. The imaginative and the unexpected are frequent ingredients of Socrates' style, though they are often introduced with an (ironic) apology. Since [students are] trying to see more deeply into current problems but are free of the burden of imminent, practical, political action, they might profitably stay "drunk" longer than the King of Kings and his royal counsellors could risk staying.

The Socratic dialectic has another code of manners than the dinner party, where religion and politics are sometimes forbidden for fear that rising passions may damage "social" intercourse, and where interrupting a speaker and even a long-winded empty speech, is forbidden. In dialectic, a quick question is analogous to "point of order" in political assemblies. "Do I understand you to be saying . . . ?" always has the floor.

Even these thumb-rules may seem guaranteed to produce bedlam. And, indeed, when they are first tried, they generally do produce it. But inexperienced dancers on a ballroom floor and inexperienced skaters on an ice rink also collide. Experience brings a sixth sense in Socratic dialectic too. The will of self-insistence gives way to the will to learn.

In dialectic, "participational democracy" consists in everybody's listening intently; it does not consist in what commercial television calls equal time. When a good basketball team has the ball, its members do not snatch the ball from each other but support the man who has it, and the man who has it passes it to a teammate whenever a pass is called for by the common purpose of the team. But in dialectic, as opposed to basketball, the "opposing team" is composed only of the difficulties all men face when they try to understand. The point is that, in dialectic, it does not matter whose mouth gets used by the dialectical process, provided all are listening intently and exercise the freedom to interrupt with a question if they do not understand. On the other hand, reading or writing while "in dialogue" is a grave offense against the common purpose of all, not because they diminish the number of speaking mouths but because they diminish the number of listening ears. (Doodling and smoking are permissible aides to listening!)

Whatever the touted merits of pluralism in democratic society today (and pluralism is, minimally, better than shooting each other with mail-order submachine guns or even than legislating on religious beliefs), the agreement to disagree is a disgraceful defeat if it means surrendering the hope of agreement through further dialectic. Even Socrates, on rare occasions, countenanced postponement of the struggle to a more propitious occasion.

Perhaps the first rule of Socratic dialectic was laid down by Socrates: that we should follow the argument wherever it leads. Presumably, this means that some sorts of relevance that a court pleading should exhibit (and, even more the forensic eloquence that pleading encourages) are irrelevant to dialectic. The deliberate manner, and even more the ponderous manner, are mere impediments. The name of the game is not instructing one's fellows, or even persuading them, but thinking with them and trusting the argument to lead to understanding, sometimes to very unexpected understandings.

The chairman [of the Fellows of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara] recently abandoned the practice of recognizing speakers in the order in which their raised hands requested the floor. The abandonment of this device, so necessary in parliamentary procedure and even in small committees if they have not learned to discuss dialectically, was an immense step towards Socratic dialogue. The chairman, [like St. John's tutors] now has the more delicate task of intervening, preferably by question, only when he believes that there is a misunderstanding or an unprofitable (not a profitable) confusion, a confusion that in his judgment bids fair not to right itself.

[Students], however, will need to be close listeners, in the event that we take Socrates' advice; we shall, indeed, have to be closer listeners than we now are. We are likely, if we meet that obligation, to attain to a level of friendship that not many men attain to. Aristotle, we may recall, held that friendship could be achieved on three levels. The lowest level is that of what we Americans call "contacts," a level on which two men are useful to each other and exchange favors and services. On a higher level, two men can find pleasure in each other's company: they amuse each other. On the highest level, each man is seeking the true good of the other. On that level [students] would be, even more satisfyingly than now, seeking in common to understand. We share the friendship, or philia, that Aristotle thought must exist between the citizens of any republic if it was to be worthy of men. It would certainly exist, and without sentimentality, in any genuine republic of learning. And it would heighten the courtesy that any good and rigorous dialectic demands.

There is only one, final rule of thumb that I would offer: When free minds seek together for greater understanding, they tend to move, as the mind of Socrates so characteristically moved - with playfulness and a sense of the comic. This, perhaps, is because men are most like the gods when they think; because, nevertheless, they are emphatically not gods; and because, for godlike animals, this fact is so thoroughly funny. The truly relevant jest is never out of order, so long as we can pursue our dialogue with high seriousness and with relevant playfulness.

Were we to apply the ten rules of thumb sketched above, we would certainly produce many of those brief interludes of bedlam when dialectical collisions occur, even though these moments of vocal static would decrease in length and in number as we gained practice with free dialectic. Such static is not dialogue's worst problem. Plato and Shakespeare both speak of the mind's eye, that eye that alone sees intellectual light. I suggest there is a mind's ear too, a listening, mindful ear. I suggest that the chief reason that conversations deteriorate is that the mind's ear fails.

Stringfellow Barr and Students in Conversation Seated at a Table in the Coffee Shop

Thoughts at the Beginning

Robert Abbott

I have been working on this essay off and on for six months. My intention was to address the confusion and antipathy that occasionally arises when someone runs up against our college's unusual way of doing things. Over the years I've heard many questions on the verge of fermenting into outright indictments, and I wondered if I could take them as opportunities to clarify what we do and why. Why is our Program so demanding? Why should the tutors have a say outside the classroom as well as in it? Why should the students be granted more freedom here than at most other schools? These are real questions and the teacher in me wanted to see them lead to a deeper understanding in myself and others of our communal life here. But something about the form the essay took did not seem right to me, so I put it aside.

I found a second beginning when a recently graduated senior pointed out a passage to me in Eva Brann's book of aphorisms. Here is Ms. Brann's advice: "Citizen's Imperative: Always act as if you were then and there founding a community, be it of two or two hundred–in conducting conversations, in enacting routines, in mounting critiques." She goes on to say that this is how Plato's Republic gets off the ground. Bearing that in mind, I would like to go back to the beginning with you and ask a question about our own college. What is required to nourish a community dedicated to the reading of great books? I can think of at least four conditions and will spend most, but not all, of this essay describing these to you. (There is a Gadflyish conclusion you should not miss.) These four conditions are in addition to those required for any residential college e.g. a campus, sufficient funding, etc. I am wondering what is needed specifically for our project, which might justify our unique way of doing things.

First Condition: an environment that grants dignity to the endeavor of reading the great books, inside and outside the classroom. Exploring the mysterious depths of the great books elicits strong and varied actions and reactions from readers. Shock, disgust, boisterousness, hilarity, fear, anger–these typical responses, and their consequences, could all easily be censured in ordinary life. But as a teacher knows, they are all part of the circuitous path the soul takes on its way to understanding, and should be dignified with tolerance and attention. There are many ways to fail to grant this dignity. One could read *The Brothers Karamazov* in a laboratory, and after every chapter be hooked up to an electrocardiogram, given a thermometer, required to fill out a survey, and asked what reactions you had after hearing certain words or phrases. If you lived in such a lab, your thinking, speaking, and feeling would only be recognized as a generic quantity. Being reduced to a number is never dignifying. If you read *The Brothers Karamazov* in an amusement park, on the other hand, which is the opposite of a laboratory, you might be encouraged simply to enjoy yourself. St. John's the Amusement Park would provide plenty of distractions from–or easily digested explanations of–the great books, plenty of carefully managed encounters, plenty of fun, but you would never be deeply moved or driven to think. Our college is opposed to both of these extremes and all their disguised variations. In both of them a student is an accidental addition to the apparatus of measurement or production of entertainment, rather than an essential agent in their own education.

Many of our fellow readers over the centuries have read the great books under duress, alone, in less than ideal circumstances–often in prisons resembling a laboratory or a funhouse. Some of the writers of the great books lived this way. Their communities did not directly support the reading of great books and yet the books did their work, often acting as a refuge to their readers and writers alike. It is useful to remember that fact in dark times. But in this essay I am interested in defining a community in harmony with the requirements of the great books, one which makes it possible for people with little or no experience of them to give them the sustained attention they repay.

Second Condition: a community that encourages its members to take time to separate themselves from the present moment. If the college did not actively encourage students to step away from the present, however urgent and fascinating, it would be at odds with its central activity–returning to books written in the past, even the recent past, and taking them seriously on their own terms.

Herodotus is, among other things, very interested in understanding the world-historical situation he finds himself in, the ascendancy of the Greeks over the Persians–but he does this by first going back in time, far away in place, and deep into the minutiae of seemingly unrelated cultures, such as the Egyptians' belief in a cat's compulsion to run into a burning house, or the Ethiopian practice of burying their dead in sarcophagi of translucent crystal and setting them up around the city. Somehow the things of others help us to see our own. Herodotus' broad and ennobling curiosity should be a model for us at the college–we who read about the immoveable earth and invisible electric fluids. I say this is a necessary condition not only because the members of our community should maintain an idiosyncratic and useful esprit de corps but because there will come a time when you realize what a strange thing you've done by coming here and you will not be reassured if someone tells you that our college is really not so different from everywhere else. It is not like anywhere else, and your first sallies beyond our walls will make that very clear to you. Sometimes this happens, as it did for me, while you are a student, which is why so many of us have occasionally wondered if we've come to the right place. You might pose that question because you have maturely recognized the magnitude and strangeness of your choice. As I say, it will not help you then to think that you haven't done anything strange by coming here. You have. And you can come to understand and own that wonderful and courageous choice, both while you are a student, and afterward, when you truly begin to need your education and the books that gave it to you.

Third Condition: a community that refuses to promise what it cannot deliver and what the books themselves say is difficult to achieve. I mean wisdom. If we were at a college for nursing or mathematics or boat-building, we would be more than justified–perhaps ethically required–to promise to deliver certain skills, and give some assurance that we were qualified to do so. By contrast, what we are doing at our college is more obscure and difficult. Neither our tutors nor our books promise to make students wise. Yet we all seek, vigorously and hopefully, to understand what lies beneath the superficial appearances of nature and culture. It takes a great deal of experience, dedication, and knowledge to sustain such an endeavor. That is the work of our tutors, not simply to pass along the skills we may have, not to turn students into numbers, and not to entertain you. Instead, we are like guides to an island that shifts its location depending on who is going to visit it. We have the conviction and the ability to crew the ship, but we must rely on much more than rote formulas, manuals, or maps to do it. The college itself must be the sort of place that is suspicious of educational models that emphasize training or entertaining because our aim is different. We want to keep alive an activity that dies when training and entertaining become widespread. This activity of ours has all sorts of wonderful side-effects, including, perhaps, mastery of a skill, or deeper understanding of an idea, or greater depth in a feeling, but it is in itself a wilder, less determinate impulse.

Fourth Condition: a community of free independent thinkers who believe that reading the great books is the primary reason they are here, and that everything that might go along with that project, such as obtaining a degree, is of secondary importance. I know it may seem obvious, but this needs to be said. We could have begun this imaginary exercise by making a degree-granting college a first principle of our experimental founding, in which case a great books program is just one possible core curriculum among many–software installed on an indifferent mainframe. But if the germ you cultivate is the reading of great books, you would see a very different organism develop, one that is only partly contained by the four-year frame of a small liberal arts college. You would see a life of reading, thinking, and speaking that begins in, but ultimately exceeds, that frame. Please note, I did not say that this community of independent thinkers should imagine that there is nothing more important than the great books. Reading the great books is a preparation for the things in life that are even more important than the books. If we are to tackle those greater things later, then we should read these books now.

At one of my weekly Tuesday lunches last year, I asked how the college was like, and unlike, a city. We do not exist simply in order to keep existing, as most cities do. We have a central purpose that defines us. We are here to read and discuss great books. When that purpose vanishes, the college buildings may stand, but our college will not. It seems to me that our college can, with effort, live up to these ideals, and remain the sort of community the students, tutors, and alumni have always known, not by following the

beat of the cacophonous drums of higher education, but by paying attention to our own melody and letting each part of this place find its harmony within it.

There is an important question I've left looming. I know it's easy to scoff at it, but I will ask: what is a great book? After all, does it really matter if you can say what one is in the abstract when there are so many piled up for us to read? I'd encourage you to spend some time thinking about it–even if not too much time. Look at the stack of books, posters, blogs, texts, captions, and zines you've already read. Do you have the conviction that there is such a thing as a book that stands shoulder height above the others, some great book worth spending far more time on than your average artifact of human thought? Part of what allows us to set aside the usual trappings of higher education–historical context, received opinions, course goals, pedagogical models, etc.–is the simple trust that entering into conversation with a great book will take care of what all those things are trying to do, and much more besides. If you have never studied at another college or university, it is possible you do not realize how rare and unimpeded the education at St. John's is. At most colleges, you would be enmeshed in a carefully constructed web of defined expectations before being allowed even to smell, let alone touch, a great book. When you find yourself complaining about how little recognition your opinions receive here, or how unpredictable class is, or when you find yourself wondering why students at other institutions are seemingly so content with their clearly defined benchmarks of success, remind yourself that we are aiming at the individual's freedom to learn, and freedom almost always generates a healthy level of disagreement and democratic turbulence.

I'd like to change tack. I've been describing the enduring principles of our community and now I'd like to turn to their opposite: contemporary threats. (This is the Gadfly's bite.) The first threat is the abandoned classroom. Absences at the college last year were shockingly high. This is partly because the rules during COVID were relaxed and many students found themselves taking more days off than permitted. To put a medicinal spin on it, we need a dose of strong medicine. The work we do here is cumulative, not because you are accumulating information but because you are learning with others through conversation. Whenever you fall out of that conversation, returning to it is more difficult. We don't attend class because we have done good work or because we are well prepared. Instead, it's just the opposite: we attend classes together in order to do good work. Most of the work around here happens in the classroom and the conversations that spill out of it. It will get easier to go to class if you are in the habit of going to class. The dean and I have agreed that the enforcement of the attendance policy this year will closely adhere to the written requirements in the student handbook. Please recognize that the bar has been reset to the place it should be, and falling below it will likely result in absence probation, withdrawal from your class or from the college altogether.

The second contemporary threat to life at the college is the universal, often intrusive presence of digital technology and the internet. Again, if I think only of the reading of the great books in conversation, digital technology presents specific threats to that endeavor. Social media encourages our social anxieties. We want to be leisurely interlocutors; we find ourselves, instead, judging and being judged in often terse, superficial phrases. Digital communication accelerates the rate of conversation, reduces its complexity, increases its emotional freight, and too often preserves what should be ephemeral. Disreputable websites make cheap opinions available at every turn. AI churns out vapid prose without thought or effort. Ubiquitous and distracting internet access discourages coherent and sustained presence of mind. Tutors and students alike have voiced concerns about how habitually they allow themselves to be distracted from the activities they really love and most want to pursue. I've noticed that these habits have affected me and perhaps you have noticed something similar in yourself as well.

This year, I want to provide ways to think about and step away from digital technology. There will be a few scheduled forums on Tuesday for us to discuss this matter over lunch. I'm sure many of you disagree with my dire assessment of the Internet Age and I'd like to know why. I'd also like to discuss more radical measures. Can we imagine a wi-fi free dorm for those interested in a less digital life, or an honor code to define our opposition to AI writing? As a less radical beginning, there will be one or more "Phone Hotels" on campus where you can safely leave your phone for a few hours to experience untethered life. If you would like encouragement to participate in this experiment, we will hold a No Phone Day in October during which

you can try out the hotel. Finally, I will be organizing a few more "Writing Jails," as they've come to be called, at which we can write together, silently, without the pestering blur of wi-fi. I know the name rubs some people the wrong way, but it is homegrown (and surely tongue-in-cheek), and further, true, that in order to write, some of us really need to confine ourselves to the task. More information about these will be available soon.

There is a chance that my efforts at reformation will be misunderstood as merely reactionary or nostalgically anachronistic. I wish you to understand that I propose such measures as radical interventions aimed at nourishing the roots of the educational endeavor. Here is a passage from a recent book about the struggle with those technologies that undermine one of those roots: our attention. "Whereas all previous tools and media have had effects that gradually and indirectly acted on our self-understanding, digital technology acts straightforwardly on us; as attention is the single most intimate expression of who and what we are, digital technology is a spiritual technology." That was Antón Barba-Kay, an alum of our college, in his recent book, *A Web of Our Own Making: The Nature of Digital Formation*, (Cambridge, 2023). What is uniquely threatening about digital technologies, he says, is that they make our attention "the subject of their measurement, control, and (self)design." If what he says is true, and I think it is, we have a pressing responsibility to guard and cultivate that precious part of us, our attention, however we can.

Robert Abbott
Assistant Dean
August 14, 2023

Students and Tutor Seated at Seminar Table

A Critique of Dialogue

Luke Briner

Last spring, Yale's Sterling Professor of Law Robert C. Post delivered a lecture entitled "Citizenship, Undergraduate Education, and Great Books." The lecture's goal, as enunciated by Post, was to examine "how the essentially political project of preserving democracy might be connected to the distinguished educational project at St. John's."[1] His eagerness to pursue this specific enquiry was attributable to his growing anxiety over the fragility of the world's current political order, and of the degeneration of political life and discourse in America in particular. "In my lifetime," he reflects, "I don't think I have witnessed a political atmosphere more angry, more poisonous, more baleful."[2] In setting out to examine the relationship between the general political project of preserving a genuinely democratic society and the particular pedagogical project of preserving the educational integrity of our College, Post thus hoped to arrive at a richer understanding of what makes real dialogue so valuable for our society, and thereby of how to implement and preserve such dialogue most effectively in our society.

This was obviously a very admirable endeavor, and was just as obviously based on an accurate assessment of the deplorable state of contemporary political life in America. As I listened on, however, despite the clarity of Post's reasoning and the nobility of his intentions, I couldn't help but find myself disagreeing fundamentally with several of the conclusions that he arrived at, especially concerning the nature of dialogue and its political and pedagogical efficacy. I propose, then, to take up the same enquiry that he did, and, through my own independent line of thinking, to state as respectfully but as decisively as I can the reasons for my differing perspective on dialogue both in America and at St. John's.

To accomplish this in a clear and orderly way, I will proceed as follows:

I. Explication of the nature of dialogue in itself.

II. Exposition of the fundamental issues of dialogue so understood.

III. Review and critique of the opposing perspectives of Plato and Karl Popper with respect to the nature and issues of dialogue.

IV. Review and critique of Post's own perspective, both in itself and as through the lens of the broader debate on dialogue explored in the previous section.

V. Application of my view of dialogue so developed to the pedagogical philosophy of St. John's.

VI. Conclusion.

I.

§1. The word dialogue is derived from the Greek διάλογος, which is itself made up of διά (through) and λόγος (typically and most relevantly word or reason).

Two interesting conclusions about dialogue proceed immediately from this simple etymology. First, with respect to διά, its meaning as through indicates the object of predication's nature as existing in a passive relation to another object; i.e., that which is gone through must be gone through by something other than and extrinsic to itself. This implies that dialogue, whatever it is, exists not as an independent and active entity in itself, nor as its own end, but either as a medium through which some other entity or activity operates and finds its being, or otherwise as a means by which some other end is attained. To be through λόγος indicates an object outside of that λόγος which is the primary actor and/or end in relation to it. Second, with respect to λόγος, its dual meaning as word or reason shouldn't be understood as a simple coincidence, but as essential to the nature of dialogue itself. Words, without the strict, universalizing discipline of reason, would be nonsense; and if that's what we wanted to describe, then we'd be better off using words like διαλαλιά (through babble) or διαἦχος (through noise). Likewise, reason itself, without the interpersonal medium of words, would be mute, dumb, unconveyable; and the necessity of its conveyability in at least some sense is evident from the meaning of διά, which it's joined to. Again, if we intended to describe something purely mentalistic and self-contained, we'd be better off using a word like

1. "Citizenship, Undergraduate Education, and Great Books." Delivered March 24th, 2023.
2. Ibid.

διανόημα (through thought in itself). Hence the fact that λόγος, with its multiple connotations, is the word that's used, should lead us to the conclusion that the proper sense in which dialogue must be taken will have those respective connotations incorporated into and manifest within itself. The λόγος of dialogue is at once rational and the means by which the content of its rationality is conveyed.

§2. This λόγος can be further divided into two distinct but highly intertwined categories, which I'll designate as the syllogistic and the dialectical. By the syllogistic I mean the formal mode of reasoning that consists in the combination of a major and minor premise for the sake of producing a necessary conclusion. This is the foundation of all serious rational thought. By the dialectical I mean the method or movement by which a manifold of individual, often contradictory syllogisms are swept up into a dynamic unity wherein each particular's premises and conclusions constantly interface with those of all others in the endeavor to arrive at a greater, more holistic understanding underpinned by yet fundamentally greater than the sum of its parts. The individual steps of the dialectical movement can be seen as in themselves syllogistic, i.e., involving ground-level deductions based on previously-given conclusions, and the final product of that movement can usually take the form of a single, perfect, culminating syllogism. Such a culmination, however, is made possible only by our ability to compare, contrast, comport, and ultimately unify syllogisms within the context of an all-comprehending tapestry of rational intercourse existing independently of any one individual component, and, most importantly, in which "the result of an untrue…knowledge must not be allowed to run way into an empty nothing, but…grasped as the nothing of that from which it results—a result which contains what was true in the preceding knowledge."[3] This is the kind of dialectic championed by Socrates throughout Plato's dialogues, which Barr describes as "something precious close to perfection,"[4] Sachs as "something that the greatest of philosophers have all talked about and practiced,"[5] and Plotinus as "the precious part of Philosophy."[6]

3. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, §87 (trans. Miller).
4. "Notes on Dialogue" (1968), p. 2.
5. "The Heart of the Program" (2004), p. 3.
6. Enneads, I.3.6 (trans. MacKenna-Page).
7. I.e., the *Laches*.
8. I.e., the *Republic*.

§3. A further aspect of dialogue's general nature demands explication. We've already seen that διά's conjunction with λόγος indicates that this λόγος must act primarily as a medium or means for something extrinsic to itself. But this, in conjunction with the dialectical nature present within that λόγος, leads inevitably to the conclusion that dialogue must be social. It's possible for dialectic to be conducted by a single individual, since its very nature implies the comprehension of syllogistic multiplicity under a greater unifying rational principle, i.e., the mind itself. But the fact that dialogue involves not the dialectical in itself but the dialectical as an intermediate implies that it is simply the mode of and occasion for the interconnection of multiple minds. This is, again, why the meaning of λόγος qua word is so important: it's only through such that the intercommunication of minds that dialogue's διά so obviously demands can actually take place, or, in other words, that the content of the one's rationality can be transferred to that of the other, and vice versa, for the sake of a greatly enriched dialectical process shared by both at once.

§4. This is dialogue qua medium; but dialogue qua means (to an extrinsic end), within the context of the social nature just described, remains as variable as the possible occasions and uses of dialogue as such a medium. It's this fact that makes dialogue so versatile, so useful in so many different situations: dialogue is only the mechanism by which the ultimate object of its dialectic is pursued, and this object can be anything that its participants want it to be. So Socrates and his interlocutors seek out the true nature of Courage in one dialogue[7] and that of Justice in another[8], and a healthy democratic body calmly deliberates over the merits and faults of a manifold of policies with the intent of determining the efficacy of each, and also at the same time over those of the overarching political values and ends informing and directing all such policies. In every case the actual goal of a dialogue is outside of itself, and if that goal is ever definitively reached, then it, whose being is constituted by its pursuit, will negate itself in its own completion.

§5. All this being established, I finally define dialogue in and of itself as the dialectical process conducted by two or more persons through the medium of rational discourse for the sake of an end extrinsic to that process.

II.

§1. Dialogue so understood, however, immediately runs into serious real-world issues. To begin with, its threefold

nature (i.e., the syllogistic, the dialectical, and the social) necessitates a threefold discipline, or more exactly a submission to the necessary conditions of each that must be met in order for the whole to be realized concretely. The syllogistic demands that the formal structure of its own logic is carefully followed, the dialectical demands that all the content of such rigorously-structured syllogisms is kept in continually graceful and well-balanced motion, and the social demands that all persons intending to participate in such motion are shown the respect and consideration that they, both as contributors and as human beings, are inalienably entitled to. But "the laws of nature," as Hobbes observes, "...of themselves, without the terror of some power to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions...[a]nd covenants,without the sword, are but words and of no strength."[9,10] Since, then, we've already determined that dialogue has no such power, it follows that it's incapable of actually enforcing its own rules.

§2. This naturally leads to the implication that dialogue, left simply to its inherently defenseless self, will provide the very grounds for its own self-contradiction, subversion, and destruction. An absolutely, unqualifiedly free dialogue will almost always allow an individual participant to shirk the discipline(s) essential to its being, and this initial violation, since left entirely unchecked, almost invariably leads to the total denigration and dissolution of the originally-posited dialogue itself. This naturally causes it to take the form of a worthless and belligerent chaos—the opposite of everything that dialogue and its dialectic is and should be. Barr calls this self-engendered antithesis the "eristic,"[11] derived from ἔρῐς (conflict or discord). Moreover, if dialogue in and of itself, i.e., unqualifiedly free dialogue, is seen to be defenseless to the point of self-contradiction and self-subversion, then the ultimate efficacy and stability of all systems founded upon it must be called seriously into question.

III.

§1. Perhaps no one ever grasped the essence of this fatal flaw more clearly and sought to rectify it more decisively than Plato himself. "Too much freedom," he reflects, seems to change into nothing but too much slavery, both for private man and city."[12] This agrees perfectly with our own understanding of the existential threat to dialogue contained within its own content—or, maybe more precisely, its lack of actual, active content, of ἐντελέχεια (self-preserving being). The eristic that proceeds naturally from the inherent impotency of dialogue's dialectic is tyrannical in that it, upon the very basis of a totally unrestricted mode of political organization, itself constitutes that mode's annihilation—it plunges all members into a hostile free-for-all in which only the strongest(-willed) may "prevail." Hence Barr correctly takes Thrasymachus, "whose purpose [in the dialogue] is to win points and to win applause," as an eristical antithesis to the always-courteous Socrates, whose own purpose is simply "to try, through dialectical discussion... to understand better the essential nature of justice."[13]

§2. Now if "the greatest and most savage slavery" proceeds naturally "out of the extreme of freedom," then the obvious thing to do in order to best preserve the actual benefits produced by freedom would seem, as it did to Plato, to be to create bounds for it, to qualify it so that the eristical-tyrannical elements which would otherwise ferment within it are eliminated or kept at bay. For Plato, this in practice means the active reproach or non-allowal of things such as harmful music[15] and poetry[16] or heresy and blasphemy[17]—anything that (at least in his own opinion), if allowed to go unimpeded in society,

9. *Leviathan*, p. 99 (Britannica Great Books edition, Fuller version).
10. I feel justified in making use of this passage despite the fact that the term "laws of nature" is alien to my own argument because it's clear that such laws consist essentially in the same kind of reason that's absolutely essential to it. As Hobbes explains in Pt. I, ch. XIV (p. 86) of the *Leviathan*, "[a] law of nature, lex naturalis, is a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same, and to omit that by which he thinketh it may be best preserved." Obviously the broader contexts of our arguments are different, but the sense in which we're thinking about reason in itself here turns out to be quite similar.
11. See "Notes on Dialogue," pp. 2-3.
12. *Republic*, VIII.564a (trans. Bloom).
13. "Notes on Dialogue," p. 3.
14. *Republic*, VIII.564a.
15. See *Laws*, II.659c-660a, III.700a-701c (trans. Griffith-Schofield) & Republic, III.400a-403c.
16. See *Laws*, II.659c-660a & Republic, X.607b-608b.
17. See *Laws*, X.

will naturally cause society to degenerate into the anarchical freedom that flings itself into tyranny at the first opportunity. Obviously we, as modern and more culturally enlightened people living in the real world, don't need to go as far as Plato did in the strictures he proposed. But the innermost kernel of his perspective, viz., that an absolutely free social organization must be conditionally closed in order to preserve the true good of its own freedom and to prevent it from becoming entirely closed through self-engendered collapse, seems not simply worthy of serious consideration but correct outright. This is shown by the force of all the preceding arguments.

§3. Plato is, of course, not without his detractors. Chief among these is Karl Popper, who coined the now-famous term paradox of tolerance in the astonishingly uncharitable critique of Plato featured in his *Open Society and its Enemies*[18]. For Popper, this paradox, whose maxim is that "[u]nlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance,"[19] is used by Plato to justify an unconscionable regime that is "fundamentally identical with"[20] totalitarianism. "The enemies of freedom," he claims, "have always charged its defenders with subversion,"[21] and therefore a genuinely free society must never resort to such justifications, whatever the cost.

§4. As an alternative to Plato's program, Popper advances an ideology he calls "protectionism." Although having "nothing to do with the policy of strict non-intervention (often, but not quite correctly, called 'laissez faire,'"[22] protectionism nevertheless promotes a highly free society in which the state has as little influence as possible on the education and dialogue of its members. This, and Popper's perspective as a whole on this matter, is founded ultimately upon his conviction that "[the] story that democracy is not to last forever is as true, and as little to the point, as the assertion that human reason is not to last forever, since only democracy provides an institutional framework that permits reform without violence, and so the use of reason in political matters."[23]

§5. There are three major problems with Popper's position so understood.

First, and most fundamentally, it is indistinct from that of Plato's—or, to put it another way, the very essence of Plato's is contained latently within his own. Popper himself explains, in response to the Platonic paradox of tolerance, that he advocates for "a government that rules according to the principles of equalitarianism and protectionism; that tolerates all who are prepared to reciprocate, i.e. who are tolerant." But this in itself is an admission that an absolutely free society, being incapable of even this noble kind of reciprocal intolerance, is not at all feasible, and therefore that it's necessary to impose some sort of subjective, external conditions upon that society in order to ensure its continued well-being; and this is exactly the view that we've seen Plato to propound. It's all well and good for Popper to talk about how "it is...difficult to determine exactly the degree of freedom that can be left to the citizens without endangering that freedom." But the fact that the Platonic society is by no means absolutely but only conditionally restrictive, and that such restriction is derived from the exact same rationale of the restrictions of the Popperian/protectionist society, necessarily indicates that the relevant differences between those societies are themselves only of degree and not essence.

Second, Popper himself admits that it's entirely possible for the restrictions that his own protectionist sensibility is willing to sign off on—which, again, are made on essentially the same basis as the Platonic belief that he abhors—to be incapable of preventing the total collapse of democratic society, and moreover that he sees no serious problem with this. He writes:

18. See *The Open Society and its Enemies*, n. 7.4, p. 546.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid, p. 87.
21. Ibid, p. 88.
22. Ibid, p. 112.
23. Ibid, p. 6.
24. Ibid, n. 7.4, p. 546.
25. Ibid, p. 109.
26. The ridiculous idea that the Platonic society is somehow absolutely or unconditionally restrictive is instantly refuted by the passages given in nn. 15-17, as well as, for instance, the entire character of the *Ion*. As explained in III.§2, Plato isn't opposed to *all* poetry, music, etc., or with them in themselves as art forms, but only with what he considers their grave social misuse and abuse. On the contrary, the *qualified* use of such art forms, as directed to the betterment or at the very least not to the detriment of the πόλις is approved of and expounded upon throughout the *Republic* and the *Laws*. And again, we obviously don't need to advocate for the precise degree of limitation that Plato does, but only the underlying rationale that informs such limitation; and, in the current context, the fact that all of this is a matter of degree at all is enough to effectively challenge Popper.

> [S]hould he [the protectionist democrat] live to see the day when the majority vote destroys... democratic institutions, then this sad experience will tell him only that there does not exist a foolproof method of avoiding tyranny. But it need not weaken his decision to fight tyranny, nor will it expose his theory as inconsistent.[27]

Thus Popper's democrat, incapable of simply introducing some further reasonable limitations on manifestly dangerous elements threatening national dialogue in order to actually preserve it in its essence, finds himself in the ridiculous situation of proving himself as the oh-so-noble champion of democracy by allowing it to die in front of him.

Third and finally, Popper fails to recognize that, although "only democracy provides an institutional framework that permits reform without violence, and so the use of reason in political matters,"[28] the very establishment and preservation of that institutional framework requires a political impetus *outside* of such reason. Again, reason, according to Popper himself, is "an intellectual link between man and man, a medium of universal understanding"[29]; but we know well enough by now that such a medium is unable to preserve itself on its own and therefore equally unable to preserve any of the institutions that are built upon it. True dialogue is of course greatly valuable for society, but the actual preservation of its integrity, i.e., the guarantee that all its participants submit to its necessary threefold discipline, is necessarily not due to dialogue in itself but the subjective, *partisan* valuation and enforcement of it by an extrinsic and unilateral power.

From these considerations it's clear that *the intolerance of intolerance*, as enunciated by Plato, is entirely necessary and right.

27. Ibid, p. 124.
28. Ibid, p. 6.
29. Ibid, p. 130.
30. "Citizenship, Undergraduate Education, and Great Books."
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Robert C. Post, "Managing Deliberation: The Quandary of Democratic Dialogue," Ethics, p. 654.
38. Alexander Meiklejohn, *Political Freedom: The Constitutional Powers of the People* (1965), p. 7
39. Robert C. Post, "Between Governance and Management: The History and Theory of the Public Forum," UCLA Law Review 34 (1987): 1713-1835.

IV.

§1. With all these observations at our backs, let's finally return to Post's own thinking.

Post's primary concern throughout his lecture, and—in his view—the cause of "the hell created by mistrust and polarization"[30] we're unfortunately experiencing today, is "extreme partisanship."[31] Since this extreme partisan attitude refuses "to wheel and to deal"[32] in the traditional way with those across the political aisle, it's antithetical to the very nature and project of liberal democracy. "We cannot enter politics," he argues, "without encountering those who disagree with us, and perhaps who disagree with us radically,"[33] and our political agonists cannot be thus encountered without the mutual recognition of "something in common that's more important than [our] disagreement [i.e., the very system of political dialogue now in place]."[34] "Politics is not like war—politics is the art of living together despite differences. In war, we seek to exterminate the other; but in politics, we abjure violence... we seek to win while remaining bound to the rules to the law that defines appropriate political engagement."[35] Since the fundamental rules and ideals of liberal democracy as an institution therefore transcend all other possible disagreements that may occur within or upon the basis of them, "political ideology" itself for Post "counts for much, but it does not count...cannot count for everything."[36]

§2. Further valuable information concerning Post's perspective on this matter can be extracted from his 1993 paper "Managing Deliberation: The Quandary of Democratic Dialogue." In this wonderful paper, Post dedicates himself to the analysis and refutation of what he calls "the 'collectivist theory' of the First Amendment,"[37] which consists in the belief that the Amendment's ultimate goal is not personal autonomy in and of itself but the ensurance of "the voting of wise decisions,"[38] and therefore also in the belief that the conditional limitation and moderation of public dialogue is not only constitutionally permissible but necessary and good in itself.

Post begins his treatment of this theory by observing that it's basically "managerial,"[39] in the sense that "the [political] meeting is regarded as an instrumental organization designed to achieve important and specific social ends, and its rules and regulations are deemed constitutionally justified insofar as they are necessary for

the attainment of these ends."[40] Public discourse, for the collectivist, is like a town meeting—and just as a town meeting, with its clear rules for appropriate language, brevity, general decorum, etc., "is free to resolve as it wishes items properly presented for decision, but... is not free to abandon the shared assumptions of function and procedure that constitute it,"[41] so it's only reasonable that national discourse should have an analogously moderated order for the sake of producing a politically and intellectually enriched polity capable of self-preservation and beneficial democratic decision-making. This position seems sensible on its face; Post is quick to point out, however, that although such a moderated order is perfectly suitable for something as small-scale and limited in scope as a town meeting, its application to national discourse would necessitate that "the framework of democratic decision making remains fixed and beyond the reach of citizen self-government."[42] And yet this must imply a State that "stands in contradiction to the central project of collective self-determination"[43] insofar as it "displaces that project for the sake of heteronomously imposed norms."[44] If such a contradiction exists, then it must obviously follow that "the democratic function of public discourse is inconsistent with government regulations that suppress speech within public discourse for the sake of imposing a specific version of national identity."[45] Hence Post concludes this argument with a warning: "[i]f we create organizations of heteronomy, we shall all, sooner or later, be condemned to inhabit them. We shall become the subjects of a power not our own."

§3. I disagree with Post's position so understood in two fundamental ways.

First, it appears to me that he, like Popper, does not satisfyingly address the basic existential problem that dialogue of any kind, and especially dialogue *qua* political discourse, faces in either his lecture or his above-examined paper. An absolutely free dialogue, again, has no means of actually defending itself against the anti-dialogical behavior and sentiments that will inevitably come onto the scene. In such cases the survival of that dialogue, i.e., of democratic society, can only ever be attributed to some power or agent *extrinsic* to the realm of dialogue itself. This is necessarily the case because, if it were *intrinsic* to dialogue, i.e., only a certain conviction or position within a *conversation*, then it would again be incapable of seriously dealing with something that is antithetical to the very *existence* of that conversation, and thus that has no interest in following any of its necessary rules. Reason is effective only against itself. The most rational and beautifully expressed argument in the world is worthless when met with irrational or *anti*-rational forces; and this is exactly the situation we face in America today. If we fail to fully acknowledge this fact, then we do so at our own peril. Therefore some active and determinate moderating power other than dialogue itself, i.e., a *heteronomous* power, is necessary.

Second, it seems as though Post doesn't appreciate that *liberal-democratic society, and the ideology upon which it's founded, is no less fundamentally partisan, no less a single subjectively-decided mode of political organization, than any other*. Actually, he doesn't even appear to be fully conscious of this fact. His claim that "political ideology... counts for much, but it does not count...cannot count for everything" is especially telling. By phrasing the matter in this way, it's clear that he doesn't consider liberal democracy to be ideologically-founded *in its own right*. Instead of perceiving that the very valuation of democratic dialogue, i.e., the conviction that such is a beneficial social practice that should be introduced and abided by, is itself *profoundly ideological*, and is therefore partisan in the sense of being unable to coexist with fundamentally contrary ideologies within the same society, Post appears to view the conventional mode of liberal-democratic discourse as *non- or supra-ideological*, and in fact as some kind of universal, impartial, value-neutral substratum upon which ideologies then grow and interrelate. This is a common and manifestly false perspective. The ideologies which do genuinely exist and coexist within the context of liberal-democratic dialogue only do so because they are all fundamentally on the *same side* as it—because they are only minor permutations of one major partisan ideology, and are therefore capable of actual intercourse and compromise within the context of that major ideology. Hence, for instance, different parties are capable of coexisting peacefully with each other because (or maybe

40. Robert C. Post, "Managing Deliberation: The Quandary of Democratic Dialogue," Ethics, p. 658.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid, p. 659.
43. Ibid, p. 660.
44. Ibid, p. 661.
45. Ibid, p. 665.
46. Ibid, p. 678.

insofar as) both fundamentally agree with and submit to the overarching ideology of liberal democracy itself. The same principle also holds for things like different (non-fanatical) religions and cultural backgrounds. This is, in fact, exactly why multiculturalism works, and is one of the real virtues of our current mode of political organization. But the same is not and cannot be the case between, for instance, liberal democracy and fascism. There can be no common ground, no substratum, no mutually recognized principle, no friendship, no *dialogue* between these two. They are utterly irreconcilable, and are thus in a perpetual state of war with each other. And it's this fact, viz., that fascism is so morally repugnant and so violently irreconcilable with the ideals of our own and of any civilized society, that makes its exclusion, suppression, and elimination reasonable, necessary, and just. "*Extreme partisanship*" in this sense is therefore not only not bad in itself but actually the foundation upon which a genuinely tolerant, cosmopolitan, and dialogue-rich society must rest.

V.

§1. Viewing the kind of dialogue featured in the St. John's Program as a model or microcosm of dialogue in broader American society is a long-standing tradition, not the least for figures like Post. We may now do the same by applying some of the general insights we've arrived at to dialogue as it manifests specifically at St. John's.

§2. The ultimate goal of our education at St. John's, and of liberal education generally, is to prepare us for the acquisition of personal moral excellence. This is obvious by the fact that it's clearly neither erudition in itself (if it is, then why would the College deemphasize grades, and why would we bother involving ourselves so heavily with the messiness and uncertainty of our kind of dialogue at all?) nor any kind of technical skill (if it is, then why not just go into STEM or trade school?). Nor is our education even capable of making us good on its own; making anyone good is probably impossible, and even if it is, one look at the character of our student body shows that it's most certainly not possible by this means. Instead, liberal education is a worthy practice only insofar as it "prepares the mind for the acquisition of moral values."[47] This is accomplished by the student's sincere engagement with the trivium and quadrivium, which we study most of at St. John's, and, specifically at St. John's itself, with the Great Books and the dialogue through which we approach them. By submitting ourselves wholeheartedly to the dialogue of the classroom in the investigation of "what is *elementary* in all subject matters,"[48] we're slowly given the inner tools by which we might become more virtuous and fully realized human beings; and this is something infinitely more valuable to ourselves and to society than simple scholarly or technical training.[49]

§3. An important and interesting distinction needs to be made with respect to dialogue's place in this system, however. We've already observed (I.§4) that dialogue *qua* means is simply the mechanism by which the ultimate object of its dialectic is pursued. If this is true, however, then it's clear that the goal of St. John's is *not* the goal of dialogue itself. *Its* goal is to fully understand its object; *our* goal, conversely, is to *use* the pursuit of that understanding as a method of *social* (the third and most characteristic nature of dialogue) and thereby ultimately of *moral* discipline, regardless of whether we actually end up understanding the object itself or not. This is why Barr writes that "[t]he [great] books really are 'to chew on,' not to master."[50] It is not mastery in itself, but the discipline of our communal, dialogical endeavor toward mastery that constitutes the essence of our education.

§4. The fact that dialogue is used simply as a moral discipline rather than as an instrument for ascertaining intellectual truth puts an even greater emphasis on the necessity of actually *preserving* that dialogue. If classes are allowed to be constantly derailed by the Thrasymachuses among us, then we aren't just deprived of a good conversation, but of the very content of our own education. It's possible that the desperate struggle to reestablish order can itself be educational, but this must be true only in very specific circumstances and is in any case not what should be generally accepted. What we've already said concerning the necessity of an extrinsic, unilateral moderating power capable of enforcing the threefold discipline of the dialogue while not interfering

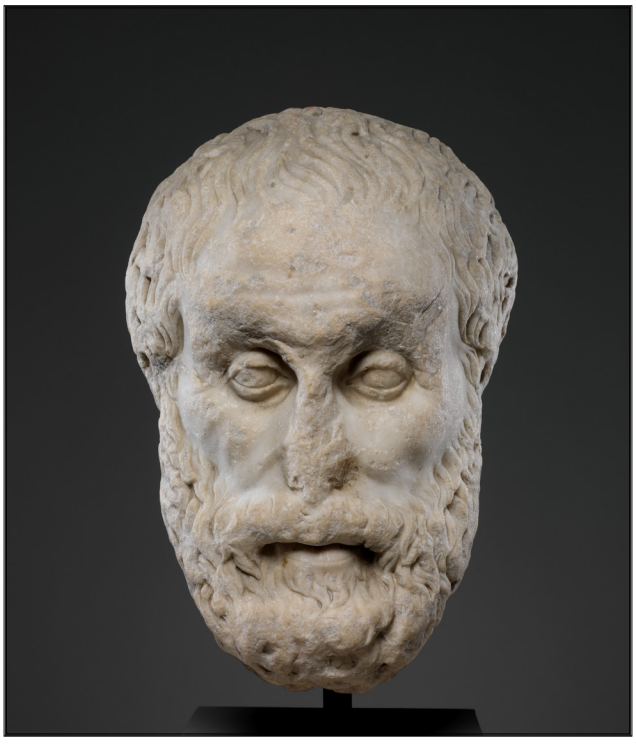
47. *Letters From a Stoic*, Letter LXXXVIII (trans. Campbell).
48. Eva Brann, "A Manifesto for Liberal Education" (2015).
49. For a more detailed account of this, see my essay "What's the Good of a Liberal Education?" in *Gadfly* XLIV.1.
50. Stringfellow Barr, "Education: Now and to Come: Liberal Education: A Common Adventure," Autumn, 1955, Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 306.

with any of its actual syllogistic and dialectical content thus holds especially true here; and this is, in fact, the exact role *tutors* should play in the classroom. The tutor's purpose is "not," of course, "to give information, nor is it to produce the 'right' opinion or interpretation"[51]; but this doesn't at all contradict their proper activity of ensuring that dialogue remains "cooperative and respectful, not competitive,"[52] i.e., of ensuring that the eristical is never able to get a considerable foothold. The St. John's classroom must be a place where all students feel unconditionally safe and heard. Thus while the actual *subject-matter* of the students' dialogue should rarely be interfered with, the *structure* within which that dialogue must necessarily take place should be very actively and jealously guarded. In summary, tutors should "guide the conversation."[53] Likewise, good students should commit themselves scrupulously to the discipline of dialogue and actively seek to preserve and promote its necessary structure as much as possible through their words and conduct, understanding that it's only by means of such submission to its strict order that the freedom promised by the Program can actually be acquired.[54]

VI.

§1. To recapitulate: my main contentions are 1) that dialogue is not an end in itself, but only the medium and/or means of something extrinsic, 2) that dialogue, being in itself incapable of self-preservation, requires a similarly extrinsic power in order to defend it from the eristical and to enforce its own necessary conditions, 3) that Plato's position on democratic dialogue is fundamentally correct, while those of Popper and Post are fundamentally flawed, 4) that modes of political organization based on democratic dialogue are in themselves every bit as partisan and ideological as any others precisely because of their valuation of dialogue, and must be esteemed and defended accordingly, and 5) that the protection of dialogue as it exists both in American life in general and at St. John's in particular necessitates the active, unilateral restriction of things antithetical and irreconcilably opposed to its very nature and being.

§2. I'm aware that these contentions will be very unpopular. But it's my sincere concern for the state of our country, and my sincere love for our Program here, that compels me to put them forward strongly anyway. I have no interest in flattering myself, my colleagues, my tutors, or my fellow citizens with the unrigorous and even complacent appraisals of dialogue that I unfortunately think have become very common. In fact, I think that seriously examining and challenging the philosophical foundations which those appraisals often seem based on is the truest way of respecting both myself and them. At the very least, I think I've done a Johnnie-like thing by questioning such a sacrosanct ideal of our country and College, and I can only hope that, in doing so, I've managed to be even the littlest bit like those great figures of our Program insofar as they, as Post rightly celebrates, "display both respect for their interlocutors and at the same time the determination to assert their own ideas."[55]



Marble head of a philosopher, 1st or 2nd century CE

51. *Statement of the Program*, p. 5.
52. "Learning Through Conversation at St. John's College," 2015.
53. Ibid.
54. For a more thorough account of this position, see my essay "Thoughts on the St. John's Class" in *Gadfly* XLIV.4.
55. "Citizenship, Undergraduate Education, and Great Books."

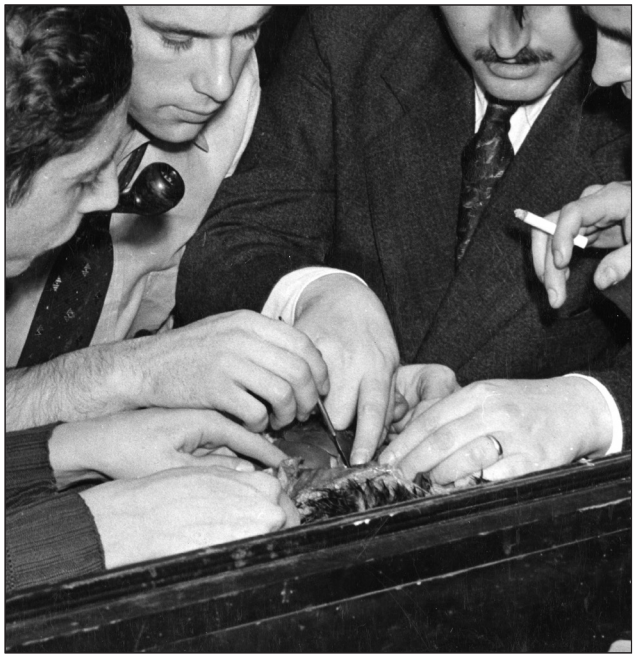
Getting Personal with the Program

Tuyết-Nhi Nghiêm

It's a new year, and a new start - certainly for freshmen, but upperclassmen should not think themselves excluded or immune from beginnings. The first questions I long to ask everyone I meet on this campus are: If you have chosen to come to this college, why? What do you believe the core purpose of the program is? Will you allow yourself to be changed?

I suppose it isn't fair to ask so many questions of someone who is still a stranger without answering them myself, but I'm not sure that those answers are clear to my own heart yet. I can tell you this: I fought for three hours with my father, shouting and sobbing, to come here. Others with strict, traditional parents, especially those from less stable foreign countries, may understand this without further explanation. I had been accepted into a prestigious, competitive, well-known school for computational neuroscience, setting me up to graduate with plenty of internships under my belt and a well-paying job lined up. In my father's eyes, I was throwing away the small fortune he had painstakingly saved since before my conception to support a child's full education. I was, and still am, incredibly privileged to have even been able to consider coming to this college. Because of this continued pressure on me by practically all of the adults in my life to justify studying here rather than a more traditional school, made worse by the fact that the school is on the other side of the country from what I knew as home and thus necessitated abandoning not only my parents' dreams for me but abandoning them physically as well, the questions of what the heart of the program is really meant to teach are ever-present in my mind.

I spend a lot of time with the Program - in classes, obviously, but elsewhere as well. I am trying to understand It truly, and each time I reach for it, this old fox twists and turns out of my grasp. Every once in a while, the Program and I, butting heads once again, walk down the grassy hill to the small docks. Under the clear stars and over the creek's restless whispers of "πάντα ῥεῖ," I beg the Program once again to give me answers. What are we doing here? What is it all for, and was everything I sacrificed to be here



Students Crowd around a Tutor during a Dissection of a Sheep Heart in Junior Laboratory

even remotely worth it? Can the Program save anyone? How can it be that a Program which I want to believe is so perfect leaves us as such imperfect people?

None of us came here as perfect students or perfect Program readers, obviously - even less so as perfect humans. Maybe no such reality exists for any of the ideals. We have to be meant to learn something, though; it can't be just talk without growth. It is clear that what we are learning are not the languages in themselves, or calculus for its own sake, and certainly not that plants contain fire. The school promises to "make free human beings out of children by means of books and a balance". Can anyone that can sophistically talk their way through anything then be called free? If so, the college is merely producing tools without guidance, which can bring evil to the world just as readily as they may do good in it. If the Program is to be seen as a good in this world - which I believe is necessary to justify its continued existence and the adoration that many of us hold for it - then it must leave us with some guidance regarding what we should go out into the world to do as well.

The obvious answer would be that dozens of our readings center around ethics and virtue. These are almost always my favorite readings, because they allow me to believe that what we are doing on this beautiful little

campus matters. They allow me to believe that after my four years here, I will exit our bubble as a better person. When I look around at all of these people I love working together to understand texts that I love, I catch a glimpse of what this place is meant for.

On the other hand, if I take a step back from my attachment to these people I adore, I hesitate to say that we have all been made better. So many of us, myself included, still fall so short of the ideals of a responsible citizen and individual that we have read about. I am far less active and involved in various clubs and activities than I ought to be, less learned in current political happenings, and less frequent in bringing people joy than I was in my past. I work far too much, partially out of an overabundance of wanting to be prepared for whatever may come my way and partially due to a touch of avarice. Little dramas and gossips still find hold here, even in what I believe is one of the strongest communities that I have seen. We fail in our responsibility to each other in tiny ways all the time, evidenced by the frequent messes left behind in common kitchens or after events. There are far more extreme examples, too: our significant substance use problem, most especially with smoking addiction and its iron grip on our "campus culture," even if we try to brush it off as a joke; the continued malicious thefts of food of people with medical conditions from common kitchens, even after explanatory notes of the severity of the crime were left; the theft of hundreds of dollars of club equipment; the cases of sexual assault or greater which are reported each year. These occurrences, even if unique in specific details, I am sure are regular occurrences generally in this college's history. Perhaps the nature of humans is too corrupt for any community to be perfect - again, perhaps ideals will never exist in reality. The books that we read and the subjects we talk about, however, are intended to work towards freeing us from such things. We know better. We choose to do worse. We spend years and years learning through the Program, and we spit in its face again and again as we go.

I wonder how many of us genuinely take the Program seriously. The gravity of the Program, the weight of what we have set out to do, hits me at times, but it is so easy to let that fade away when I am preoccupied with other things: work, fun, social conformity, etc. Perhaps that means that it doesn't really loom so large, or it would naturally stay more present in our minds.

Every fiber of my being rejects this notion, however. The Program has to be grand and life-changing, or else I will never come to terms with my personal gripes with it. I will never be able to forgive it for what I lost. More specifically, I will never be able to forgive myself for my futile foolishness. And so I need the Program to change me. This school was not the most affordable, not the most prestigious, not the most comfortable, not the easiest of my options. I chose it anyway, believing that it could teach me something that few other places could, in a way that no other place could. It is the only reason I can conceive of to come to a college so far off the beaten path and so contrary to the conventional "wise choices" for higher education.

I hope that my fellow students share most of my sentiments about our task at hand. The Program demands so much of its students that entering into it without being deeply passionate about and trusting in its power seems to me as foolish as bailing a body of water which one does not know the bounds of. But if we are all here for the same core reason, and if we all want to grow through this Program, shouldn't we live and breathe it; not just by dedicating so much time to it, but by holding it in our hearts as we decide daily how to conduct ourselves in this world? Even if we continue to fall short, at least we're making small steps. At least the weight of the Program is carried with us in some sense, even if it is only the source of some guilt and not a full change of actions. At least we can say that what we have spent or will spend four years of our short lives studying leads us to be better to each other, better to our community, better to our world. This is perhaps not someone that every college student can claim (certainly not finance majors).

The last question that I sometimes want to ask as a part of my initial torrent of them, although I fear it coming off as rudeness: If it is the case that you did not come here ready, and more than that, desperate to be changed, then why did you bother?

From the President: The Value of Civic Engagement

Nora Demleitner

During the spring's inauguration ceremony, I laid out my vision for St. John's College as a place that "sustains its unique spirit and continues to set itself apart from other institutions of higher education—and that we keep leaning into our distinctive curriculum while responding to the needs of our time, remaining relevant for the next 100 years and beyond." Part of that vision includes championing "an atmosphere where students have a strong sense of belonging, and they are set up for success as participants in civic life and the workforce; an environment where we are engendering responsible citizenship and lifelong learning..."

I believe there may be no better way to accomplish this than to support opportunities where students can be of service to others. Since joining the college, I have been continually impressed with the community volunteer efforts of our students, many of which are longstanding, such as Project Polity's tutoring sessions for local Annapolis youth, community cleanups and pantry drives. The Food Recovery Network, a partnership between students and staff of the dining hall, last year donated more than 2,500 pounds of food to Annapolis Light House, a homelessness prevention center. Volunteering has also had its place on campus, for example when tutors, students and staff team up annually to create and maintain a campus rain garden with native plants.

Beyond enhancing the College's reputation in the Annapolis community, these opportunities are a great chance to make the program come alive. You can apply skills such as listening and working together that are at the core of our program's pedagogy in the real world. You'll be amazed what you have learned and how applicable it is to situations on and off campus. Civic participation also provides opportunities to think about the values you read about in the classroom – virtue, beauty, justice, friendship – and how they relate to you as an individual, and the greater community.

Being of service to others is a way of clarifying personal values, finding purpose and meaning, and learning about one's place in the larger community. That civic engagement can take many forms, such as the community service examples above, but it can also mean getting involved in a nonprofit foundation, or in support of a cause you are passionate about. This sort of work can help you find your strengths, perhaps even figure out a career path, and build skills that will serve you throughout your lifetime.

I want you to know that the College sees what you are doing – and we support it. If you have more ideas for ways to serve the community, bring them forward. I regularly interact with community organizations who ask for Johnnie support because of the impressive way in which you comport yourself. I couldn't be prouder of all of your community efforts, and they, along with the education you receive here, are truly the foundation for a meaningful life, meaningful work, and better world for us all.

Scott M. Buchanan Leading a Community Seminar

Advice on Summer Vacation

Bennett Scott

Dear fools,

What is the divine truth of a summer vacation? The hottest days of your youth spent rollerblading till your knees bled, your knees burning as you jumped in the over-chlorinated pool, the bug bites layered on the backs of your knees distracting from your youthful four square crushes. All those wonderful knee-oriented days are gone; now your summer days are: working at the local coffee shop, ripping on your vape out back with Pam (20 years serving coffee and not once employee of the month), and being hit on by men who are old enough to be your father and apparently wouldn't mind if they were. The nights are filled with drinking and trying to be friends with people you haven't been friends with since high school and, during a lucky witching hour or two, trying out some new drug and gazing off into the distance of your car's ceiling. (If you're new here: welcome, you'll understand in about three weeks.)

Let's be frank with each other: it was a boring summer. When people ask you what you did, you're embarrassed. Sure, you tripped acid for the first time, went on a date with that 56 year old Italian mobster, and even managed to rug-burn your knees, but it's just not the same. You know me, dear reader; I've always got a solution for you.

Lie. Just straight up lie about what you did this summer. And not just one lie (coward), but as many as you can juggle in that little sun-bleached head of yours:

To your Greek class, you spent the summer curing cancer with unheard of new methods based on a vision you had in a dream (that image of your ex-three-times-removed partner surrounded by a halo of birds repeating "Oogabooga" at you over and over had to mean something!).

To your math class, you worked as a bouncer/bartender/much-requested-but-rarely-seen-dancer at a strip club by the name of The Swooch's Gentlewoman's Club (you, however, went by the name Bach It Up and exclusively danced to his Suites in Major) where you led the newest trends in seduction (not to let the cat out of the bag, but it involves putting a cat in a bag).

To your tutors, you were hiking the Appalachian trail with nothing but a sawn off toothbrush and the clothes on your back in pursuit of a spiritual experience (the spirit has spoken: you are to become a goat herder and Christian rapper).

To your "we ate once together" friend, you may have murdered three people or maybe you didn't there isn't any definitive evidence guess you'll never know, Jeremy.

To your crush, you (weren't doing anything, never have a crush on anyone at St. John's College it's a horrible idea, we're all idiots, romantic idiots who'll eat you alive without realizing it or very much realizing it and you won't know what you'd like to believe as you lay crying on Augustine's *Confessions*).

And when everything threatens to come crashing down at a party with everyone there, you'll realize reconciling the timelines is the most entertaining part: "No no no don't worry sorry I forgot to tell you all the *full* story of my summer so yes I was working at Swoochie's at night while I was curing cancer during the day and going to the Appalachians on Tuesdays where I might have murdered one person and murdered the other two at the club during a bar fight and buried them in the lot out back (4571 E. Plimpton Street, Detroit MI 48127) which is now also where I'll be setting up my combination goat-field and church/soundstage, yeah it was really a great summer huh and I know I'm so cool and hot and have lyme disease from the hikes so don't you want me huh don't want to date me now Mr.—(*Shush. Don't have a crush at SJC*).

Remember: Dead men tell no tales (hidden underneath a thick layer of pepper and dead fish in the dirt lot where you last saw your mobster boyfriend), but you sure can. So why not tell interesting ones?

—B.S. (Not for BSing)

Students Sitting in Sailboats on College Creek

Neotibicen canicularis: Dog-Day Cicada

100 decibels? Are you sick-a-da noise?

Louis Rosenberg & Vivian Miyakawa

It's another beautiful day on campus. The weather is perfect for reading, with soft hints of sunlight glancing through the trees, and not a single gust of wind to disturb the pages of a busy student. Settling down, freshmen crack open *The Odyssey* while seniors tackle the works of Hegel. On this lovely afternoon, productivity comes easy. A lull falls over the quad as everyone settles in, reveling in the peaceful simplicity of studying outside.

It starts with a hum. A simple background noise, akin to the gentle buzzing of honeybees or the quiet whir of fluorescent lights. It blends in with the rustling of the trees, hardly noticeable to anyone who isn't seeking it out. Slowly, the humming builds. Students are pressed to pay attention to their readings, attempting to tune out the now obnoxious drone of continuous noise. The buzzing sounds frantic now, getting louder by the second and showing no signs of stopping. An irritated Johnnie whips out their phone, grumbling about cicadas. In what may well be a futile attempt to guilt-trip these singing insects, they navigate to a website that records noise levels. As soon as the page is opened, the screen spits out an outrageous number. One hundred decibels. The very same volume as using a lawnmower or operating a jackhammer. As the students reluctantly retreat to their dorms for a quieter study space, they'll grumble these questions to themselves as they trek up the stairs: How on earth can such small bugs make such loud noises? And why are they absolutely everywhere?

Annual cicadas can be spotted throughout the fall at various points in their adult life-cycle: singing from the trees, disrupting classrooms in Mellon, and dying on the ground. These cicadas are distinct from their periodical brethren both in their lifecycle (they emerge every year while periodical cicadas emerge every 13 or 17 years) and their appearance. Species that emerge annually are larger than periodical cicadas and possess relatively wider bodies. Their carapaces are generally patterned in various shades of green, brown, and black; their eyes are black or brown rather than the bright red of periodical species. Many annual species closely resemble each other, however, and identification of specific species is further complicated by the significant variation within each species' patterns.

One of the more common annual species in Maryland is the dog-day cicada, N. canicularis. They come in three primary color morphs: green with black markings, brown with black markings, and predominately black. They are smaller than some other species which may otherwise be mistaken for them, such as the lyrical cicada, but are still fairly large insects at 1.5 to 2 inches in length. The adult form of cicadas is the most easily recognizable to the routine observer, as the nymphs spend all of their time underground. Adults begin emerging in mid-summer and fly, mate, lay eggs in plant stems, and yes, sing, until early October. Though each year will lead to at least some new adult dog-day cicadas emerging (hence the common reference to "annual cicadas"), each individual of this species is thought to have a life-cycle lasting around 3 years.

The characteristic singing of cicadas is among the loudest of any insect species, often building to more than 100 decibels, which is comparable in volume to a lawnmower. Their song is used to attract females or, for some species, repel rival males. Sound is produced from cicadas' tymbals, which are located in a cavity between their first and second body segments. When the tymbal is vibrated by a cicada's abdominal muscles, it produces the start of the song, and the sound is amplified to its extreme volume by resonation chambers in the thorax and abdomen. In part because of the variation between songs of different N. canicularis specimens, it is suspected that they often hybridize with other cicadas in the genus. Still, dedicated listeners can often still identify cicadas based solely on the sound of their chirping. Next time you're out on the quad, you should give it a try.

Sources:
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The Betrothed

Luke Briner

I.

As I walk weeping through the shaded vale
That seeks to swallow me in arid night
And would but for that faint-aetheric light
Which rare and sweet illumes the somber pale,
May I keep tight this consecrated veil
Wrapped 'round me, and, so wrapped, obscure the sight
Alike of extern eyes and false delight
And fix my view above by its curtail.
O veil, true cultus of obscurity!
Beloved, I desire to be unknown
Unto this world and all its surety
If only I one day before your Throne
Might find my peace at last, and if to me
You will vouchsafe eternally your own.

II.

Allow me, then, to breathe in the perfume
Of your true Name, ambrosial as the flowers
Of Lebanon or henna-braided bowers
Of fair Ein-Gedi in resplendent bloom,
And, so enrapt, with joy myself consume
In fainted love of that enthralling Power
Which in you flows innate and from you showers
Upon your servants' Idyll-famished gloom;
Ah, that I might, my Perfect One, return
My borrowed fragrance to your native Seat
From which my second race made sad adjourn
And back to which I long now to retreat,
And knelt before you, solemn and supern,
With it in trembling awe anoint your feet!

III.

See how my spirit cries out for your reign,
Sublime as that of David, who through force
Of Prodigy by Providence endorsed
Made Israel's two Kingdoms his domain,
Or Pallas, Genius-Sired of Heaven's Plane,
Who, condescending from her lofty Course,
Contrived by puissant Wisdom to enforce
Upon her namesake State her golden Rein;
As they exalted came to the command
Of subjects bound in gracious unity,
May you with sovereign soul and sceptered hand
Deign to reside triumphant over me,
And I, thus made your own new-conquered land,
Become at last by your yoke truly free.

IV.

With Longing such as this I ceaseless pray
In silent speech, my gaze cast humbly down
By meditations cumbrous as the gown
Which curtains me from the encroaching fray
And keeps me on the much-benighted Way
That leads to and is lumined by your Crown
Whose sacred shine dispels all mortal frown
And hints the dawn of amaranthine Day;
As I make my way down that lustral aisle,
Good egress of this sad-appointed place,
Allow me unto you to reconcile
My heart, so long unworthy of embrace,
So I might look, at the end of my trial,
At last with eyes upraised upon your Face.

V.

O Face, which with a smile can comprehend
The nameless ecstasies of the Divine—
O Face, whose contemplation is a wine
With which no worldly spirit could contend!
Wrapped now in your own arms do I transcend
All past-held pain, all reason for repine,
And, finding in you all that was once mine,
Achieve by new Beginning my true End.
Before I was, you Were, and but for you
I'd have no life, nor have desire thereof;
For unto you and you alone I flew,
My only wish to find you here Above,
And joined again in Consummation true
To melt away in your all-perfect Love.

The SJC Mystery #1: The Stone

Bennett "The Stone" Scott

In middle of the journey of our days
I found that I was in a darksome wood—
The right road lost and vanished in the maze.

I live by one rule: never do anything that could start a horror movie. It singlehandedly prevents all manner of foolish decisions: sex in the woods at night: no; exploring dangerous abandoned buildings: NO; using a ouija board to summon your recently deceased neighbor while insulting that neighbor's elderly widow: NO.

But I am young, dumb, and stupid, which means I already qualify for a horror movie by simple right of being. So, just this once, I want to try something: The Stone.

If I've ever been anywhere haunted, it would be the St. John's College, Annapolis campus. The college bookstore was a morgue during the civil war, people have been drowning here in College Creek for centuries, and there is something most certainly devilish in this muggy East Coast air (it's the cigarette smoke that you just blew into my face). And The Stone? The stone is bad vibe overdrive.

Walk up the brick path from the front entrance, pass the first building (McDowell, my old friend, hello, didn't you burn down in a fire?), and come to a quadrangular space we call the quad (innovative). On the southwest side of the upper lawn is The Stone, hidden amongst the gray, a small disk carved out of the slate ground. Pick it up. Turn it over. Now, you are looking at The Symbol.

The Symbol is best described as four tallies, the second having a twist attached below, and a large curve on the far side (Bad description? Read till the end of the article to find out how you can see it! And your boy! At the same time!). To me it looks like a really messed up moose ridden by my dad, mom, and me. My psychoanalyst would like me to unpack that; I will not.

So what is The Symbol? If you ask around, even the witchiest looking students (stick and poke tattoos, teeth earrings, self-administered haircuts) can't tell you, responding to all inquiries by wondering aloud if they should leave the college. You can try asking the internet too. But posts on Reddit and other, somehow sketchier websites have received only mocking responses, net -2 upvotes, and an ad for hot moms in my area (I don't care what they need right now while their husbands are gone, do they or do they not they know what The Symbol is?). Even contemplating The Symbol while absolutely out of my mind on entirely legal experiential substances led only to a vague sense of foreboding and the urge to order Papa John's. So, having tried everything, I was forced to pull out the big guns: get over my social anxiety and ask our head librarian and campus historian, Penelope Earrose.

Bennett Scott: Dr. Earrose, thank you for taking the time to meet with me.

Penelope Earrose: Of course! I love nothing more than getting to talk to students about college history and thus being given a fleeting moment of freedom where I actually get to do my job and interact with other human beings rather than just stare into the dreadful empty face of my computer all day.

BS: Great. So when was the current campus of St. John's founded?

PE: Well, work on Mellon was begun in 1742, but [entirely interesting information has been cut here to get you to the heart of the matter:]

BS: So do you know anything about The Stone?

PE: Sorry, the what?

BS: The Stone. The small disk on the quad with a weird symbol on it? This weird symbol. [Draws The Symbol.]

PE: Well, no, I don't think I've ever seen anything like that. We've got some old documents that you're more than welcome to sort through for any explanations, but that...well to tell you the truth, Mr. Scott, that symbol just doesn't look right.

BS: Thank you for your time Dr. Earrose.

PE: Of course.

BS: [Leaves the office, walks out the front of the

library, promptly:] Well, fuck my one idea.

So then, my search continues. If you have any information regarding The Stone, The Symbol, or anything even vaguely related, please send me an email at: bascott@sjc.edu. If there's anything helpful, I'll try to include it in the next article.

Also! In an SJC first, there will be a video series associated with this column; the first video is already up; go check it out for more details on this mess I've gotten myself into:

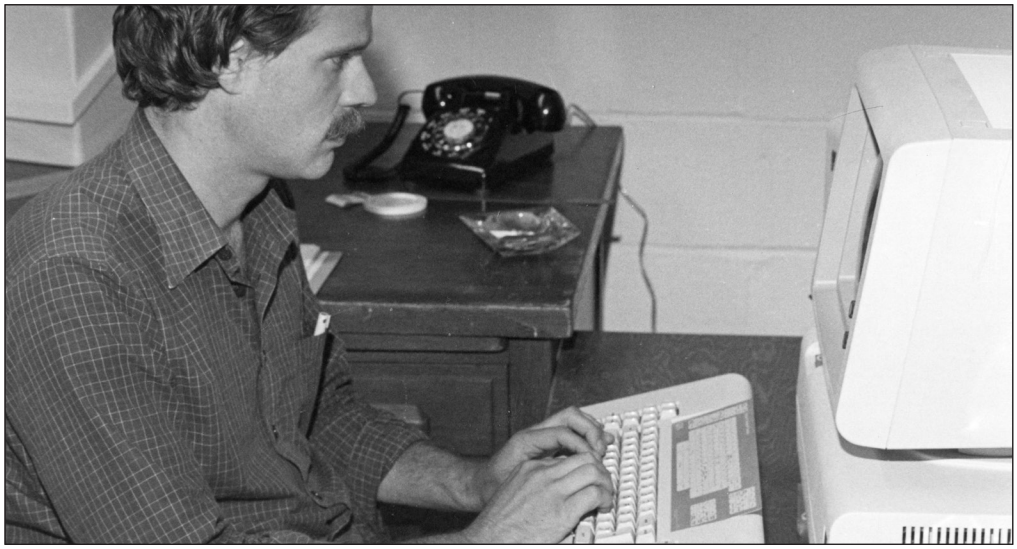
(All my videos will be uploaded to this channel (BSMysteries), so check it out!)

Review of the Freewrite Drafting Tool

John Teague

In the spring of 2023, I pulled the trigger on a used Taylor 812ce I had been eyeing at a music store in Baltimore. This particular instrument had been on my mind since my sophomore year in high school: made in America, new V-Class bracing, beautiful inlays. It manages to be articulate without sacrificing the great tone of the more traditional dreadnought, making it a fingerstyle guitarist's dream. This particular model stood unadulterated from any electronics, and its rudimentary simplicity encouraged rudimentary practice. Unamplified sets harkening back to distant memories of folk music in the Sangre de Cristo mountains, where I worked a summer exploring and presenting that country. Despite the seemingly impossible combination of both jargon and abstractions of my description, the guitar managed to touch me spiritually, invigorating my practice habits. I've improved more in a partial year of fine guitar ownership than I would in a decade of noodling on my old acoustic at my previous rate. Learning tunes and techniques from their bluegrass inceptions to their more modern nu-folk consequences, I've immersed myself in something more than a music style, a certain folkish worldview and all its accompanying philosophies and mannerisms that gradually change a personality. While the cause of this was my will (I think), I remain troubled by a realization that my musical and personal development was only the consequence of my enthusiasm for a new purchase, a state of mind also witnessed in Funko Pop mongers and MCM universe enjoyers.

With that experience showing me that virtue can, in fact, be taught, I made another purchase - ASTROHAUS's Freewrite Drafting Assistant. It markets itself as a 'digital typewriter,' the gateway to distraction-free writing. I checked the package tracking with some excitement, wanting to hold and feel the aluminum chassis in my hand, to hear the satisfying clacks of the MX Brown mechanical switches. Now that it has arrived, I can confirm that it does, in fact, feel great in my hands and that writing with it is a novel and enjoyable experience. It has fewer electronic functions, so its reduced EMF radiation probably has a less harmful effect on my genetic fidelity (I write as I smoke a cigarette). My state of mind as I write this review is as advertised. Instead of switching tabs or listening to music I feel a cool autumnal breeze and hear the sound of lapping water on ships' hulls. I'm writing this relatively quickly, a good sign that I'll get the improved output I was looking for.



John M. Christensen, Director of Admissions, Seated at Desk Typing on a Computer Keyboardon a Computer Keyboard

This article's pretensions fall away when I am led into the next part of any review, whether or not I'd recommend the Freewrite. To answer that question, I of course have to ask myself the question 'for whom?' which in this particular instance, begs an inquiry into the psychological effects of the Freewrite on a consumer in a society where things like 'distraction-free' are taglines for overpriced, metrosexual-adjacent gizmos that simply give back to the human experience the peace of our previous simpler existence. An inquiry which, in a just world, would fill a small tome your correspondent is currently unable to write with his overstimulated, mildly ADHD-ridden (can I get meds for this?) brain. I personally avoid taking responsibility by complaining about the prevalence and aggression of modern advertising, annoying at its best and maddening at its worst. It is product as spectacle that got me into this mess and so it must be another one that potentially gets me out.

— Quick aside, have you seen these iPad babies recently? God, that sh* makes me want to vomit. That's not to say I would ever say anything bad about mothers who, of course, are blameless in all instances.

Something someone once called Product Excitement Syndrome (hereafter called PES) has come on the scene as a very lucrative state of mind to be induced into the atomized consumer. Lacking church, family, good books (maybe movies), desire for social change, nationalism, or general hope the mind struggles in a search for some unattainable mystery to apply itself towards. When freed from worrying about complex strategies for the tracking down of the tribe's next mammoth, the resultant bored consciousness instead tracks down information about another other, ideas of wealth and success, and fantasizes about the procuring of one of those distant philoplutarian offerings of the megaconglomerates and especially about the presentation of one of those products to the consumer's friends and 'loved' ones. One suffering from PES, interestingly, does not especially fantasize about the changes to the quality of his life entailed from the procuring of product, especially recently (admittedly, I would probably have been frothing at the mouth for a Model T, but an iPhone? 'Come on, Man!').

The situation is not really as vain as I'm saying, though. Sometimes people afflicted by PES are really trying to find a beautiful life. Purveyors of fashion try, with varying degrees of earnestness, to embody some idea of material quality with selvedge jeans or Goodyear Welted boots. So-called 'barefoot shoes' sell the idea of a natural life halfway convincingly. It's just that I can't wrap my head around all these lifestyle choices being driven by profit motive, especially when the product embodies ideas that your correspondent sees as 'good' or 'sustainable,' It seems like whatever goodness I can sense in those ideas is being violated, bringing superficiality to things that really ought to be taken seriously. This is where the Freewrite Writing Assistant comes in.

The instruments specific to the art of idea-sharing are progressing, getting faster and easier to use, resulting generally in better ideas that are more fun to digest. There's no way to write or distribute any kind of rigorous metaphysics treatise or witty postmodern novella on a stone tablet etched in cuneiform. Recent technological developments, however, are mostly centered around the general easing of life itself, rendering obsolete previous tools with single functions by introducing complex multi-function tools: think of the smartphone replacing a cell phone, camera, notebook, library, et cetera into a palm sized brick of literally unimaginable utility. This is all well and good (arguably) when considering the total efficiency of the person, but considered individually the functions seem to be compromised, not to mention the weird thing that happens psychologically when you can't actually grasp the tool you're using. I can't conceive of a cell phone camera ever being of higher quality than a proper DSLR (even when considering ease-of-use: a cell phone will always have some kind of interface in the way, keeping you from taking your picture). All of the improvements to writing the Freewrite offers are a result of the simple re-establishment of a unique tool for a particular function. The function in question is notoriously tedious, as hundreds of millions of students will testify, and so the FreeWrite finds a particularly roomy niche to occupy. Typewriters, so obsolesced, have not had the advantage of adopting the technological innovations designed for quality-of-life improvements for writing on laptops, and so ASTROHAUS simply decided to apply those improvements -nice keyboard, digital storage, wi-fi backups- to a nevertheless simple machine.

But there are people who'll read much further into the FreeWrite than this, arguing something like 'distraction-free writing is the only way to truly write and

laptop writers must needs be either poor, unaware, or a Philistine. The FreeWrite™ has not only freed my mind, but also my soul'(the author begs you forgive this less than flattering portrait of a PES-inflicted FreeWrite enjoyer, the truth is that he, in fact, at one point held opinions regetably similar to those of the caricature he describes). Those afflicted by PES perceive a large divide in society of people who perceive the valiant struggle the FreeWrite engages in and the slobbering masses, unable to articulate a thought due to TikTok brain. The irony of this sentiment distresses me greatly. Writing, thought materialized, should be as self-aware as possible. The compromising of so basic a foundation shakes the whole building, and simply put, I won't trust you if you think this product is going to purify your thoughts.

And yet, as I've learned through my guitar purchase, the human spirit seems to be lamb-like enough to potentially be benefited by PES. For argument's sake, let's say that regular writing is a substantial enrichment of a personality, like music. Would not this character, so maddened by the FreeWrite, wind up actually being a better person for it, assuming his blistering rage puts him at the keys? And would not the regular 'distraction-free' lengths of time gradually ease his troubled soul? And then, won't he have actually accomplished his idea of himself: a little-stimulated, thoughtful, little guy with a big writing portfolio? It's this thought thought that just drives me crazy about the FreeWrite.

The best argument I have for purchasing the FreeWrite is the fact that I wrote the first draft for this article ~1500 words, in a little over two hours. For me, this is lightning pace. But really, this wasn't due to any mystical encouraging by the mechanical keyboard or imparting of wisdom by the aluminum chassis (both of which are, again, really nice) but instead the smallness of the screen preventing me from going back to what I had previously written while I was drafting. I didn't realize this, but the reason I used to write at a snail's pace was because I would go back up and make edits whenever I would get stuck on a sentence, which I now realize is a huge waste of time. I really don't think the FreeWrite is necessary to induce this, though. You could simply zoom in on your text document or have good habits or something, but for me it took buying a cringeworthy typewriter. Besides the embarrassment of my failure to come to this realization by myself, the reality of the contrivance of my improvement shakes my security of humanity's ownership of the fine arts. If I do wind up becoming a better writer, it will be the result not of my nature, nor my will, but a rather funny little object.

So, do I recommend ASTROHAUS's FreeWrite Drafting Assistant? Perhaps. Even though it's quite overpriced it does seem very nice. I think the improved feel of the act of writing will increase my output. If that kind of thing matters to you or you just like the look of it, go ahead; it will probably be what you're hoping for. Why would I even want to recommend or dissuade from buying it? It's like you're asking me to inform you how to be more like myself. But if you go out to purchase one, I beg of you to think of the consequences and recommend you come up with some sort of coping mechanism to handle the stress of battling with your identity.

Small writing desk (bonheur-du-jour).
Martin Carlin, c. 1768

Freshman Bodies and Freshman Souls

The following list is reprinted from a 1982 issue of the *Gadfly*.

Bryce Jacobsen

The reasons, both physical and metaphysical, why everyone ought to become involved in our sports program are many.

1. We have the best athletic program of any college in the country.
2. Exercise is good for the body... unless you sprain an ankle, or something like that.
3. Most of us feel better, are more alert, and can get more work done if our bodies are healthy and our souls relaxed.
4. Friendly competition is one of the really fun things in life. It is good for your soul.
5. Your circle of acquaintances will be greatly enlarged. This is good for the soul, provided you can separate the wheat from the chaff.
6. You will learn to accept, and bear with, thousands of split-second decisions from the officials, a few of which are wrong. This is very good for the soul.
7. Do you like to strive for, and achieve, specific goals? If so, consider our College Blazers. They are much sought after, and the pathway is clearly laid out. Striving for goals is good for your soul.
8. It is probablly true that more pure fun occurs in the athletic program than in any other area of the college. Fun is good for your soul.
9. If you get involved in team sports, and become a "good team player," you have realized that there are things in the Universe that are more important than your ego. That is good for your soul.
10. The benefits of exercise and friendly competition, learned while one is young, should be maintained for the rest of your life... i.e., they should become habitual. For virtue, as the Philosopher said, is a habit.
11. You will get to know numerous Alumni, Tutors, and Staff members who participate in the program. This is good for your soul, or ought to be... provided that they are the proper sort of role models.
12. Our showers are the best at the college; always plenty of hot water.
13. Are you bothered by, or worried by, tobacco fumes in the air? Come to the gym. The whole building is a nicotine-free zone.
14. If you perform some sort of heroic deed on the athletic field, your name will be mentioned in our weekly column. Heroes are always acclaimed. But do not be carried away by this. Remember that "the paths to glory lead but to the grave."
15. A high percentage of our best students are active participants in our program.
16. Those who play, stay.
17. The gym is not particularly well-equipped, as gyms go. But it has washers and dryers, and a coke-machine... and I will explain to you, if you ask me, how you can get yourself in tip-top physical shape, without any equipment at all.
18. You can sit in an old-time barber's chair in my office... you can pump yourself up or down, and adjust the slope high or low. Where else can you do that?
19. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.
20. It is better to light a candle, than to curse the darkness.

So there you have it.. twenty good reasons why you should participate in our athletic program. If you are not convinced by all this, come and talk with me... I can probably think of some more good reasons. Or better yer, ralk with the upperclassmen. They will tell you all sorts of strange, interesting and wondrous things.

Bryce Jacobsen
Director of Athletics
The *Gadfly* - September 9, 1982

Finds from the Archives

This room has since undergone a "vibe shift."
Can this thing please come down from the attic?

Students Playing Table Tennis in the Basement of Paca-Carroll House, c. 1941

Finds from the Archives

They say this student still has
that look on his face.

Students with Suspended Weights in Laboratory Class

Dean John O. Neustadt Seated on a Tree Stump Playing with a Dog on Campus, c. 1940

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THE STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

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Opinions expressed within are the responsibility of the author(s). The Gadfly reserves the right to accept, reject, and edit submissions in any way necessary to publish a professional, informative, and thought provoking newsmagazine.

Submissions sent to the Gadfly should either be in Google Docs or JPEG format. The deadline for submissions is the Friday prior to publication.

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