

THE GADFLY

St. John's College
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Johnnie Culture

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THE STRUCTURE

Λόγος holds news reports and narratives of immediate relevance to the Polity. The purpose here is to develop a shared reservoir of information relating to campus life and the community.

Συμπόσιον offers the opportunity for our readers to thoughtfully consider contrasting opinions regarding a particular topic.

Πόλις serves as a platform for elevating voices in our community. Here we find letters to the editor, columns, cartoons, and submitted pieces.

Letter from the Editor

Dear Polity,

We hope that you've had an enjoyable and rejuvenating Thanksgiving break! Please enjoy our fourth issue of the semester, and here's to finishing it strong.

Luke Briner

Editor-in-chief



THE GADFLY STAFF

COVER	Abigail Poppleton
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF	Luke Briner
MANAGING EDITOR	El'ad Nichols-Kaufman
STAFF	Meliha Anthony
	Vivian Miyakawa
	Tamar Pinsky
	Louis Rosenberg
	Bennett Scott
LAYOUT	Tuyết-Nhi Nghiêm
CONTRIBUTORS	Louis Rosenberg
	Molly Sprout
	Natalie Goldman
	Audrey Fox
	Augustus Pananas



Johnnie families participate in the school's Fall Festival (Photography by Abigail Poppleton)

Johnnie Family Weekend: An Honest Review *By Vivian Miyakawa*

For many students, college is their first taste of true freedom away from their families. Far from the stress and monotony of home life, suddenly the world is new and exciting. They have independence to live how they want, sleeping, cleaning, and working all on their own terms. However, this transition doesn't mean complete isolation from the people they grew up with, especially with events such as Johnnie Family Weekend. During the weekend of October 27th-28th, friends and family were encouraged to make the trek out to Annapolis, Maryland and visit the students they had dropped off at college just a few months before.

During this fun-filled weekend, students had the opportunity to drop their beloved family members off at a variety of educational and riveting activities, or in other words, "parent daycare." Here, Johnnie friends and family got to gawk at the old books in the Greenfield Library, listen to the dean assure them that their children wouldn't end up as deadbeat poets, and even participate in a mock seminar! Seeing the parents raising their hands all around the table, eager

to interject with an "um, actually" moment, really shed light on why some of my classmates turned out the way they did.

Another crucial aspect of family weekend was perfecting your white lies. It's a valuable skill to be able to stand in the middle of the quad and assure your grandfather that "nobody really drinks or smokes here." Flaunting your perfect rhetorical argument, you plaster on a wide smile and convince them that it's your dream to become a lawyer one day. After all, if you charm them enough, they may just help you pay tuition. Just be sure that if your room is too messy, it means your roommate is "sick" and they surely wouldn't want to catch whatever's going around.

Jokes aside, the best part of family weekend was watching students gleefully drag their family around campus, introducing them to all of their friends and seeing them genuinely excited to share their newfound home with the people they love. And, for the rest of us, well, it was our collective sigh of relief when the weekend was finally over.



The holy land and the disciples (Photo by B.S.)

The Truth of Containers *By B.S.*

The Universal Form

(MAJOR PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOVERY)

Esteemed members of this philosophical institution,

Modern philosophy, as you know, claims to have come far, rooting out so much superstition and error. But in our rapid motion towards truth, we have left behind a great many of the most important questions. If I may speak frankly, you are cowards. But I cannot blame you. For, until now, I too was afraid, a coward, a degenerate bound by the will of ‘University Boards’ and ‘Codes of Ethics.’ No more. We have hidden the most important lines of inquiry—Why is there something rather than nothing? What is truth? Who am I?—out of sheer embarrassment. Even worse, we have abandoned much of our realm of knowledge to the “hard sciences”. We have betrayed the presocratics¹, having given up even the most important of all questions: What is the essential matter of the world? “Chemists” and “Physicists” claim to know of “atoms”

and “quarks.” Let me ask you a simple question: have you ever *seen* an atom? A quark? No? Then how can they possibly be the essential matter of the world? How could there ever be anything important that was hidden away from us? It just makes no sense. My dear friends, science has misled you, has misled us all. And I am here to right that wrong.

On a date which shall go down in history² (11/1/2023), I made a trip: I went to Westfield mall. Amongst the Five Guys,³ the Hot Topic, and the empty-gazing shoppers, I found something truly incredible. The Container Store. One could say it is located right next to the Crate and Barrel, but, in truth, it exists on an entirely separate metaphysical plane. To enter into it is to be confronted with truth. Walking around with my loyal companions,⁴ I started to feel a dread emptiness: was everything here a container? Was there no substance, no actuality, only a vast abyss waiting to be filled with all the excess accretions of capitalism so numerous that we must dedicate ourselves not only to

collecting things but collecting things to collect things? There were boxes, chests, drawers, luggage, every sort of container, but then I turned and saw something: a candle? How could they be selling a candle at The Container Store? Right next to the candles were shirts. There were even fancy board games. Could it be that this store, so committed to its cause that it put 'Container' in its name, would betray itself and give us things which were not containers, but containeds? No. To believe such a betrayal would be akin to accusing the CIA of testing brainwashing techniques on American citizens from 1943 up to July 10th, 1972. It's just not possible.

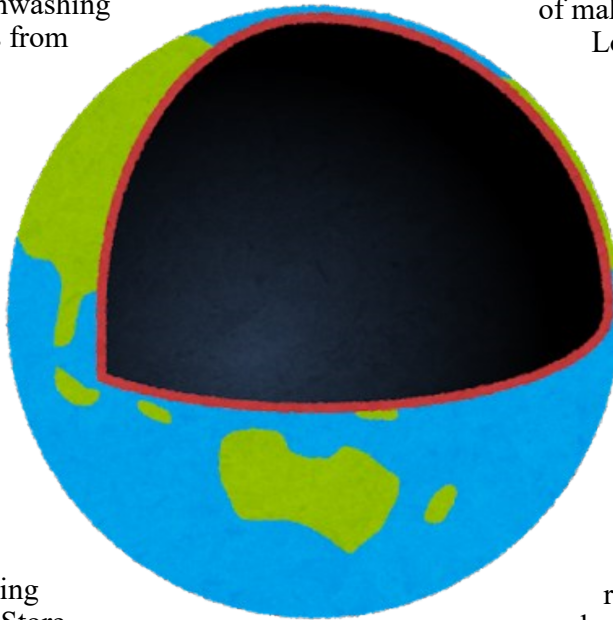
I grabbed the candle and stared, whispering, then saying, then screaming: how are you a container? What do you contain? WHAT DO YOU CONTAIN?? Then, I had my revelation, given by the gods. I looked up and around Everything I saw was containers. Not just the boxes and chests. Candles contain smells. Shirts contain bodies. Fancy board games contain fun! Everything made sense. I began running through the store, imbibing in the wisdom of The Container Store founders Garrett Boone, Kip Tindell, and John Mullen.⁵ Measuring tapes contain the form of measurement. Mirrors contain reflections. That cute french press contains a possible future for my roommate and I⁶. My mind began to expand beyond its dogmatic state. Those children running around screaming contain regret. Their parents chasing after them contain regret. My companions and I and so too you my dear reader, we are all but mere containers for thoughts and guts. The Container Store was a container container, the highest of all forms⁷. To contain is to have is to be⁸.

My peers, we've done it. I've done it. So long we have faced the dictum "Think outside the box." Fools! Fools! All of them! There was never anything outside of the box to think of! Aristotle will remind us that after physics must come meta-physics, but what about containa-physics, encompassing top, bottom, and sides? Don't you see? We were misled from the very beginning. Everything is container. Philosophy has been solved.

Thank me later (but not too much later),
B.S.

Endnotes

1. The moment Socrates began asking his insipid questions, philosophy died. How could anything interesting survive genuine inquiry? No. Questions must be silenced.
2. Alongside the death of Socrates and The Bay of Pigs.
3. Fries were not nearly as good as I remember, clearly the decline of capitalism.
4. Audrey Fox, food reviewer and enthusiast of making fun of me, and Ben Maier, Love Doctor and man who greeted every employee by saying we were shopping for Christmas.
5. [Our Container Story | Container Stories \(containerstore.com\)](https://www.containerstore.com/story/our-container-story)
6. In a small apartment on the Eastside of Seattle. There are birds singing. There's a gentle breeze. The coffee's ready. We have matching cableknit sweaters. It's all there! And we can buy it all at The Container Store!
7. There were also containers just for pasta. Truly revolutionary that containers can be so object specific.
8. "Rabbi Zeira says that there is another method [for acquiring an elephant]: One brings four vessels [which must, of course, be containers] and places them under the elephant's feet, and he thereby acquires it like any other item that is inside the buyer's vessels" [Tractate Kiddushin, 25b, tr. William Davidson]



Thai and a Movie

By Audrey Fox

Are you looking to film a 21st century Annapolis reboot of the all-time classic *The Godfather*? I too would be a little suspicious if I were told the best place in Annapolis to reenact the classic restaurant assassination was Carlson's Thai Kitchen, but hear me out; it fulfills many of the aesthetic and logistical requirements that unfortunately none of the Italian restaurants in Annapolis possess. It's quiet, customers keep to themselves, and the food is great. There are also some great stand alone tables in the restaurant that I am sure would easily break upon impact with a falling body, making for a great location to stage a cold hearted mob assassination.

Upon arrival at the location, I was struck by the various means of escape I could utilize for the getaway car. Not only is West Street an obvious choice, there are numerous side roads in the vicinity that could also aid in a "stealth" based approach. Unfortunately I could not test this, as my editor is a poor driver, and almost got us killed while pulling out of the driveway. There are also two entrances to the restaurant, which I am certain could come in handy. Inside the restaurant there are two spaces that constitute the main dining room. There is the check out area, which is connected to the vestibule of the doorway, and there is also the seating area that is partitioned off by a partial wall. Both booths and tables are available, however it seems that the majority of customers carry out, meaning it will be empty inside.

I was staking out the location with my editor to get a sense of the atmosphere. I had to come back in the morning as I forgot the most important part: the bathroom. Oh, and of course the donuts as well. It soon became apparent that we would have to stage the bathroom scene at an alternate location, as the toilet was not an old fashioned one with the pull chain. Otherwise everything was perfect. The interior



has that small, hole in the wall vibe that was essential to the assassination. Numerous vases line the wall, the lighting is warm, the only people sitting near us were an old hard of hearing couple and a young girl watching Minecraft videos. I would have some ethical issues with staging such a violent scene near one so young, but perhaps if she had headphones on this issue could be averted. By the way—to any freshman or other Johnnies who have not been to Carlson's and love Thursday night donuts—these donuts are 10x better. I recommend a good old chocolate glaze donut, but the cronuts (croissant donut) are also a fun option.

Now, let me get to the good stuff: the food. We started out with fried tofu. Very solid, a hard appetizer to mess up. I had the red curry with pork, and I found it very delicious and perhaps better than Lemongrass, which is often hailed as the best Thai in Annapolis. Their drunken noodles are also out of this world. The noodles are fresh and the flavor has a

little kick but nothing too overpowering. My editor loves Carlson's, but unfortunately the meal he got while we were staking out the location (he only referred to it as the #7) was not to his liking. We also got the Thai iced tea—which was good, but nothing remarkable. The only food they order in the Godfather is the veal. There is no veal at Carlson's, however I think any of the curry's would be a good substitute.

I have been told by my editor that my budget proposal for recreating the Godfather has not been approved. I guess it makes sense. What sort of mobster movie would take place in Annapolis at a Thai restaurant? We may never know. But in the meantime, I highly recommend you check out Carlson's Thai Kitchen.



Images by Bennett Scott, Audrey Fox, and Taste of Cinema

Leptoglossus corculus: Leaf-footed Pine Seed Bug

By Louis Rosenberg

About the many bugs that are leaf-footed largely undescribed.

I saw this leaf-footed bug on my friend's car last week, so naturally I took a picture of it. After my initial plan for this bug article fell through, I came back to that picture and began working to identify its subject. I began my search by looking up leaf-footed bugs, family Coreidae, which seemed to be the best starting place for this specimen and its jagged hind-leg protrusions. Since I found it in Maryland, I headed over to the Maryland Biodiversity Project website, which is a large database of animals (and plants and fungi) found throughout Maryland, including common names, scientific names, and pictures of specimens of each species. After noting that the leaf-footed pine seed bug, *L. corculus*, most closely matched my specimen, I headed back to my favorite search engine to try and find more information on this species.

I found very little. Michigan State University published a short article from 2006 that focused on the agricultural impacts of the species, but there was little description of the bug (only the creature's size, the white stripe on its back, and its hind leg shape were described). Its living habits were only described insofar as they impact humans — they may overwinter in human homes, causing minor nuisance, and thus the authors flatly recommend homeowners “destroy them or vacuum them up.”

Beyond the MSU article, most of the remaining search results were for a closely related species, *L. occidentalis* or the western conifer seed bug. One of those links, from Pennsylvania State University, led to an excitingly detailed article on that species, which included a note that *L. occidentalis* can easily be confused for other *Leptoglossus* species, including *L. corculus*. *L. corculus* is a darker brown than *L. occidentalis*, and the inner and outer portions of their hind leg expansions can differ in size, as they do on the bug I found, which further confirmed my identification of this specimen. A Wikipedia article for *L. occidentalis* also comes up, which includes sections on the insect's description and range. The *L. corculus* Wikipedia article, on the other hand,



contains only two sentences: “*Leptoglossus corculus*, the leaf-footed pine seed bug, is a species of leaf-footed bug in the family Coreidae. It is found in North America.”

Why is so little information about *L. corculus* available? Perhaps because it is so innocuous to humans: while its relative is expanding its range, and thus accruing ecological concerns, *L. corculus* itself does nothing worse than irritating homeowners. Perhaps it's just because there's so many species of insects in the world that it's foolish of me to hope for detailed information on each and every one of them. While I feel a little sad for every underresearched insect that I spot, it also reminds me of the glory of the natural world. There is, and always will be, so much out there that's unknown. We can only strive to find it.

Sources:

- <https://extension.psu.edu/western-conifer-seed-bug>
- <https://www.marylandbiodiversity.com/viewChecklist.php?family=Coreidae>
- https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/leaf-footed_pine_seed_bug
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_conifer_seed_bug
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leptoglossus_corculus

Gilbert's Metaphysics of Magnetism *By Luke Briner*

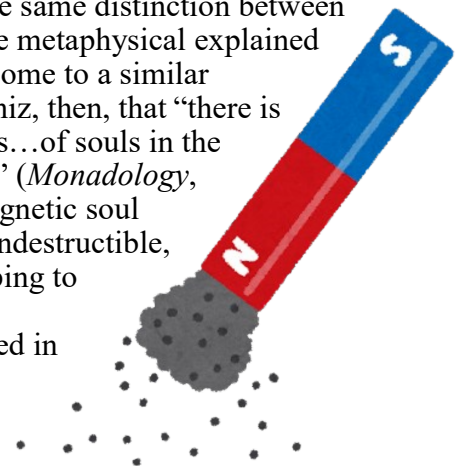
In his treatise *De Magnete (On the Loadstone)*, William Gilbert expounds his theory of the spiritual nature of magnetism, attributing the essential behavior of magnetically active bodies not to the physical properties of *body* in itself, but to the “effused immaterial forms *beyond* the limits of the body” (p. 61). How can we understand the magnetic force of these bodies as not a physical but a *metaphysical* phenomenon, and what implications does that understanding have for the way that we must think about all magnetic bodies?

Gilbert begins his investigation by observing some of the empirical phenomena which *loadstones* (naturally occurring magnetic bodies) exhibit. By taking a loadstone and shaving it down into a spheroid, subsequently called a *terrella* and “a true homogenous offspring of the earth and...of the same shape” (p. 56), he observes that, by the movement of a needle or iron wire along its surface, a *north and south pole* may always be observed along its equator with opposite directions and tendencies to each other. These two poles, however, despite being contrary to each other, are at the same time *attracted* to each other. Gilbert demonstrates this by showing that the *north* pole of a *terrella*, when suspended in water such that movement is easy and free, will actively align itself with the *south* pole of the earth itself, and that the *south* pole will thereby do the inverse (p. 58). This attraction to the contrary pole, either to that of the earth itself or to that of any other magnetic body, is in fact so great that poles of the same kind will actively *repel* each other: if two loadstones are set against each other such that the pole of one is put toward the same pole of the other “one stone repels the other” (p. 59) until the proper alignment of opposites previously observed is restored.

Gilbert attributes all of this behavior not to a merely physical or mechanical but to a *spiritual* cause. While it's true that “not from a mathematical point does the force of the stone emanate, but from the parts themselves” (p. 56), the parts themselves possess such a force at all solely by virtue of the “effused immaterial forms” (p. 61) of the *souls* which inhabit them. Just as many of the ancients believed that “not without a divine and animate nature could movements so diverse be produced” (p. 60) in the

great bodies of the universe, so Gilbert attributes a similar nature to magnetic globes large and small, since only by such a nature could their seemingly active movements and tendencies be possible or intelligible.

The implications of this assertion for the ways in which we can conceive of the general nature of magnetic bodies can be easily drawn out by applying the methods of the *differential and integral calculus* of our Junior Mathematics tutorial to them. Gilbert demonstrates that when a loadstone is split apart, the parts thus divided will naturally and immediately seek to reunite with those parts to which they were originally connected when the stone was whole, with it the one being themselves a north and the other a south pole (p. 59). But say that we divide the entire loadstone, “at one fell swoop” (Galileo, *Two New Sciences*, NE 93), into a “continuum out of absolutely indivisible atoms” (ibid). Let the whole original loadstone be *M*, and each infinitesimal atom be called *dm* (to borrow the language from Leibniz' *New Method*). Now in each infinitely fine cut made to the unified loadstone, there must, by the same tendency demonstrated above in the case of the splitting of one into two, a tendency for each to unify with their adjacent atoms, since they were connected when the loadstone was still a unity. From this it's evident that there is an *infinite series of north and south poles already and always contained within the loadstone as present in each dm, such that $\sum dm = M$* ; in other words, each loadstone, itself ensouled, contains *within* itself a virtual infinity of equally ensouled magnetic particles. A merely physical division couldn't possibly, on Gilbert's account, in any way alter the polar nature of each *dm*, since this nature has no *physical* cause in the first place. Neither does the duality implicit in each *dm* necessarily containing a north and south pole contradict their atomized indivisibility, by the same distinction between the physical and the metaphysical explained before. Hence we come to a similar conclusion to Leibniz, then, that “there is a world of creatures...of souls in the least part of matter” (*Monadology*, §66), with each magnetic soul being immaterial, indestructible, and causing or helping to cause all physical phenomena observed in magnetic bodies.



Mathematics in Seminar

By Augustus Pananas

Of all the elements of the Program, the mathematics tutorial is perhaps the one which requires the most explanation. Not that the value of the tutorial in itself isn't obvious (at least to the extent that you take it seriously). People like myself, who always hated math classes previously, find themselves delighted with the clarity, orderliness, and comprehensibility of Euclid. Even the prospect of calculus in future years and dark hints from the seniors about some kind of dark sorcerer called "Lobachevsky" aren't enough to abate the wonder of this new way of thinking about mathematics. The experiences of subsequent years only confirm this feeling. What is perhaps less clear is the way in which this miraculous experience fits in with the rest of the Program.

If the central work of St. John's takes place in seminar (and this I believe wholeheartedly), how does the mathematics tutorial serve that work? The content of the mathematics tutorial doesn't seem to aid much in the project of seminar. If the language tutorial teaches us how to utilize the tools of language in a meaningful way, laboratory helps us to use our observational and theory-forming skills, and chorus and music tutorial connect our work to the experience of the beautiful and sublime, what does mathematics do? As much as some (myself included) might like, the work of seminar is simply not reducible to propositional argumentation. And since many of us don't study any formal logic at St John's (a travesty which is too vast to be addressed here), the parallelism with syllogistic reasoning isn't very helpful either. While the kind of rigorous thinking which the study of mathematics produces is something worth mastering in itself, it is something I see applied to the work of seminar only rarely, even by the very best Johnnies. The topics of seminar simply don't lend themselves to the same sort of thinking that occurs in the mathematics tutorial. So what is it for? I suspect that the answer lies more in the effect mathematics (especially public mathematical demonstration) has on the psyche of the

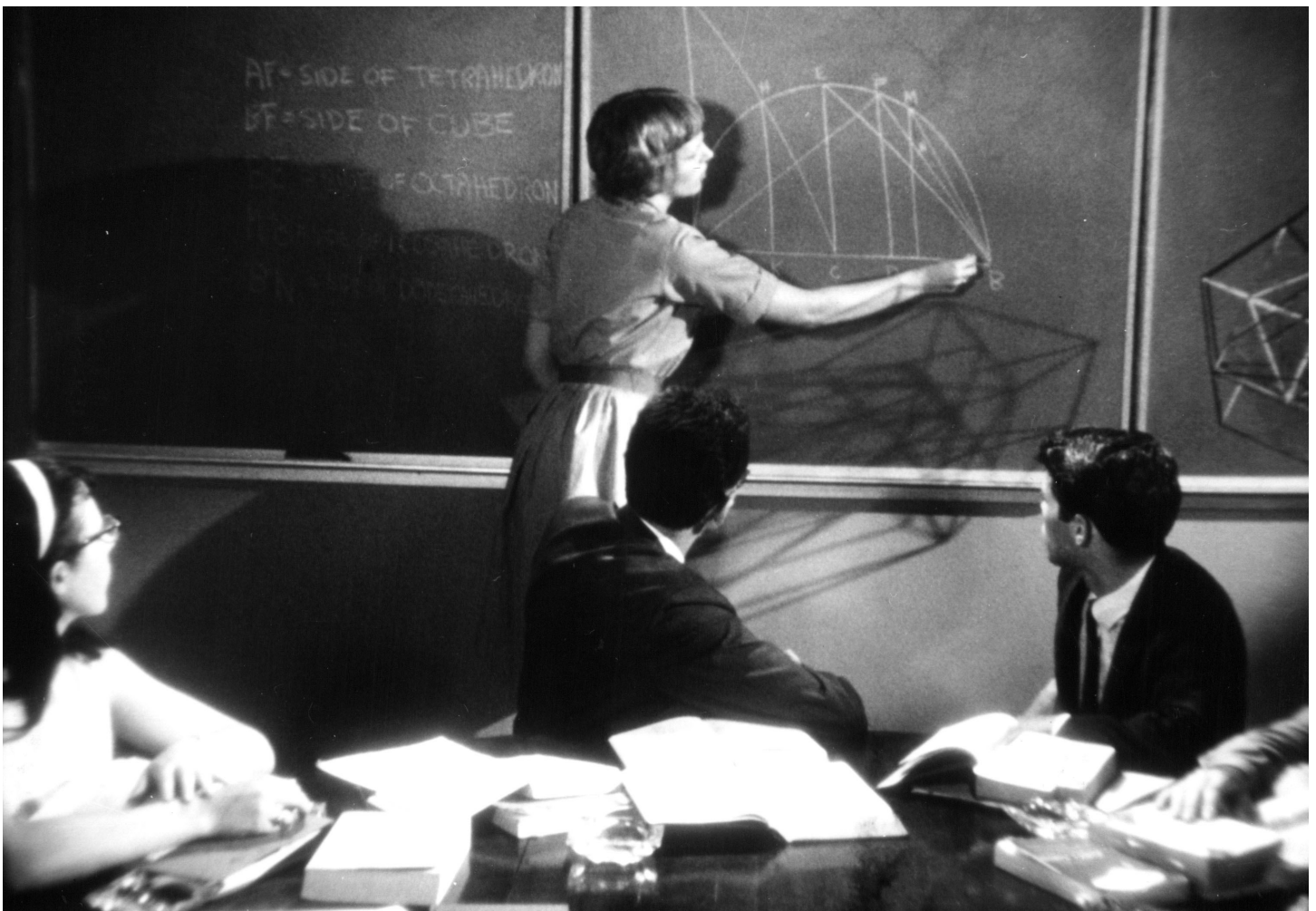
student. In particular, it has two effects which, if applied to the work of seminar, address a pair of failings to which Johnnies are prone.

First, mathematical demonstration requires a precision of language which is extremely helpful in seminar. This is distinct from the rigor of its ideas. Mathematical demonstration is rigorous in that all of its claims can be said to follow immediately from those that came before. If an unsupported claim is made, anyone who is paying attention can immediately point it out. This is extremely powerful, but is not the feature which is important here. What matters here is the fact that in a good demonstration, it is necessary to always make clear exactly what one is referring to. All of us have had the experience of watching (or even presenting) a disastrous demonstration in which someone makes repeated reference to "it" or "that one" or "the thing" without clarifying the objects being referred to. It simply doesn't work. Mathematical demonstration is incompatible with that kind of imprecision. The application of this kind of precision can be immensely helpful in seminar. Too often a conversation is hindered because someone proposes an idea (sometimes even a great idea) in terms too imprecise to move the conversation forward. At such times, reminding oneself of the constraints of demonstration (if you can't say it, you don't know it) can be immensely helpful. The topics of seminar are vast and sweeping; the thoughts which it provokes often have a grandeur which seems to evaporate on the lips. Grounding ourselves in the simplicity of speech that our shared experience in mathematics gives can be a lifesaver when we fall into the trap of trying to say everything all at once by forcing us to use meaningful language.

If our mathematical experience can help prevent us from trying to say too much, it can also save us from falling into another classic trap: saying nothing at all. In seminar, it's easy to fill a silence by rambling about nothing at all. Because a discussion of Plato or Dante or Locke isn't a proposition, it is

possible to spend a great deal of time rearranging the terms of the discussion in such a way that it produces no new ideas at all. This can happen both intentionally and accidentally, and all (or at least most) of us are guilty of it from time to time. It's less awkward than sitting in silence, but it's even more useless. And if it's interjected into a conversation which is actually progressing smoothly, it can be a massive hindrance to the flow of the argument. While this problem will almost certainly be with us for a long time to come, I'm willing to bet that it is not worse than it is because of our time spent with mathematics. While seminar may be fertile ground for using a great number of words to say nothing, the

same is not true of mathematics. When you go up to present a proposition, you either know it or you don't. There is no faking it. That feeling of standing at the board with a piece of chalk in your hand and your foot in your mouth is not easy to forget, and it reminds us that there is a real difference between being able to speak and having something to say. You can talk about a proposition all you want, but if you can't do the proof, there's no way to hide it. I suspect we all carry at least a bit of that feeling (or the vicarious version of it, for those demigods who have never flubbed a proof) with us into our other classes. It's a feeling we could stand to bring to mind a little more.



Female Student at Blackboard during Mathematics Tutorial in 1961

Five Beautiful Passages from Plotinus

Arranged by Luke Briner

All passages are from the MacKenna-Page translation as produced in Encyclopædia Britannica's 1952 Great Books edition of the Enneads.

-LB

IV.8.1.

Many times it has happened: Lifted out of the body into myself; becoming external to all other things and self-enclosed; beholding a marvellous beauty; then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order; enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the divine; stationing within It by having attained that activity; poised above whatsoever within the Intellectual is less than the Supreme: yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection from reasoning, and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the soul ever enter into my body, the soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be.

I.6.9-10.

But how are you to see into a virtuous soul and know its loveliness?

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease "chiselling your statue,"¹ until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike

splendour of virtue, until you shall see "the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine."²

When you know that you have become this perfect work, when you are self-gathered in the purity of your being, nothing now remaining that can shatter than inner unity, nothing from without clinging to the authentic man, when you find yourself wholly true to your essential nature, wholly that only veritable Light which is not measured by space, not narrowed to any circumscribed form nor again diffused as a thing void of term, but ever unmeasurable as something greater than all measure and more than all quantity—when you perceive that you have grown to this, you are now become very vision: now call up all your confidence, strike forward but a step—you need a guide no longer—strain, and see.

VI.7.36.

Knowledge of The Good or contact with it, is the all-important: this—we read—"is the grand learning,"³ the "learning" we are to understand, not of looking towards it but attaining, first, some knowledge of it. We come to this learning by analogies, by abstractions, by our understanding of its subsequents, of all that is derived from The Good, by the upward steps towards it. Purification has The Good for goal; so the virtues, all right ordering, ascent within the Intellectual, settlement therein, banqueting upon the divine—by these methods one becomes, to self and to all else, at once seen and seer; identical with Being and Intellectual-Principle and "the entire living all,"⁴ we no longer see the Supreme as an external; we are near now, the next is That and it is close at hand, radiant above the Intellectual.

Here, we put aside all the learning; disciplined to this pitch, established in beauty, the quester holds knowledge still of the ground he rests on but,

¹ Plotinus is referencing *Phaedrus*, 252b7 here. Although the quotation marks are absent in MacKenna-Page's version, I have chosen to follow Armstrong's lead and add them in order to make that reference's fact clear to the reader, and will do the same when necessary going forward.

² *Phaedrus*, 254b7.

³ *Republic*, 505a2.

⁴ *Timaeus*, 31b1.

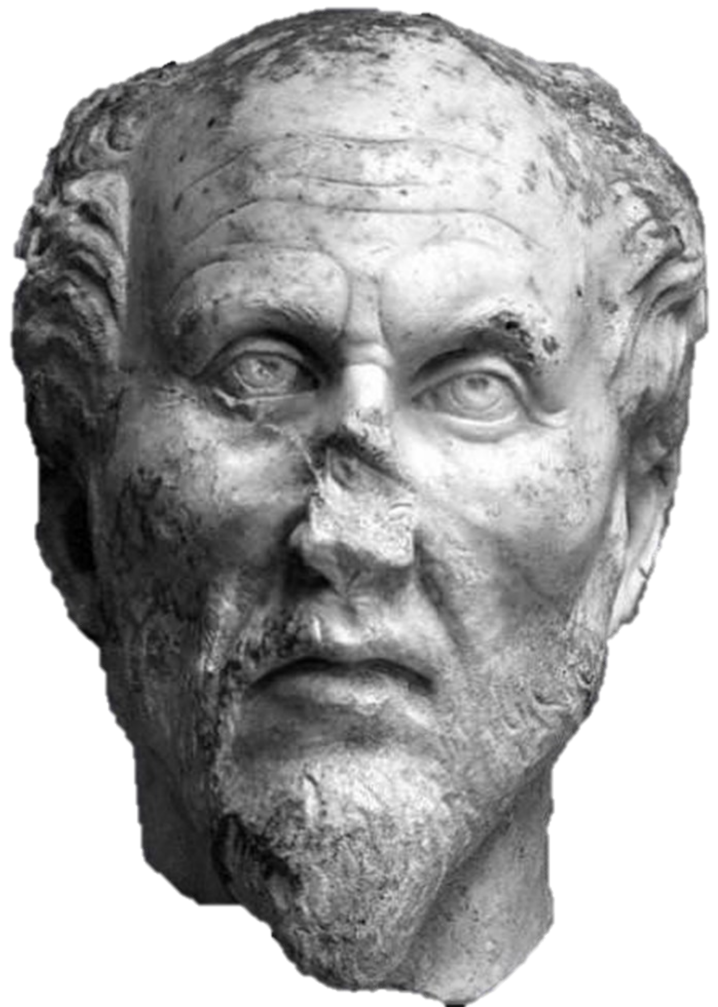
suddenly, swept beyond it all by the very crest of the wave of Intellect surging beneath, he is lifted and sees, never knowing how; the vision floods the eyes with light, but it is not a light showing some other object, the light is itself the vision. No longer is there thing seen and light to show it, no longer Intellect and object of Intellection; this is the very radiance that brought both Intellect and Intellectual object into being for the later use and allowed them to occupy the quester's mind. With This he himself becomes identical, with that radiance whose Act is to engender Intellectual-Principle, not losing in that engendering but for ever unchanged, the engendered coming to be simply because that Supreme exists. If there were no such principle above change, no derivative could rise.

VI.9.8.

Thus the Supreme as containing no otherness is ever present with us; we with it when we put otherness away. It is not that the Supreme reaches out to us seeking our communion: we reach towards the Supreme; it is we that become present. We are always before it: but we do not always look: thus a choir, singing set in due order about the conductor, may turn away from that centre to which all should attend: let it but face aright and it sings with beauty, present effectively. We are ever before the Supreme—cut off is utter dissolution; we can no longer be—but we do not always attend: when we look, our Term is attained; this is rest; this is the end of singing ill; effectively before Him, we lift a choral song full of God.

VI.9.11.

This is the purport of that rule of our Mysteries: Nothing Divulged to the Uninitiate: the Supreme is not to be made a common story, the holy things may not be uncovered to the stranger, to any that has not himself attained to see. There were not two; beholder was one with beheld; it was not a vision compassed but a unity apprehended. The man formed by this mingling with the Supreme must—if he only remember—carry its image impressed upon him: he is become the Unity, nothing within him or without inducing any diversity; no movement now, no passion, no outlooking desire, once this ascent is achieved; reasoning is in abeyance and all Intellection and even, to dare the word, the very self; caught away, filled with God, he has in perfect stillness attained isolation; all the being calmed, he



Bust of Plotinus from the Ostiense Museum in Rome, Italy (Source: worldhistory.org, CC BY-SA license)

turns neither to this side nor to that, not even inwards to himself; utterly resting he has become very rest. He belongs no longer to the order of the beautiful; he has risen beyond beauty; he has overpassed even the choir of the virtues; he is like one who, having penetrated the inner sanctuary, leaves the temple images behind him—though these become once more first objects of regard when he leaves the holies; for There his converse was not with image, not with trace, but with the very Truth in the view of which all the rest is but of secondary concern.

There, indeed, it was scarcely vision, unless of a mode unknown; it was a going forth from the self, a simplifying, a renunciation, a reach towards contact and at the same time a repose, a meditation towards adjustment. This is the only seeing of what lies within

the holies: to look otherwise is to fail.

Things here are signs; they show therefore to the wiser teachers how the supreme God is known; the instructed priest reading the sign may enter the holy place and make real the vision of the inaccessible.

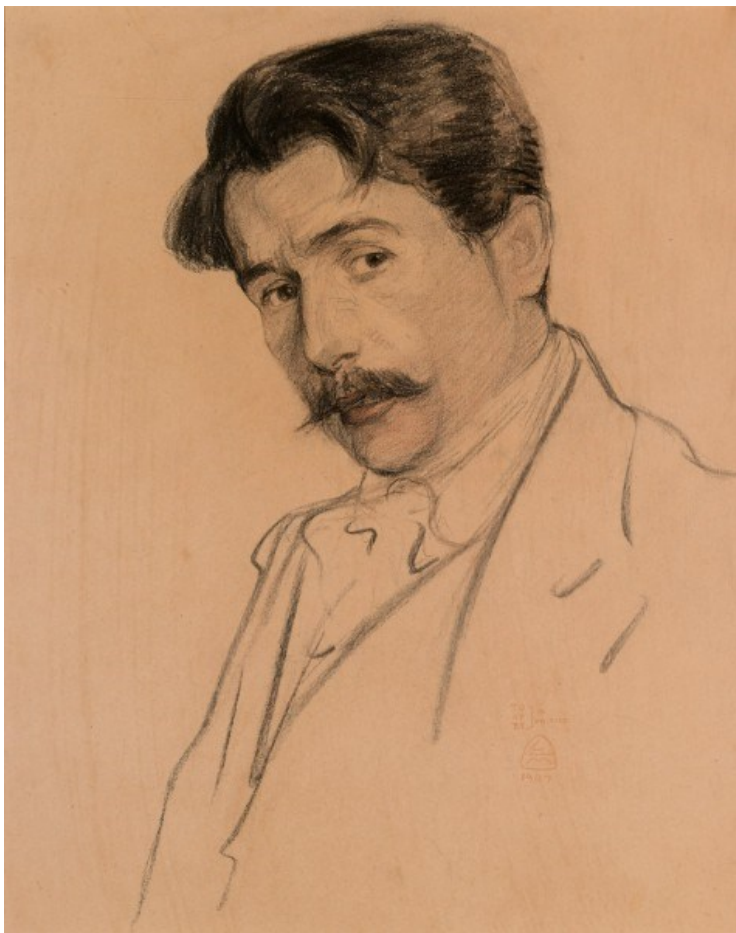
Even those that have never found entry must admit the existence of that invisible; they will know their source and Principle since by principle they see principle and are linked with it, by like they have contact with like and so they grasp all of the divine that lies within the scope of mind. Until the seeing comes they are still craving something, that which only the vision can give; this Term, attained only by those that have overpassed all, is the All-Transcending.

It is not in the soul's nature to touch utter nothingness; the lowest descent is into evil and, so far, into non-being: but to utter nothing, never. When

the soul begins again to mount, it comes not to something alien but to its very self; thus detached, it is not in nothingness but in itself; self-gathered it is no longer in the order of being; it is in the Supreme.

There is thus a converse in virtue of which the essential man outgrows Being, becomes identical with the Transcendent of Being. The self thus lifted, we are in the likeness of the Supreme: if from that heightened self we pass still higher—image to archetype—we have won the Term of all our journeying. Fallen back again, we awaken the virtue within until we know ourselves all order once more; once more we are lightened of the burden and move by virtue towards Intellectual-Principle and through the Wisdom in That to the Supreme.

This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of solitary to solitary.



Pictured on left: Portrait of Stephen Mackenna, translator of Plotinus, drawn in 1907 by Leo Mielziner

Excerpt from a 1907 journal entry of MacKenna's: "Whenever I look into Plotinus I feel always all the old trembling fevered longing: it seems to me that I must be born for him, and that somehow someday I must have nobly translated him: my heart, untravelled, still to Plotinus turns and drags at each remove a lengthening chain. It seems to me that him alone of authors I understand by inborn sight..."



Noodles: “The Pessimist”

By Tamar Pinsky

SJC Mystery #4: A Deeper Dark

By Bennett “Toxic” Scott

I was in Mellon 206, looking for a strike lighter and a bunsen burner (I have no idea how long the power is going to last). I haven’t been going out much. The rain was always cold, but I’m fine with the cold. My problem was how loud and blinding it could be; in all my paranoia, the thought of not being able to see or hear properly sounded, to say the least, unappealing. But I couldn’t sit inside forever (I’m slowly discovering all the different ways you can go crazy), so I went on a little adventure in pursuit of the thing my little caveman brain can understand best: fire!

Lights turned off and on in a few of the windows I passed, the cars were in different locations despite never moving, all the usual haunts to make me question the stability of my mind/reality. I checked my phone out of habit: no texts (despite having service?), and the date still and always the same: somewhere between midnight and 8, April 7th, 2016. I kept walking.

After I’d been in Mellon for a while, I found myself with a bunsen burner in one hand and a problem in the other: how was I supposed to get a fuel source from the lab to my apartment? For all the evidence to the contrary that I have provided you dear reader, I am not entirely a fool. Having a propane tank in my apartment that has one exit and no windows which can open in a world where firefighters definitely will not answer my call? That’s fool central. So I decided to light it then and there instead. About three seconds later, the lights went out.

Now, someone who has actively put themselves in the position of summoning powers beyond our comprehension would be well served by having a good survival instinct. I, naturally, do not; when it comes to fight or flight, I freeze. So I stood, unmoving, trying to make out the contours of the darkness. At first, I only heard the rain and the burner. The burner, about a minute in, went out. After about three or four minutes (long enough that I could have just been hallucinating), I began to hear the scratching, a rhythmic cutting in the darkness. It was coming from the next room.

There is only one thing to do in such a situation, once more a correlate of ‘Don’t do anything that would start a horror movie’: if you’re in a horror movie situation, do something absolutely antithetical to being murdered. Options include: break dancing, yodeling, reciting the declaration of independence, etc. My demon prevention method of choice? Britney Spears. Toxic. Certainly has some bad vibes, but who ever got stabbed to something so danceable? Now, I didn’t sing too loud at first for obvious reasons, but once you get to the chorus, brother you cannot stop yourself from going for it. I put on a little show for those demons: choreography, high notes, drama. And by God, it must have worked; I finished singing, and there was no more scratching.

I stood in silence, waiting to hear the screams of the damned. Nothing, nothing so pure it started to hurt my ears. I looked around: why the hell did silence hurt? My head felt like it was expanding, pressing out at the temples. I tried coughing and it was swallowed up. It was so very quiet. Out the window, I could see the stars. The panes were clear.

The rain had stopped.

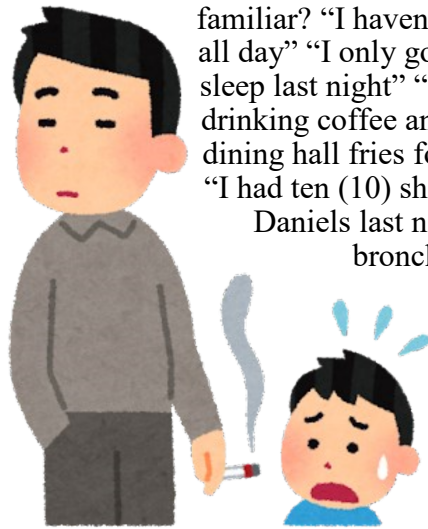
Well I—to speak like my good ol’ grandmother—just about jumped for joy. What the hell happened? What the hell kind of explanation could there be? What the hell did I care for an explanation? The rain was done and the air was warm! The lights turned back on (I only jumped a little when they did). Everything was gonna be alright! There was only one problem: I had to check where the scratching had come from. It might get me killed, but there might be answers. This was what I found:



St. John's, A New Panem

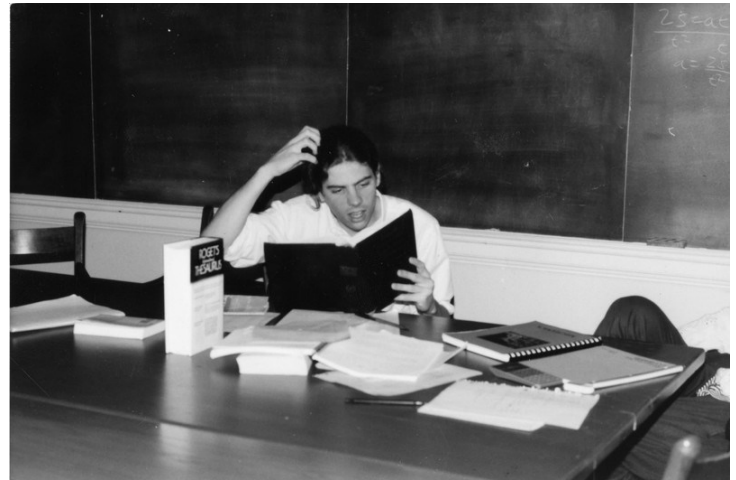
By Molly Sprout

Recently my friends and I were imagining a Hunger Games-type situation at St. John's; a fight to the death with the entire student body. While entertaining to think of, and maybe even intriguing (Reality Club... maybe something to work on?), there was a thought that came to me: we are all incredibly weak. And yes, this is ignoring some of the student body that does really have their shit together and could probably kill a lot of us with their bare hands. But for the most part our weakness is accurate and unavoidable. And this isn't just due to the student body comprising mostly of previous high school nerds, and we can hear why in the conversations we have outside of class. Does any of this sound



familiar? "I haven't eaten anything all day" "I only got three hours of sleep last night" "I've just been drinking coffee and eating the dining hall fries for the past week" "I had ten (10) shots of Jack Daniels last night" "I have had bronchitis for eight weeks but will continue to smoke half a pack a day"—this campus is malnourished, under slept, and sick.

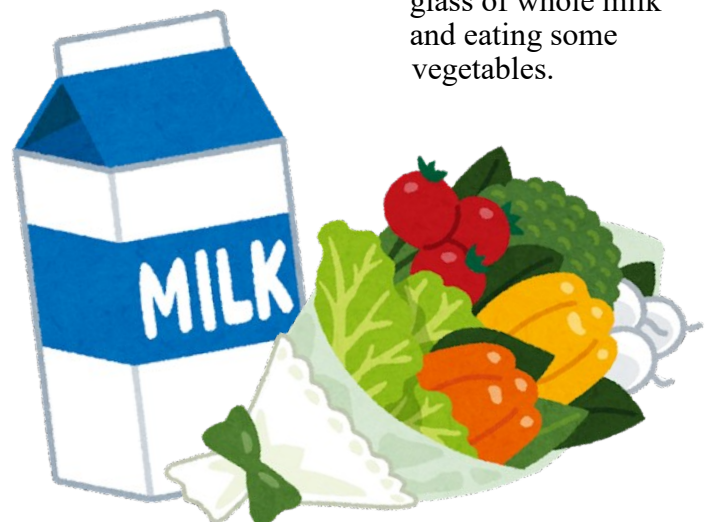
With our college's motto being "Books and a Balance" one would think that we would attempt to execute this. Our failure to do so raises the question of what kind of balance the student body is seeking. If it is not the balance of a healthy life with an immersive study of books, then what exactly is it? With the obsession with acting thoughtlessly and unhealthily along with the need for our peer's eyes, it seems as though we are seeking the balance of someone on a tightrope, teetering on the thin line we have created for ourselves, made for the spectacle of it. Because it is not that we are just drinking too much or eating and sleeping too little, but that it is done in tandem with scholarly perfection. It is an attempt to do the impossible; reduce your body and health to



Student Studying in McDowell Hall

nothingness while turning in a beautiful essay on time. We must be the impossible to everyone we know! And as glamorous as that sounds, being a functional alcoholic with a great Don Rag, it is impossible. We can try to convince ourselves that the essay we turned in after seventy-two hours of not sleeping is good, but it really isn't. Instead of reaching perfection and self-destruction at the same time all we have done is hurt our bodies and our minds without anything to show for it. As much as we avoid this conclusion it is inevitable, and we can all see it when we cry to our friends about not being able to keep going as tired as you are.

To offer a solution for this is to throw a stone in a glass house. I smoke an incredible amount and absolutely do not work out. So, really what I have done is offer up useless critique on a mass problem of young people in academia. But I will say that each and every one of you would benefit from drinking a glass of whole milk and eating some vegetables.



The Statuary

By Luke Briner

They stand abidingly amid the sun-enhalcyoned shrouds
That diadem the lofty, lonesome mount
As though the eminences of a never-passing age,
Formidable and unoblivioned.

I've longed so much to know
Myself the secrets of that conclave's beatific life—
No longer to meander through its ranks
In idle fancy, but to offer up this trembling flesh
Unto its highest rigor, and be free
From all that lies below.

Beneath this sacred crest partitioning the long-estranged
Hypostases of timelessness and toil
A worthless nature writhes, unidylled, frantically inert,
And aching for a self-subverted peace.

Is that my destiny?
Or does a higher motion dwell within this dismal breast,
By which I could endeavor to endure
In still submit the apogean kiln that immolates
All false debris, and fires the faultless form
That hides inside of me?

Take all that's good within: outstretch, unfold the tiny point
Of infinite and life-enthraling light
That silently reposes in the center of the squalls
And miseries of its posterity
Into a puissant shape,
Epitomized in its unique perfection, as its kin,
Atop an undeclining golden age;
Would that ascendancy be *mine*?—or would *I*, thrown aside
As an extraneous vessel, only watch
Its heavenward escape?

Alighted effortlessly on the yawning azure apse
The Luminary, cool and pontiff-like,
Presides above the praises of her progeny, and sighs
A living redolence that sweeps them up
In transcendental rite;
As she to them, so they to me—and I in kind aspire
To carve upon the all-anointed plane
A self-derived exemplar that, unmoving, moves the world,
And, surpliced by the noon, behold her with
An uneliding sight.

I have withdrawn into myself and looked, and I have found
The dim quiescence of a once-held spouse;
There lies the one true work made for these transience-addled hands:
To grasp the chisel, and restore him to
His early, godlike shine.
For you and you alone, my Critic, do I make myself
At once the Statue and the Cypriot—
For nothing but the hope of finding in your loving eyes
My truth and legacy, forever fixed
Within your stainless shrine.



Competition, Victory, Joy. (Picture by Meliha Anthony)

Competition at the College: The National Intercollegiate World Chopsticks Championship *By B.S.*

Dear friends competitors,

You are certainly aware that society is presently going down the drain. But why? Scroll long enough on any Tik-Tok feed (past the incessant dancing, stolen jokes, and... is that just almost porn? Why?) you will find the same answer given by the same people: men variously to the side of the camera, a microphone in their face, will tell you that masculinity is dead (the so called 'Bro Scogan Experientia' is the prime example of this). People tell you to be tougher, harder, fight more wolves. And, to be honest with you dear reader, it's boring. The man-

o-sphere's solution is returning to something more primal, less soyboy; I, as the soyboy philosopher king that I am, know that they are only striving after shadows; we must strive after truth. And the truth is competition.

The immediate, weak-minded assumption is that competition exists purely in and for itself; the thoughtful, big-brained solution sees that competition solves every single problem ever and never has any issues thank you very much Adam B. Smith. And let me tell you: St. John's College has entirely lost its competitive edge. We make our college 'hard' by



having enabling, but what is enabling when everyone and their cousin gets enabled? We claim to have a rigorous program, but we don't even require a single class in Business Administration (the most difficult course)? We take our name, our calling professors tutors, calling evaluations don rags from Oxford, the most prestigious school in the world. The first step to being truly competitive is to take another Oxi tradition: post grades on public bulletins. "But B.S.! We don't concentrate on grades at the College!" Shut up. What kind of world is it where we are not comparing GPAs? What is there to compete over when our unit of measurement is the number of longing looks directed your way during a semester (2)? And god damn it, why do we only have to be graded on our classes? We need to be truly expansive in our evaluations. We need grade postings for everyone as a waltz partner (C+), as a friend (A-), as a lover (F). You try kissing like a fish and being publicly ridiculed for it; you will change. You will evolve.

But why stop there? Everything done by everyone should be rated all the time to build pressure and spite. Seminar points should get a rating from both tutors on the spot (a la gymnastics); papers should be read aloud and critiqued at random; intramural games should be made overly violent and obsessive (see how small the steps we have to take are!). Forget renovating the dorms: destroy them all and make one giant Naval Academy building: eat and be judged, sleep and be judged, shower and be judged, judged even for your judgement. When they

say pressure makes diamonds, they are not going far enough: enough pressure makes a black hole, strong enough to swallow up even Einstein.

Imagine the money from the reality TV version.

And to prove my commitment to this cause, I have begun the competing process with a new and great competition, not just for the college, but for the whole world: The Intercollegiate National World Chopsticks Championship:



Entirely seriously,
B.S.



vessels

By Natalie Goldman

The channels for spirit
Are delicately constructed.
Lying in a well-worn path,
They drive passion to madness.
Nobody, though, would doubt
The hardness of the walls themselves,
Keeping in even the most
Base and heinous of rages.
There is no seeping out.

Someday, blood will be replaced.
They will change it for something
More beautiful and terrifying.
When that day comes,
We will break down our barriers
And run into each other's arms.

The Student's Lament

Backward, turn backward, O Time in thy flight,
Feed me on gruel again, just for tonight.
I am so weary of sole-leather steak,
Petrified doughnuts and vulcanized cake;
Oysters that slept in a watery bath,
Butter as strong as Goliath of Gath;
Weary of paying for what I don't eat,
Chewing up rubber and calling it meat.
Backward, turn backward, for weary I am,
Give me a whack at grandmother's jam;
Let me drink milk that has never been skimmed.
Let me eat butter whose hair has been trimmed.
Let me once more have an old-fashioned pie,
And then I'll be ready to curl up and die.

*The Student's Lament from the St. John's College Yearbook;
Author and Year Unknown*

Hope you all had some wonderful food over Thanksgiving Break!



(Photography by Abigail Poppleton)

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60 COLLEGE AVENUE
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

