2002

Takin' it to the streets: culture war, rhetorical education, and democratic virtue

Beth Jorgensen
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Takin' it to the streets: Culture war, rhetorical education, and democratic virtue

by

Beth Jorgensen

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Rhetoric and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Michael Mendelson, Major Professor
Virginia Allen
David Wallace
Susan Yager
Robert Hollinger
James McGlew

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2002

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of

Beth Jorgensen

has met the requirements of Iowa State University

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program
To Virginia Ellen Saunders Jorgensen

Daughter of Austin Cassius

and

Catherine Mary Sowles

Bride of Kenneth Eugene

A Most Virtuous Woman.
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Thank you.
Introduction

First Philosophy, Democracy, and Composition

Those who take the meat from the table
Preach contentment . . .
Those who eat their fill speak to the hungry
Of wonderful times to come . . .
Those who lead the country into the abyss
Call ruling too difficult
For the ordinary.

—Bertolt Brecht, 1937

Democracy is government by discussion but it is only effective
if you can stop people talking.

—Clement Attlee

You’re tellin’ me the things you’re gonna do for me.
Well, I ain’t blind and I don’t like what I think I see.

—The Doobie Brothers
“Takin’ It To the Streets”

I was frantically working my way through what I expected to become my final chapter when the twin towers of the World Trade Center were toppled by terrorists. Suddenly, the most urgent thing in my life lost its urgency. Over the next few days, as I moved from denial to grief to despair, I came to understand that in my attempt to be properly academic, my work was failing to describe the urgency I felt even before this crisis. An urgency that has been in my classroom since the day I began teaching: that remains there still, now with greater potency. I resolved to return to the beginning, to step up my arguments by setting them against the circumstances from which this and many other tragedies have arisen.

No doubt this will frustrate my committee, for my project is large and delay frequent as my concerns as teacher, wife, mother, daughter, sister, and community member command my attention. From the beginning, my committee, acting in my interest, has seen this project in practical terms—a means to achieve an honorific, maybe even a professional position. They’re anxious to see me safely tenure-tracked. I, on the
other hand, have seen this as my first, possibly my only opportunity to say something significant. I want to make sure I get it right—even if only a handful of people read it. I've never been sure I have anything really remarkable to say, but I've always been damn sure it's pretty remarkable to get this chance.

Some readers may find what follows a bit unsettling, the blend of the personal, political, and scholarly too provocative. But the precedent was set long before this dissertation. Scholars throughout the humanities have argued for many years that personal experience may serve scholarship by making diverse experiences visible within the larger culture (Brandt; Spigelman; Villanueva); by challenging assumptions about the validity of "ways of knowing" (Belenky, et. al.; Gere; Tannen); and by revealing the clash between our expectations and our experiences (R. Miller; Rose). It has also been maintained that personal writing may be ethically imperative to certain types of research (Brodkey; Herrington). Indeed, Protagoras, from whom I derive my paradigm of rationality, argues that social, i.e. personal and political, context is the very wellspring of both knowledge and virtue. For Protagoras, the search for truth and personal experience are not dichotomized, as truth and justice consist of negotiation between ourselves and our communities. It is therefore from personal context that I begin my inquiry.

I was born in Storm Lake, Iowa—a pretty little town next to a silty pond in the middle of a corn field. But my conscience was born in Viet Nam—a ruined jungle: a flickering glow of carnage and casualty lists cast upon a brown-eyed little girl and a fat pinkish terrier snuggled up on nylon loop carpet: a bundle of photographs, more carnage, taken by a desperate boy, my brother, far, far from home.

In the free exchange of ideas that is America, I began to read what I was not supposed to read. Alongside Shakespeare, Dickens, Alcott, Euripides, Reader's Digest, John Wesley, Browning, Dickinson, and The Bible, I read Alan Ginsburg, Marx, Lenny Bruce, Ursula LeGuin, The Bhagavad-Gita, The Book of Mormon, Mother Jones, The Tao, Carlos Castenada, Joseph Heller, Sylvia Plath, Marshal McLuhan, Dalton Trumbo and The Bible. I began to learn bit by bit that my education was peppered with "noble lies" that acted against my liberty, the rights of others, and my dream of global justice. I learned that risking one's life to escape religious persecution does not necessarily translate into religious tolerance. So many women burned. So many stoned. So many drowned.
That civilization comes at the expense of civilization. So many trails. So many tears. That freedom sometimes means only freedom to suffer by one's own wits in a land that denies one's wits. That material progress was bought on the backs of strangers. Not only were these streets *not* paved with gold, people like my grandparents were expected to pave them. To make themselves too soon old breaking soil for grain, breaking rock for ore, breaking hearts over grandsons surrendered to a war no one really understood. And the TV flickered on.


¹ Deconstruction is "a sceptical approach to the possibility of coherent meaning initiated by the French philosopher Derrida" which denies any "privileged point, such as an author's intentionality or a contact with external reality, that confers significance on a text ... only the limitless opportunity for fresh commentary or text" (Blackburn 95).

The conservative commentators I am about to take to task—whom I call "moral-traditionalist™—praise the European West. America in particular, for a unique impulse to self-scrutiny and critique. Yet when faced with ugly truths by those who encourage this impulse, they condemn the messenger, seeking to return our youth to a mythical world. an education of "noble lies™. ethno- even egocentrically claiming they hold the universal answers to the questions of first philosophy—What is truth? What is justice? What is being? Questions that remain unanswered after twenty-five-hundred years of asking. Questions the very power and significance of which lie in the asking and re-asking. in the self-restraint to hold all answers tentatively. In the meantime. whatever answers we stumble upon provide our paradigms. constructs we think with but too rarely think about.

The democratic world has long claimed the need to teach our children to deeply question the tentative answers of their forebears. Our efforts to do so comprise what we call "liberal education™ and we consider this education the foundation of our democracy. Yet too often the primary purpose of public education has been assimilation to the "noble lies™ that characterize the American myth. At bottom, a broad. deep liberal education has been too often limited to an elite: only these few sanctioned to grapple with the conflicts which characterize inquiry and debate. Alas, without access to the kind and depth of education allotted the few, the many will never hear the full range of voices and so will never enter the democratic dialogue as peers.

Against this backdrop, moral-traditionalists claim nostalgic ownership of a past education which somehow did a better job of transmitting both knowledge and skills. As usual. I turned to Mom for perspective. Mom. educated for eight years in a one-room school. another four in a rural high school. just laughed. We talked about my education.
Mom reminding me how difficult it was, how much trouble I got into trying to feed my curious mind. We talked about my kids, marveling at how much more knowledgeable and sophisticated they are than I was as a young adult. And yet, from the vista I have gained as a teacher, my children’s public education has not yet proven adequate. Too many students still enter my classroom uncritically accepting the status quo, comfortably assured that America embodies justice, that national prosperity is evidence of American justice, and that the unfortunate among us and abroad are uncivilized, unenlightened, or unwilling to pay their dues. And they don’t want to learn otherwise. Faced with the task of critically examining assumptions, both theirs and mine, and armed with popular rhetoric about “tenured radicals,” they balk at anyone who asks them to seek a greater good than athletic shoes and designer jeans. Perhaps something has been pushed aside as students are compelled to absorb vast amounts of highly specialized information preparing them for careers. Coming to focus less on community than on self, they lose the naïve faith in democracy that drove their grandparents, even their parents, to the polls (at least)—replacing it with an equally naïve faith in the marketplace, the field of perceived opportunity which promises (at least hope of) material comfort.

No doubt academic philosophical debates seem far removed from daily life. But in fact, “the problems central to our everyday social and practical lives” are often rooted in the questions which “engage the specialized attention of academic philosophers” (MacIntyre *Virtue* 36). Truth is, the answers offered determine what our children are taught, how they are taught, and to what purposes they are taught. But frankly, as discussion is most often carried out in obscure language.² those who have the greatest stake in the answers often find the questions bewildering or cannot offer answers in voices respected by authority. One result is that citizens feel alienated from governance of our democracy. Fewer and fewer citizens participate in political processes, including the simple act of voting. Even as an economic elite command the ear of our government, we put our trust in an intellectual elite who employ conceptual and verbal tools that serve to

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² Michael W. Apple notes that much theoretical and empirical research on the “relationship between education and class, race, and gender” is inaccessible to a broad audience because “it is published in academic journals or scholarly books . . . less than totally visible” to the general population and it “has been carried on in something of a private language . . . noted for its involved theoreticism and, often, the abstract nature of its arguments” (Shor *Culture Wars* xi-xii).
shut out the average citizen. Yet to place both political and economic power in the hands of a few is contrary to democracy. Therefore, it is imperative that all those who lead these “everyday social and practical lives.” comprehend the conversation regarding the roots of these most pressing questions. This imperative has only intensified now that our lives are not so “everyday.”

In the meantime, English Studies has only touched the tip of the philosophical iceberg. Although many in English engage with Continental literary theory, few engage directly with first philosophy, that is, epistemology, metaphysics, cosmology—questions about human nature and the nature of knowledge. And in light of the attacks on academia, many English teachers are reluctant to address the discourse of dissent and the accompanying study of ethics, for fear of inappropriately “politicizing” education. Even as our disciplinary literature is increasingly marked by dissent and charged with ethics, classroom treatment of ethics is often shallow; dissent too often relegated to a literary past or limited to a host of “safe” topics toward which we can point in the name of diversity and freedom of thought—AIDS, the death penalty, animal rights, gun control, abortion—topics which command our attention though only symptomatic of deeper concerns. More concerted efforts are all too often narrow attempts to open students’ minds to new options of belief, particularly ideologies of oppression, to gain a forum for silenced voices: what some might call “political correctness.” But such efforts often do little to improve the poor understanding many students show regarding the historical and contemporary contexts from which conflicting ideologies arise and in which they contend. Meanwhile, the continuing worth of long-cherished ideas and the fresh insight new readings bring to these ideas are too often treated as though they cancel each other out. Time and time again, moral- and counter-traditionalists simply negate, even belittle the other’s views rather than seriously engage them, leading to contentious and nearly irreconcilable debate both within and without English Studies. Therefore, to re-engage one another (as well as the lay audience who, directly or indirectly, depends on our teaching), we need to demonstrate self-restraint, cross disciplinary boundaries, and revisit the roots of this conversation.

As my arguments are, therefore, inter-disciplinary and potentially esoteric to lay readers. I have put this introduction to use to define and contextualize some of the vocabulary I will use in the following discussion. Likewise, I have attempted in the
following chapters to define and link specialized vocabulary and concepts. So while some readers may feel I belabor certain concepts or neglect subtle distinctions, while others continue to find my arguments esoteric, I ask my readers to indulge the democratic spirit behind my attempt to reach diverse audiences. Certainly I cannot exhaustively address such huge questions, but I can both have my say and invite Mom, her neighbors, my children, and my students into this very important conversation.

The Roots of the Conversation

A central issue of this conversation is how to mark out belief, knowledge, and truth. The dominant paradigm—traceable from Plato through the scientific revolution—is grounded upon two notions: 1) that humanity is "capable of deep and accurate insight into the nature of being" (Farrar 48); and 2) that humanity "in general exhibit[s] seriously defective judgment about such matters" (48). Upon these two premises is established the conclusion that only certain individuals can gain "privileged insight" (48). This position, often called rationalism, is constrained by the assumptions that reality is unchangeable and invariant, that by employing the right method rationally gifted individuals can access reality, and that, in light of the timeless and universal nature of reality, a given proposition either must or must not be true regardless of circumstances.

These claims are both epistemological and ethical. As to epistemology, rationalism asserts that truth is timeless, stable, objective, neutral, knowable, and applicable to human problems. Called by the Greeks sophia, this stable concept of knowledge is associated with the "essences" of things (Aristotle Metaphysics 1016b), "first causes and forms" (1032b), things that cannot be other than what they are. An
absolute and unchanging reality that transcends the human condition. *sophia* is thought to stem from discovery through logical reasoning and scientific analysis of unshifting data within humanity's environment. As to ethics, rationalism asserts that such truths can be applied to values as well as facts. Under this construct, the goal of inquiry is to discover truths that transcend the material and human world—stable, timeless, and invariant abstractions upon which we can ground science, ethics, and government. Possession of such knowledge is thought to allow mastery of both the physical and social worlds.\(^5\)

But the 20\textsuperscript{th} century ultimately cast doubt upon these assumptions, as "scientific" industrialization polluted our water and air, as nuclear annihilation became a palpable threat, as we paved over communities in the name of progress: in sum, as modern life seeded greater problems than we had ever imagined. In response to these problems emerged *postmodernism*—an intellectual reaction against the foundational claims and social consequences of Modern rationalism, seen as a "naïve and earnest confidence in progress" and "confidence in objective or scientific truth" (Blackburn 294). Although it takes many forms, postmodernism suggests, by contrast, that notions of objectivity, logic, and rationality do not transcend time, culture, and situation but are determined by the worldview of the dominant culture. Postmodernists question objectivity, demonstrate alternative logics, and object that Euro-western (ostensibly male) notions of rationality ignore the valuable resources of other ways of thinking. Although they seem radical and revolutionary, many of the questions raised by postmodernism are as ancient as democracy. In fact, they arise from democracy—for democracy shifts attention from abstract philosophical problems of truth and being to concrete, political problems of knowledge and justice: from the search for certain truths (*episteme*) to problem solving in the face of many opinions (*doxai*).

Yet this democratic shift does not represent an abandonment of philosophical for the political, for plurality of thought is the highest ideal, not only of liberal education, but

\(^5\) As political theorist Thomas A. Spragens, Jr. points out, "[a]t first glance, epistemology and politics might seem strange bedfellows... Epistemological questions appear to be highly abstract and reflexive quite removed from the sphere of political beliefs and behavior... however... tacit assumptions about the who, the what, and the how of reliable knowledge profoundly shape... basic orientation and attitude toward a whole range of important political concerns... Revolutions within the tradition of political theory... are very often intimately associated with new departures in epistemology" (10-11).
of the Euro-western philosophy from which it springs. As political scholar Benjamin Barber notes:

From their earliest encounters with belief (the claims of subjectivity), knowledge (the claims of intersubjectivity), and truth (the claims of objectivity), pedagogy and scholarship have tried to balance the need to ask questions with the need to offer well-grounded but tentative answers. (Aristocracy 113)

In ancient Athens, as in the contemporary U.S., these encounters took place in the public and political arena of civic, democratic discourse—formally, in the law courts or the assembly; informally, in the agora, or marketplace. In such arenas, success is not guaranteed by accident of birth nor is it a matter of force. It is instead a product of the citizen's rhetorical skill. To gain these skills, Greeks turned to the Sophists, the first professional teachers in the Western world. Rhetoric, loosely defined as the art of persuasive speaking, was the key skill needed by the citizens of Athenian democracy and so was the center of the Sophists' curriculum.

Yet the age of the Sophists was marked, as our own, by a conflict between conservative values and the needs of democracy. Theirs was a functional epistemology with the aim of arriving at knowledge by agreement within concrete situations calling for guided action. Concerned thus with practice more than theory, "the Sophists gave people not only a philosophical base for liberalizing outlooks but also the specific skills for implementation" (Barrett 38). Doing so, the Sophists furthered the aims of democracy and thus ran into conflict with proponents of the conservative view that only a naturally superior few have sufficient virtue to guide the populace in accordance with divine or natural law. Above all, the Sophists mark out a distinction between truth and justice, fact and value, between what is true and what is good, which acknowledges the uncertainty of the social realm.

While marked differences exist in the philosophies of individual Sophists, particular trends appear. First, they mark a shift from the poetic, or mythic, tradition, in which the gods were seen as the source of wisdom, to the philosophic, or logos tradition.

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Substantivity – individual perception; Intersubjectivity – the relationship between the perceptions of two or more separate conscious minds; Objectivity – the theory of knowable reality apart from perception.
in which human reason gains force and which is continued in the works of Plato and Aristotle. In brief, they challenged received theology and the rules of social order which followed upon it. Second, they introduced the concept that virtue (arete) can be taught, thus challenging the notion that virtue springs from noble birth. Third, they introduced a notion of knowledge in the human realm as contingent upon perspective and context. Finally, they furthered the notion that democratic decision-making is a process of rhetoric. As teachers of rhetoric, they thus promised skill in argument and consequent power in the legislature and law courts: a result that has been placed in opposition to the quest for truth which Plato names as the province of philosophy and which exists apart from, or despite, situational and cultural context. No doubt because rhetoric was often seen as mere persuasion, a tool for winning rather than uncovering truth, the Sophists became subject to attacks that they were relativists.

Such is the view of the Sophists that emerges in Plato's dialogues as Socrates interrogates them as to what kind of knowledge rhetoric can claim. In one such dialogue, pointing to various other disciplines, such as astronomy, Socrates clearly defines the parameters of each in an attempt to demonstrate that rhetoric does not possess knowledge of its own, as do these, but merely constitutes a "knack" for packaging knowledge gained by other means so as to affect belief (Plato Gorgias 463b). Without access to any truth to call its own, rhetoric is thus subject to the whims of dilettantes and liars.

At the root of the conflict between Plato and the Sophists is a distinction between nature, physis, simply speaking, that which is, and human convention, nomos, that which we create. The tension arises from Protagoras, whose assertion "humanity is the measure of all things" appears to do away with sophia, leaving truths to be "only what they are according to one individual in a particular situation" (De Romilly 98). The implications for maintaining social order are immense. Among other things, this doctrine was extended to question religious foundations upon which the laws were given their legitimacy. In the arena of justice, then, there comes to be "no difference between justice

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* Unless otherwise indicate, Classical citations represent Greek editions.

* Protagoras. (485? - 405? BCE (before the common era)) is considered foremost among the Sophists.
and legality" (112); justice ceases to be a matter of preordained truth, coming into being as a matter of human convention. At the extreme, governance comes to be seen by some Sophists as no more than a matter of competitive power, the victors being those whose notions of knowledge and virtue attain cultural dominance: justice becomes merely "the advantage of the stronger" (117 cf. Thrasy-machus\textsuperscript{11}). The very possibility of justice becomes unsettled, shaking the foundations of governance.

Yet despite such anti-democratic undertones, the distinction between \textit{physis} and \textit{nomos} bears humanist and democratic potential as well. If "humanity is the measure," then each human is capable of measuring. Of such persuasion, Antiphon\textsuperscript{12} points out that "we are all by nature born the same in every way ... We all breathe into the air through mouth and nostrils" (De Romilly 115 cf. B44b. col. 2 in Freeman), a statement which classicist Jacqueline De Romilly asserts is "the first time that the thesis of a brotherhood of man had ever been put forward" (115). In this light, democracy takes advantage of the "humanity is measure" doctrine to build an ethic of egalitarianism which foregoes competition and power in favor of cooperation and rhetoric. Democracy, in short, is an agreement to talk.

Along these lines, Protagoras defends rhetoric as a realm of knowledge concerned with "prudence in affairs private as well as public" (Plato Protagoras 319a). while nonetheless recognizing that in the social arena, one person's word is pitted against another's. How then is the truth to be determined? To Protagoras, the task falls to rhetoric, not to uncover stable truth, but to arrive at the best decision in the light of conflicting \textit{doxai}. Hence, while the realm of rhetoric so defined is not nearly so tangible as that of astronomy, it is clear that Protagoras is attempting to identify a kind of knowledge which is not so certain, stable, or foundational as \textit{sophia}. More clearly defined by Aristotle, this alternative is \textit{phronesis} or prudence, the citizen-ruler's, i.e. orator's, "practical wisdom," thought "directed to some end and concerned with action" (Nichomachean Ethics 1139b1). \textit{Phronesis} is not a product of inquiry but a process of deliberation, a movement

\textsuperscript{11} Sophist. 460? - ? B. C. E.
\textsuperscript{12} Athenian orator and Sophist. 480 - 411 B. C. E.
toward concrete action in solving problems (1141a31), concerning imminent justice rather than immutable truth.\footnote{Phronesis is both named as a virtue (Rhetoric 1306b) and contrasted to virtue, arete (1378a: Politics 1281b), as a kind of wisdom or decision-making capacity (Eudemian Ethics 1214a), distinguished from episteme (1216a) and sophia (Rhetoric 1366). Phronesis is closely associated with language, which "serves to declare ... what is just and what is unjust" (1253a11)—language is among the "arms" which "serve the purposes of phronesis and arete" (1253a16). Yet Aristotle maintains that rhetoric has been given too much credit for phronesis, which, he claims, requires analytic knowledge and knowledge of human characteristics (Rhetoric 1359b4-5)—so indicating his resistance to Sophistic doctrine. Defined as both particular and necessary to rulers (1277b17), phronesis is an internal good (Politics 1323a-b) named as one of the three highest goods—goodness, wisdom, and pleasure. Using phronesis almost exclusively to represent wisdom in the Eudemian Ethics, Aristotle associates it with "the life of philosophy" rather than with "the life of politics," which is associated with goodness, arete (1215a). This ambiguity is cleared up in the Nichomachean Ethics where it is clearly defined as the ability to determine what is good or best, as opposed to sophia, which is composed of scientific knowledge and intelligence and concerns what is true. As phronesis is a virtue of deliberating about action (1140b24) rather than a techne of reasoning, therefore it does not achieve excellence but is itself an excellence (1140b25). Although it does not concern absolute truth, phronesis differs from doxa because it is informed by reasoning and virtue, while doxa may be arbitrary. Phronesis is a "truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to the things that are good for human beings" (1140b20 Rackham) or "a truthful characteristic of acting rationally in matters good and bad for men" (Ostwald)—the virtue of the rational part of the soul that forms opinions. While Aristotle differentiates somewhat between practical wisdom (phronesis) and political wisdom (politike techne or politike arete), the latter is a component of the former (Books 6-8).}

Firmly seated in the public (in ancient Greece, oral) sphere of problem solving, phronesis invokes a perception of knowledge which presupposes dialogue between two or more parties with varying points of view—an inherently dynamic, local, and contingent process. Seen as the practice of phronesis, rhetoric aims neither for static truth nor merely effective manipulation in self-interest, but for contingent knowledge contextualized to the problem at hand. Rhetoric is thus, like more tangible disciplines, epistemic: it produces some kind of knowledge. Understanding this, although we may claim to arrive at absolutes by means other than rhetoric, we must acknowledge the flux of human experience, the native, nonrational qualities of the human psyche, as well as the imprecision of the language in which claims are voiced, and conclude that foundations for universal claims are by no means absolute, but accepted by cultural consensus with a degree of faith. Rhetoric serves the purpose of making possible this consensus by the sharing of multiple viewpoints, the public weighing of the benefits of each: rhetoric aims, at least in part, for krisis, or judgment (Lunsford and Ede 44). It concerns good decisions, rather than true propositions.
A rhetorical view of knowledge thus acknowledges the political dimensions of knowledge formation, i.e. the ways in which the canon of knowledge is influenced by questions of citizenship or social status, audience psychology, ethics, and individual bias reflected in the questions asked and the manner in which they are answered. Politics is herein defined broadly as not only the means by which humans establish government, but the means by which humans interact in all arenas. from the elevated theory of scientific inquiry to the pragmatics of interpersonal interaction. Such a view presupposes that truth is influenced by the varying experiences and dispositions of individual humans, that truth is determined in a context of culture, events, and persons, a context of justice. The primary purpose of epistemic rhetoric is to account for the way in which subjective human experience influences knowledge making. It is a *politike techne*, a skill for sorting through particular viewpoints in the social arena so as to arrive at a decision upon which action may be taken.

Eighteenth-century Italian humanist Giambattista Vico aptly explains the difference between abstract knowledge, *sophia*, and *phronesis*, which he terms prudence:

In science, the outstanding intellect is that which succeeds in reducing a large multitude of physical effects to a single cause; in the domain of prudence, excellence is accorded to those who ferret out the greatest possible number of causes which may have produced a single event, and who are able to conjecture which of all these causes is the true one. (720)

As Vico explains, in substance *phronesis* deals with particulars rather than universals—the events, individuals, and concerns of the moment rather than static truths which transcend the moment: it is an ability to reason correctly with respect to the variable (Aristotle Nichomachean Ethics 1140b 29). Primary to such an active concept of knowledge is the connection between human contingencies and intellectual pursuit. Rather than "seeing" the truth, the seeker interacts, or dialogues, with the data of existence, as with other seekers, in an attempt to arrive at a good *decision*. Accordingly, the seeker does not operate autonomously, but socially. We do not find subject matter just waiting for us but create subject matter to fit the needs of the present social situation. Hence, while an

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14 Epistemic rhetoric *produces* knowledge, as opposed to merely packaging knowledge for an audience.
investigation may begin with the general question “does it exist?.” It culminates in the particular question, “why does it exist?” or “what purpose can it serve?” (McKeon 60). Rhetoric, in this sense, is the substance of the conversation regarding relative truth, the "science" of society, of relationships between oneself and others, whether one defines these as individuals or communities, even a community as expansive as humanity. Essentially, the aim of rhetoric is to arrive at the best decision when truth is uncertain, to deliberate what action is most prudent and just.

Objectives

It is this basic conflict between two visions of knowledge which underwrites the current debate regarding humanities education. Quite simply, this debate has tended to polarize, one side arguing that the humanities tradition is to explore universal social truths, sophia, the other claiming that social truths cannot be conflated with sophia because such truths vary from culture to culture, circumstance to circumstance. Meanwhile, both positions are underwritten by philosophical assumptions regarding truth which are in some ways both incoherent and incommensurate. To illustrate these points of incoherence and incommensurability, in the following chapters I will explore the ways these assumptions serve to construct diverse self-concepts which underwrite the theory and practice of liberal democracy and, therefore, the theory and practice of democratic education.

In Chapter One, I will clarify the divisions that mark the debate over the canon of literature, history, and philosophy and the treatment of this canon in the classroom—the educational end of what has been called the “Culture War.” I will examine the broad debate as it applies to English Studies, as well as the debate within English Studies, contrasting the epistemological and moral assumptions in this apparently polar conflict. Drawing a parallel between the Culture War and traditional hostility toward the Sophists, I will argue that, as democracy is embodied in rhetorical practice rather than foundational truths, the English classroom is a natural site for education in the virtues of phronesis. In fact, study of virtue is particularly relevant to rhetoric—as virtues are themselves rhetorical constructs rather than universal truths and as virtues can be used to describe the way in which the rhetor comports herself.
In Chapter Two, I will identify the central concern of this conversation as a tension between moral excellence and political effectiveness. Employing an Aristotelian vocabulary, I will illustrate the ways in which the assumptions of philosophical liberalism may undermine the pursuit of excellence in the realm of justice. In particular, I will argue that the liberal self-concept identifies the individual apart from and in conflict with others and the community: that liberal thinking is undercut by marketplace assumptions which discourage civic participation and provide an inadequate model of inequality, domination, and oppression. I will conclude that liberalism misidentifies social goods as it misdirects social practices, and hence provides insufficient grounding for ethical discourse.

In Chapter Three, I will examine the assumptions of Euro-western rationalism which underlie liberalism and their implications for democratic practice. I will argue that the dominant paradigm of inquiry, dependent on a concept of the calculative rational self, misconstrues the Good as an abstract, timeless, and unitary form, misrepresents the practices of reasoning as transcending “the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely” (Toulmin Cosmopolis 30), and mishandles social institutions by according the “misrepresented” rationality of individuals. Among the consequences are rhetorical practices which suppress dissent, conceal bias, and fail to challenge existing social hierarchies, so excluding most people from public deliberation. I will conclude by raising the specter of the fragmented self, a passive subject, citizen of nowhere, who conflates material acquisition and the right to personal privacy with self-determination and ethical social progress.

In Chapter Four, I will employ the Platonic cardinal virtues to illustrate the way in which contemporary constructions of these virtues are used to silence dissenting voices. I will then propose a rhetorical way of looking at these virtues which draws its force from the teachings of Protagoras, provisionally resolving the somewhat artificial binary drawn between episteme and doxai so providing a more democratic vision of rhetorical ethics.

As the Chapter Five I had planned toppled with the towers, in my final chapter I will return to our “everyday lives” in the classroom, offering a glimpse into what has been called by many a “radical” pedagogy. My experiences and those of my students as we attempt to work our way through the grief and terror will serve as illustration of the advantages of this approach to inquiry and teaching. Drawn from the work of Brazilian
revolutionary educator Paolo Freire. radical pedagogy not only promises to bring to life the ideas of Protagoras, but serves as a means for both student and teacher to reflect, to self-scrutinize, as we reflect and scrutinize the context against which this tragedy occurred. In this context, radical pedagogy offers a step toward healing through intellectual growth and with that growth, to move each of us closer to becoming peacemakers.
Chapter One
Culture War and the Moral Imperatives of English Studies

Men who are more familiar with books than with affairs are apt to over-estimate the influence of philosophers. When they see some political party proclaiming itself inspired by So-and-So's teaching, they think its actions are attributable to So-and-So, whereas, not infrequently the philosopher is only acclaimed because he recommends what the party would have done in any case.

—H. G. Wells

The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in the insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding.

—Judge Louis D. Brandeis

If education worked, the rich would stop it.

—Oscar Wilde

As the only academic from a large and opinionated family, I occasionally find myself targeted at family gatherings, fielding (sometimes ducking) an onslaught of opinions regarding the current "crisis" in humanities education. Depending on the political leanings of the individual, these range from claims of declining literacy to assertions that the humanities have been "politicized" by radical leftists (like me, according to some). One brother expresses concern that his daughters may not be learning the skills they will need in the marketplace. Another laments that students are not being taught values. A sister worries that her sons will be indoctrinated into a worldview that excludes her and their sister, perhaps even her developmentally disabled son. My mother asks whether the values being taught are the traditional values we want our children to be taught. Often they seem to see these as unrelated issues. Yet in their frequent calls for "back to basics," many seem nostalgic for an education which did a better job of teaching both skills and values. While I frequently disagree with their proposed causes, as well as with their solutions, the concerns they name have been at the root of my pedagogical, curricular, and research efforts throughout my graduate education and teaching career.

Meanwhile, they don't really understand what I teach, or for that matter, what I research. Most of them remember English class as the place where they were compelled to read "great" literature. Some of the boys clearly preferred Mad, Hot Rod, and Bart Starr.
American Champion, while the girls preferred Teen, Archie, and Trixie Belden. One sister remembers not even learning to read well until after high school. "Rhetoric," at worst, was something that took place in Washington: at best, a class where the college-bound learned to compose a five-paragraph theme. My love of literature and particularly my affinity for writing poetry marked me as the bookish type. Today they recognize me as a writer and a writing teacher, but they don't understand what I write about and their vision of writing instruction hasn't gone beyond five-paragraph themes.

Once in awhile, someone asks, "What's a rhetorician?" Explanation is difficult: I usually settle for describing myself as a teacher and analyst of human symbolic behavior, and explain that I look for, and teach others to look for, the meanings hidden between the lines, within the images, in the communicative behavior of human beings. Like Protagoras, who plays a major role in the following arguments. I believe all people capable of practicing my discipline. Not only that, I believe everyone must practice this discipline for democracy, equality, and liberty to flourish. Unfortunately, we live in a world which numbs this capacity—sometimes through poverty and oppression, sometimes through education that suppresses rather than encourages thought (sometimes in the guise of encouraging it), and sometimes through excess material satisfaction. As an heir of the rhetorical tradition, I believe it the responsibility of everyone in the humanities to embrace our legacy and re-enliven this capacity in our students and in our community.

As a rhetoric teacher, I am therefore faced with a vast array of interlocking and sometimes conflicting challenges. Clearly, my students must learn to write in such a way that they will be not only understood but respected. To deny them this skill is to deny them social, political, and economic self-determination. Yet rigid standards of correctness often inhibit the content, tone, or style of what they write, frequently in effect silencing them, and so likewise inhibiting their self-determination. At the same time, my students need something to say. But those who have led comfortable lives too often wear blinders to all but their most immediate fancies while those who have struggled often feel that no one will listen. For most of these students, learning to write is merely a painful task "to get
over with." 1 Asked why they need to learn to write, they give varied, unsatisfactory answers. "To get a job." "To write papers in my major classes." "To succeed in business." Even, "I don’t know. In my career, I won’t even have to write." They do not see writing romantically as a way to express their deeper souls. Nor do they see writing as a fundamental element of their exercise of free speech. Frankly, most of these students see the right to free expression as freedom from government intrusion rather than as the privilege of participating in self-governance. The point is, I must not only teach my students to write. I must give them a purpose for writing beyond the classroom and a forum in which they feel free to try their wings. Above all, I must teach them to write, and to speak, so that their free exercise of expression does not misrepresent, mislead, or unfairly silence others. To do so, I must teach them to respect dissent, to reflect on the roots of dissent, perhaps recognize their own dissent. And this means teaching, or at least facilitating development of, values. Among these values are the ideal of human equality upon which civil rights are grounded and the impulse to self-governance, the responsibility of democratic participation that attends these rights.

Meanwhile, school shootings, Washington moral scandals, increased sex and violence in the media, and declining civility in the political arena have elicited heated debate regarding moral virtue. Though the notion of virtue is itself conservative, commentators across the political spectrum have entered the fray, nearly all sharing the assumption that at least partial responsibility for inculcating virtue lies with schools. History backs them up, as the American university and public education have generally been characterized as having a moral purpose in the service of democracy. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, "the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty" is to "educate and inform the whole mass of the people" ("Comments" 123), that they may be raised "to the high ground of moral respectability necessary to their own safety, and to orderly government" ("Aristocracy" 285).

1 Susan Miller argues that administrative discrimination between students required to take composition and those sufficiently qualified to "avoid" it, as well as division of majors and non-majors into separate composition courses, defines composition as "a task to be got out of the way" (86).
Yet recent discussions of moral crisis have largely focused on domestic behavior, sensationally that of our elected officials, but particularly that of our youth. Though noteworthy, this focus has two consequences: 1) it deflects our moral gaze from the practices of governments and economic institutions which, in a democracy, are morally answerable to the people; 2) it threatens to define virtue as passive cooperation with these practices, so denying the average citizen opportunity to participate in their improvement. There is no better time to expand our focus than the present. Indeed, against the context of “America’s New War™” (CNN), public debate regarding liberal and democratic virtue may escalate as we try to identify what went wrong. Or it may cease as fervent patriotism and national security concerns silence dissent and self-critique. I take the position that the latter must not be permitted, that in our efforts toward justice and, ultimately, peace, we must hold ourselves accountable to the values we have so long professed.

With this in mind, among my primary concerns is the failure of U.S. public education to prepare the average citizen to critically analyze the central concerns of democracy and attendant economic systems. In the spirit of “equal access to all,” we have come to interpret access in economic terms and so our schools have become little more than centers of job training. With their rights reduced to “a piece of the pie” and their responsibilities reduced to production and consumption, students are often denied the very education they need most, that in which “future citizens learn to critically engage politics and received knowledge both inside and outside the classroom” (Giroux Stealing 2). The

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2 This “moral decline” may be exaggerated. Political analyst Michael Lind cites journalist Barry O’Neill (New York Times Magazine, 6 Mar. 1994) which reveals as a hoax “two lists of behavior banned in public schools, one from the 1940s and the other from the 1980s”—the former listing “(1) talking; (2) chewing gum; (3) making noise; (4) running in the halls; (5) getting out of turn in line; (6) wearing improper clothing; (7) not putting paper in wastebaskets” and the latter listing “(1) drug abuse; (2) alcohol abuse; (3) pregnancy; (4) suicide; (5) rape; (6) robbery; (7) assault” (164).

Stanley Aronowitz asserts that vocationalism motivated the GI bill and other higher education funding (Factory). Ira Shor identifies three phases of school reform between 1969 and 1983, each focused on the creation and/or management of a labor force. The earliest, careerist reform, offered the elite a broad liberal education and tracked majority non-elites into job-oriented programs. This movement’s failure led to “back-to-basics,” which Shor describes as a “blame the victim” movement with the depressant effect of lowering expectations of the non-elite (Culture Wars 93-96). The third phase disguised “education for high tech corporate growth” as “education for economic growth” (129). Shor argues that these measures are largely conservative reactions to the turbulence of the 1960s and sets out to debunk many of the myths and to reveal the political machinations that support arguments for such plans. Clark Kerr, meanwhile, calls knowledge the “product” of the university, calling for a two-tier system—the upper to train knowledge-makers, the lower to produce technical personnel for the labor market (Uses).
domestic consequence is a narrowing of the democratic vision—as evidenced by drastically low voter turnouts, and a growing economic, as well as political, power gap. The global consequence is that our citizenry often seems to accept U.S. economic dominance as unproblematic evidence of cultural and moral superiority—a worldview which has elicited international hostility toward the U.S. at times even from allies. We must therefore expand our moral focus to encompass the practices of governmental and economic institutions and we must bring this focus into the classroom as we prepare our students as occupants of these. In short, we must produce citizens answerable to a greater good than the bottom line, willing and able to scrutinize U.S. governmental and economic practices, that they may hold excess in check. Such focus will likely meet with resistance, for engagement in self-critique is liable to unsettle both cherished beliefs and seats of power. Nevertheless, it must be done, for if we fail to recognize U.S. culpability for global crisis, we cannot become better, we can achieve neither justice nor peace. This will require humility, for we have long held up America as moral exemplar. This will require

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1 2000 Voter turnout was 51.1% (National Public Radio), up only slightly from 49.08% in 1996 (Federal Election Commission).

2 CEO salaries increased on average 17% from 1998-99, reaching an average $12.4 million—475 times the average blue collar salary. 6 times the 1990 CEO average (AFL-CIO), nearly 1200 times the minimum wage. Michael Lind points out that “between 1973 and 1995, the wages of the 80 percent of the American workforce whom the government classifies as “production and nonsupervisory workers” fell by 18 percent, in dollars adjusted for inflation, from $315 per week to $258 dollars per week... most of the income gains have gone to a small group within the upper 20 percent of the workforce. A mere 1 percent of families in the United States received 79 percent of all the income generated in this country between 1977 and 1990, with much of that bonanza going to the top tenth of that 1 percent” (247).

3 Industry gives huge sums to campaigns and spends millions lobbying. For example, the drug industry gave $2.4 million to Democrats and $6.3 million to Republicans between 1999 and 2000 to further legislation extending patents and blocking generics. Past successes loosened advertising regulations, leading to a profit increase from $16 billion in 1990 to $25 billion in 1996. Tax code changes allowed the drug industry to pay an effective tax rate of 16.2% from 1993-96, compared with a 27.3% effective tax rate for other major industries. Oil companies have likewise benefited from heavy campaign and lobbying expenditures—$100 million in direct contributions since 1991, nearly $58 million on lobbying in 1998 alone. Their aims include repeal of gasoline taxes and increased domestic drilling, notably in the Alaska Wildlife Refuge (The Center for Responsive Politics). Meanwhile, facing the biggest bankruptcy in U.S. history, energy giant Enron avoided federal corporate income tax in four of the last five years by hiding profits in nearly 900 offshore subsidiaries—yet it received $382 million in tax refunds (Cohen 13A) Enron contributed half a million dollars to the Bush campaign as well as contributing to the campaigns of 71 senators and 188 congressmen and has enjoyed remarkable influence over government energy policy (Rich 2). Against this backdrop, Michael Lind argues that politics in the U.S. is controlled by an “overclass... based in the university-credentialed professions” (10), distinguished from faculty at colleges and research institutes by employment in independent think tanks funded by “large individual and corporate donors and ideological and professional groups” whether left, right, or centrist (11).
restraint. for justice without restraint is vengeance. And this will require dissent: for peace without dissent, we call tyranny.

Education at Cross Purposes

In the meantime, a market emphasis in our schools and colleges threatens this very task. The market pressures placed on academia are apparent from elementary school through post-doctoral research. Increasingly, the need to compete for research dollars places universities in the service of industries which may profit from new knowledge. This very real financial burden filters down not only to undergraduate education, but to the public schools which prepare our children for college. Under these conditions, much education is passive preparation as product for the labor market and consumer of goods produced; each seen as a central civic duty. Even that lofty goal, "research for human improvement," is not spared, as research has come to be cast primarily as a profit source, often in the form of consumer products and services. Meanwhile, concerned that their children will be unable to compete in the global marketplace and conflating economic security with the benefits of democracy, uninformed parents seek greater focus on technology and job-related skills. In the eyes of many, while once the marketplace of ideas, the university is now a mere training ground for the material market.

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8 Jean Bethke Elshtain argues that the "ideology called Progress . . . celebrated a world of endless growth, which meant . . . more and better consumerism. It was essential to move from the glorification of producer to the glorification of consumer because the conclusion was that underconsumption leads to declining investment" (13). Bill Readings concurs that education is no longer defined by "its civic function; rather it is primarily a commercial venture in which the only form of citizenship . . . is consumerism" (85).

9 Aronowitz notes that theoretical research has come to be seen as useless because it bears no industrial or consumer application, citing funding cuts for "non-dedicated research such as particle physics" (42). See also Martin Kenney. The University Industrial Complex. New Haven: Yale UP. 1986.

10 Composition theorist Gwen Gorzelsky points out that this "utilitarian" view of "education's meaning and uses," particularly among working-class students and their families, encourages the market-driven forces within the university which currently threaten the humanities and thus "ironically help[s] to resolidify working-class students' exclusion from higher education" (307).
Indeed, the dual demands of career and moral training often appear to be at cross purposes. At least since the 1984 release of William Bennett’s *To Reclaim a Legacy*, a host of scholars and commentators from across the political spectrum have expressed concern that the humanities, traditional site of the liberal democratic conversation, have been sidelined by science, technology, and business administration. Literature professor Bill Readings, for one, sees this trend as an indicator that the mission of the university as “producer, protector, and inculcator of an ideas of national culture” (3), has fallen prey to economic globalization and the accompanying ascendancy of corporate culture over national. That is, the need to secure wealth and global dominance for multi-national corporations and their investors has forced the university to legitimate itself in economic rather than cultural terms. As this market focus may “signal the end of ‘culture’ as a regulatory ideal that could unite community and communication” (89), Readings maintains that

either we seek to defend and restore the social mission of the University by simply reaffirming a national cultural identity that has manifestly lost its purchase... or we attempt to reinvent cultural identity so as to adapt it to changing circumstances... [or we] abandon the notion that the social mission of the University is ineluctably linked to the project of realizing a national cultural identity, which is tantamount to ceasing to think of the social articulation of research and teaching in terms of a *mission*. (90)

Despite Readings’ pessimism, humanists throughout North America, unwilling to abandon this mission, are eagerly engaged in defending or reinventing it.

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11 Produced during Bennett’s tenure as director of The National Endowment for the Humanities.
Bennett, for example, sets out to defend the humanities against market pressures on the premise that the mission of the humanities is to impart values. Of course as might be expected in our pluralistic society, this effort has raised the question, "Whose values?" The variety of answers offered have culminated in an often contentious debate known as the "Culture War." Frequently characterized as a tug-of-war between the Judeo-Christian or Euro-western tradition and a diverse body of theories and practices which have come to be identified as cultural studies, multiculturalism, deconstruction, and a variety of other monikers. Without a doubt, the central question of the Culture War—whether to "reaffirm" or "reinvent" this culture—represents academic resistance to abandoning our cultural mission. Setting aside disagreement as to what constitutes this culture, what values it promotes, or which developments are legitimate, there seems to be general agreement that our educational mission is to strengthen and further democracy.

In the meantime, as a correlation between literacy and moral values has had a long history as rationale for English departments, it comes as no surprise that journalists and scholars outside the discipline have identified English Studies as a central battlefield in this so-called war. Against this backdrop, a number of interrelated movements are taking place within English Studies. First, English departments increasingly look to their role in teaching Composition—seen in utilitarian terms—as rationale for their place in academia. Yet certain problems emerge from an emphasis on Composition as a skills-based, service profession. Seen as having no subject matter, Compositionists are considered "mere" teachers, rather than scholars. They can thus be drawn from the ranks of graduate students and the surplus of English Ph.D.s in search of permanent, tenure-line positions in their areas of specialization—saving departments and their colleges vast sums of money, though at the high human cost of low salaries, overwork, and lack of job security. While the high cost paid by these teachers is clear, it is not yet clear what impact their subjection

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13 Lind argues that the "so-called culture war" serves as a means for the conservative elite "to divert the attention of voters from the ongoing class war of the overclass against wage-earning Americans" (12).
14 The status accorded Composition reflects the arguments of Socrates that Rhetoric has no subject matter.
to overwork and undue economic stress may have on the quality of education their students receive.\textsuperscript{15}

Second, Composition is engaged in an effort to overcome an image as a remedial\textsuperscript{16} course—an image that marginalizes Composition research as internal to the discipline, a private conversation geared toward improving our product, teaching. At many colleges, this results in lower salaries even among the ranks of the tenured and less opportunity for tenure than comparable disciplines in the humanities. To overcome this image, Composition has been working to define a public body of knowledge specific to itself to serve as rationale for its existence as a research discipline. One strategy is to follow the market model and develop a body of knowledge directly beneficial to industry— theories and applications for improving internal corporate communications, as an example. A second strategy, the subject of my interest, is to resist market pressures and develop theories and applications of civic discourse—which, of course, involves discussion of values. While these strategies frequently intersect, it is the second strategy in particular that places Composition at the center of the Culture War.

Third, Literature is engaged in a concurrent effort to reassert its relevance to public life. Long understood as peripheral to market concerns, Literature gained its place at the core of English Studies as “the major discipline entrusted by the nation-state with the task of reflecting on cultural identity” (Readings 70). This trust has operated on the premise that a stable canon of virtue underlies the Euro-western and/or American ethos, that great

\textsuperscript{15} Teaching assistant salaries, often unaccompanied by health insurance or tuition assistance and not subject to unemployment benefits, are often below poverty level—although “assistants” may teach heavier course loads than tenured faculty while attending classes full time. Temporary instructors, usually employed semester to semester with no unemployment benefits, may also teach heavier loads at pay often lower than the U.S. average for a \textit{beginning} public school teacher—often with no benefits, cost-of-living adjustments or raises. Robert Connors chronicles the poor working conditions, low pay and status, and high workloads of writing teachers since the beginning of English departments (“Overwork”). The American Historical Association documents that, in all but three humanities disciplines surveyed, part-time faculty comprise 22 to 42 percent of teaching staff. Freestanding composition programs rate the lowest percentage of tenure or tenure-track faculty (14.6), while in broader English departments, “just over a third . . . were full-time tenure track” (“Summary” 2).

\textsuperscript{16} Aronowitz argues that “in the wake of the failure of secondary education to equip students with basic writing and reading ability (where this means more than “skills,” connoting genuine facility with language), postsecondary institutions of all types have an important role to play. In this sense, even many so-called elite colleges are, in part, remedial” (29). See also James Berlin. “Conclusion and Postscript to the Present.” \textit{Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1986}. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP (1987), 180-189; and Susan Miller. \textit{Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition}. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP (1991), 84-120.
literature ameliorates these virtues, and that the business of English teachers is to teach
appreciation of such literature so that students may be encouraged to emulate these virtues
in their writing and daily conduct.\textsuperscript{17} It is both resistance to and insistence on this history
that places Literature at the center of the Culture War.

\textbf{Values and Literacy}

While it is not difficult to envision a link between moral education and the reading
material to which our children are exposed, it may seem strange to regard language usage
as a moral issue. Yet historically, arguments regarding functional literacy often bore a
surprising moral component. This is nowhere better illustrated than in George Bernard
Shaw's \textit{Pygmalion} which satirizes not only the way in which language usage bears on
social class, but the way in which social class subsequently bears on moral assessment.
Simply put, Henry Higgins' goal is to raise Eliza Doolittle from the status of a guttersnipe,
"a person of the lowest moral or economic station" (Webster), to that of a duchess, merely
by changing her dialect. That Eliza herself understands that her poverty and the language
which reflects it cast her in poor moral light becomes clear as she persistently defends her
sexual honor and sobriety. As for Eliza's father, Higgins maintains that "sentimental
rhetoric . . . the Welsh strain in him . . . accounts for his mendacity and dishonesty" (Shaw
25). Even Doolittle himself points out that the poor "can't afford" morals (27). Plainly,
adopting the language or dialect of the dominant class has long been seen as necessary to
acculturation, moral as well as civic and economic.

In the U.S. as increasing numbers of immigrants and other low-status individuals
entered public education in the late nineteenth century, the English curriculum "uneasily
divided in its allegiance to a utilitarian vocational objective . . . and a class-inspired
discipline of culture, of linguistic and moral propriety" which emphasized "common moral
values and the development of general vocational abilities" (Piche 18-19). "Exclusive and
\textsuperscript{17} For the history and politics of English departments see: Arthur Applebee, \textit{Tradition and Reform in the
Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1986}, Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987; Gerald Graff,
\textit{Professing Literature: An Institutional History}, Chicago: University of Chicago P. 1987; Susan Miller,
Slevin, "Depoliticizing and Politicizing Composition Studies," \textit{Politics of Writing Instruction:
compulsory instruction in English” came to be seen as a way to release students from the
“thraldom and tyranny” of “un-American” language, “traditions and associations” which foreign tongues carry with them (20). Consequently,
with linguistic propriety and correctness so intimately associated with civic
responsibility, absolute accuracy in these matters assumed the attributes of
a moral imperative. Slipshod spelling rose from slipshod thinking which
rose from “inadequate moral ideals.” (Piche 21)
Yet moral concerns regarding literacy education go far beyond the linguistic assimilation
of immigrants, from an early emphasis on public oratory to arguments regarding the place
and purpose of English literature in the curriculum.

Without a doubt, one argument for the establishment of Literature as an academic
discipline was that literature “as an instrument of moral and aesthetic education” would
“exercise that influence on taste, on tone, on sentiment, on opinion, on character, on all
... which is susceptible of educational impression” (Collins 78). Several leading
nineteenth- and twentieth-century educators argued for English departments as a site for
molding character, including President Woodrow Wilson, who asserted:

If this free people . . . is to keep its fine spirit, its perfect temper amidst
affairs, its high courage in the face of difficulties, its wise temperateness
and wide-eyed hope, it must continue to drink deep and often from the old
wells of English undefiled, quaff the keen tonic of its best ideals, keep its
blood warm with all the great utterances of exalted purpose and pure
principle of which its matchless literature is full. (89)

This “moral touchstone” view of literature is perhaps best known through the works of

18 The shift from the Greek/Latin canon to the English was also, in part, a means for “initiating unruly
immigrants into the superior culture of the English-speaking races” (Euben Corrupting 24). Composition
likewise arose in response to admission of the “common masses” into schools for “gentlemen”—a means for
“indoctrinating them into openly middle-class values of propriety, politeness, and cooperation” (S. Miller 7).
19 Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran argue that, influenced by 18th-century oratorical culture, 19th-
century rhetorical education initially assumed that rhetoric “was to form and sustain a public consensus,
intellectual and moral, as the basis of civic action” (“Transformation” 2). As oratorical culture gave way to
literary culture, the locus shifted from enlistment of “communal consensus” to development of “the expert
and autonomous individual” (5), “the good man skilled in speaking” whose civic duty it was to articulate an
established wisdom and focus it on particular issues” (7 cf. Quintilian (Institutio Oratorio 12:1). While this
shift may mark a development in the theoretical underpinnings of English Studies, it does not extinguish the
moral imperative but shifts it from the community to the individual (13).
nineteenth-century literary theorist Matthew Arnold whose “ideal of broad general culture and... literature as a coherent criticism of life” (Graff Professing 4) had enormous influence on English departments through the twentieth century. Arnold, objecting to the research orientation of philology (linguistics) and historical literary studies which dominated English departments in the nineteenth-century, preferred to see the study of literature as “capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies... to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us” (“Poetry” 403). Indeed, a study of student-written themes at Harvard reveals not only that “Europeans and Americans considered the essay an essentially moral form” (Joliffe 170) but that many “writers felt a moral obligation to foster a vision of “culture” that stems directly from the works of Matthew Arnold” (169).

Much of this argument rests on assumptions about aesthetic “taste.” Eighteenth-century rhetorician Hugh Blair, for example, maintains that cultivation of “taste”—defined as “the power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art” (803)—is “in its native tendency, moral and purifying” (802). Blair goes on to say

The moral beauties... exert an influence... on a great variety of other objects of taste. Wherever the affections, characters, or actions of men, are concerned... there can be neither any just or affecting description of them, nor any thorough feeling of the beauty of that description, without our possessing the virtuous affections. (805)

Blair further suggests that the superior taste to be cultivated is a Western product of Western values, “reflecting on that immense superiority which education and improvement give to civilized, above barbarous nations” (804). Likewise, he asserts that the “high, manly, and forcible eloquence” necessary to such expressions of taste are “to be looked for only, or chiefly, in the regions of freedom... [the] democratical states” (821). Doing so, Blair connects aesthetic considerations with those political.

The sentiment that literature embodies and implants virtues continues to have great force. Writing for the public eight years following his report as Humanities chief. Bennett argues that Euro-western philosophy, history, and literature “are a rich quarry of moral literacy” (De-Valuing 48) which will ensure that youth uphold “the principles, sentiments, ideas, and political attitudes that define the permissible and the impermissible, the acceptable and the unacceptable, the preferred and the disdained. in speech, expression.
attitude, conduct, and politics™ (10). These "principles, sentiments, ideas, and political attitudes" he identifies as those of the American middle class (13).

Moral-Traditional Values

Bennett has led the charge for critics who see attempts to multiculturalize humanities curricula and to critique Western culture as threats to the Euro-western canon of philosophy, history, and literature and the values it allegedly represents. This position—which I call "moral-traditional™—has dominated the media for some years and has thus raised alarm among the general public. Moral-traditionalists hold that movement away from the "best that is known and thought" (Arnold “Criticism” 257 in Cheney Truth 14) and toward analysis of power relationships represented by such texts, as well as study of alternative literatures, histories, and language conventions, have resulted in excess intellectual liberty, diminished literacy, and moral decline.

Among these critics, philosopher Allan Bloom calls for shoring up the Western tradition by means of education in the “Great Books,” claiming that “courses in ‘values clarification’ springing up in schools” are “little more than propaganda” which introduce students to “issues the significance of which they cannot possibly understand” (61). Unlike Bennett, Bloom faults the middle class, claiming that “parents do not know what they believe, and surely do not have the self-confidence to tell their children much more than that they want them to be happy and fulfill whatever potential they have” (61). Yet Bloom locates primary fault in the universities where, he claims, by opening inquiry to “all kinds of men . . . lifestyles . . . ideologies” (27), scholarship has been thrust into a state of relativistic chaos, the consequence of which is a lack of foundation for claims, moral or otherwise. Bloom maintains.

Relativism is necessary to openness . . . [the] only virtue which all primary education™ . . . has dedicated itself to inculcating. The point is not to

20 While Republican cabinet members and advisors often voice this position, it has no consensus along party lines but represents a faction vying for dominance on the right. Michael Lind identifies four U.S. political philosophies which illustrate divisions within the parties as well as between them—left liberalism (economic and social liberalism); neoliberalism (economic conservatism, social liberalism); conservatism (economic and social conservatism); national liberalism (economic liberalism, social conservatism).

21 While Bloom here indict primary education, his purpose is to describe the state of mind with which students enter college. Bloom goes on to argue that college further encourages this alleged “relativism.”
correct the mistakes and really be right: rather it is not to think you are right at all. (26)

In short, he charges, openness results in a closing of the mind to the truth of our traditions and history, plunging the student or scholar into an ineluctable condition of radical skepticism. Likewise, writer and editor Roger Kimball warns against the destruction of the fundamental premises that underlie our conception both of liberal education and of a liberal democratic polity. Respect for rationality and the rights of the individual; a commitment to the ideals of disinterested criticism and color-blind justice; advancement according to merit, not according to sex, race, or ethnic origin. (xii)

Kimball calls multiculturalism "thoughtless egalitarianism" in which "differences of race, class, sexuality, and ethnic heritage must be given priority over our common humanity," culminating in an "Orwellian" demand for "strict intellectual conformity" in which "tolerance is reserved exclusively for those who subscribe to one's own perspective" (219). Arguing that the canon is by no means elitist but a "deeply democratic . . . tradition before which all are equal" (78), Kimball further contends that multiculturalism is antidemocratic as "the phrase "multi-culture" and its variants have become code words for an approach to the humanities that is in effect anti-cultural—at least anti-high-cultural" (81), so denying the multicultural student body equal access to the allegedly unique enlightenment of Euro-western civilization.

Former Reagan domestic policy analyst Dinesh D'Souza similarly takes issue with the ways in which the terms "culture" and "values" are used among those he labels members of the "victims' revolution" (14):

The term cultures signaled a new pluralism—not one culture but many. Values suggested a certain relativism, in which various systems of thought would be considered on a roughly equal plane. Certainly any hierarchy of cultural values would be alien to the spirit, if not the letter, of the new requirement. Both physically and culturally, "other voices" would find themselves included and indeed emphasized. (67)

D'Souza sees the core of this problem as pollution of the academy by the unworthy, arguing that affirmative action admits unworthy students as well as hires and promotes
unworthy faculty. Denigrating the "new canon" for lack of timelessness and universality, as well as an alleged focus on victimhood. D'Souza argues that the new curriculum and the scholarship which attends its formation lack necessary academic rigor. For example, he contends that Rigoberta Menchu—whose autobiography about Indian victimization by the Guatemalan army has become standard fare in multicultural curricula—has entered the curriculum not because her work has literary merit but because "she simply happened to be in the right place at the right time" (72). The consequence of such a particular, as opposed to universal, curriculum is lack of objectivity among students, says D'Souza.

In like mind, Lynne Cheney, former Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, insists that the humanities are being turned into a "political tool" at the hands of feminists and multiculturalists. Hence, she decries a student activity which places John D. Rockefeller on trial for "knowingly and willfully participat[ing] in unethical and amoral business practices designed to undermine traditions of fair and open competition for personal and private aggrandizement in direct violation of the common welfare" (Truth 27). Here Cheney commits an error of self-contradiction by failing to note that a trial shows both sides.

Cheney, too, calls for a humanities curriculum in which "the enduring truths that emerge from the study of great authors: Homer and Euripides, Milton and Shakespeare, Locke and Montesquieu" (14) are examined in "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" (Arnold "Criticism" 257 in Cheney Truth 14). Although both she and D'Souza give a nod to texts from non-Western, non-European, and female perspectives, presumably these are to be evaluated by the Euro-western standards which gave birth to the canon and their political implications are to be excluded from the classroom as "ideological." It is certainly telling that Cheney wrote her dissertation on Arnold.

At any rate, while D'Souza laments a diminishment of the elite and a consequent failure to prepare our students for membership in this elite, Cheney warns that "many
feminists—and other political activists as well—maintain that we should do away with the idea of excellence not only on the grounds that it is oppressive but because it is an illusion” (Truth 36). Meanwhile, journalist George Will\(^{24}\) leads the cry that “the elites have abandoned an ethic of character” (in Bennett De-Valuing 13). And, while nonetheless arguing that all students should be educated in the canon, Allan Bloom baldly identifies the elite as “the kind of young persons who populate the twenty or thirty best universities” (22). According to Bloom, the students who will benefit most from his self-defined liberal education are few and “become the models for the use of the noblest human faculties and hence are benefactors to all of us, more for what they are than for what they do” (22).\(^{25}\)

By contrast, Bennett plays on fears that the elite excludes the average American. Decrying a “soft curriculum” (De-Valuing 49) developed by a “liberal elite that today dominates our institutions and who therefore exerts influence on life and culture.” Bennett maintains that education is dominated by political liberalism—as distinguished from philosophical liberalism—which is out of touch with “the most important beliefs of most Americans” (11).\(^{26}\) These beliefs are, of course, those we have come to know as the American dream—which apparently includes “conventional morality, patriotism, Ronald Reagan, or even Rocky, light beer, cookouts, or Disney World” (13). Bennett, too, is caught in a contradiction as he claims these values are best represented in elite literary texts.

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\(^{24}\) Will condemns the “democratization” of the arts, faulting then-current chair of the National Endowment of the Arts, Bill Ivey, for “auto-intoxicated, faux-intellectual[ism]” (“Artists”).

\(^{25}\) Lester Faigley calls attention to “a reversal of the longstanding American belief that the public schools should give everyone equal opportunity to education” (52), correlated with the U.S. Dept. of Education’s A Nation at Risk which calls upon schools to provide “a supply of trained workers for the labor market” (51).

\(^{26}\) Lind claims that realignment of the left from representation of working and middle class white immigrants and their descendants to “affluent white left-liberals” (29) and minority, female, and gay “caucuses” has “given credibility to claims of conservative politicians . . . to represent ‘the forgotten majority’ against a supercilious ‘cultural elite’” (30). He notes that working class whites have defected from the Democratic party at a remarkable rate largely because of the perception that their economic interests are no longer represented (30). Yet Lind argues that these conservative claims are a smokescreen for economic policies destructive to most working people. Calling conservative populism an “oxymoron,” he notes that conservatives have long been “defenders of elites and establishments, and American conservatives, in particular, have been defenders of the prerogatives of the rich and the business class” (2).
Politics and English Studies

In light of concern over the traditional canon, it is no surprise that college teachers of English have come under direct fire from moral-traditionalists who see focus on diverse literary traditions and political conflict as inappropriate in classrooms traditionally devoted to the study of Euro-western literature and Standard Academic English.27 The villain named in this crisis is theory, specifically postmodern Continental literary theory, which holds, on the one hand, that the meaning of text is not fixed and, on the other hand, that texts reproduce the power relationships of the cultures in which they are produced.

Although Continental theories are many and varied, they are often lumped together, along with the curricula and pedagogies they inspire, under the rubrics "deconstruction" and "multiculturalism." On the one hand, this move allows opponents to ignore debates among theorists, so allowing a great body of distinguished scholarship to be dismissed with a wave of the hand. Liberal arts professor Cary Nelson explains: the term "deconstruction" now functions as something like a traveling suitcase that can be crammed . . . with every prominent theory of interpretation over the last several decades: "multiculturalism" . . . serves for them as a convenient meeting ground for affirmative action efforts in hiring, along with every research or pedagogical effort to revise and rethink the dominant canon of literary texts. (98)

On the other hand, ignoring these debates allows some proponents to embrace such theories tout court, so giving some credence to moral-traditionalist claims.

D'Souza comes down directly on literary criticism, using selective examples to effect the charge that literary theory is a primary source of the relativism which he claims now plagues scholarship throughout the university. Among the consequences he cites:

There is no determinate standard against which classroom evaluations, or student papers, can be measured. Thus grading assumes a pointless character: it doesn't reflect what the student produced, only the arbitrary and politically motivated preferences of the teacher. (180)

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Similarly, Cheney asserts, “the usual grades are A’s and B’s, with feminists arguing that even that much hierarchical ordering is patriarchal and oppressive . . . aesthetic standards are nothing more than white male constructs” (Truth 18). Above all, D’Souza and Cheney claim that new voices are not merely being added to the curriculum but are displacing Homer, Aristotle, and Shakespeare, among others.28

Likewise invoking selective comments from literary theorists, Kimball bemoans that the idea that college students should acquaint themselves with the great ideas which have influenced the actions of men in the past, and continue to do so in the present would instantly elicit a whole range of objections . . . [including] that there is no agreed-upon set of “great ideas” that speaks equally to every ethnic and racial constituency. (14)

In unison, Will decries the “supplanting of esthetic by political responses to literature” which he charges “aims at delegitimizing Western civilization by discrediting the books and ideas that gave birth to it” (in Nussbaum 102). The assessment is simple: theory-driven literary practice inserts politics into an arena which should be culturally neutral.

Not only does curricular content come under fire from moral-traditionalists, but pedagogical practice does as well. In keeping with their view that the Euro-western canon represents universal truths, moral-traditionalists see the purpose of pedagogy as transmission of these truths. Hence, Allan Bloom sees the task of teaching as assisting “his pupil to fulfill human nature against all the deforming forces of convention and prejudice” (20) through exploration of “the permanent concerns of mankind” (19). Under this construct, the text, as traditionally read, is authoritative. “Alternative” readings such as spring from gender and minority studies are simply misreadings. Likewise, the instructor, insofar as she is a traditional literary scholar, is authoritative: her job is to present proper interpretations and to correct misreadings. Moral-traditionalists tend to be disturbed by “critical” pedagogies in which both canonized and uncanonized texts are examined for the power they represent, as well as those considered “radical,” in which the teacher resists her intellectual authority to make way for new readings from students.

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28 D’Souza claims universities are “expelliing Homer, Aristotle, Shakespeare and other ‘white males’” (20) whom Cheney claims multiculturalists view as “icons of the corrupt civilization of the West” (Truth 15).
Yet not all who would defend the canonical tradition are comfortable grounding their defense in values education. Echoing criticism that market forces subvert the disinterestedness and objectivity which are the mark of true scholarship, humanities professor Harold Bloom, for one, maintains that the silliest way to defend the Western Canon is to insist that it incarnates all of the seven deadly moral virtues that make up our supposed range of normative values and democratic principles . . . The West’s greatest writers are subversive of all values, both ours and their own.” (Canon 28)

To Bloom, the question is not whether students are obtaining appropriate values from the humanities curriculum but whether the university exists to serve the marketplace or something vaguely defined as “pure scholarship” which seeks knowledge “for its own sake” rather than for gain, material or moral. Bloom rejects moral arguments on the same terms as market arguments—that they place scholarship at the service of interests.

However, Harold Bloom’s argument for a non-moralistic aesthetic is itself a set of moral values. He stresses that the “authentic reader” will be “an illumination to others” (“Praise” 103) and that “the quest to be canonical” is a striving to “join communal or societal memory” (Canon 18). Certainly, the ability to illuminate others is a quality of character, hence of values. Likewise, communal and societal memory embodies the values of a community and society. Whether these values are reflected in or challenged by canonical works, the struggle to read “authentically” builds a kind of character which includes the “capacity to form . . . judgments and opinions” (“Praise” 102). By Bloom’s lights, the right kind of reading is carried out by an elite “few who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers” (Canon 17). As for democratic education, Bloom believes, “literary criticism, as an art, always was and always will be an elitist phenomenon. It was a mistake to believe that literary criticism could become a basis for democratic education or societal improvement” (16). In addition to being elitist, here Bloom reduces the purpose of English Studies to literary criticism, ignoring its role in writing instruction, linguistics, and English as a Second Language.

Despite Bloom’s objections, in the end, moral-traditionalists argue that defense of the Euro-western canon is not a defense of a political point of view, but a defense of moral truths which, having withstood the test of time, should be considered absolute, universal.
and transcendent. Of such a mind, Allan Bloom asserts that "the West is defined by its need for justification of its ways and values ... for discovery of nature ... for philosophy and science" (39). Going on to lament that "cultural relativism succeeds in destroying the West's universal or intellectually imperialistic claims, leaving it to be just another culture" (39). Likewise, despite giving some credence to great works in other cultural traditions, D'Souza claims that "curiosity about other cultures appears to be a distinctively Western trait" and that "Western culture was [sic] distinctive in that it was so introspective" (88). "Self-scrutiny" is the term Roger Kimball gives this allegedly unique Western moral quality as he maintains that "the civilization represented by that much maligned [white] race has been ... considerably more enlightened politically than any other civilization in world history" (xvii).

Yet classicist Martha Nussbaum directly challenges Allan Bloom's assertion that "only in the Western nations ... is there some willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one's own way" (Nussbaum 132 cf. 36). Nussbaum also chastises Kimball and Will, who, she stresses, "caricature the activities of today's humanities departments by focusing only on what can be made to look extreme or absurd" (298). While conceding that "literacy, including cultural literacy, confers both strength and independence" (35), she maintains that "introduced as cultural authorities," Western civilization or "Great Books" are "all too likely to become products of veneration and deference, sitting in the mind without producing strength in the mind itself" (35). Moreover, she argues that Harold Bloom's professed alternative, teaching literature without reference to values, would likely succumb to "an extreme kind of aesthetic formalism that is sterile and unappealing" (35). So while she agrees with moral-traditionalists that the Euro-western aesthetic tradition has shown an "intense [though not unique] concern with character and community" (89), Nussbaum asserts that the values explored should represent global diversity and that exploration must include examination of historical and contemporary conflicts which have arisen from this diversity.

Political theorist Benjamin Barber concurs that "if education is treated as or reduced to nothing more than giving the right answers—the proper values, the canon, the moral Truth—it becomes a kind of indoctrination" (Aristocracy 82). In Barber's view,
The aim of introducing gender and racial categories into curricular discussions and the aim of challenging formal roles of equality and universalism need not be to fragment and subjectify knowledge or deny the possibility of a true universal theory. The aim, rather, is to show that supposedly objective knowledge is already subjectified and fragmented in covert ways. (104)

Barber asserts that the canon's claim to truth stems from arguments as to its authoritative origins—"revelation, or nature as read by reason, or of wise philosophers in possession of a unique rational faculty" (214)—origins the legitimacy of which Barber doubts and which are fundamentally undemocratic. Such a static canon fails to account for alternative historical experience and cultural expression and so "fails the test of truth as well as pertinence" (214). Hence, Barber concludes, "the ancient canon choking on its dusty claims to legitimacy can suffocate" (213).

Above all, particularly at this historic moment, proclamations of Euro-western superiority may fuel the resentment and hostility that increasingly colors non-Western perceptions of the European West: may inhibit insight into our commonalities with non-Western traditions: may blind us to fresh insight into problems of justice: and may retard scrutiny of the ways in which we have failed to uphold our beliefs in practice. Unfortunately, the events of September 11th may have served to exacerbate Euro-western claims of moral and cultural superiority. Almost immediately following the attack, Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi, for example, was pressured by Muslims worldwide to recant his assertion that Euro-western civilization is superior to Islamic culture ("Premier" 2).

But certainly the women of Afghanistan, as well as the victims of other oppressive regimes, cherish the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice. Even so, underlying media commentary on the war on terrorism is the premise that "moderate" Islam represents their enlightenment by Western values. Meanwhile, the Bush administration and U.S. military and intelligence agencies scramble for recruits with capacity for insight into the language, culture, beliefs, and grievances, not only of extremists, but of the Islamic world as a whole. Should such insights prove damaging to America's self-image, the question may arise as to whether they will be heeded. Indeed, current events cast a shadow over our claims of superiority—for when we consider the long war waged by the Taliban and other
oppressive regimes against their own, we must ask ourselves, “Why were we not outraged before September 11?”

Concerns such as these are often voiced by representatives of the position which I will call “counter-traditionalist.” While this term is inadequate to cover the diverse body of theories and practices about which moral-traditionalists are alarmed, it will for present purposes suffice to say that the theories it encompasses number among intellectual reactions to the assumptions of Modernism. In this, they can be called “postmodern.”

Counter-Traditional Values

Educational theorist Henry Giroux submits that the moral-traditional position is underwritten by three myths—“the end of history,” “childhood innocence,” and “disinterested scholarship.” The first “assumes that liberal democracy has achieved its ultimate victory and that the twin ideologies of the market and representative democracy now constitute . . . the universal values of the new global village” (Stealing 2). That is, this myth assumes that human history has reached its culmination: all that remains is to extend liberal democracy throughout the world. But as this myth holds “liberal culture” as “synonymous with market culture,” democracy is likewise “conflated” with the market. “cancel[ing] the tension between market moralities and those values of civil society . . . that are critical to democratic public life” (2). As I will later argue, this myth, in part a product of philosophical liberalism, depletes democracy of its vital core.

Meanwhile, the second myth suggests that students must be protected from alternative viewpoints lest they succumb to immoral choices or plunge into relativism. In Giroux’s view, such protection denies students autonomy and self-determination as it absolves adults of their responsibility for teaching children how to negotiate moral terrain and the “dictates of marketplace mentalities that remove the supportive and nurturing networks that provide young people with adequate healthcare, food, housing, and educational opportunities” (Giroux Stealing 2). In fact, he asserts, the viewpoints from which this myth claims students must be protected are those that don’t buy into the third myth, which disconnects teaching and learning from “improving the world” (3) and

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29 The United States contributed $43 million dollars to the Taliban in May 2001 for their efforts in the war on drugs, despite our knowledge of rampant human rights violations in Afghanistan (Scheer 1).
defines teaching as a "technical and instrumental practice" (3) of disseminating "objective" knowledge and "neutral" skills. Culture has come to be "exclude[d] . . . from the political realm . . . enshrin[ed] as a purely aesthetic discourse or as a quasi-religious call to celebrate the "great books" and "great traditions" of . . . Western Civilization" (4). Giroux thus proclaims that the moral-traditionalist argument "betrays a racist discourse and rising fundamentalism in American society that impairs the possibility for schools to address the democratic imperatives for civic courage, social responsibility, and critical citizenship" ("Pedagogy" 180). He is not alone in his assessment. Bill Readings concurs that "the canon is an ethnocentric and non-representative basis on which to ground the claims that have been historically made for literature" (85). More diplomatically, liberal arts professor Cary Nelson points out that while the texts themselves may or may not betray racism, they "have a history of racist and sexist use" and that "the Right confuse(s) efforts to reinterpret texts with efforts to remove them from the curriculum" (102).

At the heart of these arguments is the issue of agency—"the ability to interpret events as well as the ability to influence, change, or redirect them within a specific situation" (Ewald and Wallace 343). Composition theorist Nina Schwartz, for one, raises concerns about "ideological abuse . . . a culture's representation of itself in the media and elsewhere as an unproblematic "translation" of natural law into social practices and institutions" (60). Because practices and institutions appear unproblematic, Schwartz asserts, "students . . . failing to distinguish between the natural and the social, the inevitable and the conventional, cannot help but develop a world view that keeps them relatively inarticulate" (61). Schwartz shares with other counter-traditionalists the concern that because public education has primarily focused on economic access to the material benefits of United States capitalism, students are unable to perceive the forces working to reduce them to worker bees and, hence, cannot be active makers of meaning. From this position, corporate ideals represented by "outcome based" instruction in standardized practice contribute to passivity like a carrot on a stick—if only the student can master this standard, she can attain a place among the elite and enjoy the material rewards that attend such a place. Moreover, counter-traditionalists fear, ideals represented by the Euro-

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western canon may serve to silence voices, both historic and contemporary, which offer fresh insight into problems of justice. At bottom, they argue that standards are never neutral but are infused with the cultural values of those they benefit.

At any rate, while moral-traditionalists suggest that English departments are generally unified in their alleged allegiance to relativism, the debate within the discipline has been fierce. For example, Maxine Hairston bemoans “a new model emerging for freshman writing programs” which “puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student” (“Diversity” 22). At the center of her concern is a shift away from traditional literary topics as the content of student writing. Response to Hairston’s fears has been vast and varied. Ron Strickland, among the responders, contends that the concept of “canon” doesn’t apply in composition studies in the same way that it does in literary studies, and composition scholars have long been concerned with extending social power through literacy in ways that are frequently at odds with literary studies’ traditional emphasis on the preservation of elite culture. (250)

Strickland asserts that composition studies has long operated on the democratic premise that widespread literacy levels the playing field. The albeit optimistic goal is to produce citizens who participate in the creation of culture rather than watching from the sidelines or reading on the bench.

But in fact, “the concept of a canon” often plays a major role in Composition. At many colleges and universities, Composition represents a majority of courses taught in the English department. To meet this high demand, English faculty in other specialties, such as literature and linguistics, are often rotated into teaching Composition. Likewise, graduate assistants who teach Composition are often drawn from other specialties and most, regardless of graduate specialty, received their undergraduate degrees from Literature-dominant departments. The upshot is that Composition students need subject matter for writing: Composition teachers have a close affinity to Literature departments: so subject matter for Composition is often drawn from Literature. Even when subject matter is drawn from elsewhere, Literature frequently serves as the “touchstone” for writing standards. Hence, the battle over the literary canon intersects with Composition.
Even so, the teaching of writing raises additional concerns.

First, the standard language taught is that of the powerful. Yet students are often better able to express themselves in their own dialects. Hence, the National Council of Teachers of English has adopted the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language.” The NCTE, after compiling rigorous research, concluded that “differences in dialect derive from events in the history of the communities using the languages, not from supposed differences in intelligence or physiology”; that “designations of prestige” are “externally imposed,” shifting “as the power relationships of the speakers shift”; that “dialect is not an impediment to reading” and does not “impede the child’s ability to learn to write” or “limit the ability to think.” They thus conclude that failure to understand a speaker of a dialect in one’s own language is “attitudinal” and that “the claim that any one dialect is acceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another” (NCTE 2-4). Second, emphasis on mastering grammatical standards at the expense of critical reading, textual analysis, and other literacy skills threatens to prepare students only to be cogs in the machine. Third, emphasis on structural exactitude and purportedly “objective” style reduces language to a neutral, non-moral medium through which passes knowledge discovered by other means, effectively ignoring the practical matter of communication ethics.

These things in mind, rather than model good writing after that of dead white men, composition teachers often prefer to examine political conflicts, including those embodied in grammatical, literary, and rhetorical standards. These scholar/teachers hope no less than to facilitate the ability of students to become meaning-making subjects, to challenge accepted wisdom and, by doing so, to deepen both cultural knowledge and democratic justice. Looked at in this way, counter-traditionalists espouse “not so much a politics of composition as what might more accurately be called a rhetorical ‘ethics’” (M. Clark 168). This ethical concern is two-fold: one, that to teach students to emulate a “standard” grammar and rhetoric is to reproduce a culture that benefits a privileged elite which few will ever join; and two, that failure to examine the political implications of standards gives tacit agreement to the privileged and oppressive authority of those few who will join, or are already members of, the elite.
On this note, Patricia Donahue and Ellen Quandahl argue that “learning to write conventionally (‘correctly’) is at odds with reading complicatedly,” leading to “prose that suppresses conflict and encourages the unconscious reproduction of social norms” (“Reading” 14). Mariolina Salvatori similarly maintains that “adoption of a theory of reading that privileges and counts on prior background information can . . . obliterate the understanding and the practice of reading and writing as interrelated, self-reflexive, and reciprocally illuminating activities” (20). According to John Clifford, one result is that “the status of the ‘I’ that ‘writes’ the essay is so decentered. so alienated from actual experience that many students have as much emotional identification with their school writing as they do with geometry” (48). The goal, says Don Bialostosky is to “authorize our students to reaccent, not just reproduce, the disciplinary languages we and our colleagues impose on them” (18).

Other defenders of this “new model” share concern regarding Hairston’s characterization of students. John Trimbur, for one, worries that Hairston “reveals a predilection to look at differences as threatening, confrontational, and potentially violent” and “doesn’t trust her students’ ability to handle the social and cultural differences that organize the realities of contemporary America” (249). Trimbur argues that the “low-risk” classroom Hairston envisions “can only have the effect of reproducing students as spectators. perpetually on the verge of being overwhelmed by the experts who have the credentials to speak” (249). Similarly, William H. Thelin asserts that Hairston “characterizes students as apprehensive and timid. nervously testing their teachers and freezing in high risk situations . . . mak[ing] it seem that students are incapable of discussing political and ideological stances that threaten their own ideas” (252). Trimbur’s and Thelin’s comments are reminiscent of Giroux’s argument regarding the myth of childhood innocence. College students are not children. They may marry, drink alcohol, vote, have babies, hold down jobs, attend PTA, fight with in-laws and, as we have most chillingly been reminded, fight our wars.1

1 Referencing Bakhtin, Russian literary theorist and philosopher of language (1895-1975).

2 Susan Miller argues that placement of Composition at the beginning of an “imagined continuous and sequenced collegiate curriculum” (87) constructs the student as “a young beginner . . . presexual, preeconomic, preliterate” (87), although the “typical college student is an adult . . . unlikely to complete a degree in fewer than five or six years, and is most likely to be part of the approximately 60 percent of entering freshman who do not graduate at all from the institution at which they begin” (87).
So while counter-traditionalists are in tacit agreement with moral-traditionalists that citizenship is an underlying purpose of English Studies, many see functional literacy as inadequate and cultural literacy as arbitrary, elitist, oppressive, or itself inadequate, and so endeavor to encourage political literacy. As an example, Trimbur identifies "a move to reconceive (or perhaps restore is a better word) First-year Composition as rhetorical education for citizenship... and to place public discourse squarely at the center of the curriculum" (248-9). Trimbur asserts that in such a curriculum, "students can learn an ethos of collaborative disagreement that casts differences as matters of negotiation instead of as fearfully violent" (249). Similarly, Donald Lazere maintains that

our primary aim should be to broaden the ideological scope of students' critical thinking, reading, and writing capacities so as to empower them to make their own autonomous judgments on opposing ideological positions in general and on specific issues... within a rhetorical framework quite different from anything students are apt to encounter in political science or other social science courses." ("Teaching" 36)

Indeed, from assorted theoretical camps and political perspectives, compositionists frequently point out that practical ethics is an integral part of writing education.

For example, Sandra Stotsky, herself leaning toward traditionalism, asserts that our task is to introduce students to "the academic principles that should guide thinking and learning about any topic... academic manners as well as academic mores" (795). Stotsky suggests renewed focus upon the responsibility of the writer to all audiences "independent of the reader's needs" (798), correlating academic writing to "participation in a republican form of self-government" (798). Thomas Miller takes a similar approach, redefining professional writing as "social praxis," an "effort to negotiate between the pragmatics of public life and the abstractions of the academy" (59). Miller argues that the assumption that rhetoric can exist apart from ideology renders knowledge irrelevant to the public forum, concluding that political context is central to composition. For Miller, too, this is an ethical issue because "when we broaden our frame of reference... to focus instead on the ideal of the public citizen, we can then begin to place the organizational context in the larger context of public life" (67).
Postmodern Sophists

As these writers exhibit, some writing theorists and teachers perceive citizen education as more appropriately grounded in rhetoric than in literature. Among them, James L. Kinneavy asserts that “one of the most promising saviors of the humanities might be the restoration of rhetoric” as “rhetoric . . . made the humanities relevant to the political and religious life of society” (“Restoring” 20). According to Kinneavy, the loss of this “core and this vital link” (20) is to a large degree responsible for the ebb of the humanities. In a similar vein, John Schilb posits that composition studies “can even more powerfully illuminate [cultural studies and postmodernism] and examine the wisdom linking them” (175) than can literary studies. Certainly, this focus on rhetoric serves, in part, to explain the importation into English departments of the work of Continental philosophers of language. Yet many composition scholars/teachers draw their impetus from canonized literature as well, notably Aristotle, whose rhetoric handbook not only well serves such purposes but addresses familiar questions of culture and values. Others, like me, draw their impetus from the Sophists, to whom Aristotle responded as much as he did Plato.

Certainly, the accusations moral-traditionalists level at counter-traditionalists bring to mind another trial 2500 years ago—that of Socrates. There is irony in the way moral-traditionalists so often rely on Plato as exemplar of the search for truth. Despite Plato’s near reverence for Socrates, as political scientist J. Peter Euben points out, the charges they assert—as those against Socrates—are that counter-traditionalists are corrupting the youth by seducing them away from their parents and traditional authorities and distracting them from the pursuit of wealth, honor, and power . . . of not believing in the gods . . . with being unpatriotic and lacking proper respect for the achievements and sanitized self-representation of their native lands . . . of making the worse argument the better by engaging in logical shenanigans that trick the youth into transgressing proper boundaries and repudiating normal ways and rightful hierarchies as they are defined by those with political and cultural power.

(Corrupting 33)
Notably, "when these conservatives appeal to the ancients, it is the rationalist Plato to whom they turn, rather than the subversive Socrates" (Barber, *Aristocracy* 111). It is further notable that it is the Sophists whom "the rationalist Plato" chose as the foolish "relativists" at wise Socrates' feet.

Clearly because moral-traditionalists claim the role of cultural protectors, counter-traditionalists, like the Sophists, are subject to attacks that they are furthering the ills which beset U.S. democracy. Thus a poster found in a corridor at my university warns:

**Knowledge Under Fire**

**Your Professors' War Against the Mind:**

*The Black Hole of Post-Modernism and Multiculturalism*

Multiculturalism and deconstruction are the new rage on college campuses—and they are destroying a student’s ability to think and to value. The two movements teach students that Objectivity is a myth, and that a student’s subjective whims determine the meaning of a text. These ideas are responsible for the ever-growing racism on campus.

In this talk, Dr. [Smith] explains the essence of post-Modernism, and how philosophers for the past two hundred years have paved the way for today’s irrationalism by systematically divorcing reason from reality.

While this poster goes on to specifically argue in support of Ayn Rand’s Objectivism, it is nonetheless emblematic of the moral-traditional critique of multicultural or deconstructive curricula and alternative pedagogy in the humanities.

Particularly to my concerns, it appears that moral-traditionalists would deny teachers in English Studies the role most appropriately assigned literacy classes—to introduce students to the conversation of democracy. Certainly, by means of electives and new

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Russian-born novelist and philosopher (1905-1985) who founded a philosophical school of radical individualism, summed up as "man—every man—is an end to himself, not the means to the end of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness as the highest moral purpose of his life [my emphasis]" ("Introducing Objectivism" 1).
"diversity" requirements, some students may gain the liberal outlook that constitutes this conversation. But both students and teachers too often see the purpose of these classes as merely to foster "tolerance" in the workplace rather than to engage in scholarly inquiry into global conflict and difference. Again, the market prevails. What's more, only in literacy education can democratic education be carried out en masse.\textsuperscript{34}

Without question, as literacy education has its roots in the study of Rhetoric, renewing this role for English departments can be seen as the most recent development in a twenty-five-hundred-year tradition of education for the political arena. Viewed in this tradition, the purpose of literacy education is to facilitate students' practical and political reasoning, that is, \textit{phronesis}. Such education must have a moral component, for \textit{phronesis} is not abstract thinking but judgment in the messy context of human affairs.

\textbf{Rhetoric and Virtue}

Since \textit{phronesis} is the wisdom to sort out social problems, it is clearly an ability to arrive at a decision in light of competing claims. Each of which is likely to appear to the claimant as truth, even as the truth of \textit{sophia}. If one were to assume a foundational stance, such as the moral-traditionalists, one would reason that only one claimant may be correct. A view of human knowledge as \textit{phronesis}, by contrast, holds that each claim may possess a grain of truth, relative to each claimant's perspective. The method of \textit{phronesis} is to weigh the merits of each claim against the other: to debate, critique, reconsider, concede or refute all or a portion of a given claim; to integrate claims with one another, i.e. to engage in rhetoric until a decision is reached which seems just to all or most. Naturally, the ethics of both judge and claimant in such circumstances are of utmost importance. Hence, to arrive at a judgment, both judge and claimant must possess not only knowledge, but \textit{arete}, commonly translated as excellence or virtue.

\textbf{The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy} defines virtue as a "trait of character that is to be admired: one rendering its possessor better, either morally, or intellectually, or in the conduct of specific affairs." Alasdair MacIntyre calls virtue "an acquired human quality" which "sustain(s) us in the relevant kind of quest for the good" and "furnish(es) us with

\textsuperscript{34} At many colleges, at least one semester of First-year Composition is required for most students. Most colleges and degree programs also require advanced Composition and additional literature courses.
increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good" (Virtue 219). Both definitions distinguish virtue from other formulations of ethics by embodying the notion that ethics may reach beyond surface abidance of cultural rules to penetrate the very self. Ethics are culturally determined rules of conduct. Virtues are those qualities which enable us to determine to which ethics we must adhere in a given moment. While canons of virtue and definitions of individual virtues within them have not been historically and culturally consistent, notions of virtue bear social weight because respect and esteem for those with whom we disagree is often the defining element that inclines us to engage them in discussion. In fact, it was virtue, **arete**—"the knowledge and attitude for effective participation in domestic, social, and political life" (Barrett 5)—which the Sophists claimed to teach.

Classicist Erik Havelock elaborates, "in sophistic theory excellence or virtue is used to symbolize that condition of **mores** which makes any society stable and politically effective and its members likewise" (178). This is not to suggest that virtues are pre-existing stable "entities but over-lapping attitudes, and shifting ones at that" (200).

The method of political judgment, since it involves the estimate of given human beings and their actions, is two-fold . . . You begin by viewing a human being as sharing in a common humanity with all others . . . Presumably it is proper to go further and formulate the outline of this common humanity or common morality. (200)

To facilitate this goal, "certain types of behavior are fundamental as being sociologically necessary" (200). Havelock maintains that this "instrumental" or "operational" view, particularly furthered by Protagoras, envisions humanity's "social organization, justice, and law" as a technology. "that same kind of faculty which lit the first fire" (184). As it serves our collective interest, it is imperative that we be taught collectively to employ this tool. By analogy, Protagoras maintains that if everyone were taught to play the flute, everyone would be . . . adequate enough in comparison with anyone without professional status at all and with no training in flute-playing . . . you may visualize a man. Mr. X . . . reared in the midst of laws and of other humans beings as excessively unrighteous. But . . . evaluate him in comparison with a Mr. Y. who has enjoyed neither and educational system
nor law courts nor laws nor any compulsion continually forcing him to
concentrate on excellence . . . It would be quite right to conclude that your
. . . Mr. X. by comparison with Mr. Y. was actually a qualified craftsman.
(Havelock 186 cf. Plato Protagoras 327b)

Without question, the “qualified craftsman.” is adequately skilled to participate in the law
courts and legislature, despite the presence of those few who possess either money or
natural talent enough to be “great and famous.” In fact, the craftsman must participate in
self-governance for democracy to be possible. Havelock explains, “technologies cannot be
fully effective without the cooperation that the presence of the social sense guarantees. In
short, human morality is also human utility” (185). Virtue, that is, is not divinely
ordained, an accident of birth, or a characteristic of aristocracy, but something which must
be learned by all capable of self-governance.

But despite this history, judgments concerning character often arise from anti-
democratic foundations. As our country’s founders saw it, one such foundation is
institutional religion. Hence. they made a decidedly anti-founderalist move to establish
our government upon the conviction that religious disagreement should be tolerated and
thus that governance cannot justly proceed from religious truth. Still, in so doing, they
fixed our government upon an alternate set of secular foundations—equality and
inalienable rights—grounded not in God’s unchanging law but in the equally formless and
universal notion of “self-evidence.” In this. U.S. democracy may be seen as a response to
the Enlightenment vision that science holds the key to truths uncontaminated by
disagreement between partisan concerns: that as some truths are “self-evident”
governance can proceed scientifically from them. As I will later discuss, it may be said
that in rejecting theological foundations, Enlightenment thinkers divinized reason.

Upon this paradigm of reason, moral-traditionalists cling to the notion that truth,
knowledge, and justice are one—embodied in the principle sophia. While claiming that
through equal access to education, any intellectually normal individual may attain sophia.
contemporary advocates of this position nonetheless hold out that the masses are limited
in such ability and so an educated elite is needed to manage governance and secure
democracy against the “irrational” mob. Casting their beliefs as absolute and advocating
rule by a knowledge elite, they succumb to an anti-democratic ideology. What they
propose, in fact, is the silencing of unpopular ideas (at least those they believe should be unpopular)—the very ideas the First Amendment was established to protect.35

Yet counter-traditionalists can be equally dogmatic, likewise attempting to silence ideas they believe should be unpopular. Consequently, concerned with the potential for ideological abuse in the classroom, many teachers ask. “In this era of tolerance, multiculturalism, and postmodernism, how do we address the sometimes bigoted and cruel voices raised in our classrooms without undemocratically imposing our own systems of belief?” For while persons of good character may express differing viewpoints, the way in which a viewpoint is arrived at or expressed may exhibit good or bad character. That is, rhetors demean themselves when they express their viewpoints in ways which demean others, seek to impose their beliefs, or arrive at viewpoints unreflectively or without sufficient knowledge. The point is, both teachers and students must learn to negotiate the contingencies of justice in democratic ways, for the results of unexamined action by any of us may result in our victimization of others or, conversely, our own victimization.

In this way, the poster in my university corridor holds a grain of truth. While it exaggerates both the claims and consequences (not to mention the motives) of postmodern arguments, it nonetheless points toward the dogmatism to which some postmodernists resort, as well as toward nihilistic extremes to which others seem to resort. Meanwhile, however, the author of the poster’s claims fails to recognize the politics which underscores his own position. Frankly, in the postmodern Culture War, the distinction between a politicized education—in which an ideological position is presented as foundational—and a political one—in which citizens are educated to critically judge political conflict in democracy—seems to elude most factions (Euben “Reading” 330).

Certainly notions of virtue lie in tension with postmodern notions that “excellence” is an arbitrary cultural measurement bound up with power as well as with democratic

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35 In the 1960’s, the positivism of the social sciences against which “radicals” object was a major concern for conservatives as well—including Leo Strauss, mentor of Allan Bloom and William Bennett. In their view, the “centrist liberal academic establishment” (Barber Aristocracy 90) forwarded a highly political liberal agenda under the “pretense of Universalism and neutrality” (89). However, upon gaining dominance in American cultural institutions, conservatives abandoned their skepticism. Having found it useful to question standards of neutrality and objectivity when condemning scholarship to their Left, they were forced to cease when such arguments operated against the Right. With “the cloak of ‘neutrality’ they once exposed as fraudulent... now draped over their own opinions... conservatives now find themselves charging the university with violating a neutrality in which they never believed” (89-90).
notions which would extend the right of self rule to some whom few of us would consider virtuous or excellent. Yet postmodernism has offered no alternative to "excellence" while democracy both demands excellence and shuns elitism. Benjamin Barber says it well: "the question is not whether we prefer excellence or democracy. It is whether the excellence we naturally wish for can be democratic" (Aristocracy 265).

Regrettably, as religious scholar James Davison Hunter asserts, moral-traditionalists and counter-traditionalists "do not operate on the same plane of moral discourse" (Culture 118). Noting that all individuals, even those non-religious or anti-religious "base their views of the world in unprovable assumptions about "being" and "knowledge" (119). Hunter points out that "public discourse over the various issues of the Culture War is almost always framed in rhetoric that is absolute, comprehensive, and ultimate" (62). The resulting shrillness seems to preclude any possibility of resolution or compromise, not to mention internal analysis of the contradictions of any given position.

The matter is not simply one of competing ideologies but of incoherence and incommensurability within arguments. Hence, Alisdair MacIntyre contends that Barber's question is underscored by a "fragmentation" of contemporary moral debate: an unarticulated conflict between narratives of justice which are at odds even within the individual and are "constructed out of an amalgam of social and cultural fragments inherited both from different traditions... and from different stages in and aspects of the development of modernity" (Justice 2). MacIntyre suggests not that disagreement persists among conservatives and progressives within the same system of thought but that the positions of both operate upon assumptions taken from different and conflicting systems altogether. That is, opponents in moral debate are not only not on the same page, they are not even reading from the same book. Indeed, MacIntyre extends this claim to suggest that the thought of all positions is muddled because all ground their claims upon multiple and conflicting systems: thus the claims of any given disputant are often incommensurate and lack internal coherence.

I find Hunter's terms "conservative," "orthodox" and "progressive" problematic as they 1) are less descriptive of curricula and pedagogy than mine; 2) imply that "orthodox" has a history, "progressive" does not; 3) carry political "baggage" from loose usage; 4) imply that these positions share "ideals of moral community and national life" but only "different strategies for getting there" (Culture 118). My use of progressive to describe the left is not to be confused with Progressivism as a fully fleshed out philosophy nor as a political party, but only as a general description of the political left.
It is my contention that because philosophical liberalism embodies the fragmentation of which MacIntyre speaks, it has failed to fulfill its potential as a foundation for democracy. I further contend that liberalism underwrites the arguments of both positions of which Hunter and I speak. With these concerns in mind, in the following chapters I will identify points of incommensurability and incompatibility within the liberal narrative. Doing so, I will draw an outline of the liberal self-concept, identifying the problem as resulting from the confluence of three narratives of self—the determinate self, the autonomous self, and the rational self—which are commensurate only to the extent that they exclude most people from the realm of practical deliberation. The determinate self, the Classical subject, constructs the individual as causally determined by outside forces and defined by the constraints of social role. The autonomous self, the modern political subject, constructs the individual as an isolated entity of paramount ethical import whose agency operates in contrast to and in conflict with the community. The rationalist self, the modern knowing subject, fashions the individual as a seeker of abstract, systematic certainty that transcends "the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely" (Toulmin Cosmopolis 30) and promises mastery over both natural and social forces.

Ultimately, I argue that the fragmentation of contemporary moral debate is underscored by a fragmented self-concept which enables powerful distinctions between the elite and the masses, so defining liberty negatively, as limited governmental interference, while minimizing democracy through institutional constraints and forceful cultural myth.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the autonomous self, contrasting it to the determinate self of the Classical world, tracing its historical formation: clarifying its internal claims regarding what is good and the role of the individual in attaining the good: and examining contemporary consequences which follow upon these claims. Upon this, I will argue that the practices of liberal democracy in the U.S. are underwritten by a rhetoric of elitism and conflict which conflates justice and economic effectiveness, excludes most individuals from political deliberation, and thus limits the primary benefits of liberal democratic justice to a few. The consequences of this elitism inflect rhetoric pedagogy and curricula in myriad ways with ominous implications for our students both in and outside the classroom.
Chapter Two
Liberalism and the Decline of Public Excellence

Justice is incidental to law and order.
—J. Edgar Hoover

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.
—John Rawls

There will be no justice as long as man will stand with a knife or with a gun and destroy who are weaker than he is.
—Isaac Bashevis Singer

There is no crueler tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of law and in the name of justice.
—Montesquieu

As the question of whether excellence can be democratic is at its core a question of justice, the Culture War can be seen as the latest skirmish over competing views of justice. Consequently, this debate clearly goes far beyond disciplinary boundaries, reaching across and outside academia. To better examine this conflict, therefore, I, too, wish to step outside these borders, calling upon the opinions of a variety of scholars throughout the humanities to examine the tension between liberty and democracy: the consequences for justice of this tension: and the implications of these consequences for the study and teaching of Rhetoric. Adapting to familiar frames of reference a Classical vocabulary of justice and practical rationality.¹ I shall begin by defining practices and goods and the relationship between them.

Practices and Goods

Human practice, as opposed to mere movement or action, is activity which in and of itself possesses something good toward which humanity strives. More particularly, a practice is a "coherent and complex socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to

¹ I am indebted throughout to contemporary philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre, whose reading of Aristotle has been invaluable to clarifying this vocabulary.
achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to and partially definitive of that form of activity” (MacIntyre Virtue 187). Picking up a pencil may be a coherent action but it is not complex. Moving a piano is cooperative but is not a socially established activity. Tic-tac-toe, while cooperative, socially established, and somewhat more complex than picking up a pencil, has no standard of excellence appropriate to nor definitive of it, while chess fulfills both criteria. Neither does tic-tac-toe hold the potential for human powers to achieve excellence nor offer potential for systematic extension of human conceptions of the good, while again, chess does (187). In short, a practice establishes a relationship between human beings who share in it in which there is agreement as to what is good as well as an allegiance to the standards of excellence and obedience to the rules which define the practice and its goods (190-191). As justice has, at least in theory, traditionally fulfilled these criteria, it can be considered a practice. What then are the goods toward which justice aims?

While it is nearly habitual to think of goods as material, there is more to justice than mere distribution of material resources. Goods can be social, such as prestige: intellectual, such as understanding the movement of quarks; political, such as freedom of speech: or any number of things which real people call “good.” Key to all considerations is that a good is anything “identifiable with . . . some compound of happiness, virtue, freedom from care, and success” (Blackburn 160). Goods are not necessarily in and of themselves good: they may also be good because they lead to other goods. To illustrate, I may decide to obtain a fine automobile, a material good, for the purpose of prestige, a social good; or for the ease of moving from place to place, a practical good; or for many other goods, alone or combined, acquirable by possession of a car. But by the above definition, if justice is to be considered a practice, it must aim for internal goods.²

**Internal and External Goods**

An internal good is that which cannot be obtained except by the practice to which it is particular (MacIntyre Virtue 188). We do not, for example, play music merely to earn cookies, gain prestige, or attain some other material or social benefit. Instead, we perform

² See Aristotle’s Rhetoric (Kennedy 1.5.4) and Politics (1323a – 1325b).
for personal challenge, appreciation and improvement of the art form: the internal goal is
the excellence of the performance itself, that which is \textit{in itself} good for the musician, her
community, and the nature of music. Because recognition of what is good in music can
only result from experiencing music and can only be described by reference to music, our
performance must be measured against some "concept of the best, of the perfected" which
enjoys "canonical status" (Justice 31). Music, or any other practice, must aim at some sort
of excellence which has priority over any other goods obtained (31).

For the sake of argument, let's say that Miles Davis is greatest jazz trumpeter in
history. Then along comes some kid who turns the jazz community upside down. Before
long, fellow musicians, critics, and fans alike are touting him as the "new Miles." As he
matures, his community marvels at the way he redefines the art form. They begin to say
he has surpassed Miles: they even begin to call him by his first name. Does this mean that
Miles is no longer an excellent trumpet player? Of course not. Nor would he (were he still
living) be denied the internal goods of excellent jazz—the gratification of a beautiful
chord, the satisfaction of a well-chosen quote, etc. Despite the new voice, Miles' music
will continue to provide internal goods to succeeding generations as he continues to
represent what is excellent in music. Meanwhile, as the new kid contributes fresh
understanding of musical excellence, the entire jazz community will debate the merits of
both players, which will provide internal goods for everyone by refining the standards, \textit{the
goods of excellence}, in ways that make them better (Virtue 190).

Of course excellent jazz performance may in fact lead to wealth or prestige. Yet
these goods may likewise be obtained through excellence at football or even theft—an
activity which by no means meets the criteria of practice. These goods are \textit{external} to
practices. "objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners" (190).
Also characteristic of these goods is that when one person obtains a larger share, another's
decreases (MacIntyre Virtue 190). So, should a new voice take command of the market,
not only will Miles' estate and record label lose profit, according to this line of thought.
Miles will lose relative prestige—as this and other social rewards, too, are external goods.
To be brief, these \textit{goods of effectiveness} are analogous to commodities in a competitive
market.
While internal and external goods are distinct, it should be kept in mind that excellence and effectiveness are not mutually exclusive. First, effectiveness "often enough requires . . . some kind of genuine excellence" (Justice 35)—no one will buy CDs featuring a lousy trumpet player. Second, excellence most often requires "acquisition and retention of some degree of power and . . . wealth" (35)—someone has to pay for the trumpet and studio time, not to mention the rest of the band. In fact, according to this line of thought, practices require institutionalized settings to sustain standards of excellence which, in turn require the goods of effectiveness (Virtue 194). So while excellence and winning are not the same—"there is no suggestion that the pursuit of the two is incompatible or that it might be necessary to choose between them" (Justice 50). Nevertheless, historical debates concerning justice tend to hinge on their distinction.

**Justice as Excellence**

Although justice may be seen as both a virtue and a practice which embodies virtue, for the present I will focus on justice as practice, usually thought of in terms of correction or distribution. Corrective justice has the purpose of restoring "a just order which was partially destroyed by some unjust action or actions" (Justice 105) while distributive justice defines this order (105). Each takes on a different cast according to whether justice is viewed as pursuit of excellence or as effectiveness in the midst of competition.

Justice as excellence rests on "a judgment as to what way of life is best and what human flourishing consists in" (MacIntyre Justice 34). Justice as excellence has a telos, a predetermined purpose or end which is defined by the good that it pursues. It is maintenance of the best social order, principles regarding the best way to resolve conflict, and reduction of social ills so as to maximize what is best. As distributive justice, it is the distribution of goods so as to meet some standard of the best.

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1 MacIntyre argues that while under maximally fair conditions winning and excellence are likely to coincide, bad luck, momentary errors, and so forth may cause the more excellent to lose. Standards thus depend on "the concept of a certain kind of fairness" (Justice 28). Moreover, as both excellence and victory "require effective practical reasoning," one must learn "how the kind of practical reasoning necessary for the achievement of excellence differs from that necessary for the achievement of victory" (28).
Alisdair MacIntyre offers examples of justice as excellence in both the Aristotelian and Augustinian narratives. In the former, *telos* is determined by a pre-existing order which governs both the natural and social worlds. Society is a part of nature, a *physis* (something which is), rather than apart from nature, a *nomos* (something which we create) (*Justice* 14). The aim of inquiry is to understand this *physis* so that individuals may behave according to its dictates and so model society in accordance with its laws. Justice is a *themis*, something laid down prior to society, which transcends society and is universally applicable in all times and places (14). Similarly, in the Augustinian narrative, justice corresponds to divine law (153)—again something laid down—which predetermines the *telos* of humanity and the individuals who make up humanity. As these narratives illustrate, justice as excellence is thought to be metaphysical in that it corresponds to a cosmic order, divine law, or some other foundation that is stable, ahistorical, transcendent, universal.

Justice as excellence is therefore “definable independently of and antecedently to the establishment of enforceable rules” (39). Rules simply serve as maxims which characterize “the best practice so far” (31). In fact, to exceed what has been the best so far requires a capacity for judgment which “cannot be specified by further rules” (39), as well as the freedom to violate current maxims to develop better ones (39). To use my analogy, excellence in jazz requires the musician to improvise, to push the boundaries of the form, even exceed them, in redefining ways. With regard to justice, such a capacity is virtue—the purpose of which is to “sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter” and “furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good” (*Virtue* 219). Under these terms, to violate community standards without redefining them is to act against self-interest because rule-breaking denies the violator internal goods—regardless of any harm it causes others (*Justice* 37). The purpose of corrective justice is thus to educate both the individual and the community as to what excellence consists in (37). In short, in pursuit of justice as excellence, practical

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4 MacIntyre notes that the modern contrast between nature and society cannot yet be expressed (*Justice* 14).
rationality, or *phronesis*, is governed by the *rule of morality*: it is akin to *sophia*. possessing the certainty of a pre-established moral order.

For the individual, then, justice as excellence holds potential for internal goods even in the face of community hostility: to an extent, morality may be self-defined. That is, I may rationalize that I serve a higher morality or that I live in the wrong community, so attaining the internal goods of self-proclaimed enlightenment. Such a position need not deny that justice is teleological, but may instead subscribe to an alternate teleology. I may likewise view education as the aim of corrective justice, but see the community from which I dissent as uneducated. While such self-rationalization seems futile at first blush, it is just such a situation in which both Socrates and Jesus found themselves. While both were executed for their attempts to define justice as excellence, their definitions have been paradigmatic for millennia. Yet as these historic examples demonstrate, the degree to which the individual is accorded agency to self-define justice as excellence is largely dependent on how the dominant community defines the self in relationship to others.

For my argument, the Aristotelian self-concept—what I call the *determinate self*—will serve as sufficient contrast to the modern liberal self. In this tradition, the practice which embodies justice as excellence is politics and the *polis* [Greek city-state] is the institutional site of this practice. Far more than a place of mass habitation, the *polis* is a system which “constitute[s] a higher-order integrative form of activity,” a tightly ordered communal lifestyle, if you will, in which humans seek their *telos*. “not this or that good, but the good and the best as such” (Maclntyre *Justice* 44). Defined by Aristotle as *eudaimonia*, “the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man’s being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine” (*Virtue* 148). this *telos* is not achieved “at

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1 Although he roots this narrative in both Plato and Homer, Maclntyre contends that Aristotle completes Plato’s project of reason, arguing that “those who have thought their way through ... justice and practical rationality, from the standpoint ... pointed out first by Aristotle and then by Aquinas, have every reason ... to hold that the rationality of their tradition has been confirmed in its encounters with other traditions” (*Justice* 402-3). For my purposes, Aristotle stands in contrast to the Sophists, one in particular, Protagoras, from whom I will draw my arguments in Chapter Four.

2 Ethics scholar Martha Nussbaum cautions against trying to neatly fit Aristotle’s ethical theory into the teleological category as Maclntyre seems wont to do. Indeed, in the emphasis on duty and merit, Aristotelian ethics also bear the mark of deontological ethics (119)—those “based on the notion of a duty, what is right, or rights as opposed to ethical systems based on the idea of achieving some good state of affairs or the qualities of character necessary to live well” (Blackburn). Maclntyre’s reading is nonetheless useful in distinguishing between justice as excellence and justice as effectiveness—a distinction which underlies moral-traditionalist defense of the canon and canonical standards.
some future point, but in the way our whole life is constructed” (175). The self is defined by determinate roles which maintain this way of life. Virtues are simply “qualities which enable an individual to do what his or her role requires” (Justice 15). As this lifestyle is best, to fulfill one’s roles is to act not only in the interest of the polis but in self-interest; even a slave justly serves both community and self by being an excellent slave.

Given such mutual interest, distributive justice maintains social, i.e. cosmic, balance by awarding goods according to what the actions of each citizen merit in accordance with this order and what each deserves by way of his role—merit and desert gauged by “how important the role . . . and how well he has performed in it” (107). Practical rationality is no more or less than understanding and acting upon the order of things, the proper roles of individuals in given contexts, and the merit and desert accorded each role. As premises for reasoning are “good reasons for action for anyone whose telos is the good and the best” (Justice 45), justice, a condition of ethics, and phronesis, a condition of epistemology, are one and the same (Marcuse 125). Corrective justice serves to facilitate phronesis by educating the polis in “the good and best as such” and in the virtues their roles require. In all respects, injustice is “failure in respect of the metaphysical, political, and psychological order” (MacIntyre Virtue 157), which as personal vice is taking more or less than one merits and deserves."

Yet as the determinate self does not so much choose a course of action as identify the right course by what she knows of the transcendental order, she surrenders her agency to the demands of her role. She does not employ reason to independently “interpret . . . influence, change, or redirect” (Ewald and Wallace 343) events according to her needs or desires but to provide a stable form to which she may subordinate her impulses and desires. This lack of self-determination stands in stark contrast to the defining principles of liberalism and modern democracy. In fact, both liberalism and democracy have been historically linked by critics and proponents alike with justice as effectiveness.

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*As pleonexia (taking more) is “a disposition” (Liddell and Scott), it may effect judgment even if not acted upon. Aristotle also saw its opposite as a vicious violation of one’s role (Nicomachean Ethics 1106).*
Justice as Effectiveness

Unbound by community agreement as to what is good or what human telos consists in, justice as effectiveness is reduction of conflict and social ills simply to maintain order. Justice as effectiveness aims for solving problems in light of competition for external goods. It is therefore limited to material distribution and protection of property and persons, consisting of principles of negotiation and contract: adjudication of competing self-interest. The boundaries of justice as effectiveness are much more clearly drawn than those of excellence because “a perfectly just person is no more and no less than someone who always obeys the rules of justice” (MacIntyre Justice 39). In fact, without clearly articulated enforceable rules, this concept of justice “lacks any content” (39)—anything goes as long as the law is not broken. Rule-breaking, seen as self-interested, is considered harmful to the community without regard to the rulebreaker’s well-being. Corrective justice serves as deterrence and punishment: justice as effectiveness ascribes to the rule of law; it lacks the certitude of sophia, depending instead on human convention.

Given such clearly defined limits, justice as effectiveness cannot be self-defined: the individual must abide by community agreement or be denied the external goods of respect and cooperation. Living on personal terms, she will not be perceived as effective, much less excellent, nor will she be effective in any community context. She may even lose her freedom. Serving only self-interest, the individual is only incidentally a member of her community: she may come or go as she pleases and she owes the community nothing. So long as she follows the law, moral matters belong to her private realm.

As a Classical example of justice as effectiveness, MacIntyre offers Thucydides who presents arguments reflecting those of certain Sophists. First, noting as above that winning and excellence are neither the same nor mutually incompatible. Thucydides argues that "arete [virtue or excellence] is one thing and practical intelligence quite another and their conjunction is merely coincidental" (Justice 69)—that is, being good does not necessarily render you effective. And since governance requires effectiveness, this thesis comes to be seen as promoting the notion that morality is secondary to results.

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8 Greek historian, 471? - ?400 BCE
in the political realm. Second, responding to the perpetual warfare and Greek imperialism of his era, Thucydides asserts that “the stronger may and always do impose their will upon the weaker” (69); justice is what the powerful say it is. Third, because people disagree about the good. Thucydides comes to believe that the concrete issues which lead to conflict are rationally unanswerable. As this leaves “only non-rational forms of persuasion” (69), he concludes that “rhetorical deliberation . . . is the best way for human beings to answer questions about what to do” (MacIntyre Justice 69). For Thucydides, then, humanity has no common telos to fulfill and no way to appeal to a metaphysical or divine order other than that in which the audience believes. Practical reasoning gives way to deinotes politike or cleverness in politics. It is rhetorical rather than philosophical, argumentative and persuasive rather than in pursuit of transcendent truth. The individual, having full agency, is at least partially causal of “human actions and their outcomes” (67). As practical reasoning pertains only to external goods, “cooperation with others demands recognition of their reasons for action as good reasons for them, not as good reasons as such,” in turn requiring “the creation of a framework for bargaining” (45). Virtue exists in addition to practical reasoning, its function to balance the interest of the community with self-interest. So, as one may be quite effective without virtue, allegiance to effectiveness often raises charges of moral relativism. It is just such a charge which moral-traditionalists level at counter-traditionalists.

Clearly, moral-traditionalists see themselves allied with excellence, accusing counter-traditionalists of allying with instrumental effectiveness in pursuit of ideological objectives. So, Allan Bloom charges that they present “relativism” (26) and “propaganda” (61), while Kimball calls them “intolerant” (219) and “anti-cultural” (81) and Bennett argues that they are “hostile” to the white middle class (De-Valuing13)—which, he presumes makes up the bulk of our student body and maintains values represented by the Euro-western canon. Meanwhile, D’Souza insists that canonical authors are being replaced with “mouthpiece[s] for a sophisticated left-wing critique of Western society” (72) whom Cheney denounces for attempting to “do away with the idea of excellence” (Truth 36). In that vein, D’Souza condemns the admission of minority students who, he implies, have high school grade point averages and standardized test scores too low to
indicate potential for academic success (2). Above all, these critics present their criteria as universal, arguing that teaching their values is not ideological—as theirs are canonical.

Counter-traditionalists are suspicious of "excellence"—some, like Bill Readings because, lacking "external referent" and "internal content" (23), the term has come to be a means to conceal criteria for judgment (24); others, such as Benjamin Barber, because it is often defined in exclusionary, elitist terms which discount persons and cultures outside the white, Euro-western, predominately male tradition. Many, myself included, argue that the liberal tradition has equated excellence with domination, power, and control—goods of effectiveness—and that the results have been neither excellent nor effective for those oppressed and dominated. Moreover, the appearance that moral-traditionalists are allied with excellence while counter-traditionalists are allied with effectiveness is deceiving. As an example, while moral-traditionalists frequently cast their moral gaze upon domestic values, they hesitate to impose moral regulation on industry. Others promote market capitalism as an inherently moral system—measuring its benefits by material prosperity and economic growth. At the same time, some counter-traditionalists, in arguing for openness and tolerance, simply proffer their viewpoints as more moral than those of moral-traditionalists, while others measure excellence in terms of effective distribution. Meanwhile, moral- and counter-traditionalists seem to agree, on one hand, that human telos, that toward which humanity strives, is embodied in some delicate balance between liberty and the constraints of government; on the other, that the government which makes possible this balance is democracy. In short, we collectively recognize liberty and democracy as mutually dependent—the former seen as an internal good, the latter as the practice which makes possible this good. Indeed, our common dilemma is that liberty does not itself aim at any excellence beyond itself.

While D'Souza may be accurate in saying that minority students with lower g.p.a.'s and standardized test scores are sometimes admitted to some institutions before majority students with higher g.p.a.'s and test scores, he fails to acknowledge that the numbers he cites are still well within admission requirements. He also overlooks cultural factors in education and testing that some researchers claim are biased against minorities and women and wholly neglects to mention the tradition of legacy (child of an alumnus) admissions to the nation's most competitive universities. At the very least, when two equally qualified students vie for the same space, the legacy wins. As elite schools have traditionally been the milieu of whites, legacy policies are highly biased in their favor. See Sarah Winkeller. "Silver Spoons? The Legacy System at Harvard." Diversity and Distinction Online III (1998). www.hcs.harvard.edu.

As an example, George Will argues that "neither the studying nor the achievement of [excellence] is something to which everyone has equal 'access'" ("Artists").
Liberalism

Freedom—the defining doctrine of the United States. As individuals, we invoke it when we do not get our way. As a nation, we go to war over it. As a culture, we allow it to serve as evidence of the superiority of our way of life. Yet the concept of liberty is not so simple. Liberty can be simply negative—absence of constraint. Or it can be positive—liberation from social forces which impede self-actualization. And in the absence of sufficient constraint, dominant groups often in fact impede the self-actualization of minority groups and individuals. While such impediments seem clearly unjust to many, to others, constraint from such domination is itself unjust simply because it denies liberty—as is apparent in the resistance to civil rights and women’s movements.

Often in contemporary society, liberalism is mistakenly associated with any form of left-leaning thought: as when so-called conservatives cry out against “big government liberals” or label members of the Democratic party “liberals.” Sometimes it is mistaken for mere rejection of traditional sexual and behavioral mores, for openness to or tolerance of formerly taboo practices. But this meaning is too limited to constitute the liberal tradition. Indeed, in the U.S., because liberalism serves as “a background theory or set of presuppositions and sentiments of a supposedly neutral and universal kind” (Bellamy 1), it is as much a conservative as a progressive value. For example, the political Right invokes freedom when arguing for the right to possess handguns or to engage freely in commerce. Conversely, the Right rejects liberalism in support of abortion bans and drug laws. The political Left is likewise ambivalent about liberty. On the one hand, the Left embraces liberalism in support of the right of gays and lesbians to live, work, and recreate where and as they see fit. On the other hand, the Left supports restrictions on trade and limits to land use. With these examples in mind, it is clear that “political liberalism, economic liberalism, and the many discourses that constitute the ‘philosophy of liberalism’ do not

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1 Lind notes that the political use of “liberal” refers to left-liberals, aligned with both economic and social liberalism. Economic liberalism, equated by Lind with “higher taxes on the rich and more government services” (32), is contrary to philosophical liberalism which is more closely aligned with what Lind calls “neo-liberalism” which advocates low taxes, small government, free trade, and a liberal social agenda.

2 Lind identifies eight potential U.S. political positions (only five of which are represented in Washington) resulting from the ambivalence of the terms “liberal” and “conservative.” To simplify, I have represented only two—the former what Lind calls “consistently” conservative; the latter what he calls “left liberal” (32).
form a single doctrine” (Mouffe 20). Yet there is a common thread in the fabric of liberalism which is none other than a concept of the autonomous self.

**Liberalism and the Autonomous Self**

Alisdair MacIntyre maintains that the failure of political negotiation and rational theology to “embody a cogent shared conception of the good” (Justice 210), coupled with “the persistent and savage conflicts” of the 17th century, culminated in the realization that “no appeal to any agreed conception of the good for human beings . . . was now possible” (209). The resulting focus on human competition and conflict paved the way for “the individual” to become “one of the fundamental . . . categories of social thought and practice” (210). Identity and individual capacity come to be held “apart from and prior to . . . membership in any particular social and political order” (210). No longer could the individual be defined by roles which uphold a particular telos nor could “good reasons for accepting and valuing the constraints imposed . . . by the social and political order” be limited to those in concert with “some teleologically understood, divinely legislated order” (210). Imbued with full agency in her personal realm, the self became autonomous, free to determine her own telos, ascribe to any of a number of teleological doctrines, or abandon the notion of telos altogether. In the place of such questions came to rest questions of how to balance agreement and coercion in maintaining social order in light of competition for the goods of effectiveness.

It seems fair to say that this tradition was first fleshed out in the philosophy of John Locke (Russell 600) wherein he posited a state of nature prior to society in which men “lived together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them” (Locke Treatises 307). In nature, he argued, humans are free to do as they wish so long as they observe the laws of nature, primarily the law that “no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions” (309). As this country’s founders saw themselves as liberating individuals from the restrictions of society, monarchy, and the “tyranny of tradition” (MacIntyre, Justice 335), it is no

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13 Political theorist Thomas A. Spragens, Jr. calls autonomy a “central motif in the new epistemology” (81), arguing that autonomy is “clearly a political situation as well as an epistemological precondition . . . An important implication of the new epistemology, then, was that men must be free to follow the natural light of their intellectual faculties” (81).
coincidence that Locke's words reverberate in the Declaration of Independence. Theirs was a new age in which liberal reason would bring order to the public realm, leaving the chaos of competing beliefs to the privacy of home and church.

Above all, each individual was henceforth “his own boss . . . free to be good, bad . . . moral, immoral . . . tolerant, intolerant,” to “act properly or improperly” whether “he gets away with it or not.” All that matters is that he has his own way” (Dietze 8). At such an extreme, liberty may destroy the individual’s own life, through suicide or acts which lead to imprisonment, execution, poverty, or disease: or it may be used to deprive others of the right to act how they choose, where they choose, and to possess what they choose. Political theorist Gottfried Dietze names such freedom “liberalism proper” (1).

Yet while liberty “can mean freedom of the stronger to do down the weaker,” it can also mean “effective freedom of all to use and develop their capacities” (Macpherson 1). As “the latter freedom is inconsistent with the former” (1). liberty must be bound to maintain the initial premise of equality. Liberalism proper must become proper liberalism (Dietze 1). Yet restriction must likewise be limited so as to maintain the initial premise of liberty. Since liberalism can “never be totally replaced by propriety . . . we turn to . . . an ethical minimum, the law” (13). Beyond the law, the individual is free to determine her own morality. “I want. I need. I believe” serve as “statements of a reason for action.” as “premises for practical reasoning” (MacIntyre Justice 338).

Operating on such premises, distributive justice ensures only that competition proceed according to law, while corrective justice is punitive, operating on the basis of costs and benefits—the costs of getting caught theoretically outweighing the benefits of criminal success. With practical reasoning thus reduced to a means-end process, disagreement begins to appear to be as problematic as Thucydides claimed. for here

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14 Contemporary philosopher Susan Bordo argues that “the separate self, conscious of itself and of its own distinctness from a world ‘outside’ it, is born in the Cartesian era” (7). The significance of Cartesian rationalism to the formation of modern liberal self-identity will be discussed in Chapter Three.

15 Spragens points out that due to “ambiguity, overlap, and confusion, any attempt . . . to identify coherent accounts of the relationship between intellectual and political progress can only produce ‘ideal types’” (76). He then identifies four “liberalisms” that hearken to Locke—(1) politically conservative liberalism. (2) democratic natural-right liberalism. (3) natural-reconciliation-of-interests liberalism, and (4) artificial-reconciliation-of-interests liberalism” (76). While Spragens’ distinctions are useful and important, discussion of them strays too far from my purpose. Liberalism is, therefore, here discussed as an extreme abstraction.
conceptions of virtue have no bearing on practical rationality. Practical rationality becomes no more than a capacity to identify the most effective means to one’s personal ends. Moreover, as virtue “is a function of liberty rather than power.” only “by limiting the popular exercise of political power” (so as not to inhibit individual liberty) can democracy be “virtuous” or excellent (Wallach 322). A virtuous democracy is a liberal democracy. Yet how is such a society to determine a just or excellent result? What is the proper balance between permitting the liberties of one individual while protecting those of others? How can liberalism be made proper?

Certainly, to maximize liberty, constraints should be minimal as possible. Hence liberalism, contrary to political rhetoric, distrusts government, preferring “small” government which tightly limits constraints to “big” government which optimizes constraints to ensure equality of individuals at the expense of personal freedoms. As liberalism assumes that the demos\(^\text{16}\) desires maximum liberty, it seems that democracy should ensure such a government. Yet there is, in fact, a tense balance between liberalism and democracy as the latter holds the potential to limit the former by guarding against imbalances of power which result when liberty is not constrained by personal virtue: in short, when one group or individual takes advantage of liberal principals to gain power over another. Despite concern over liberal excess, this potential limitation has often led to democracy being seen negatively, as an impediment to liberty, rather than positively—minimally as a constraint against excess, more fully as a means to justice. Undoubtedly, as liberalism “is not so much a positive theory about how political power ought to be organized and directed as a negative theory about what the limits on that power ought to be . . . liberalism . . . limits democracy” (Wallach 321): freedom is not to be curtailed to ensure equality of power. Despite rhetoric about “saving the world for democracy.” democracy does not represent what is good and best for humanity, but is simply one mechanism among others by which individual liberty might be realized.

Nonetheless, the ability of democracy to constrain liberal excess is a fundamental principle of our unique form of government—which extends a democratic hand to the demos via our right to elect representatives and which provides a means. our system of

\(^{16}\) Demos, meaning “the people” or “the citizenry,” is the root of democracy.
checks and balances, by which elected and appointed officials may deliberate toward ends which are made more or less democratic through public accountability. While it is true that our founders favored republican government over majoritarian participatory democracy, the fundamental assumption that the “fabric of American Empire ought to rest on the solid basis of THE CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE (sic)” (Hamilton “Federalist” No. 22) was never denied.

By this point, it should be apparent that the association of liberalism with the political Left is arbitrary. As a matter of fact, the tension between liberalism and democracy manifests on both left and right. The political Right, as represented by the Republican party, sees the economic sphere as essentially private and so properly governed by liberal principles, while seeing the cultural sphere as public, i.e., in “accord with shared public values” (Hollinger 114). They “define freedom economically (as individual economic initiative) and justice socially (as righteous living)” (Hunter Culture Wars 115). Conversely, the political Left, as represented by the Democratic party, considers the cultural sphere “private and pluralistic,” that is, democratic, while believing that liberalism in the economic sphere should be checked by “some sort of public action.” (Hollinger 114). They “define freedom socially (as individual rights) and justice economically (as equity)” (Hunter Culture Wars 115).17

Still, many critics are concerned that preference for negative liberty, i.e. absence of constraints, “implies that collective decision making and democratic practice are inherently dangerous, and must be checked” (Hollinger 7-8). In fact, as liberal democracy “is concerned more to promote individual liberty than to secure public justice, to advance interests rather than to discover goods” (Barber Strong 4). In its current form in the U.S. it alienates those who have little economic power, concentrating power in the hands of a few. Liberty, under these conditions, is not synonymous with agency, for it privatizes the

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17 Elstain similarly asserts that “the political Left continues to argue for taming the market in an economic sense” but “follows the market model when social relations are concerned,” while “many on the political Right love the untrammeled . . . operations of the market in economic life, but call for a state-enforced restoration of traditional mores” (16). Lind observes a similar split within the right, as represented by the U.S. Republican party, which is “divided rather sharply into a culturally and economically populist far right and a more or less consistently libertarian right” (5). Lind contrasts the suspicion of religious fundamentalists toward big business, international finance, and big government to the liberality of economic conservatives on social issues, even though these liberal and social views are often suppressed “in the interests of Republican unity” (5).
agency of the masses while the vast public agency of economic entities drives the public policy which determines the constraints within which these masses must function. Among the liberal limitations of democracy relevant to my pedagogical concerns are the application of market logic to justice, a misidentification of goods resulting in a misdirection of practices which culminates in a disregard for democratic institutions.

**Liberalism and External Goods**

The first limitation to liberal thinking is the notion of the individual as no more or less than a competitor for finite material resources. While it is certainly true that competition is an ongoing theme of the human narrative, this formulation abandons internal goods as a defining cultural need, which signals the demise of humanity's quest for excellence in the public sphere. Even individuals come to be defined as "material beings" whose "social and political time and space" as well as "motivation, agency, and interaction are necessarily physical" (Barber Strong 32): social laws come to "correspond to the laws of physical mechanics" (32). That is, as material objects "cannot occupy the same space at the same time" (33), human beings come to be seen as constantly aggressing toward or defending political, social, and psychological spaces (33).

In similarly physical terms, the operations of the market are considered self-regulating under some sort of natural law or "invisible hand." Based on the small-scale entrepreneurial economy of early capitalism, which optimizes "equilibrium between production and consumption" for "mutual advantage" (Bellamy 3), this model assumes that intimate and local relations between economic actors will make producers, their relatively small crews of workers, and the consumers they serve interdependent and accountable to one another. Thus the principle of *laissez-faire* has been thought sufficient for development of "a meritocratic society of self-reliant and responsible citizens" (3). This model, in substance, asserts that economic "equilibrium" ought not only mean "stability of prices near actual costs" but "social stability—that is, harmony, felicity, public order" (Lowi 7). Meanwhile, optimism regarding progress, which "posit(s) human wants and needs as expandable—indeed, nearly insatiable" (12), has led to assumptions that production can grow indefinitely "to satisfy and continually fuel the restless cycle of the creation and satiation of needs" (13). Productivity takes on a moral force: individuals
become obligated "to work hard and reap their rewards" (13) as economic development comes to be equated with social improvement and the social order becomes increasingly meritocratic. And, since growth requires investment and investors demand profits, increased consumption is needed to fuel continued progress. Material consumption is transformed into civic responsibility, the consumer "glorified," as life becomes increasingly "pervaded by market imagery" (Elshtain 13). Capitalism becomes more than "a bundle of economic and technological processes" (Lowi 3); it becomes an ideology, "a source of principles and means of justifying behavior" (3).  

While the realities of the last century cast doubt on the efficacy of laissez-faire, leading to its fluctuation as public policy, this doctrine continues to carry considerable weight as moral ideology. One consequence is that public education tends to be directed toward the market: the student is both consumer of the educational product (Aronowitz 58) and product of a market-oriented educational system. Upon completing the desired level of education, this marketable product becomes both an "enlightened" producer and consumer of other commodities. A second consequence is that relationships of power tend to be cast in materialist terms which are insufficient to articulate ethical matters.

**Education and the Rhetoric of Markets**

Judging from Chapter One, it may seem that counter-traditionalists are likely to reject the moral-traditionalist assumption that liberal education has been "dumbed down." But on this point many agree. Sociologist Stanley Aronowitz, for one, laments that "undergraduate education in the United States may achieve what a decent secondary school was expected to deliver fifty years ago" (2), while Cary Nelson points out, as a given, that "the gradual collapse of the secondary school system . . . has left Americans without any common foundation of historical knowledge" (139). Meanwhile, Benjamin Barber worries that "illiteracy and innumeracy meet at ground level to create a splendid

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18 Lowi calls capitalism a liberal ideology because it "had always participated in positive attitudes toward progress, individualism, rationality, and nationalism" (3).

19 Lester Faigley, citing French postmodernist Baudrillard, asserts that U.S. consumer culture seduces students into defining themselves as products for consumption. He cites a paper in which a student author describes "packaging" her high school aged sister into the proper sorority girl for consumption by "fraternity brothers" and "jocks"; and another in which a student associates "the value of agency" with the objects of consumption which construct his external (and Faigley infers, internal) identity (214-215).
egalitarianism of ignorance" (Aristocracy 201). In fact, a primary point of disagreement concerns what has caused this decline and what content has been lost. Moral-traditionalists claim that the political agendas of self-proclaimed victims and advocates ensures unearned success for marginal students, lower standards and poor instruction for "quality" students, poor research and scholarship, and a disregard for truth. Counter-traditionalists are more likely to look at market factors and structures of domination and oppression. Claiming that liberal capitalism and cultural hegemony exclude, dominate, and exploit those who have little economic or cultural power, these critics fear that their students are denied self-governance under current institutional structures, will continue to be unable to remove or alter these structures, and will be inadequately educated to govern wisely should these structures be altered or removed by others' efforts.  

Indeed, the evidence of market logic on education is all around us. At the elementary and secondary levels it can be seen as concern about failing schools has elicited cries to privatize, to subject schools to market competition—on the assumption that *laissez-faire* will sort out the losers. Yet many commentators fear that privatization will push marginalized students further to the margins by abandoning them in increasingly underfunded and decaying schools. Giroux, for one, sees this as an "attempt to transform

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20 The literacy crisis which allegedly began in the early 1970's comes under some doubt. Ira Shor questions the reliability of the most referenced source, the SAT, as a measure of literacy, noting that the test has no written component (Culture Wars 71). Moreover, while SAT documents an alarming decline in test scores, the National Assessment of Education Progress shows markedly different results, notably that "basic literacy, reading performance and writing mechanics, especially among blacks, showed either increases or slight [my emphasis] declines" (in Culture Wars 73). Educational researchers David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle note that "none of the supposedly supportive 'evidence' [of educational decline] actually appeared in *A Nation at Risk*, nor did this work provide citations to tell Americans where that 'evidence' might be found" (3). Berliner and Biddle also point out that the slight decline in SAT scores from 1963-1975 as reported in *A Nation at Risk* "reflects the fact that more students from unimpressive educational backgrounds have chosen to take the SAT which "proves that more students who would not have gone to college in the past are now planning to attend college" (Lind 162). When "disaggregated," that is, broken into smaller components, "verbal achievement has been holding steady... minorities... earning higher average scores," whites level (Berliner and Biddle 20). The average SAT score among Native Americans actually showed an increase of 39 points; blacks showed an increase of 55 points; and whites held steady. Berliner and Biddle also note that the number of students expected to have IQs over 130 is seven times greater than "for the generation now retiring from leadership positions in the country and often complaining about the poor performance of today's youth" (44).

public education from a public good, benefiting all students, to a private good designed to expand the profits of investors, educate students as consumers, and train young people for the low-paying jobs of the new global marketplace™ (Stealing 84). He is likewise concerned that privatization will privilege “the most motivated and gifted students”—the bulk of whom have not had to bear “the crushing burdens of poverty, racism, and other forms of oppression” (89)—and so “deepen [the] racist exclusions” (89) that characterize the inequities between suburban and inner-city schools.

Market influence at the elementary and secondary levels is displayed as cash-starved schools contract with industry for equipment and materials, in return subjecting children to the onslaught of advertising during their classroom routines. The perils of advertising aimed at children have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere, but it bears repeating that among these is increased material dissatisfaction which “remove(s) the dynamics of student performance from broader social and political considerations” (89) and “feeds a value system in which compassion, solidarity, cooperation, social responsibility, and other attributes of education as a social good get displaced” (89). Above all, a market orientation at the elementary and secondary levels threatens to diminish individual agency by under-preparing students for democratic participation as well as for the moral and political challenges of higher education. The consequence of the first is the alienation of the people from the political process. The consequence of the second is the necessity to adapt college curricula to the diminished liberal knowledge base and underdeveloped critical skills of incoming students.

At the college level, the effects of increasing market logic can be seen in attacks on tenure, our traditional guarantor of academic freedom. To save money, colleges offer early retirement packages to expensive senior faculty, replacing them with temps, adjuncts, and graduate assistants. Unfortunately, at research institutions, faculty who devote themselves predominately to teaching are denied tenure with alarming frequency—teaching seen as a distraction from the “real” work of research. But the market model is not limited to attacks on tenure. Administrators, now often “drawn from the ranks of

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corporate executives” and valued for “their managerial style.” treat schools as “major companies.” students as “customers.” and learning as a “measurable outcome” (Giroux Stealing 84). Many other private sector business practices are also imposed as colleges and universities begin “mimicking the drive to ‘flexibility’ or ‘lean’ production” (Aronowitz 84). Working from this commercial model, they “downsize academic units and narrow the ‘mission’ of the university on the grounds of ‘efficiency’” (Hollinger 119). Unfortunately, the debates summarized in Chapter One “have made cutting university budgets a great deal easier” as a “delegitimated university is easier to defund” and “easier for state governments to ignore when making basic policy decisions about higher education” (Nelson 108). Meanwhile, in the popular media, academics, particularly those in the Humanities, are considered irrelevant to public life—ivory-tower idealists with nothing to contribute to effective policy.

In the meantime, to compensate for budget losses, professors are encouraged to “provide commercially useful knowledge” (Aronowitz 173) funded through contracts with industry. Such motives may skew research away from vital projects which do not yet promise great commercial reward (e.g., organic farming) and may skew research with commercial potential toward marketable rather than socially responsible ends (e.g., genetic engineering). Ultimately, a commercial emphasis threatens to privatize knowledge that best belongs in the public domain—^—the most ominous example being the Supreme Court’s position that “corporations can own all of our collective genes” (173). Indeed, if there is any doubt regarding the influence market logic enjoys at the college level, one need only examine the rhetoric of values currently employed.

Market logic echoes throughout the rhetoric of higher education in North America, as reflected in magazines such as McLean’s (Canada) and U.S. News and World Report which annually review and rank colleges in terms of “relative value-for-money” (Readings 27). Such rhetoric raises concerns that education is evaluated by means of “an analogy between the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities and the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge” (146)—an analogy that reduces

[^2]: Aronowitz cites MIT biology professor Jonathom King, who notes that “many who deliver papers concerning scientific research at scholarly meetings may omit information on patent grounds, thereby closing intellectual communication” (Factory 48).
knowledge to a product an individual can own rather than the foundation for human excellence. By means of a "cost-benefit analysis," the university's social responsibility is reduced to "solely a matter of services rendered for a fee" (32). Public education is no longer defined by "its civic function: rather it is primarily a commercial venture in which the only form of citizenship available for young people is consumerism" (85). Among those concerned. Readings and Giroux criticize such rhetoric for reducing students to "consumers," rather than people "who want to think" (Readings 27) while reducing teachers to the "ultimate salespeople" (Giroux 'Stealing' 89). Certainly educators do not see themselves as salespeople and are likely to resent being thought of as such. However. I will argue with Readings and Giroux that such rhetoric may serve to fuel the commodification of learning at the policy level and in the minds of the public.

Evidence that such rhetoric influences students' perceptions of their roles and status can be observed in the classroom. As consumers, students may reject anything in the classroom they do not want to hear: "they can leave class without penalty": and they can demand "alternative" assignments if the course material is "too controversial" to them" (Hollinger 119). Seeing knowledge as "owned," rather than as something with which to actively engage, students are often tempted. and do. buy term papers on the Internet. depend on Cliff's Notes. and hire better students to write or sort out their messy term papers and theses. They sometimes demand higher grades, arguing that they have paid tuition for good results. They seek credentials, an external good which leads to more external goods. rather than the internal goods of personal and human development.

Recognizing temporaries and graduate assistants as replaceable commodities. they sometimes blame failure on "product" quality—"How can I learn when she's a man-hating feminist?": "I can't understand his accent": "He gives too much homework": "I got stuck with a T.A.": "If he's so good. why isn't he tenured?". Such arguments mistake

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25 The notion of consumerism as patriotism took on new force following the September 11 attack, as the administration called upon people to strengthen America by shopping.
26 A. Bloom notes that in the marketplace "an education, other than purely professional or technical, can even seem to be an impediment" (339).
27 A 2000 nation-wide survey of American first-year students conducted by the American Council on Education and UCLA shows that 73.4 percent claim their primary goal as "being very well off financially"—a consecutive, cumulative increase from 39.1 percent in 1970 (ACE 2).
28 Meanwhile, at many colleges. students are the primary evaluators of instruction.
negative liberty and consumer agency, i.e. choice in purchasing, for socio-political agency, the capacity to "interpret . . . influence, change, or redirect" (Ewald and Wallace 343) public events which bear on their personal lives and on global conditions—the facilitation of which is, of course, the ostensible purpose of democratic education.

Where is pursuit of excellence in all this? According to rhetoric commonly employed by higher education, it is of course, the mission of the university. Yet excellence, too, is conceived in commercial terms as a "purely internal unit of value that effectively brackets all questions of reference or function" (Readings 27). Among other effects, "the question of access to tertiary education is bracketed" (27). "Purchasing" an education has become analogous to buying a car—as reflected in U.S. News and World Report which extols efficiency, examines the "best values," and compares "sticker prices" and tuition "discounts," i.e. scholarships and grants (28). The criteria used to determine these values are likewise cast in material terms: quantitative measurements, themselves arbitrarily determined, of such equally arbitrary factors as "graduation rates within standard time limits," "quantity of federal grants obtained," and "ratio of tenured faculty to part-timers or graduate teaching assistants" (25). The first of these criteria neglects the influence of part-time students on these numbers, as well the number of students who may take lighter full-time course loads while supporting themselves and/or families. The second assumes that the best teachers get the most grants, while the third assumes that tenured faculty are automatically the best teachers. Above all, excellence—which as "an integrating principle . . . has the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless, or to put it more precisely, non-referential" (22)—has became a code word for effectiveness conceived in terms of a cash-nexus.

Of course, many universities attempt to define "excellence" within their mission statements. Iowa State University, for example, includes "the discernment, intellectual curiosity, knowledge and skills essential for [students'] individual development and their useful contribution to society," as well as "literacy in science and technology. an

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29 Post-secondary.

30 Arrived at by "combining a ratio of 20 percent for students, 18 percent for class size, 20 percent for faculty, 10 percent for finances, 12 percent for libraries, and 20 percent for reputation" (Readings 25).

31 Aronowitz notes that "excellence" has become an "'indeterminate concept' that signifies little more than . . . 'comparative advantages'—a euphemism for competitive position . . . closely related to 'revenues' and other signals of profit and loss" (48 cf. Columbia University Provost Jonathan Cole).
understanding of humane and ethical values, and awareness of the intellectual, historical, and artistic foundations of our culture, and a sensitivity to other cultures and to international concerns” (ISU 1). Yet many of the terms used to define “excellence” are themselves “non-referential.” Intellectual curiosity seems somewhat self-explanatory, but “discernment” must be in regard to something in particular. While “knowledge” and “skills” certainly encompass many details too numerous to mention in a mission statement, “personal development” and “useful contribution to society” remain wholly non-referential. Does personal development mean something more than success in the job market? What do the authors of this mission statement see as “useful” to society?

As for “literacy in science and technology,” students in liberal arts are required to take only eleven credit hours in natural sciences and mathematics and are not required to take any technology course—although First-year Composition is usually taught in computer labs where the instructor, if able, assists students in learning word processing and other text-processing programs. For engineering majors the story is similar. To obtain the required “understanding . . . awareness . . . and sensitivity,” these students are required only twelve credit hours in Social Science or Humanities—three of which must meet the “diversity” requirement, another three to meet the “international perspectives” requirement. Although effort is being made here, this low demand seems insufficient to develop the broad and deep “excellence” toward which the university purports to aim.

Footnotes:

12 Faigley notes that textbook criteria is also non-referential—“clear,” “concise,” “effective,” “interesting,” projecting the “authentic voice” of the writer; as are departmental guidelines—an “A” paper “displays unusual competence”; hence, an ‘A’ paper is an ‘A’ paper” (113). Terry Eagleton notes that the “values” students are expected to glean from literature are equally non-referential, involving not a particular set of values but something vaguely defined as universal, requiring students to be “sensitive, imaginative, responsive, sympathetic, creative, perceptive, reflective. . . about nothing in particular” (“Subject” 98).

13 Generally four classes. Here, too, students may at least partially subvert the intent of these requirements by obtaining some credits through dance or music classes—which do not generally possess linguistic modes of expression necessary to understanding of cultural or political issues. While such classes have substantial value in their own right, they may be insufficient to the task of facilitating sensitivity to other cultures and perspectives or of providing a sufficient knowledge base for deliberation in a multicultural society. This is especially true considering that no requirement is placed upon instructors for teaching the greater cultural and political implications of these art forms and in light of moral-traditional objections to attempts to do so. Faculty and students in colleges other than Liberal Arts often argue that such courses are irrelevant to their disciplines: serve a “political agenda” which aims to discredit their interests; and take valuable time from disciplinary study. Likewise, Liberal Arts students and faculty sometimes claim that they don’t need math and other sciences.
Although deeply concerned about the internal goods of education, moral-traditionalists often seem ambivalent regarding market influence on education. D'Souza, for one, seems notably unconcerned, although in concert with counter-traditionalists, he calls for more intensive liberal education "for rulers" (250) which, in a democracy, he concedes, means everyone. Yet in light of the elitism of his general arguments, it is difficult not to feel that he has merely tossed a bone in the direction of philosophical democrats. Cheney likewise says little about market influences except to express concern that emphasis on research has devalued teaching. Although she concurs that *U.S. News and World Report* inadequately assesses quality of teaching, she persists in defining parents and students as consumers, arguing that market pressures—the choice of private schools—will culminate in better public schools at the elementary and secondary levels. With all due respect, Bennett maintains that "acquiring 'skills' should not come at the expense of acquiring knowledge" (*De-Valuing* 50). Nevertheless, he too falls back on "free-market" arguments in calling for vouchers for private schools (52). Kimball, by contrast, baldly denounces concerns about market influence, as "sheer quackery" (39), labeling those so concerned "intellectual Marxists" (39)—diminishing the significant contributions Marx made to economic theory in favor of a Cold War sound bite. In like vein he wonders, "What is so compromising about being an employee of the state or a corporation, even a 'major corporation?'" (39)—glossing over real concerns about what preparation for such employment may entail. It is telling that Kimball applies the same gloss to concerns about gentrification in SoHo and similar communities which have pushed out the less-advantaged as they have become trendy spots of "high" culture.\(^\text{35}\)


\(^\text{36}\) Even cities as small as Des Moines, Iowa have experienced the oppressive effects of inner-city gentrification. In the 1960s, Des Moines' vibrant minority commercial district, Center Street, was demolished for freeway construction—ending the livelihoods of many families and the cultural center of minority life. In the 1970s, artists, activists, and other representatives of the so-called "counter culture" began living side-by-side with minorities and poor in some of Des Moines' oldest neighborhoods where huge Victorian homes were divided into small, inadequate, and often unsafe apartments. As they began improving neighborhoods, demanding services, and winning restoration and revitalization grants, purchasing a converted house as a "project" or "investment" became trendy and property values rose dramatically. As a result, lack of affordable housing for the poor has remained steady, even increased, despite public housing efforts. Meanwhile, commercial projects said to be in the interest of "revitalization" continue to remove affordable housing.
Allan Bloom is particularly self-contradictory about market influences—in ways which well reflect the internal contradictions of liberalism. On the one hand, he berates the Left for “abstracting” rock music from the “capitalist [my emphasis] element in which it flourishes” (77). While on the other, he disdains the music as promulgating “a society where the greatest satisfactions are sexual” (79)—a society he charges was promised by Marxists advocating “the overcoming [my emphasis] of capitalism and its false consciousness” (79). Bloom briefly bemoans that “the modern economic principle that private vice makes public virtue has penetrated all aspects of daily life” (84), yet leans on the language of contracts to provide minimal rationale for community obligation, relying primarily on the “glue” of private relationships, the family in particular, to hold community together. But in the public realm, does not a unified family represent something much like an individual who must then compete with other such composite individuals? At any rate, is the alleged collapse of the family the cause or effect of the breakdown of communal ties?

Bloom is right to identify social atomism as contrary to civic obligation and he usefully criticizes value-relativism, but in the end, it is not value-relativism that troubles him, but commitment to values other than his own. He berates Continental philosophers for labeling the “new man of the democratic regime” as “bourgeois,” that is, “diminished, egotistical, materialistic” (157), but in later chapters complains that “almost no one wants to face the possibility that ‘bourgeois vulgarity’ might really be the nature of the people, always and everywhere” (249). And he is quite clear that by “people” he means those unlike himself, those who do not live up to “Aristotle’s great-souled man, who loves beautiful and useless things” and “is not a democratic type” (250). Unequivocally, while acknowledging concern over “a fudging of the distinction between liberal and technical education” (59), Bloom contends that liberal education is “what the small band of prestigious institutions [my emphasis] are supposed to provide” (341), while the responsibility of “big state schools” is to “prepare specialists to meet the practical demands of a complex society” (341), i.e. train workers for the fragmented world of work. Above all, he echoes the most vehement arguments of his associates—that his territory, the territory of philosophers, must be protected from feminists, minorities, egalitarianists.
popular culture, and other threats to reason. To Bloom, as well as other moral-traditionalists cited herein, it seems the agency of the masses is limited to meeting material wants and needs: socio-political agency is rightfully constrained to the elite.

Yet, as I will later discuss, the response of counter-traditionalists to this elitist onslaught often has been both inadequate and unconsciously self-incriminating. It has likewise been overly dependent on material assumptions, often holding up "capital" as the one true villain and/or characterizing the Culture War as a battle over cultural "capital." Like moral-traditionalists, such commentators fail to recognize that market logic, what political theorist Iris Marion Young calls "the distributive paradigm" (8), provides an inadequate model of domination and oppression which assumes that all inequalities are analogous to the unequal distribution of material goods: that justice itself is no more than effective distribution and protection of material goods.

The Distributive Paradigm

Young defines "paradigm" as "a configuration of elements and practices which define an inquiry: metaphysical presuppositions, unquestioned terminology, characteristic questions, lines of reasoning, specific theories and their typical scope and mode of application" (16). Upon this, she argues that "contemporary theories of justice are dominated by a distributive paradigm, which tends to focus on the possession of material goods and social positions" (8)—"the morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among society's members" (15). Social justice and distribution are treated as "coextensive concepts" (16), a consequence which reifies non-material goods as "identifiable things or bundles" (8), treats individuals as discrete "points in the social field" (18), and "evaluates justice according to the end-state pattern of persons and goods that appear on the social field" (18). Because this focus ignores relationships between individuals that go beyond "the amount of goods they possess" (18), social justice is commonly discussed in terms of taxation, allocation of public funds, or distribution of privileged social roles: terms which do not adequately account for "the social structure and institutional context that often help determine distributive patterns" (15). Requiring a more process-oriented and relational

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37 French postmodernist Jean Francois Lyotard is likewise concerned with "the reduction of everything to 'exchange value' in capitalism"—what he calls "the hegemony of the economic genre" (in Faigley 237).
conceptualization" (8), issues of domination and oppression tend to be obscured while questions regarding the distribution of social positions and opportunities are usually subsumed under those regarding wealth, as the desirability of a social position is measured by income or access to resources (19). The distributive paradigm therefore fails to account for "the justice of decisionmaking [sic] power and procedures," "the creation and use of cultural imagery and symbols," and "the structure of the division of labor and a right to meaningful work" (20). Two main aspects of the distributive paradigm contribute to the above problems: 1) misrepresentation of non-material goods and resources; and 2) presupposition of "the institutional context that determines material distribution" (18).

When non-material goods are treated as "a kind of stuff possessed by individual agents in greater or lesser amounts" (20), the "functions of rules and relations" (25) in social life are vastly misunderstood. Take rights, for instance. When an individual is given the right to "a distributive share of material things, resources, or income," it is not the right, but the goods that are distributed (25). When rights are extended to include non-material concepts like free speech or trial by jury, all individuals are granted these rights.

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Young defines oppression as "structural": the "everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society... unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules, and the collective consequences of following those rules" (41). Further, noting that group membership is "multiple, cross-cutting, fluid, and shifting" (48), she argues that group differences "cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different respects" (42).

Young therefore examines five non-distributive "faces" of oppression: 1) Exploitation, "the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another" (49), entailing a "structural relationship between social groups" (50) in which "the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves" (50). 2) Marginalization, the exclusion of a category of people from the system of labor—which may result in material deprivation, but may also affect individuals even when material deprivation is relieved by welfare policies by depriving dependents of "rights and freedoms that others have" (54) through bureaucratic "patronizing, punitive, demeaning, and arbitrary treatment" (55).

See also Jorgensen, Beth. What If They Have No Boots? Narrative and Ceremony in the Rhetoric of Welfare. Unpublished Master's thesis. Iowa State U. 1995. 3) Powerlessness, the condition of "those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it" (56) resulting from the many hierarchies of decision-making that inflect the day-to-day existences of most people. 4) Cultural imperialism, the way in which "the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (59). 5) Violence, which encompasses not only physical acts but harassment, intimidation, and ridicule; and which cannot be treated as isolated acts for they exist in a social context "which makes them possible and even acceptable" (61).

Such violence is a systematic, social practice "directed at members of a social group simply because they are members of that group" (62)—consisting "not only in direct victimization, but in the daily knowledge shared by all members of oppressed groups that they are liable to violation, solely on account of their group identity" (62).
in full: no one has to surrender her “portion” or “amount” because rights, as “social relationships which enable or constrain action” (25), are not something we have: they are, rather, something we exercise. Similarly, opportunity is not best thought of as a thing but as a “condition of enablement, which usually involves a configuration of social rules and social relations, as well as an individual’s self-conception and skills” (26). Likewise, while “distributive arrangements” may “provide the background conditions for self-respect” (27), self-respect is not an “entity or measurable aggregate,” but “an attitude toward [one’s] entire situation and life prospects” which issues in response to “many nonmaterial conditions that cannot be reduced to distributive arrangements” (27). These non-material conditions are fruitfully viewed as conditions of agency.

Similarly, this paradigm describes power as “a pattern of the distribution of this stuff” (31), failing to recognize that power, too, “is a relation rather than a thing” (31). So assuming a “static conception of society,” (18) this model directs attention to “particular agents or roles that have power” (31)—a “dyadic” model of “ruler and subject” which ignores the many additional agents and actions which mediate power “between two agents in a power relationship” (31). Existing social stratification and hierarchy are assumed: “redistribution” of power is cast as the movement of one individual into and another out of power while the structures themselves remain. Domination itself is not questioned: only the right of a given individual or group to dominate is questioned. In short, this paradigm misidentifies power as a material good rather than as a set of conscious as well as tacit practices which comprise our social institutions. According to this line, empowerment of disenfranchised groups or individuals must mean less power for those dominant: there is no vision of a public arena where all or most are empowered.

At any rate, domination and oppression are prior to and independent of distributive issues. In the first place, wealth accumulates to those with power: power most often precedes gain. In the second place, fully equal distribution of material goods and resources will not necessarily signal the end of domination or oppression. Young explains the issue as one of “doing” versus “having.” Doing involves “learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings: participating in forming and running institutions, and receiving recognition for such participation; playing and communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings, and perspective on social life in
contexts where others can listen” (37). Economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis similarly see the issue as “becoming” rather than “getting” (22). Pointing out that the civil rights and women’s movements “are not claims on resources” but claims for “the creation and transformation of community and the establishment of individual and collective identities” (10), Bowles and Gintis maintain that these movements deny “the separability of economic, moral, and cultural concerns” and assert “the primacy of moral and cultural ends and the general status of economic concerns as means” (10)—though not the only means—to these ends.39

The distributive paradigm inflects the rhetoric on both sides of the Culture War. In the first place, moral-traditionalists tend to treat respect for the canon as material stuff—as though respect for the work of Rigoberta Menchu means less respect available for Shakespeare. Yet counter-traditionalists, too, fall prey to the logic of distribution. In conceiving of every text as a product of self-interest, reducing literature to an emblem of either struggle or power on a competitive plane, counter-traditionalists often partake of a distributive logic in which social justice is measured in terms of who gains and who loses by publication and subsequent reading or placement in the canon. Ironically, it is the critics upon both sides who gain in this zero-sum grappling by keeping the controversy lively enough to fill journals and gain tenure. Unfortunately, their gain may be their students’ loss if they lose sight of what their students need to know, not only as skilled employees but as socio-political agents. Moreover, the esoteric research in which many engage may do little or nothing to reduce the oppression of those for whom counter-traditionalists claim to speak—distributively or otherwise—although it, too, leads to publication and tenure. At any rate, challenging the canon is not simply about giving more exposure to some works while giving less to others. It is about dismantling structures which limit not only exposure, but valuation. Forcing a white male to read Menchu will mean nothing unless the structures which encourage him to resent the reading are dismantled—one of which seems to be coercion.

39 Bowles and Gintis also define domination, exploitation, and class in ways that go beyond distributive issues—the first as “a systematic relationship of unequal power”; the second as “a particular economic form of domination”; the third as “a form of exploitation based on the ownership of property” (23).
In the second place, moral-traditionalists tend to see opportunity in distributive terms. But more opportunity for one young person does not necessarily result in less for another. Take affirmative action—under the current paradigm, the Right argues that educating Rita at Harvard instead of Bill means that Bill will get less of that stuff we call opportunity. But given the underlying assumption that Bill is even more qualified than Rita, it is more than likely that Bill will be admitted to another fine institution. Concern that Bill’s second choice may not be as prestigious as Harvard only reinforces counter-traditionalists’ arguments that the social, political, and economic structures of higher education are discriminatory. In the meantime, moral-traditionalists fail to acknowledge that these institutions engage in “affirmative action” of their own through the practice of priority admission for legacies—the children, relatives, or friends of alumni.

Yet while affirmative action was conceived as a challenge to discriminatory structures, it too reduces to distributive logic. Mere distribution of diverse individuals among academic ranks will not ensure the demise of discrimination and oppression if education serves only to acculturate them into the structures which perpetuate these ills. Alas, as currently conceived and discussed, affirmative action operates on these structures as “given background conditions whose justice is not brought into question” (Young 198). Evidence that this is so can be gleaned simply by looking at the Humanities departments that moral-traditionalists so malign. Here, the very scholars who disparage canonization and the structures which give rise to it enjoy tenure as a consequence of these very structures. Despite their rhetoric of inclusion, these departments are often sites of the struggle for dominance rather than for questioning and dismantling structures of dominance. Besides, diversity of skin color, gender, or other variables does not ensure diversity of thought, much less progressive thought—as the rise of intellectuals such as

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40 This can be seen in the struggle of TAs, temporary instructors, and adjuncts. It is also reflected in much of the disciplinary literature in English, often pejoratively labeled “politically correct,” as these theorists describe struggles to find voice in the academy. Moral-traditionalists also cite examples of the university as a site of the struggle for dominance. D’Souza, for example, includes a number of anecdotes regarding censorship of research and intellectual curiosity. Indeed, moral-traditionalists often paint those who ally with them as the victims of this struggle.
Clarence Thomas, Thomas Sowell, and Lynne Cheney attests. While I agree that affirmative action somewhat addresses the narrow distributive question of opportunity, it diverts attention from social patterns which leave many "Blacks, Latinos, or women [not to mention Native Americans, poor whites, and others] whose social environment and lack of resources make getting qualified nearly impossible for them" (Young 199). And qualified they must be. Affirmative action does not admit the unqualified.

In other words, in the struggle for dominance, counter-traditionalists often confuse agency with power. Power is *stuff* that needs to be taken from some and given to others. At best they speak of balancing power—again it sounds like *stuff*—even as they call it empowerment. Reason—considered a construct of power—is thrown out on an all-or-nothing wager. Authority, too—all authority seen as oppression. But some agreement on principles of reason is vital if the search for knowledge is to amount to more than mere assertion and counter assertion. Likewise, some authority must be granted to someone somewhere if we expect even tentative answers to our most pressing questions. To be sure, the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" is well and good if students can choose their languages—but to choose they need another language option. For this they need the instruction of authority. The same is true of culture and values.

Of course students also need to better understand issues of power and authority if they are to think critically. If the canon is treated as the authority, as the source of objective truth, what are students to make of the vast disagreement between canonized authorities? If Plato's truth is absolute, then Locke's cannot be. All too often students encounter conflicts between lines of thought and cannot sift through the contradictions. One risk is shallow analysis—a search for the right quotes to force highly divergent ideas to converge. Another is nihilism, the temptation to throw up one's hands and plunge into total relativism. Still another is dogmatism, acceptance of authorities who share one's viewpoints, utter rejection of those who do not. Meanwhile, if students are to be prepared for democratic participation, they must come to understand, as Thucydides recognized.

41 The cabinet selections of George W. Bush likewise illustrate that diversity of gender and skin color does not ensure diversity of thought. Although Bush appointed three women, two blacks, two Hispanics (one female), an Asian-American and an Arab-American, "most members hold moderate to very conservative views, and several faced opposition from labor unions and women's, environmental and civil rights organizations" (Superville "Cabinet").
that use of power too often represents abandonment of the quest for excellence and that
the use of power against the Other means that power can and will be used against them.
Simply put, limiting their, or our own, understanding of power to the logic of distribution
can do nothing but sustain an “us-them” dualism which is contrary to democratic
cooperation, threatening to liberty, unfavorable to justice, and hostile to peace.

Finally, we want our students to become “doers” not simply “havers” and we want
them to keep on “becoming” throughout their lives. Both the Right and the Left err in
thinking that higher education for minorities will end distribution problems or issues of
oppression. First of all, a degree in mechanical engineering may not mean much in terms
of distribution to a minority who cannot get hired or promoted because of racial
discrimination. From another perspective, a degree in English these days may not mean
much to anyone in terms of distribution. Second, higher education will not end the
oppression of educated minorities until oppression is reconceptualized beyond the logic of
distribution. In short, “having” does not ensure “becoming” or “doing.”

The distributive paradigm has consequences for our students’ civic attitudes as
well. Many come into our classrooms poised for battle, suspicious of those different from
themselves, ready to do what it takes to get “theirs.” Some arrive assuming that college is
but a hoop through which they must jump before their prior connections will invite them
into the world of commerce. Still others are deluded into thinking that the sole credential
of a college degree is an automatic ticket to the middle class and beyond. While Allan
Bloom claims that students come to us as relativists (25), my classroom experience
suggests that students come to us along a broad continuum of moral commitment.
Moreover, their commitments vary not only in intensity, but in kind. What few of them
can escape is a conceptual paradigm which divides their world into “us” and “them,” in
which they must look out for number one” to get “their share.” As one young man told
me. “There’s just not enough to go around. We gotta protect our futures.”* By such lights,
some students have argued that fair wages don’t apply in third world economies because
“their standard of living is different” and that those who immigrate in search of fair wages

*As most college students identify with or aspire to the professional middle class, Barbara Ehrenreich’s
description of the professional middle class as characterized by fear of social decline (Falling) seems to
apply.
(illegally, it is presumed) steal good jobs from Americans—jobs these students are in college to avoid. Often they contradict themselves, arguing that these job-stealing immigrants (in my classroom, nearly always perceived as Spanish-speaking and referred to en masse as “Mexicans”) have too many children on welfare, refuse to learn English and, as all welfare recipients do, increase the crime rate and threaten our way of life. Moreover, they argue, tyranny on other soil is none of our business: U.S. economic and security interests trump human rights: sweatshops and child labor provide needed income: inhumane practices are inseparable from the workers’ cultures and unsolvable by U.S. interference, whether governmental policing or consumer boycott. At any rate, they need the shoes for track.

At bottom, distributive thinking encourages social atomism: when human relationships are reduced to competition, we become no more than “points in the social field . . . inasmuch as there is no internal relation among persons in society relevant to considerations of justice” (Young 18). Such limited thinking with regard to goods inevitably leads to inadequate thinking about practices and institutions. As practice is reduced to commercial and social competition, one is left searching for the coherence, cooperation, internal goods, and standards of excellence which MacIntyre claims define human practice. Without them, civic institutions crumble, only to be replaced by the chaos of the cannibalistic market. And, in fact, modern liberalism undermines democratic practice by offering no rationale for political obligation.

**Liberalism and Political Practice**

Political scientist Carole Pateman argues that liberalism is in part constituted by the idea that community obligation is self-assumed, voluntary, part of the social contract consensually entered into by free and equal individuals. On this view, voluntarism is necessary to a liberal system because the very notion of obligation, which requires that one at least temporarily be governed by another, is antithetical to freedom. By analogy to a promise freely made, voluntary obligation is seen as an antidote to obedience which can result only from domination or coercion. But, Pateman stresses, this analogy fails because a promise is an individual act of agency, a conscious use of personal judgment while
political obligation is an assumption of the liberal democratic state which cannot explain "who has, and when, and how, actually and explicitly consented" (15).

A common way out of this problem is to think of voluntarism as hypothetical, the result of voluntary actions of self-interest which give rise to obligation—one example being acceptance of the benefits of the state (16). Yet as people "do not connect walking down the road with consent" (16) and so cannot be said to have consciously consented, hypothetical voluntarism fails as well. Similarly, it is often suggested that "the political counterpart of promising is voting" (17); that is, in the conscious act of voting the individual grants her consent, not hypothetically, but actually. Yet as voting represents people's alienation from political decision making and so from determining for themselves "the content of citizens' political obligation" (17), it is little more than "a promise to obey" (19) the determinations of an elite few. By weakening "the sense of personal responsibility in community governance" (Trend 10 "Crisis"), as well as the sense of personal effectiveness, this alienation from political deliberation undermines the impulse of citizens to participate in governance. On one hand, political involvement, even voting, comes to be seen as unnecessary, even irrelevant, as government appears to generally meet public need. On the other hand, political involvement comes to be seen as inconsequential, meaningless, as government ignores public need and the voice of the people. In any event, both perceptions diminish the socio-political agency of individuals.

This alienation from self-governance is a direct consequence of the priority of the personal over the public which characterizes liberal democracy. As Barber points out, "the aim is not to share in power and to be part of a community but to contain power and community and to judge them by how they affect freedom and private interest" (Strong 7). Natural man is "free": community is "artificial," a means of coercion. Ignored is "the possibility that community may support certain types of freedom or that nature may nourish forms of coercion and conflict more insidious than those known to democratic politics" (10). Because the liberal ethos moves to minimize the individual's involvement in things public and the public's influence over the individual, the liberal citizenry is "unable to understand the formation of collective identities" and "cannot grasp that the collective aspect of social life is constitutive" (Mouffe 22). Separation from the
community becomes a primary right, ultimately leaving the "free" individual vulnerable to the deliberative power of others.

Moreover, the normative image of the liberal individual as a white, Western, heterosexual male may particularly diminish minority and female participation. On this note, Armapal Dhaliwal contends that even "liberal discourses that presume . . . to make everyone a "self" (through inclusion) ignore that the liberal "self" always needs and is often manufactured in opposition to the "other(ed)" (the excluded)" (44). Indeed, because social obligation and inclusion are conceived in terms which "still oppress or fail to alter structures of domination" (44), those whose "selves" do not embody the liberal ideal may not agree that they have consented to governmental policy. Case in point: the right to vote does little to alter structures of domination when the choice of candidates is limited to those who would uphold existing structures which culminate in an unequal playing field. Relatedly, inclusion often means nothing more than "happy family multiculturalism" (Nelson 35) which relegates significant differences to the private sphere, ignoring "conflicts, contestation, or contradiction" (Dhaliwal 44)—which in a democracy are rightfully made public. In short, as "the United States constructs its "democratic" image through a series of selective constitutive erasures" (51), dominated populations are actively discouraged from participating in democratic practices.

Even so, though also concerned with such "erasures," Chantai Mouffe defends the liberal element of democracy as the only hope "that the logic of popular sovereignty can avoid becoming tyrannical" (21). Mouffe's concern is that democracy unchecked by liberalism "speak(s) of the people as if it was one homogenous and unified entity with a single general will" (21), ignoring that agreement is always "partial and provisional.~ a "product . . . of a given hegemony" (24). Mouffe thus calls for a radical liberal democracy which embraces pluralism. "discarding the dangerous dream of a perfect consensus. of a harmonious collective will" (20) which can suppress minority opposition and which, like liberalism itself, finds articulation on both left and right in forms too numerous to examine here. In the end, like Dhaliwal, Mouffe rejects "happy family" pluralism which is "blind to relations of power" (24), in favor of a pluralism which recognizes that the social agent occupies a "multiplicity of subject positions." involving a "multiplicity of relations of subordination." which clearly means that an individual "can be dominant in some groups
while subordinated in others” (25). According to this argument, we can sustain democracy’s link with liberalism without “endors(ing) either economic liberalism or individualism” (20), by extending “the democratic ideals of liberty and equality to more and more areas of social life” (20) and by using “the symbolic resources of the liberal democratic tradition to struggle against relations of subordination not only in the economy but also those linked to gender, race, or sexual orientation” (20).

In concert with Mouffe, I have no intention of throwing the liberal baby out with the white Western male’s bath water. Nevertheless, there is a “dark side” (Hollinger) to liberalism that must be understood if we are to keep its excesses in check. Among these is alienation from the political process, which among other things has precipitated a decline in citizen involvement. Even within dominant populations, alienation is augmented by “the ethic of equal opportunity,” and its “imaginary corollary, the American dream,” which serve as “collective myth(s)” to justify the State’s “partial claim to authorize power over its citizens as a universal claim to social truth” (Wallach 322). According to Josiah Wallach, these myths, “authorize . . . a community of individual means rather than shared ends . . . displac[ing] radically individual fantasies onto the nation as a whole” (323). The state comes to be seen as no more than a collective of radically autonomous individuals suspicious of “any and all ties of reciprocal obligation and mutual interdependence” (Elshtain 12). As this fantasy is one of effectiveness in the midst of competition rather than excellence in a way of life, it does not concern virtue but rather rights. And rights are construed as attaining to anything that meets an individual’s ever-expanding, often consumer-oriented “needs.” Thus feminist legal scholar Jean Bethke Elshtain argues that, “designed primarily as immunities . . . from overweening governmental power, not as entitlements,” even rights are defined in consumerist terms as possessions of the autonomous “rights-bearing individual” (15). Unfortunately, as rights increasingly come to be construed as entitlements that free the individual from interference with or obligation to the community, the language of rights places the individual in opposition to community.

Among other things, this opposition translates into the language of moral instruction in our public schools. James Davison Hunter, for one, contends that individualism has led to values curricula which promote the belief that “the foundation of
goodness, and especially altruism, is love of self" (Death 134). Moral instruction is "self-referencing and oriented toward the end of personal well-being" (147) and moral reasoning is "framed by a cost-benefit calculation" (92) in which the costs and benefits accrue to the individual rather than the community. In the end, he asserts, the "moral imperative . . . is not some antiquated notion of rectitude or even clear conscience but, rather, basic survival with one’s emotional and mental health intact" (93); agency is reduced to survival while community is rendered irrelevant. Hunter gives, as one example, the drug prevention program known as DARE which depicts drug use as "unsafe" and "harmful" to the individual and ties abstinence from drug use to "one’s sense of well-being" (94) rather than to community issues surrounding drug use.

At any rate, notions of obligation and rights may be seen as liberal surrogates for Classical notions of virtue and merit. That is, where we once held standards of excellence to determine the best for the community, we now have obligation for personal benefits received; where we once attached merit to virtuous behavior, we now have rights to ensure that vicious behavior does not impede liberty. This substitution is nowhere more apparent than in the contemporary rarefaction of merit—which John Wallach attacks for lacking moral substance as well as perpetuating the notion that "relationships of power . . . depend on virtually natural hierarchies of legitimate authority" (325). In the end, with virtue "privatized" under liberalism, we are left with only "a de-moralized conception of virtue" (325) embodied in the liberal notion of merit. Criteria for merit tend to be left unexamined, reducing democracy to "a set of institutional procedures designed to promote competition among elites for the approval of ordinary citizens" (326 cf. Schumpeter).

Young similarly holds that the "myth of merit" legitimates a "hierarchical division of labor" (200), which is often unjust in that "normatively and culturally neutral measures of individual performance do not exist for most jobs" (202). Young’s critique is equally apt regarding government and other social hierarchies beyond the workplace. With regard

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43 Young provides four reasons why neutral measures do not exist: 1) "most jobs are too complex and multifaceted to allow for a precise identification of their tasks and thus measurement of levels of performance of those tasks"; 2) "in complex industrial and office organizations, it is often not possible to identify the contribution that each individual makes, precisely because the workers cooperate in producing an outcome or product"; 3) "a great many jobs require wide discretion in what the worker does and how best to do it" (202); 4) "the division of labor in most large organizations means that those evaluating a worker’s performance often are not familiar with the actual work process" (203).
to education, for example, political scientist Amy Gutmann points out that, in its essence, meritocracy must neglect students with "relatively few natural abilities and little inclination to learn" (134) in favor of those more gifted and motivated—leaving us free to ignore the conditions which produced these inequalities as well as possibilities for remedying them. Should meritocracy triumph, children would be simply assumed to be autonomous individuals who can be held responsible for their abilities and motivation. In effect, the liberal model of merit "assume[s] free competition between individual producers of approximately equal standing" (Bellamy 3), ignoring real differences in the places from which individuals begin. The individualism inherent to this model was nowhere better expressed than by Vice President Dick Cheney who, as a candidate, claimed that his financial success as an oil company executive was based on personal merit that "government had nothing to do with"—an utterance made with disregard to federal policies which largely benefited oil producers at the expense of consumers, laborers, and the environment as well as disregard to the connections he made to the oil industry while serving as Defense Secretary and in other governmental positions. As Wallach points out, "equality of opportunity says nothing about the conditions (apart from the rules) in which the race occurs" (326).

At bottom, community interest gives way to self-interest: politics becomes nothing more than negotiation of power—seen as necessary to control those who would impede one's liberty. The idea is not to alter or transform "hedonistic self-interest" but to manipulate it (Barber Strong 13). Certainly this manipulation is behind governmental "dog-biscuit laws, reward-and-punishment sanctions, and carrot-and-stick incentives" (13). Because such laws resort to private benefits rather than promote community benefits, they "do nothing to create a sense of genuine public interest" (13) but instead make "justice a matter of personal profit" (13).

Prior to the September 11th attack, the consequent "me-first" attitude was strongly present in my classroom. Students made it quite clear that they think of politics primarily in terms of personal benefits. During times of relative prosperity, the comparatively

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44 Cheney seems ambivalent about the government's role in facilitating citizen virtue. On the one hand, he is a social conservative who opposes abortion rights and advocates censorship of the arts. On the other hand, he argues that energy conservation is a fine personal virtue but inappropriate as government policy.
affluent tended to express apathy as their needs were met, while students on the economic and/or social margins tended to express powerlessness and hostility as they went without in the midst of plenty. During times of economic distress, the affluent tended to blame the poor and environmental or ethical trade regulations for burdening society and so, briefly, activated to oppose policies related to these issues. Meanwhile, the poor tended to sink further into their despair, powerlessness, and resentment. But more often students complained that politics doesn’t interest them, doesn’t affect them, and is irrelevant to their education and their lives. In fact, after resorting to grade points to encourage my students merely to register to vote, only about three dozen of over three hundred students bothered to proffer a voter registration card. Needless to say, they, like most Americans, thought little about the horrors of terrorism and oppression until it bore a recognizably American face. Only time will tell whether their new awareness will endure.

In the meantime, when students choose to participate, particularly when they choose community service or social activism, they often do so for altruistic motives which stem from faith-based, rather than secular, belief systems. Such a foundation for altruism may fuel arguments that the government should get out of the social welfare business and leave it to churches and other community groups but, in the end, dependence on private belief as a foundation for community action is insufficient, as some faith organizations may be punitive toward those in need, may abandon them when needs closer to home seem more pressing, and may have more concern with facilitating cultural homogeneity than with creating a democratic, even liberal democratic, culture. And as any individual is free to reject faith systems all together, much of the population may be left with no justification for community obligation at all. What’s more, as liberalism generally defines

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45 An annual survey conducted in 2000 by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute shows that among responding first-year college students only 28.1 percent “are inclined to keep up to date with political affairs” and only 16.4 percent “say they discuss politics frequently,” reflecting a continuing decline over 35 years. 2000 findings are considered particularly significant because student interest usually increases during a presidential year (UCLA 2). Susan Miller argues that Composition Studies is complicit in orienting the student inward “rather than toward the full, highly political experience of an external world” (95). According to Miller, in failing to address (or even be aware of) the purposes for which students are likely to write, composition curricula and pedagogy do not value literacy “as an indication of capacities to transmit property, create it, or take political action” but instead “address the modern ‘individual’ who has little at stake in the culture’s organization, commerce, or politics” (95).

46 The objection may be made that I might have invited a non-partisan organization to register my students during class. I presented this idea to 10 of 12 classes, all of whom voted that to do so would be coercive.
needs in terms of material resources and rights as freedom from interference, the needs and rights of these students may be just as well met by benevolent despotism or rational aristocracy. Liberalism offers our citizenry no reason to prefer democracy over either. Alas, these forms of government do not possess democratic checks and balances to ensure that they remain benevolent or rational. We can implore students to participate to ensure freedom and democracy, but in the end, because liberalism eschews obedience, political obligation can be avoided simply because they "don't have to," no one can "make" them.

But while liberalism offers no justification for political obligation, democracy necessitates obligation because democracy ceases to exist when the demos does not participate. Theoretically, one can be free in social isolation, but democracy is inherently political: it "presupposes a degree of faith in the possibility of politics—a belief that human need can be addressed within communities, as opposed to the anarchy of absolute privacy, liberty, and individualism" (Trend "Crisis" 9). Certainly if democracy is faith, liberalism is skepticism as to whether this faith is sufficient to social stability.

Certainly liberalism in and of itself is not the problem. We rightfully cherish our rights, yet fear the tyrannical mob who may take them from us. But when the context of liberalism is accepted unproblematically, when liberalism is taught as an ideology, rather than as a fluid and self-regulating conversation, it may become as dangerous as extreme Islamism. Declining to a condition wherein justice is no more than the will of the strong. Indeed, too long has the U.S. claimed our effective strength as evidence of moral excellence. Too long have we claimed economic liberty and material prosperity as our paradigm of excellence. Amidst claims of democracy, upon claims of liberty, we have weakened our claim to democracy by limiting its reach both within and without our borders. At bottom, liberalism is neither a virtue nor in itself virtuous. It is instead an argument that virtue is a private matter. It is amoral. It does not prescribe norms. Hence, if we are to achieve excellence, we must rely on the principals of democracy, our agreement to be virtuous amidst freedom. In this sense, democracy, the recognition of each individual's right to self-governance, may be said to be the virtue by which we moderate liberalism.

I distinguish "Islamic" from "Islamist"—the former denoting a faith tradition, the latter the radical movement which aims to bring down the U.S. and establish Islamic dominance worldwide.
In sum, as Elshtain points out, "rights are always transitive, always involve us with others, cannot stand alone, and cannot come close to exhausting who and what we are" (16). Accordingly, rights are not best understood as possessions but as functions of our relationships. Democracy provides a means to equilibrium in these relationships: it is "not a terminus for individually held rights and values: it is their starting place" (Barber Strong xv). On this account, as liberalism offers no justification for political obligation, we must draw such from democracy. Any "notions of civic virtue, public spirit, and political community . . . must be reformulated in a way that makes them compatible with pluralism and [my emphasis] the defense of individual liberty" (Mouffe 23). To do so will require that we reconsider the paradigm of Modern rationalism which undergirds liberalism, recasting it in a way which accounts for actual human practice.
Chapter Three
Rational Autonomy and Thin Democracy

Men stumble over truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened.
—Winston Churchill

Truth—an ingenious compound of desirability and appearance.
—Ambrose Bierce

The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple.
—Oscar Wilde

What is laid down, ordered, factual is never enough to embrace the whole truth: life always spills over the rim of every cup.
—Boris Pasternak

The road to truth is long, and lined the entire way with annoying bastards.
—Alexander Jablokov

If taken at face value, philosophical liberalism appears to wholly ally practical rationality with effectiveness. Hence I have argued that the moral-traditionalist self-proclaimed alliance with some sort of lost excellence is undercut by an operating allegiance to effectiveness and that counter-traditionalists are equally divided—though in different ways, toward different ends. But this is only part of the story. A further part of the story is that the modernist model of rationality which underwrites liberalism at once upholds and is incommensurate with many liberal premises—a circumstance which may account, in part, for the fragmentation of contemporary moral debate. In the words of political theorist Thomas Spragens, “liberal reason has turned out to be not very liberal, after all. and perhaps not very rational either” (14).

I would like to begin by recalling from Chapter Two that Thucydides’ allegedly “relativistic” view of human affairs arose in response to the political crises of fifth-century Athens (MacIntyre Justice 64-68). A generation later, responding with equal alarm to continuing crisis, Plato moved in the opposite direction, setting out to establish a theory of certain truth. Plato’s concern was clear—flattery, manipulation, and other deceits of language are responsible for the ills which beset the polis. What was needed was a means
to distinguish between *episteme* and *doxa*, a method of reasoning by which humanity could arrive at infallible truth and conduct their lives accordingly. In the Classical world, this method was logic.

**The Context of Reason**

The first fluttering of Western logic is found in Parmenides as an effort to keep “what is . . . uncontaminated from what is not” (Nye 12). A “perfected object of desire” (13), *what is* may be apprehended only by rejecting “the twisting and branching of ordinary existence . . . for the straight way” (12). So establishing the “desire” of philosophy as perfect, unchanging truth and the practice of philosophy as a linear, logical progression unconcerned with “ordinary existence.”

Parmenides initiates a move away from sophistic modes of reasoning concerned with “the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely” (Toulmin *Cosmopolis* 30) toward “a purely theoretical view of philosophy” (x) which continues in Plato and comes to dominate Euro-western thought through the twentieth century. Yet the limitations of this linearity are apparent from the beginning.

In Plato, philosophical reasoning, called *dialectic*, takes the form of a binary “logical division” (Nye 24) which forces the interlocutor to choose between “two opposing alternatives” (26), each of which leads to a radically different conclusion. In one instance, Socrates asks Gorgias to choose between “learning” and “believing” as the outcome of rhetoric, associating rhetoric with flattery, cookery, and self-adornment (Plato *Gorgias* 463b) as opposed to truth, health, and justice. Because Gorgias distinguishes between “justice” and “truth” and thereby associates rhetoric with justice, he has no option but to admit that rhetoric leads to belief rather than knowledge. Backed into a

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1 Contemporary rhetorician Michael Mendelson notes that “Parmenides regards all apparent manifestations of variety and transformation . . . as illusion . . . truth itself can only be approached by logical deduction . . . any reliance on opinion or sense perception constitutes a descent into error” (xx).

2 Parmenidean logic cannot express what “what is” is. One may say “my dog is a dog,” but not “my dog is brown” because both “dog” and “brown” are *what is*. To admit one to the other is to contaminate *what is* with *what is not*. All truthful statements are thus tautologies. See Nye.

3 Platonic method allows such statements to contain a predicate. Nye explains: “A thing does not simply exist, it also is or is not a certain number of things: ‘a man,’ ‘not a dog,’ ‘rational,’ ‘not ruled by his appetites,’ etc . . . ‘is not’ is not always the simple contrary of ‘is’ . . . to say something is ‘not something else’ is not to say that it is ‘is not’ but that it is ‘different’ from something else in some respect” (27). To more fully demonstrate, Nye diagrams the argument of the Eleatic stranger in Plato’s *Sophist* (26).

4 *Sophist*. 485? – 385 B.C.E., represented by Plato as one of Socrates’ interlocutors.
semantic corner. Gorgias is compelled to agree that “Rhetoric . . . is not for instruction in the matter of right and wrong” (455a1) but a “device” for “mak[ing] one appear to those who do not know to know better than those who know” (459c2)—so indicting Rhetoric, and himself with it, for manipulation and deceit.

Of course this line of reasoning elides the distinction between truth and justice and, in so doing, evades the very question at stake—whether Rhetoric can lead to justice. Clearly, opposing binaries do not represent the range of possible contrasts—“learning” may be also contrasted with “judging” or “deciding.” Binary logical division does not, therefore, uncover knowledge new to all participants in the exchange, but leads to a telos prefigured by the dialectician. While often useful for uncovering flaws in the reasoning of Socrates’ interlocutors, binary logical division also covers over flaws in Socrates’ reasoning. That is, by limiting semantic options, Socrates simply shuttles to the realm of opinion anything that lacks the certainty he seeks—including any experiential or contextualized knowledge his interlocutor may bring with him. As products of social contexts, judging and deciding, posed in opposition to truth, are thus linked with belief—a linkage which ignores practical distinctions between knowledge and decision-making which indeed contrast but do not inherently conflict. As Socrates’ encounter with Gorgias illustrates, the persuasiveness of binary reasoning rests not upon linear exactitude but upon “powerful metaphors and analogies which underlie [the philosopher’s] divisions” (Nye 30)—negative analogies to describe belief, positive to describe knowledge. Yet such analogies are themselves constructs of the rhetorical practice Plato through Socrates purports to disdain. Even so, plagued by the need for certainty in a time of crisis, the philosopher leads his audience away from the messy world of human affairs toward the perfected cosmic realm of Forms, abstract ideals which are only imperfectly realized in the physical human world. ⁶

However, because Socrates cannot provide an arche, an indubitably true starting point from which accurate division can proceed, there are no “sufficient reasons for any

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⁵ Rhetoricians Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca call this “dissociation,” a practice which “replaces customary usage . . . with a more precise, ‘correct’ usage, thus dividing a unified idea, such as knowledge, into a pair of ideas, here ‘truth’ and ‘belief,’” the former valued positively, the latter negatively (411–59).

⁶ For Plato, only the Form is true; physical realizations of the Form are mere shadows of what is true.
sophisticated adherent of the opposing view to admit that a refutation has occurred” (Maclntyre Justice 75). Aristotle thus charges that Platonic logic “is still too removed from human affairs, still too encumbered with Parmenidean circularity” (Nye 41) to produce new knowledge. Meanwhile, Aristotle maintains that certainty, necessity, and generality are irrelevant to moral reasoning as “the nature of those issues” is determined by the conditions and circumstances of the moment and therefore “the kinds of arguments relevant to them “differ in degrees of formality or certainty: what is ‘reasonable’ in clinical medicine is judged in different terms from what is ‘logical’ in geometrical theory” (Toulmin Cosmopolis 20). On these terms, Aristotle carves out a division between sophia and phronesis which commands that each be subject to different methods—a division which contributes to his theory of rhetoric. Meanwhile, to rectify the circularity of Platonic logic, Aristotle introduces the syllogism, a minimal three-part structure consisting of a string of true and accepted assertions which combine to create new assertions which he claims as new truth. As an example, he offers the primary assertion, “all mules are barren.” followed by the secondary assertion, “this animal is a mule,” which lead to the conclusion, “this animal is barren.”

Yet Aristotle’s linear syllogism also proves insufficient to practical reasoning. As the above example illustrates, in syllogistic reasoning the first and second assertions are not demonstrated but taken as common sense or “general opinion” (Aristotle Topics 1.14 in Nye 47). Moreover, “the direction of syllogistic reasoning” is not “from premises to whatever conclusion might follow, but from a conclusion to premises that will affirm or contradict the conclusion.” from effect to cause rather than from cause to effect (Nye 51-2). As the validity or invalidity of the conclusion or major claim is taken for granted by the dialectician, his aim is not to uncover truth but to persuade his audience to accept his primary assertion as true. The point is to make the premises appear “more basic, more intuitively certain than the conclusion” (52) and to arrange them in such a way that they appear to follow necessarily from one another. Questions of truth are thus “bracketed” in preference for “questions of logical form” (47). Hence, the syllogism, like Plato’s binary

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MacIntyre claims that, recognizing this weakness, Plato offers only “a program for constructing such a theory” (Justice 82). Any theory satisfactory to Plato would have to grasp an arche, embodied in the forms, which can culminate in human telos. According to MacIntyre, as Plato sees apprehension of forms as still inaccessible, it is up to Aristotle to complete this project.
division, demonstrates only formal truth rather than revealing substantive truth. Certainly, even without this structure any farmer knows that his mule is barren, but then, this method is not intended for use by farmers but for use within "a specific Athenian institution of elaborate, often artificial debate in which farmers, laborers, or workers were not involved" (47). The purpose is not eternal truth but political advantage, "power, privilege, and wealth" (44) for those identified as citizens. The point is "not whether the statements . . . are true but whether they are believed and make a valid argument" (47). Indeed, the claim that such a method arrives at indubitable truth serves to reinforce belief.

Meanwhile, modeling the rhetorical *enthymeme* upon the syllogism and privileging its abstract distance to the intimacy of the concrete, local example. Aristotle transports the formal exercise of dialectic to the chaotic, rhetorical world of problem solving, dismissing the emotional and ethical components of *phronesis* as mere persuasion. So, based on the assumption that objective truth is formally valid. Aristotle, like Plato before him, attempts to embody truth in linear purity, denying the messy, non-linear world of immediacy and emotion. Emotion is relegated to the world of women and "others" who do not have access to the dispassionate reason that syllogistic logic brings about. According to contemporary philosopher Andrea Nye, one result is that

> [a]n ethics can be theorized based on the authority of reason over emotions which is the mark of a man: a politics can be developed that founds men's authority over women and slaves . . . other natural creatures can be divided into lower species in imitation of the superior species man: and finally divinity itself can be theorized as a nonmaterial, manly intelligence removed from the distortions of matter. (57)

By this means, Aristotle reinforces the desire for linear certitude, undergirding a school of thought which comes to dominate inquiry for millennia.

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* The enthymeme is a rhetorical chain of reasoning in which one premise is suppressed. For example, "Socrates is mortal" suppresses the premise "Socrates is a man" which is present in the syllogism "Men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore. Socrates is mortal."
Rationalism Reborn

Fast forward to the seventeenth century, the approximate birth of Modernism. The common narrative, that taught in school and once presupposed in the study of Modernist ideas, tells us that Modernism began in a time of prosperity and material comfort, quite unlike that of Thucydides and Plato, in which literacy had become “as widespread in the prosperous laity as it had earlier been among priests, monks, and other ecclesiastics” (Toulmin Cosmopolis 14). Lay scholars, so schoolbooks say, insisted on reading and thinking for themselves and so reserved the right to reject church doctrine and free the human mind from the tyranny of superstition, tradition, and theology. Bolstered by a new spirit of intellectual tolerance, a new rationality emerged, a “method,” which lay the ground for science and freed philosophy to pursue “pure” inquiry unhindered by human concerns which cloud the mind and distort understanding.

But, in fact, the seventeenth century was a time of great suffering and conflict throughout Europe. Near the turn of the century, Spain was defeated by England, ending her European dominance: religious disputes divided France and Germany: and England teetered on the brink of civil war. Economic depression and the Little Ice Age set in before the end of the century’s second decade: the Thirty Years’ War began: and, as the century passed, periodic recurrences of plague struck both England and France. Contrary to the standard narrative, scientists and “other intellectual innovators” (19) experienced intensified theological pressure from both the Papacy and Protestant reformers. Unlike Copernicus a century before, Galileo was forced to abjure claims in conflict with Catholic doctrine and was placed under house arrest for heresy. Given such circumstances, can it perhaps be said that while liberalism arose from a Thucydidean response to seventeenth-century conflicts, modern rationalism simultaneously arose from a Platonic response? If

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1 In am indebted throughout this section to philosopher Stephen Toulmin’s Cosmopolis.
2 Toulmin argues that “tradition and superstition were not clearly distinguished” in the 17th century (Cosmopolis 14).
3 According to Susan Bordo, “the dilemmas Descartes constructs, the solutions he embraces . . . are more fruitfully read through the template of the cultural turmoil of the seventeenth century . . . than as ever-applicable, ‘enduring’ philosophical experiences” (3). Similarly, political philosopher Sheldon Wolin argues that “most of the great statements of political philosophy have been put forward in a time of crisis” when “institutional breakdown” causes “political behavior and events to take on something of a random quality” and destroys “the customary meanings that had been part of the old political world” (Politics 8).
so, the very contexts from which rationalist philosophies have sprung challenge rationalism's first premise—that truth and inquiry transcend human contexts.\(^\text{12}\)

This internal contradiction is just one of many which shake the foundations of liberal reason. Among other things, the self-concept of Enlightenment\(^\text{13}\) rationalism paradoxically both culminates in and denies the fundamental premises of liberal autonomy. For on one hand, if one is to doubt all received wisdom, inquiry must proceed in intellectual isolation: one must be free of outside influence to question anew. On the other, if knowledge gained by rational inquiry is certain, then freedom to entertain one's own beliefs is illusory: it is nothing less than madness to deny certain knowledge. Despite these contradictions, rationalism does indeed provide the foundation upon which liberalism is built.

**Rationalism and the Autonomous Self**

Any culture which possesses a singular notion of transcendent good likewise possesses an image of the ideal authority figure—that person thought wisest and best, possessing both knowledge and virtue. With this in mind, rhetorician Susan Jarratt maintains that the struggle between contingent and absolute truth represented in the Platonic dialogues marks a shift from the poet to the philosopher as teacher and exemplar of virtue, from *mythos*, the stories and theology of a culture, to *logos*, transcendent authoritative reason modeled on a perfect cosmological order.\(^\text{14}\) The seventeenth century witnessed a similar shift from the theologian and textual authorities to the rational empirical scientist and the authority of perfect reason, modeled once more on perfect cosmological order.\(^\text{15}\) At bottom, unwilling to abandon the notion of a human *telos* and

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\(^{12}\) Toulmin notes that "the philosophical debate... started by Descartes" has a "historical parallel" in Plato (Cosmopolis 31), while Spragens calls "modern rationalism... a radicalization of the Platonic... line... separat[ing] doxa from episteme, unreliable belief from genuine knowledge" (47).

\(^{13}\) The Enlightenment, "discerned [in England] in the 17th century with the writings of Francis Bacon and Hobbes, and in France... in the work of Descartes." fully flourishes in the 18th century (Blackburn 120).

\(^{14}\) Maclntyre maintains that the shift "from the imaginative universal to the conceptual universal" is not complete until Aristotle.

\(^{15}\) Like Plato, 17th-century rationalists distrust poets—as aptly expressed by John LeClerc (1699) who calls the poet "a purveyor of lies, whose aim it is to feed us on chimeras, or on truths so twisted and distorted that we are hard put to it to disentangle fact from fiction" (in Spragens 34).
succumb to a world of conflict, both Classical and Enlightenment\(^\text{16}\) rationalists conclude that human emotion and its accompanying prejudices, traditions, and superstitions interfere with our rational capacity to apprehend the good. To draw on the language of Plato, to arrive at true knowledge, logos must dominate thymos (desire); or, in the words of the seventeenth century, reason must subordinate the emotions that the will may act wisely.\(^\text{17}\) But while the Platonic division of human nature into reason and passion represents a distinct departure from the mythos tradition,\(^\text{18}\) the concept of the will is presupposed by the dominant Christian theology of seventeenth-century rationalists.\(^\text{19}\) So we uncover a second contradiction in liberal rationalist thought—that reasoning must begin by doubting all one knows, by clearing the slate so that knowledge can be written anew. As point of fact, although they claim freedom from theological tyranny, Enlightenment rationalists incorporate Christian assumptions, particularly the concept of the will, throughout their vision of liberal reason.

In fact, the founders of modernity were not “theologically lukewarm or even agnostic—let alone atheist” (Toulmin \textit{Cosmopolis} 20) but saw in their work a “pious purpose” (21).\(^\text{20}\) The assertion that their methods were perfect and pure simply allowed them to speak in “the idiom of certainty” (70)—the idiom required for truth claims by the “theological dogmatists” (70), as well as necessary to the stability the rationalists desired. So, rather than abandon Christian theology concerning the will, Descartes and his fellow rationalists incorporate it into their model of reasoning.

\(^\text{16}\) Toulmin notes that “all the protagonists of modern philosophy promoted theory, devalued practice, and insisted equally on the need to find foundations for knowledge that were clear, distinct, and certain” (\textit{Cosmopolis} 70).\(^\text{17}\) Descartes argues that anyone who “desires to investigate the truth of things . . . should alone consider . . . how best to augment the natural light of reason . . . in order that his understanding may guide his will in the choices he has to make on all the various issues by which he is faced throughout his life” (“\textit{Rules}” 2).\(^\text{18}\) In Homer, thymos is contrasted with arete (virtue) rather than with logos, as in Plato. Thymos is “self as a kind of energy” that “carries [one] forward” (Maclntyre \textit{Justice} 16), while arete is a cosmological necessity of one’s role which guides one in overcoming thymos. As both are prior to reason, their relationship is means/ends, rather than reason giving (19). What to do is known “independently of their reasoning” (19).\(^\text{19}\) Free will is a primary doctrine of Augustinian Catholicism which has carried over through many subsequent revisions of Christian doctrine, both Catholic and Protestant.\(^\text{20}\) These thinkers were optimistic that reason would “disclose” the certainty and stability of God’s law in nature. Locke, for one, depicted the law of nature as “the decree of the divine will discernible by the light of nature and indicating what is and what is not in conformity with rational nature” (\textit{Essays} 111).
Descartes follows the example of Augustine, who, confronted with the problem of evil, maintains that the voluntary nature of grace makes evil a necessary alternative to righteousness. Augustine wished to explain why, given that humanity is a perfect, divine creation, we sometimes fail to do what we know is best to do. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle explain such failure as an "imperfection in that particular person's knowledge at that particular time . . . or by some imperfection in the education and disciplining of the passions" (MacIntyre Justice 156). But, given the perfection of divine creation, God could not have created humanity already bearing the mark of sin—not only is our reason perfect, so are our passions. The possibility of sin must therefore lie elsewhere. To meet this end, God gave us free will, "the capacity to behave as moral agents" (Bordo 79), making "the will alone . . . responsible for sin" (79). Thus, Augustine holds that, by light of his perfect reason, an individual with no defect in his passions may know what is best, but may not act accordingly because his will misdirects him.

As Augustine explains, Adam, directing his will, his "freedom to choose between good and evil." toward "love of self rather than of God . . . impaired his freedom to choose good" (MacIntyre Justice 157). The will is thereby "systematically misdirected . . . in such a way that it is not within its own power to redirect itself" (157). Thus the individual can attain grace, that is, the freedom to choose good, only by subordinating the will to divine law (157). But as free will is itself a divine gift to God's perfect creation, subordination must be voluntary—for to suggest that God can deny free will is to engage in a contradiction. 21 Reason is not the source but the result of this choice—a gift from the mind of God in the form of divine law. So while Plato and Aristotle maintain that reason is "independently motivating." Augustine holds that reason must be "moved to activity by will" (156). Although under rationalism the locus of reason will shift from the authority of sacred texts to nature read by reason, this metaphysical freedom provides the foundations of political liberalism, the autonomous self. 22

Descartes parallels Augustine's argument to deal with errors in reasoning—our reason, modeled on the mind of God, is perfect; error belongs to the will. Error ceases to

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21 The voluntary nature of the will is exemplified in the Latin for will, voluntas.
22 The first principle of Cartesian rationalism, cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), clearly expresses this fundamental presupposition of intellectual autonomy.
be equated with a failure of passion or reason as the will comes into being as a faculty subject to either reason or passion—a crucial distinction being that emotion acts upon us while the will is ours to use—for good or evil, for truth or error. Intellectual error is thus a misuse of the will as applied to understanding (Bordo 79) rather than a failure of reason itself. In this way, judgment is distinguished as an act of will independent of reason (79): that is, while reason leads us to understanding, the will determines how we act upon our understanding. In place of the belief that the will must be brought under submission prior to reason comes to rest the belief that reason can master desire so that the will may resist temptation. The certainty and stability of reason become the virtues of the rational self by which the autonomous self may be directed to righteousness and truth.

Yet despite theological underpinnings, seventeenth-century rationalists saw the church and political authorities, cultural mythos, as primary sources of intellectual error. As they saw it, nature rather than ancient textual authority provides certain evidence of God’s law: nature exemplifies God’s logos. Unlike the truths of books which are written in obscure language, they maintained, the truths of nature are simple, self-evident, and easily accessible to the natural capacities of the mind—should one but use the right method. By these lights, made in the image of God, each individual possesses agency to become her own authority as “the power of distinguishing the true and the false...what is called good sense, or reason, is by nature equal in all” (Descartes Discourse 5). Even peasants could become “better judges of the truth about the world than philosophers are now” (Letters 6). In brief, the assumption of rational equality subverted the sovereignty of traditional authorities, paving the way for both epistemological and political liberty.

To be sure, in light of the religious wars of the era, these thinkers discerned that “the church and the political establishment...had a vested interest in thwarting unfettered rational inquiry” (Spragens 26). The church hierarchy, “devoted to the

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23 Contemporary philosopher Drew Hyland argues that, beginning with Descartes, the will comes to be “considered superior to and more fundamental than reason, and so human nature comes to be increasingly characterized...as fundamentally irrational rather than rational” (8). While liberalism reflects Hyland’s position, rationalism privileges reason. So while I agree that the will is privileged in the assumption that the many are less rational than the few. I hold that the optimistic view of reason—what Hyland calls the “stance of mastery” (3)—culminates in an ambivalent view of human nature.

24 While many texts were still printed in Latin and Greek, Enlightenment rationalists were equally suspicious of texts in their native idioms, claiming that the imprecision of language distorts truth.
preservation of faith . . . and their own social privileges" (26). was compelled to indict as impious all attempts to sever the ties between theology and rational inquiry. The political establishment, driven likewise to uphold the status quo and, with it, privilege and rank, was “threatened by the subversive possibilities of unfettered critical reason” (27). Under these conditions, autonomy, like equality, both a “political situation as well as an epistemological precondition” (81), served as a foundation for the notion of liberty. Freedom of mind and political freedom came to be synonymous: “man would never truly be free ‘until the last king had been strangled with the entrails of the last priest’” (27).

In sum, Enlightenment rationalists both adapted and rejected church doctrine and political authority in carrying out the project of liberal reason. They adapted the doctrine of free will to support political freedom. They embraced the theological necessity of certainty and stability but looked to nature rather than books for evidence of divine law.25 thereby undermining traditional authority by declaring individuals equal. They nonetheless argued that true belief is certain and stable, in a word, rational. In short, while rationalists declare individuals free to determine their own good, their own telos, they insist upon a vision of the Good, a rational human telos to which all must supply their allegiance. Their point hinges upon their understanding of practice. Simply put, they believed that through correct practice, i.e., rational method applied to inquiry, free people must eventually come to agreement. In their minds, freedom of thought would lead to correct thought; disagreement and conflict would cease. As a consequence, their insistence on rational method undercuts the very liberty they hope to attain for all.

Method and the Rational Self

The idea that inquiry can proceed methodically and self-consciously was by no means new to Enlightenment thinkers: “the real difficulty was . . . what those methods were” (Spragens 41). Having found the semantic trickery of the medieval Scholastics26

25 While Descartes, distrusting the senses, looks to the mind alone as the mirror of God’s perfect order, the rational empiricists which follow him “rehabilitate” the senses (Spragens 39), arguing that the senses convey “primary qualities” of material things which, being themselves “simple” and “clear,” correspond to simple and clear ideas (41).

26 A mix of “religious doctrine, study of the Church fathers . . . Aristotle . . . and to some extent . . . Plato” (Blackburn 342). Scholasticism relied on “a highly specialized form of Latin” (Bizzell and Hirschberg 465) to attain a logical formality which led “in some cases . . . to the point of sterility (Spragens 41).
specious and Aristotelianism suited only to a “stable, finite Greek cosmos” (41). Enlightenment rationalists sought a new source of first principles that would stand the test of infinite time. To arrive at these principles would require new “reliable procedural guides for inquiry” (41). As words deceive, a new “language” was needed to represent thought directly. So, as nature exemplifies God’s perfect plan, and as the “Book of Nature is written in mathematical symbols” (Galileo in Toulmin Cosmopolis 74), mathematics and geometry come to be viewed as the perfect model of the precision, clarity, and certainty needed for knowledge and language.27 One need only divide subjects “into as many parts as possible” in order to “commence with objects the simplest and easiest to know” then move “step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex” (Descartes Discourse 18)—each new truth serving as “a rule available in the discovery of subsequent ones” (19).

So reducing the process of reasoning to a linear calculus, this model of rationality assumes that all individuals in all circumstances essentially think alike. The argument is simple: since humanity is part of the divine plan, mental operations are subject to natural law; thus they, too, are analogous to mathematics. All I need do to convince someone else of my conclusions is to take her through my chains of reasoning much as I would take her through a mathematical formula. In a nutshell, by explicitly testing my deductions against the natural mirror of another’s mind, I may examine my knowledge for absolute certainty. Cognitive process and human motivation are thus seen as stable and permanent: knowledge as “a conceptual ordering of the thinking mind” (Crowley 5)—“sequential . . . accurately inscribed in memory.” and reproducible “upon demand” (12). Paradoxically, the rational self thus comes to be seen as a part of nature and above nature, possessed of the ability to intuit inalienable truths, to reduce complex problems to intuitive principles, and to methodically reason conclusions from them, thus gaining mastery over both nature and our material selves.

Ultimately this paradox culminates in a distinction between Mind and Body. “between the rational freedom of moral or intellectual decision in the human world, and the causal necessity of mechanical processes in the natural world of physical

27 Liebniz, among others, had faith that a language could be created to attain the exactitude of mathematics.
phenomena”—which was to become “common sense” for the next 100, 150, or 200 years” (Toulmin Cosmopolis 107). Along this line, “physical phenomena and natural processes [are] material . . . mechanical, repetitive, and predictable, effects of causes” (108), contrasted to the “mental or spontaneous outcomes” of human reason, which are “performed willingly and creatively” and “are active and productive” (108). While the body may be material and so, causally affected, the mind is non-material, possessed of a capacity to control both the body and material effects on the body. Extended beyond interpretation, influence, change, or redirection of human events, human agency ceases to be power to, becoming power over events both in nature and in society.

According to philosopher Susan Bordo, this distinction between acting subject (the human mind) and passive object (material bodies, including our own), this “self-consciousness,” is analogous to childhood movement from an egocentric state in which “events occurring in the self” are not distinguished from “events occurring in the world” (46) to one in which the juxtaposition of self and world is “distinct, firm, and stable” (46). Reason becomes a function of the individual’s internal world, detached from human contexts. So removed from material need and attendant emotions, the rational mind comes to be regarded as the solution to material causality. Knowledge, now a product of individual deliberative action rather than a response to and reckoning from causal experience, can effect only positive change upon the world—as calculation from known “facts” enables mastery and control of that which was previously causal and beyond human control. Such reasoning follows Aristotle’s linear model: as to know is to apprehend the true order of things, to act upon what one knows is to do the right thing. As to do the right thing is in one’s self-interest as well as that of others, should one know only enough to act in self-interest, one’s actions will nonetheless serve humanity. Knowledge comes to be equated with progress—each “discovery” serving to expand our control of material forces. At bottom, if liberalism assures each individual freedom to serve self-interest, the individual’s inherent rationality coupled with the inherent rationality of that

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28 Bordo draws on developmental psychologist Jean Piaget.
29 Nuclear fission well illustrates the problem of this construct—producing a seemingly infinite energy supply along with problems of waste disposal, nuclear stalemate, possible nuclear annihilation or meltdown.
which is known, i.e. nature, assure that self-interest will be enlightened, unerringly precise, and practically efficient; so, in the interest of all (Spragens 88).

From this view, knowledge is not regarded as the result of cultural interplay, but as awaiting discovery, within nature and within the individual human mind. This vision of rationality thus abandons the chaotic, public world in favor of a world of personal vision and concrete, testable scientific truths. Banished are relational modes of thinking which account for time, place, and the needs and claims of diverse individuals. What is left is a vision of reason which "conflates moral reflection with scientific knowledge" (Young 4) and mistakes claims for "theorems to be demonstrated in a self-enclosed system" rather than pleas, claims upon some people by others" (5). In sum, Enlightenment rationalists, like Plato before them.

read questions about the soundness or validity of "arguments" as referring not to public utterances before particular audiences, but to written chains of statements whose validity rested on their internal relations . . . [They] thus set aside all questions about argumentation—among particular people in specific situations, dealing with concrete cases, where varied things were at stake—in favor of proofs that could be set down in writing, and judged as written. (Toulmin Cosmopolis 31)

Looked at this way, the Enlightenment project, like the Platonic dialogues, not only represents a move from mythos to logos, but a narrowing of logos which makes it increasingly calculative. Logos having once meant words, stories, and arguments, comes to mean linear, calculative proofs, with the consequence that "Plato's libel against rhetoric" is so successfully reinstated "that the colloquial use of the word rhetoric has been deprecatory ever since" ("Recovery" 339). Rhetoric is once again equated with selfish, political machinations. Paradoxically, however, this abstract, linear, and individualistic rationality is grounded in deeply contextual political motives.

**Rationalism and Politics**

Above everything else, Enlightenment rationalists believed the new method of scientific inquiry to be applicable to all humanity is capable of knowing. Anything to which it cannot apply comes to be seen as outside the scope of human knowledge.
residing in the "kingdom of darkness" (Spragens 45). The choice was clear: "absolute certainty or epistemological chaos" (Bordo 17): either apply this method to the "moral sciences" or plunge humanity into absolute relativism. To the rationalists' way of thinking, just as method would allow humanity to understand nature, it would fortunately "unveil the good" (Spragens 69). Science, including the study of society, "would possess both the intuitive certitude of Aristotelian sophia and the practical force of Aristotelian phronesis" (55)—and so it came about that practical rationality passed from the domain of rhetoric to the domain of systematicity. Henceforth, "the enlightened individual could be expected to discern his self-interest with careful reference to a felicific calculus and to behave accordingly" (6). Simply, reason would enlighten the wills of diverse autonomous individuals that they may choose the best course without sacrificing essential liberty.

On this account, much of the Enlightenment project in philosophy, like the Classical, is an attempt to identify and articulate the ideal political order, a political telos. called by Steven Toulmin the cosmopolis, "a comprehensive account of the world" which can "bind things together in 'politico-theological,' as much as in scientific or explanatory terms" (Cosmopolis 128). Prior to 1640, political philosophy examined the operations of actual cities or states—what has worked, what has not worked, what can be done differently. After 1640, under the influence of rationalism, political theory increasingly comes to be "handled in abstract general terms, with the individual citizen or subject taken as the unit of analysis . . . the problem became to explain the political loyalty of the individual to the State" (77). In a stark move away from the Aristotelian tradition, the natural state of humanity comes to be identified as "apart from civil society" (Spragens 102), a condition prior to prejudices, superstitions, and traditions. Rationalists come to believe that by logically calculating from this imagined ideal state, human governance, while not attaining the status of a physis, could nonetheless rise above nomos by modeling the physis, the perfect plan of divine cosmology. In sum, "they hoped to illuminate Nature as it had been conceived in the classical tradition, with its teleological order, by

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9 Variations in the "state of nature" thesis show sharp distinctions. Locke envisions harmony and tranquility: Hobbes envisions a life which is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (76); Rousseau objects to both—to avoid "import[ing] into [nature] ideas gathered in . . . society" (214). He imagines humanity in the natural state as devoid of both reason and egoism (Spragens 103).

10 While both Plato and Enlightenment rationalists rely on the notion of a perfect cosmos, in Plato, the cosmos is purely metaphysical, while for Descartes and other rationalists, it is nature itself.
using the beacon light of new methods (71). Political stability could now be assured because loyalty was no longer a matter of fickle emotional bonds but of unfailing rational adherence to the *themis* represented, on the one hand, by nature; on the other, by a method which emulates the order of nature. In a significant way, modern rationalism thus represents a triumph of Platonic epistemology. Henceforth, the tradition of practical reasoning initiated by the Sophists, accommodated by Aristotle, and continued by the Renaissance humanists is pushed to the margins of intellectual thought.12

The upshot is that scientific discourse comes to be interpreted as dispassionate, value-neutral exposition—the inverse of the passionate, subjective persuasion of rhetoric. Ethics comes to be considered integral to the scientific process: written text is reduced to a mere site of empirical demonstration and logical proof, the truths of which are presumed clear to any rational person. Consequently, to obtain this appearance of neutrality, objectivity, and detachment from personal concerns and prejudices, the various studies of human society—sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology, and particularly, economics—emulate the calculative methodologies and rhetorical style of the physical sciences. Rigorous method, preferably quantifiable, is applied to ensure detachment, clarity, and exactitude: people, as well as natural resources, become units of analysis dissociated from the particularities of daily existence. In sum, since the truthful results of method are thought to precede their delivery in text, the text is itself thought neutral and objective: ethical and contextual considerations are pushed aside as calculative results are thought to “speak for themselves.”13

But again, we are bound in a paradox. For while rationalism, like liberalism, is grounded in a calculative or “distributive” paradigm which treats all goods as though they are commodities in the marketplace, rationalism also claims to transcend mere

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12 Aristotle’s accommodation is reflected in his distinction between *sophia* and *phronesis*—he “treated questions about the conditions on which, and the circumstances in which, arguments carry conviction as ones that philosophers can address with a clear conscience” (Toulmin Cosmopolis 31), noting that ethics is not “a universal or abstract science” nor “for theoretical analysis,” but for practical wisdom (76). Toulmin also sees “the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely” as “long-standing preoccupations” of Renaissance humanists (Cosmopolis 30), who saw rhetoric and logic as “complementary disciplines” (27).

13 Donald Macedo maintains that “blind belief in objectivity not only provides pseudoscientists with a safe haven from which they can attempt to prevent the emergence of countercodes that interrogate ‘the hegemony of positivism and empiricism’ but also generates a form of folk theory concerning objectivity believed only by nonscientists” (“Foreword” xxii cf. Brodkey “Designated” 8).
effectiveness by arriving at the correct and appropriate calculation, operating from first principles known by “insight” and “self-evidence.” truths recognizable “by everyone of sound mind who understood the terms in which they were stated and . . . had not been subverted by false doctrine” (MacIntyre Justice 223).

In the first instance, modern rationalism appears to ally with justice as effectiveness in the midst of competition—any notion of human telos appears abandoned to power and control. Distributive justice is governed by legal rather than moral constraints as the “effective” individuals who win the competition exercise their power to minimize regulation. And, as the “rational” methods of the market obscure the real contexts of people and resources, profit and/or economic growth serve as primary measures of effectiveness. Meanwhile, corrective justice is punitive rather than corrective, again a matter of only measurable social costs and benefits. Although such measures may tell part of the story, offenders are sentenced with little regard for circumstances, needs, sometimes even humanity, as retribution supplants prevention and/or rehabilitation. Moral considerations aside, the measurable costs in terms of recidivism which may stem from an excessively punitive approach, as well as the measurable benefits which may stem from a rehabilitative approach, are often overlooked. Such a view of rational justice “is simply too abstract to be useful in evaluating actual institutions and practices” (Young 4), lacking “substantive premises about social life” (4).

In the second instance, rationalism claims alliance with justice as excellence, paradoxically evoking the determinate self and so negating the autonomy which circumscribes both the liberal and rational self-concepts. Simply, if humanity is, on one hand, subject to material, mechanical nature but, on the other hand, above nature due to the causal ability of human reason, it seems to follow that, as in nature, the abilities of some creatures must be greater than those of others. Some individuals, “by attaining scientific truth,” must be capable of freeing themselves “from the grasp of deterministic nature that swallows the unenlightened” (Spragens 106). Such men emerge to become our

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54 The effects of this punitive approach to justice is reflected in minimum sentencing laws which have led to overcrowded prisons where minor drug offenders make up large populations; in zero-tolerance policies which have led to school suspensions of elementary students for such minor infractions as kissing a classmate, threatening to “kill” someone on the playground, or creating a cartoon character with a marijuana leaf on his t-shirt; and in subjection of juveniles to the adult criminal justice system—in one case sentencing a fourteen-year-old boy to life in prison.
rational leaders, offering infallible solutions to human problems in clear language to the natural, though inferior, reason of all individuals everywhere. Society comes to be divided in two—those whose scientific truths allow them to escape nature and those who do not possess these truths (107). The former, what Thomas Spragens calls “human subjects,” rise above contingency and partiality: rather than “being radically determined beings . . . they are radically self-determining” (108). The latter, “human objects,” are “artifacts . . . characterized by their immanence, their passivity, their manipulability, their bondage, their ‘drivenness’—in a word, by their blind determination by outside forces” (107). The former possess not only agency, in the sense of volition, but mastery. The latter possess only minimal volition subject to forces beyond their control.

By this means, social hierarchy comes to be read as part of the divine plan as demonstrated in nature, where “the actions of ‘lower’ things depended on, and were subordinate to, oversight and command by ‘higher’ creatures, and ultimately the Creator” (Toulmin Cosmopolis 128). Paradoxically, then, the very rationalism which underwrites political autonomy was once used to uphold the sovereignty of kings—the solar system serving as a model for government. With the monarch at the center of the political cosmology, each successive social stratum was understood to revolve around that next closest to the “sun”—“what God is to nature and the King is to the state, a Husband is to his Wife, and Father to his Family” (127). This “orbital” (133) relationship between classes and status—what Spragens calls “moral Newtonianism” (66)—“depended on all the parties in society ‘knowing their place’ relative to the others, and knowing what reciprocal modes of behavior were appropriate and rational” (Toulmin Cosmopolis 133). As in the Aristotelian narrative, practical rationality and the virtues which attend it are no more than understanding what is required of one’s role: hence, social inequality can be dismissed with the argument that social disturbances arise from the indiscretions of irrational subjects (128)—agency run amok. Under this construct, the depth and breadth of liberty and democracy hinge on a distinction between what Bowles and Gintis call “choosers” and “learners.” Liberty “is held to apply to rational agents (choosers) but not to others (learners), and the norms of democracy are held to apply to the actions of choosers in the public realm alone” (17). In fact, belief in a rational social order extends beyond the European nation-states to serve as justification for colonialism, slavery, and limited
suffrage, as well as gender and racial discrimination, giving “discriminatory practices a new respectability” (134). Once again at issue are power and control.

So it appears that rational liberalism is something of a contradiction in terms. Being equal, we are free to determine our own telos. but should we prove rational, we will inevitably acknowledge the true, singular, and unitary telos recognized by all who rightly apply their reason. Should we fail to recognize this telos, we are simply not rational and are therefore incapable of sovereignty over ourselves. At any rate, the apparent contradiction in rational liberalism’s dual allegiance to excellence and liberal effectiveness is no blunder of logic but is embodied in an assumption which underwrites both liberalism and rationalism—the state of nature.

Rationalism and Market Assumptions

As I have pointed out, liberalism assumes that in the hypothetical state of nature, humanity is in competition for scarce material resources. Of course under rationalist assumptions, nature is itself rational, hence the conditions of competition are rational. So, too, are humans, who both inhabit and are a part of nature. Again, due to our reason, human nature is essentially mental: capable of controlling material nature—of understanding natural operations and resources, of using (even exploiting) them, of manipulating the order of nature for our gain. It seems to follow that the most rational humans are those who obtain the greatest amount of material resources. By virtue of their rationality, they are, in fact, entitled to these resources: resources belong to them, they are property. In a nutshell, based on the hypothetical competitive state of nature, rational liberalism assumes property rights to be as fundamental as life and liberty.35

This reliance on the state of nature thesis and its inherent assumption of property rights has had two notable consequences. One. “liberals came to assert not only that economics was the most useful form of knowledge for the individual in his pursuit of happiness, but that it also provided the necessary prescriptions for handling the common affairs of society” (Wolin Politics 302). Two. even as the equality assumption challenged

35 Noting the linguistic connection between “propriety” and “property,” as well as the analogous connection between “property” and goods—in French, biens; in German, gut; in Spanish, bienes—Dietze points out that “property rights are generally considered the oldest of human rights” (48)—reflected in Roman law, common law, Locke’s philosophy, the U.S. Constitution, Napoleonic Code, and Germany’s Civil Code.
monarchy, the world continued to be divided in two—rational agents, "choosers." measured by good fortune; and semi-rational, even non-rational or irrational, agents, "learners." measured by lack of fortune. Simply, power comes to be viewed as rightly falling to men of property, as "those who have something to lose would act more rationally and responsibly than poor firebrands . . . homo economicus thinks rationally" (Dietze 231).

The first consequence, discussed in Chapter Two, is the foundation upon which liberalism has reduced politics to marketplace power. The logic is again linear: rational conquest of nature leads to productivity, productivity reduces human misery, therefore, industriousness and productivity are the rational virtues of the liberal individual. As human nature is thus assumed to be grounded in economic activity, rational liberalism assumes that the surest of the human "sciences" must be economics. Here in particular it is not "the causal tangle of motives or feelings behind real human choices" which are of concern, but "the rational choices of 'ideal' producers or consumers, investors or policymakers" (Toulmin Cosmopolis 125). Economic patterns are taken as a part of the natural order, accorded a rationality of their own: all that is needed to maintain constant economic progress is greater understanding of the "natural" laws of artificial markets. As personal distribution is affected by the same rational system which profits public industry, "what's good for GM is good for America"—or so the argument goes. In the guise of science, politics becomes "prudence in the service of homo economicus—the solitary seeker of material happiness and bodily security" (Barber Strong 20).

It bears repeating that, according to this line of thought, to follow these economic laws should be to attain material success. Again, the reasoning is linear: rationality applied to human effort results in productivity: productivity culminates in property: therefore, a rational government exists to protect property. So operating on the premise of rational self-interest—if I respect the property of others, they will respect mine—virtue, which once directed humanity toward the public interest, is replaced by productivity and acquisitiveness. The public good is served only incidentally as my rational ability to anticipate threats to my private interests reveals to me that only mutual cooperation and respect for the private interests of others can protect my own. As wealth thus comes to be
seen as material evidence of enlightened self-interest, it likewise is seen as material
evidence of rational superiority.

But if all humans are equal, should not our equal reason culminate in equal
material prosperity? Not so, as we are also equal in passion. Following this line of
thought, the ills that beset some individuals and, through them, society, must be due to
emotions carrying them away; these folks must lack some quality, some virtue, which
enables reason. In the interest of the community, therefore, the political, ethical realm
must be ruled by a few objective “experts,” individuals whose superiority in “knowledge,
will, and power” (Spragens 108) affords them “omniscience,” “detachment,” and the
“god-like” potential for creating social harmony (109). Such individuals are men of the
public, while the majority are consigned to their own private realms so as not to unduly
influence policy. Liberty is ensured by narrowing the public space, by excluding most
activities of most individuals from public consideration. Democracy is (at least minimally)
ensured by the right to choose from among these competing experts. In fact, to ensure that
the property rights of these public “experts” are not threatened by irrational, propertyless
private citizens, the founders of United States democracy found it necessary to
institutionalize democracy to check the excesses of liberalism, establish “rational”
procedures for government, and protect the rational, propertied elite from the irrationality
of excess democracy that results from fully enfranchising the unpropertied. The means by
which this process was initiated is the United States Constitution.

Rationalism and Constitutional Democracy

While under despotic governments, liberal or not, citizenship is little more than a
description of one’s legal inhabitance. Democratic citizenship is “a set of practices . . . that
involve public action as much as private rights” (Euben, et. al. 3): it is a “civic identity”
(Elshtain 30) built upon “public actions” (38); without the public sphere, “no politics can
exist, by definition” (40). To ensure liberty, the public sphere must be narrow and clearly
distinguished from individual’s private lives; but to ensure democracy, the public sphere
must be broad enough to address private social concerns. Hence, the defining problem of
liberal democracy is to balance the tension between democracy and liberty, between the
public, “those spheres of social life over which the twin norms of liberty and democracy
may be rightly held to apply": and the private, “those spheres over which only conditions of liberty may be rightly held to apply” (Bowles and Gintis 66). The problem, simply, is that too much democracy can interfere with individual liberty—a majority may tyrannize a minority. Some artifice, some “mechanical contrivance,” is thus needed to “provide creative outlet for the moral, communal, and altruistic components of human nature while establishing procedural safeguards to prevent the selfish and domineering tendencies in man from producing tyranny or anarchy” (Spragens 90).

The fundamental mechanism which establishes the necessary public/private distinction is the Constitution, designed to check the conflict that arises from moral and cultural pluralism by *institutionalizing* democratic practices. Having rejected both metaphysics and natural aristocracy as proper foundations for government, constitutional theorists evaded “questions of who should rule and how they should rule, by inventing the question of *what* should rule” (Wolin “Norm” 46). They lay down the Constitution as a *themis*, an objective, universal form grounded upon rationally “self-evident” premises—the *telos* of which is to ensure optimal liberty in the private arena while alienating citizens from real public power which can only, so our founders feared, result in mob tyranny. Simply put, the Constitution was regarded as a means to deal with the “surplus democracy” (47) which ensues when the morally and culturally heterogeneous masses are enfranchised. According to political theorist Sheldon Wolin, its purpose is to specify “a set of integrated conditions for the production of power” (36) by which democracy, which is “informal, indifferent to formalities . . . wayward, inchoate, unable to rule yet unwilling to be ruled” and “inherently formless” (50), is forced to conform or be considered “misinformed” (49). This move allows democracy to be discussed as a “theoretical object” (49)—stuff, in Iris Young’s terminology—which possesses “a distinctive character, structure, order, and boundaries, a mode of ruling” (Wolin “Norm” 49) which constrain it to serve “‘ends’ distinctive to that form” (34). In this case, a primary end was to limit the capacity of the “irrational,” “driven,” unpropertied mob to interfere in the “rational” economic practices and institutions of the propertied few.

Indeed, as propertied men, the framers of the Constitution found it imperative to limit the power of institutions which govern distributive practices. As “all political forms are prone to favor some group” (51), constitutional democracy thus favors “the social
groups and classes represented by the "best men"—defined by their economic and cultural influence. In this vein, Alexander Hamilton argued that the "habits of life" among the "mechanics and manufacturers" (Federalist 166), i.e. the unpropertied, "have not been such as to give them those acquired endowments" (167) needed for deliberation in the assembly; hence representation of all classes is "visionary" (167). In accord, James Madison argued that "a well constructed Union" is largely defined by its ability to "break and control the violence of faction" (Federalist 42). Something pure democracy cannot do because it has no rational form by which to check "this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities" (44)—particularly those brought on by "various and unequal distribution of property" (44). In sum, because liberalism defines freedom in terms of socio-economic power rather than socio-political agency, and because rationalism assumes that the irrational, propertyless majority will abuse power, democracy serves as a narrow mechanism of public control rather than a way of life, pacification (even passivation) of the irrational mob through the right of suffrage. Liberal democracy is thus thin democracy. It is not "a synthesis of "liberal" and democratic" ideas and practices" but is in origin and today "essentially liberal" (Pateman 5).

With this in mind. Ellen Meiksins Wood argues that because liberal democracy leaves only "formal" rather than "substantive" democracy, it does not stand for "the exercise of political power but its relinquishment, its transfer to others, its alienation" (62). Even Aristotle, she points out, saw "election as an oligarchic feature" (62) of "mixed" constitutions as it accedes power to an elite few. Thus, Wood claims, by evading "the one literal democratic feature of Athenian democracy, its extension of citizenship to laboring, 'base,' and 'mechanic' classes," invoking instead the "liberal values of Classical Athens," the framers of the Constitution redefined democracy to

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56 Jefferson, for one, made the somewhat more democratic assumption that the vast land availability would enable most citizens to become property owners, thus enfranchised. However, claiming this land meant displacing Native Americans. Meanwhile, even free blacks were denied property rights.

57 The former is elected representation while the latter "refer[s] not only to political procedures and institutions but also to their social context, the distribution of class power within society" (61).

58 While the 15th and 19th amendments prohibit race and sex discrimination, the Constitution does not guarantee universal suffrage, leaving jurisdiction to the states. The Supreme Court ruling in Bush v. Gore and that which denied Washington, DC citizens national representation reaffirm that the people do not have a federal constitutional right to vote—violating the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (Raskin 10).
coincide "not with popular power but with the values of liberalism" (66). Taking their lead from European feudalism, where democracy came not from elevating propertyless commoners but from liberating propertied lords from the claims of monarchy, these democrats "took it for granted that a propertied minority would stand for the population as a whole" (68). Liberal democracy "accepted class division, and built on ... the assumptions of capitalist market society and the laws of classical political economy" (MacPherson 24) to liberalize, i.e. privatize, economic institutions under the guise of rational motives.

So, as market capitalism is a liberal ideology grounded upon rationalist assumptions and fear of large government, corporations ultimately come to be "defined as persons separated from their owners." private entities entitled to "all the rights of citizenship under the Bill of Rights and the Fourteenth Amendment" (Lowi 5). Paradoxically, due to beliefs about "the sanctity of property and the binding morality of contract" (5), corporations also come to be defined as private property. In fact, operating on the assumption that our nation would be comprised of scores of agricultural property owners, this model further assumes that "property" represents an independent means of production. However, by its very nature capitalist industrialization shifts ownership of the means of production into a few hands. For the majority, property, and the power which attends it, have thus come to mean only that which you can purchase with wages. Within the workplace most individuals thus have little agency—save whether or not to abide by company policy—substantial agency reserved for those who own the means of production. Likewise, outside the confines of the "private" workplace, most individuals possess little socio-political agency, while corporate entities, being both private person and private property, are doubly protected from the reach of democracy. At bottom, "the most powerful form of collective organization in contemporary capitalism—the modern business corporation—is stripped of its communal status" (Bowles and Gintis 16), operating at the hands of, and to serve, a privileged few. That is, because the institutions in place to determine and uphold the rules of production and competition—i.e. the

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39 Though the Constitution may have its flaws, I do not advocate fundamental changes in the institution itself or those mandated by it. I do, however, advocate a shift in our interpretive practices based upon a shift in our view of what is good—from a determinate, teleological, and thus, passive, paradigm to a negotiable, active paradigm.
Constitution and the interpretive bodies of the legislature and judiciary—severely limit governmental jurisdiction over the economic realm, little force governs the practices which most affect people's lives. No wonder that students argue that "politics" is irrelevant.

But if both material goods and the goods of public esteem are external goods, then the power to rule, to make economic, military, social, and cultural decisions for a nation is likewise an external good. With this in mind, distributive justice ought to apply not only to material resources but also to the distribution of executive, legislative, and judicial powers, privileges, and influence. But in fact, constitutional federalism is intended by design to limit these goods to an elite few who then control material distribution as well. Reduced to an institution rather than a way of life, democracy is thus limited to effective administration of the narrow public sphere. Moreover, when the elements of collective life it is supposed to administer are rendered private (labor practices or research, for example), the results may not be to the public good. In short, claims that our government embodies "self-evident" ideals which constitute humanity's greatest excellence rest upon an ideological document the purposes of which are to limit democracy, preserve a status quo which discriminates between the propertied and unpropertied, and forward the worldview of the elite. The emphasis of such rhetoric is not on equality but on the rights of equality. These rights include the "natural" right of the best to rule. Justice is indeed what the powerful say it is.

In fact, the imposition of form to limit democracy in the service of economic interests goes well beyond government into the workplace, schools, and even social and family life. Evidence lies in the "hierarchical system of authority: centralization of decision making: division of labor and specialization... and increasing reliance on expert knowledge" (Wolin "Norm" 36), which characterize labor, education, social, and family policies, in government as well as in the "private" economic sphere. These characteristics

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40 One example which came to light following the September 11th attack is the poor training, low wages, and high turnover rate among airport security personnel. A 2000 General Accounting Office report notes that this "last line of defense against a terrorist" bears an annual turnover rate of 400 percent at some airports. Seven prior reports issued since 1987 concur. Maintaining high profits has been persistently cited to justify this practice—with government approval (Cocco. "Airport "Security").
of modern administration severely constrain the agency of students to become meaning-making subjects in academics, the workplace, and culture at large.

But embedded within the rationale for economic privatization and deregulation is a fundamental error regarding institutions—"that power and control are properties of [only] the state" (Lowi 16). In fact, given the "indispensable assumption of democratic theory" that a given social sphere is public "if its operation involves the socially consequential exercise of power" (66), the very existence in the private sphere of administrative mechanisms—which by definition provide rules and so "rule"—makes clear that power and control are not only properties of government but of private institutions as well (Lowi 31). Indeed, Bowles and Gintis identify "three types of socially consequential power" conferred upon capital: 1) command over production, 2) command over investment, and 3) influence over state economic policy (67). According to their reading of liberal democratic theory, the assignment of economic concerns to the "private" is illegitimate: corporations "do" politics and are thus rightfully public. As currently drawn, the public/private split simply "makes power invisible in the economy" (66). Under such conditions, it is not the convergence of liberty and democracy (as I have argued, they conflict as much as converge) nor the actuality of democracy which ensure the loyalty of subjects to the state, but the ideas of liberty and democracy. And this is where the university steps in.

The University and National Ethos

Just as any teleologically-driven society possesses an image of ideal authority figure, every form of government requires an image of the ideal citizen—a citizen who acts and, presumably, thinks in ways which demonstrate the values of and loyalty to the state. A tyrannical government requires a fearful and submissive citizen. Monarchy, liberal or otherwise, requires a reverent and obedient citizen. Just what democracy requires depends on its depth and breadth. A direct, majoritarian democracy requires an informed, cooperative citizen, capable of making the kinds of decisions that constitute

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41 According to Bowles and Gintis, "an exercise of power ... causes others to act in ways they otherwise would not, yet goes beyond the mere protection of one's negative liberties" (66) and a "socially consequential action ... substantively affects the lives of others, and the character of which reflects the will and interests of the actor" (66).
rule, while a representative democracy requires a citizen sufficiently loyal to state values and sufficiently informed to transfer rule to individuals thought better qualified to make such decisions within the parameters of these shared values. As I have discussed, the ideal citizen constructed by rational liberalism is both autonomous and unerringly calculative of self-interest—free to define excellence on her own terms and excellent in pursuing the satisfaction of material needs and desires—under rationalist assumptions, to the benefit of both self and community. But as rationalism assumes that such an ideal is attainable only by an elite few, some means must be devised by which to gain the loyal cooperation of the masses. Either an alternative image of the citizen must be constructed for emulation by the masses—a citizen willing to transfer power to an elite who knows her place in the order of things—or the masses must be persuaded to embrace a national narrative in which the common citizen may rise among the elite. It is my contention that the American narrative accomplishes the former by means of the latter.

This issue of citizenship ties the emergence of the modern university to the rise of the nation-state. In the first place, the rational, liberated individual will subject herself to governance only if governance proceeds from values she shares—as political revolution persistently demonstrates. As liberalism assumes a significant degree of pluralism (else liberalism would be superfluous), the values of the state cannot adapt to the individual. The individual must therefore be adapted to the state. must become "the bearer of a meaning that is only accessible as part of a collectivity," enunciated as a "subjective 'we,'" as in the phrase "we, the people" (Readings 46). This adaptation has been, in part, the responsibility of public schooling. It has also been taken by some to be the central mission of humanities and literacy education through post-secondary schooling.

In the second place, while freedom from government intrusion and protection from the whims of others serve as mechanisms to ensure loyal cooperation, these mechanisms ultimately prove insufficient given that they particularly ensure economic liberty and protection. That is, should persons of power and wealth employ their liberty and advantage to exploit the less fortunate for greater power and wealth (and I argue that they have), the resulting imbalance of power risks dissatisfaction among the masses, so threatening subject loyalty to the state. Hence, an additional mechanism is necessary to ensure loyalty. some sort of shared belief system which serves to rationalize such inequity
to the satisfaction of the narrowly enfranchised citizen. Certainly, given the underlying liberal assumption of equality. Americans are more than unlikely to embrace a ruling elite. Therefore, a narrative is required which places each citizen, potentially at least, among this elite. Toward these ends, ideology, that is *national* ideology, embodied in the notion of culture, comes to be viewed as a legitimate mission of the university.

In a nutshell, what was needed was some means “to imbue the student’s imagination with what it was to be . . . American” (Aronowitz 5). Of course, given that *Americans* have no common history and that our philosophical tradition is drawn from international sources, our history, our *story*, must be the story of *America*, an idealized narrative of place “whose terms define [our] identity,” even if it “tells a story of diversity” (Barber *Aristocracy* 40). Lacking the bond of religion as well as the bond of common ancestry, “for America the problem was one of finding a surrogate for religion—a secular bond . . . conceived of as a civil religion” (43). The premises of this religion are familiar to anyone educated in U.S. schools. Our story is “unparalleled in human history” due to “liberty’s achievements . . . progress and the victory of aspiration over history” (45). Even negative narratives, which emphasize the hegemony of the few over the many, tell a “unique story whose chief player is liberty and whose chief antagonist is the past, history itself” (45). The story is simple: America is the land of opportunity where everyone is free and equal to overcome the limitations of the[ir] past and pursue happiness (read “property”). In this vein, the history of Western civilization comes to be a story of human progress toward its culmination in United States democracy while the earmarks of liberal capitalism—industry, acquisition, consumption, and political dominance—take on a moral force which, it is claimed, underwrites democracy.

Against this background, English and, ultimately, American literature come to be seen as a fitting means to teach the values embodied in this story. Based on a presupposition that the ideals of Greece and Rome were “inherently bound up with the grammar and etymology of the languages in which [Classical] works were written” (Graff 29), literature in the English vernacular likewise comes to be considered “essentially national” (29). Hence, “many members of the founding generation” of English Studies saw literacy education as a means to foster “between the social classes, the cultivation of larger sympathies,” the instillation of national pride and the transmission of moral
values" (12). Moreover, because it is embodied in a heritage which "throws off the shackles of tradition through revolution" (Readings 84), the American literary tradition makes the canon "appear to be the object of democratic choice rather than the sheer burden of heredity" (12). Yet "real" America certainly has not lived up to this narrative, either within or outside her borders. In the first place, the "everyone" to whom liberty and equality apply has not always included women, immigrants, even those who are legal, and minorities. In many ways, for many, it still doesn't—a plight which is arguably reflected in the canon debate. In the second place, in the name of political and economic interests, both the U.S. government and economic entities have sometimes turned a blind eye when liberty and equality are denied to those outside our borders—at times, advertently or inadvertently, even contributing to undemocratic regimes.  

In fact, although the American narrative has always been contested and although the view of literature as a moral instrument has not been universal within or without English Studies, both the belief in a national literature and the belief that English Studies were founded for this mission, have come to take on the proportions of myth. It is upon this myth that moral-traditionalists establish their arguments for preservation of the canon as well as their arguments against counter-traditionalist theory and practice. Likewise upon this myth, counter-traditionalists denounce the canon as an artificial and discriminatory emblem of national ethos, rejecting the claim of a unifying American

42 A recent example is the U.S. gift of $43 million to the Taliban for banning opium in May 2001 (Scheer 1). Another example is the U.S. tax-supported School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia. Founded in 1946—originally in Panama—the School of the Americas was established "to bring stability to Latin America" (Bourgeois and Panetta 1), by training Latin American soldiers. SOA graduates include dictators such as Manuel Noriega of Panama and General Hugo Banzer of Bolivia, as well as death squad leaders Roberto D'Aubuisson from El Salvador, and Col. Julio Alpirez of Guatemala (1). The Defense department admitted in 1996 that "for years training manuals used at the School of the Americas had advocated executions, torture, blackmail, and the use of truth serum" (1). As a result, "the SOA has produced some of the most notorious human rights abusers in our hemisphere," including "those responsible for the rape and murder of 4 U.S. Church women; the assassination of Archbishop Romero; the execution of 6 Jesuit priests, a co-worker and her daughter; and the massacre of more than 900 civilians at El Mozote, El Salvador" (Panetta and Seraglio 5). In addition, "human rights reports have detailed the role of the Pentagon, the SOA, and U.S. corporations in propping up an unjust socio-economic structure in Latin America" (Bourgeois and Panetta 5). The School of the Americas continues to operate.

43 Gerald Graff points out that arguments for establishing literature as a discipline with a moralistic and nationalistic focus were met with strong resistance, particularly from research scholars in philology, whose loyalties lay less with their national traditions than with their professional research fields" (72).

44 S. Miller credits F.R. Leavis and his followers with "entrench[ing] social gains for English . . . by giving "English" a past, the "great tradition" whose recognition allowed them to claim that native belles lettres has a history parallel to ancient counterparts" (21).
vision and calling for a new canon inclusive of the viewpoints of minorities and women. In a nutshell, on both right and left, the myth that English Studies came into existence to impart a national ethos has become institutionalized. The former see themselves as guardians of this institution, while the latter hope to deconstruct, if not reconstruct, this institution. In either case, the discipline of literature has become analogous to a museum—"a linear map of a particular account of a history of art, offering a unified account of linear development and a generalized system of classification" (Readings 73). The contemporary conflict surrounding and within English Studies is often no more than an argument over which roads will be drawn on this map. Rarely is it considered that the American, much less the human, narrative resists linear mapping. Typically, it is thus the proportions and details of this myth that are contested rather than the myth itself.

The first consequence is that the practices embodied in the myth (those which uphold the desired ethos), rather than actual human practices in real contexts, become the focus of literacy education: practices themselves become institutions. Texts and the qualities of texts, come to be studied as passive objects that embody static universal truths, rather than the creations and idiosyncrasies of living subjects in response to specific cultural circumstances. Under the traditionalist model, literary criticism takes on "the task of combining the Hebraic rigor of religious 'light' with the Hellenic grace of poetic sweetness, uniting knowledge and meaning in what Matthew Arnold calls a 'national glow'" (Readings 78). Under the alternative or multicultural model, literary criticism often takes on the task of problematizing, deconstructing, or even rewriting the myth, often imparting a moral "glow" to alternative narratives and readings. In either case, criticism becomes "textual exegesis" of the "truths" embodied in the text rather than "ethical commentary" (Green 277) on the places and circumstances toward which the author addressed his work. In this way, a work of literature, what was mind—a human response to circumstance which can never be fully understood or explained—becomes body—a static and eternal institution, a canon or museum, which imparts so-called universal truth to those able to see.

Under the moral-traditionalist construct in particular, the canon, as material body, is thus accorded the unity and order of a singular entity with the result that difference and conflict within are elided. Aristotle tends to be taught as though his work simply
progresses from, or builds upon, the work of Plato, as Thoreau progresses from Jefferson—when in fact these authors conflict and contradict in myriad ways. By such assessments, the truth of Louise Gluck's "A woman's body is a grave: it will accept anything" is as universal as the truth of Walt Whitman's "This is the female form. A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot"—but do they not conflict? This assumption that the literary tradition is unified and cumulative, which is indeed traditional, accepted, and prevailing at least through secondary education, teaches that the history of knowledge is paradoxically both progressive and static—that expression of unchanging truths is movement toward a telos beneficial to all humanity.

Indeed, to attain the alleged "lost organic unity" (Readings 80) of the grand American narrative, an author's resistance must be eclipsed by readings which more favorably align him with the desired grand narrative. As an example, the struggle of Walt Whitman as a gay man in a hostile culture is not only pushed aside as irrelevant to understanding his work, it is just the sort of thing moral-traditionalists condemn as serving a "political agenda." Alternately, efforts to use his struggle and reflection to assist students in coming to grips with contemporary hostility towards gays and lesbians is condemned as "therapeutic" rather than "educational." To achieve this so-called "apolitical" and "educational" aim, homosexual references in Whitman's work have been avoided or reinterpreted. As an example, the furtive and lonely eroticism of what is now known as Whitman's "Live Oak, with Moss" series can be avoided by treating them out of sequence, so recontextualizing them in ways which diminish the homoerotic content.

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45 This notion of knowledge as cumulative progress is illustrated by Alisdair MacIntyre's claim that Aristotle is a "completion" and "correction" of Plato as well as his claim that "the importance of other subsequent moral and political philosophy will then turn on whether they do or do not impugn, vindicate, or correct and supplement Aristotle's answers to Plato's questions" (Justice 85).

46 Though the individual poems are well-known, "Live Oak, with Moss" was discovered to be a twelve poem sequence only 40 plus years ago. Fredson Bowers uncovered the sequence when working with the Valentine Collection of Walt Whitman manuscripts now owned by the University of Virginia. Following the roman numerals in Whitman's hand-written leaves, Bowers pieced together the sequence and published it in Studies in Bibliography in 1953. In 1955, Bowers again published the poems in his Whitman's Manuscripts: "Leaves of Grass" (1860): A Parallel Text. However, because his purpose "was to allow readers to study previously unpublished . . . manuscript poems against those first printed in . . . 1860," Bowers printed them parallel to the way they appear the "Calamus" sequence in "Leaves of Grass" rather than in the sequence in which Whitman originally envisioned them (Parker 3). The poems were not again published in original sequence until 1994 when Hershel Parker included them in the first volume of the 4th Edition of the Norton Anthology of American Literature (4).
In this way, the very identity of the “bard of Manhattan” may be left in the closet and Whitman declared among the most “American” voices. Ironically, as this sequence of poems reveals, Whitman “repudiates his ambitions as the poet who had struck up ‘the songs of the New World’” (Parker 2 cf. “Long” 478), asking “bards of ages hence” (2 cf. “Recorders” 102)48 to remember him “not as one who ‘prophesied the States,’ but as a lover” (2). “Who ever as he sauntered the streets, curved with his arm the manly shoulder of his friend—while the curving arm of his friend rested upon him also” (2). Yet just as in erstwhile readings of Plato, in an attempt to avoid political content, eros becomes Platonic friendship—sexless arrangement the terminology for which is often applied to a relationship between a man and woman. However, understanding of homosexual relationships in Greece is critical to understanding how social mores influenced Classical thought: not the least of which is Plato’s view of reason. Does not the same apply to Whitman?

What then are we to make of this icon of American genius and virtue, when the story that emerges is that of a man whose life represents such a grave struggle against the “universal” values moral-traditionalists claim characterize our “national glow”? What do we make of the canonization of Whitman’s work, when moral-traditionalists cite openly gay/lesbian scholars, as well as research into gay/lesbian experience and influence, as examples of academic unworthiness and poor scholarship? What message do we deliver to young people suffering their own struggles, when not even Whitman’s can be voiced? What knowledge do we gain when a primary means by which Whitman knew the world is erased from his body of thought?

At the same time, counter-traditionalists err when they reject the canon as just so much imperialist dogma. To do so is to forget that Shakespeare played to the people, that Homer traveled among the people, that great poets, thinkers, and leaders, indeed, some of them white, male, and privileged, have risen from the people. Such rejection is also paradoxical—for it can only be grounded in the moral-traditionalist assumption that the canon is unified. If anything, the Euro-western canon is certainly marked by controversy

47 Whitman himself seems to have realized that the “sequence revealed too much” (Helms in Parker 3), for he never published the poems in sequence, instead revising them and “shuffling” them into the “forty-five poem ‘Calamus’ cluster” (Parker 3).

48 Parker cites the original manuscript, unavailable to me, which reads “bards” rather than “recorders.”
and debate, even hostility. Moreover, to attribute some sort of organic unity to the voices of the disenfranchised is simply to supplant one set of universal claims for another. Likewise, to attribute some form of guileless integrity to the disenfranchised is to negate the integrity of canonized authors just as it is to deny the guile of those on the margins.

Meanwhile, language practices are also regarded as progressive yet static. Each newly canonized author “develops” the form, creates new usages in both vocabulary and structure, yet somehow upholds the formal standards of what we call literature. Followed to extremes, this theory suggests Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Bring me wine, but wine which never grew in the belly of a grape” somehow exemplifies the same formal beauty as e.e. cummings*
—else one does not belong in the canon. And while Homer, Plato, and Aristotle did not write in English, they too are part of the American story and Classic examples of eternal beauty. Likewise, translations of these authors are thought to uphold standards of both content and form, although translators convey the meanings, vocabularies, and structures of each in radically different ways—else there would be no call for further translation.

So materially objectified, literature becomes an object of consumption, rather than creation. Literacy education becomes the study of, rather than creation of texts: authors become "others" and the uses to which students envision putting their writing becomes merely instrumental. At best, this creates literary critics rather than authors: at worst, it creates non-writers, non-makers of meaning. Moreover, given that a traditional mission of literary study is cultivation of "taste"—somehow a moral, as well as aesthetic, quality—a distinction emerges between "high" and "low" language uses. Literary writing is "high," an unattainable model of perfection available for students to consume for spiritual nourishment and set apart from utilitarian purposes. Literary knowledge is positioned "as its own end, against the mechanical specter of technology" (Readings 75), which is seen to fragment knowledge by means of "mechanical specializations" (81) serving utilitarian ends. Meanwhile, despite obscure criteria for merit, not all fiction or poetry is "high." Popular fiction is "low," considered "trash" or "propaganda," little more than an "exercise in consciousness-raising, trashy sentimentality and elevated sentiment" (A. Bloom 64). The notion of canonizing cowboy poetry or cyberpunk is appalling—regardless of the substantive insight or creativity of form they demonstrate. By such standards, entire groups of "meaning makers" are excluded as illegitimate.

Moreover, the kind of functional language students will employ in their future as workers is "low," subject to instrumental standards determined by the task toward which it is put. The language students bring with them to the classroom is similarly "low." In need of remediation, the language that colors their identities is thought to demonstrate, in the best light, intellectual and moral underdevelopment; in the worst light, intellectual and moral incapacity. Moreover, as the language spoken in the university best resembles the language of the propertied elite, children of affluence and privilege arrive on campus

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[9] Thus, compositionists are characterized as the "sad woman in the basement" (S. Miller 121)—the underpaid, overworked grammarian whose purpose is purely utilitarian.
advantaged while the insights of less-privileged majority are silenced by disapproval of
and/or embarrassment about their mode of self-expression. Such distinctions and the
discriminations which result from them are behind the NCTE's "The Student's Right to
Her Own Language."

The second consequence is that, when treated as material body, as non-living stuff,
the canon becomes essentially dead, a corpus, a corpse. Attempts to write into the history
of America previously overlooked perspectives of women, slaves, Native Americans, and
other oppressed people are called "revisionist" and condemned. Literature which resists
the accepted narrative and shatters formal standards is shunned by canon-makers
(whichever they might be). As a matter of fact, to my knowledge, Louise Gluck is not yet
universally canonized—likely in part because images such as the above, which shatter the
romantic notion of woman's body as the well of life, violate some "moral" perspective by
"politicizing" what it means to be a woman. The student who hates Moby Dick—long,
often dull, archaic in vocabulary and structure, and told from a perspective difficult at
least for many women—must be persuaded of the greatness of the book or accept her own
aesthetic and spiritual inadequacy. Such a student may have merit if she sufficiently
appreciates Jane Austen, but not if she prefers Barbara Cartland or William Gibson.

Literary study is thus reduced, at least in theory, to historical study, lessons from the past.
hyper-extended metaphors which "visionary" individuals created to illuminate today and
all our tomorrows. Literature is no longer stories intended to make you turn the page, to
laugh or cry out loud, or invite you to adventures of your own. To present literature to
students this way is analogous to telling the young trumpet player that when he becomes
more sophisticated he will like Miles Davis (more likely, Handel) better than Aerosmith—in
fact, he may be embarrassed that he ever liked Aerosmith. According to such
thinking, music ought to become for him an object of thought and mimicry rather than an
experience, a moment in which to dance, sing, or play.

Contemporary romance novelist.
Contemporary science fiction author credited with founding the cyberpunk genre.
 Conversely, the counter-traditionalist may be prone to argue that as sophistication develops the student
will like Aerosmith better than Miles, or even Beethoven, and appreciate Menchu even more than
"patriarchal and hegemonic" dead white men.
Meanwhile, under the moral-traditionalist construct, Composition Studies is reduced to attempts at emulation of "historic" and "standard" forms, content provided by canonized "experts" in their respective fields. Teaching formal standards in such a way is analogous to telling the young trumpeter that when he becomes more sophisticated, he will just play like Miles—style, structure, and message will belong to another. But if that is the goal, from where will come new voices which redefine our standards?

At any rate, students won't accept this line. Seeing the vast diversity and variation in "canonized" texts, when told not to use dialect or slang, they are bound to ask, "Why can't I, when Mark Twain did?" Noting the fragmented sentences and dangling prepositions which contribute to force to many great works, they are bound to see grammatical rigor as an oppressive imposition rather than a flexible tool of communication and creation. Meanwhile, to reduce composition to the reporting of "expert" opinion is like telling the young musician that he can never "speak" like Miles: in fact, he can never speak at all, only parrot another's meaning. So what's the point of writing? Our reply—that they must compose well in future occupations, that to climb the ladder of success they must express themselves as "educated" persons. Following this line of thought, we do not invite them to use their language to question the terms of their occupation nor the measures of success and standards which define "educated," that is, to independently determine whether the practices of their industry or the institutions in which these practices are housed are truly excellent. In the realm of industry, they must emulate "high" writing to prove their worth, but use it for the "low" purposes to which their occupations constrain them: they must emulate excellence for pragmatic effectiveness—typically defined as "the bottom line." Their public language becomes a mere instrument of their industry as they become instruments of the industry of others. Writing, and writers, become mere tools by which to exploit commercial opportunity.

At the same time, keeping alive the myth of opportunity for ourselves as well, we paradoxically teach them that writing is a means self-expression, equated with self-determination. We thus encourage students to see themselves as "choosers" (Bowles and Gintis 17)—rational agents who possess socially consequential power or at least empowerment—rather than "learners" (17). But given the purposes to which their writing generally is put, this self-image of "chooser" is likely little more than illusion. In the first
place. by arguing that the messages delivered through our models of expressive writing are somehow universal, we imbue these authors with a "greatness of soul" that makes students' insight and need for expression trivial and petty by contrast. Against such a background, students come to not expect their expressive writing to be public—at least until they "rise above themselves" to attain that elusive virtue of universality. Hence, the student often ceases to envision herself as someone who knows something worthy of public expression. Expressive writing becomes private writing, at best directed to a slim audience of loved ones or teacher.

In the second place, as self-expression is interpreted in terms of liberal values, students often fail to understand that "expression" means "expression to" someone—with paradoxical results. What the author feels becomes more important than what the audience needs for understanding and empathy. Misunderstanding becomes an audience deficiency and guidance from peers and/or teachers becomes impossible. Yet emphasis on authorial expression rather than relationship with audience may also reinforce the notion that personal readings of the canon which vary from prevailing scholarship reflect their deficiency. The self-expressing student is thus at once master of her own texts—which may be neither excellent nor effective—and mastered by the texts of self-expressing others—often presented as excellent in ways yet beyond her comprehension.

In these ways, we have made the practices of writing just that—practice. They practice and practice and practice, but they rarely really write. As students, they revise and re-edit over and over again toward the goal of pleasing the teacher and/or achieving higher grades, rather than to strengthen their arguments, to re-examine their assumptions, to negotiate with a living audience. The teacher-student relationship thus embodies an artificial audience of one—artificial because this audience does not read as a peer, but as an evaluator, a judge not only of the argument but also of its form. To please such an audience, students must approximate the privileged discourse of academics: they must know, that is, what English teachers know (Bartholomae 140)—which of course they do not. In composition theorist David Bartholomae's words, students are thus forced to "invent the university" in their own minds. A common consequence is stilted, unnatural prose, filled with almost comical errors and twists of phrase committed as "imitation and parody" (143) of what they believe to sound "high-minded."
Once they leave academics, most merely apply writing to instrumental practices, routine documentation and correspondence within administrative systems that render public writing private. That is, writing which may be publicly consequential, typically workplace or occupational writing, becomes a neutral technē, "a technique of information processing" (T. Miller 59), rather than a praxis, a "doing," a social action upon something. Meanwhile, expressive writing is left to the private realm—personal correspondence or a private exercise of emotional purging—most individuals having abandoned the unreachable goal of getting it "right." Hence, "real" praxis is confined to superior others—the intellectual elite. Writing is not embraced in the sense of the jazz term "play," as in "Man, that cat can play. He's a real player," as a public act which reaches toward an audience in hope of carrying them to new places, nor is it embraced as a "socially consequential exercise of power" by which citizens may participate in and extend democracy. In short, when subjected to an education which makes such distinctions between high and low usages, students come to believe that writing may be literary and expressive and thus the public practice only of an elite, or it may be instrumental and routine, aimed only at institutional effectiveness; should the teacher propose to make writing social and political, she is stepping out of line.

Unfortunately, by helping to transform our students into passively determinate selves who believe themselves self-determined due to narratives of opportunity and free expression, English Studies has come to serve the very commercial forces which threaten our alleged mission. Students have been reduced to consumers of the "American story," a story they are, on the one hand, expected to place themselves within, but on the other hand, not expected to create. Merging the concepts of liberty and equality, this story tells us that not only are individuals equal, but that the playing field is equal as well. All things being equal, then, we are utterly self-determined: all things out of our control stem from our deficiencies. While clearly flawed, this principle of individual agency commands loyalty for, without it, no individual could attain socially consequential power, or preferably, agency or empowerment.

In fact, both denial and acceptance of the equality assumption (with its attendant myths of opportunity and merit) lead to a narrowing of the public sphere—denial by claiming the public realm for those few whose truths allegedly allow them to rise above
personal concerns: acceptance by perpetuating the notion that lack of personal agency stems from allowing private concerns to intrude on public judgment. In this scenario, equating power with economic gain, students often confuse “having” and “choosing.” Meanwhile, as moral-traditionalists and counter-traditionalists battle over the right to indoctrinate students, the university each desires is being dismantled from within by an increasingly corporate paradigm which feeds on public conflation of “having” and “choosing.” That is, bolstered by American narratives of opportunity and merit, corporate interests which threaten the intellectual independence of the university have taken advantage of internal disciplinary debates to discredit both traditional and critical views and locate their values in the rift we have created. In short, in the midst of disagreement, by establishing our grounds upon the same collective myth, we work together to construct passive and fragmented student subjects ideally suited to the administrative hierarchies of the transnational corporations which increasingly exploit them. As my mother says, “When you point the finger at someone, there are three fingers pointing back at you.”

The Fragmented Self

There is nothing so stupid as an educated man.
if you get off the thing that he was educated in.
—Will Rogers

Thus far I have distinguished two rival epistemological traditions in the Euro-western world—the rationalist or philosophical and the Sophistic or rhetorical—tracing the rise to dominance of the rationalist tradition and connecting this tradition with liberal political theory. From this I have argued that rational liberalism has culminated in the intellectual conditions to which counter-traditionalists react and respond—conditions which are clearly more liberal than rational and which limit the primary benefits of democracy to an elite, allegedly more rational, few—ultimately resulting in a diminishment of individual agency and an attendant alienation of the average citizen from self-governance. With regard to English Studies, I have argued that our discipline has been complicit in the success of this project by promoting a national mythology which facilitates in our students an erroneous identification with an economic, cultural, and
political elite which enjoys minimally checked liberty at the expense of common citizens, as well as by encouraging our students to assimilate unproblematically to rhetorical standards and practices which may suppress conflict and injustice.

Indeed, the elite which benefits from this state of affairs—exemplified by transnational corporations (which often hold great sway over governmental policy)—literally abandoning the physical boundaries which comprise nations have likewise abandoned the ethical boundaries marked out by these nations. No longer loyal to national interests, the transnational corporation requires a different subject, a subject with shallow, manipulable loyalty to the state and, if not loyal to the company, at least self-interested enough to maintain the bottom line. This self-construct forcefully draws on liberal and rational assumptions to produce a subject which is, at bottom, largely determinate in significant ways. This fragmented self is defined not as a participating citizen but as a professional, client, and consumer (Gorzelsky 307 cf. Habermas).

As a professional, the fragmented self possesses a “disciplinarily grounded authority” (308) which proves Janus-faced. From one view, her profession provides both economic security and a sense of personal authority which facilitates her identification with the elite. From the other view, her “authority to make judgments is confined to a narrowly defined vocational sphere” (308) which limits her ability to question the determinations of others. Rather than possessing full authority for, as well as full knowledge of, the outcomes of her industry, she provides, and is aware of, but a fragment of the whole, discernment of which is limited to the few who possess ultimate power for judgment and decision-making. So mistaking economic security and disciplinarily grounded authority for socially consequential power, the fragmented self is doubly pacified (even passivized) as she congratulates herself for being both economically and authoritatively higher in the pecking order than her less-educated subordinates. Yet confined to her narrow realm, she is nonetheless determined by the demands of her occupation and industry—demands which she is under-equipped to examine and which often result in fundamentally undemocratic consequences both within the workplace and within the greater society. In short, her self-image as a member of the professional elite serves not only to undermine her admission to the power elite, but also to reinforce her perception that elite power is justified.
Meanwhile, as a client of other professionals, the fragmented self is "subject to their direction" (Gorzelsky 308) due to the perceived limitations of her expertise. Composition theorist Gwen Gorzelsky offers by way of example the top-down authority which characterizes medical encounters. In one particular example, Gorzelsky cites the top-down authority of a managed-care plan to deny recommended cancer treatment in the effort to save money (313 cf. Kolker). In both contrast and correspondence, she further cites the use of controversial, "expensive, toxic procedures" for cancer treatment by which "for-profit health care exploits a desperate patient market" (313 cf. Linden). While the latter example may at first blush seem to justify the authority of the former, both instances illustrate the ways in which "authority as a top-down channel . . . not only offends clients' dignity but also infringes on their rights to participate in decisions that affect their lives" (308). Likewise, top-down authority may prevent co-workers in disparate disciplines from participating in decisions which may affect not only their lives but the public good. In the meantime, the fragmented self is subject to the top-down authority of government agencies little accountable to the demos. As her interest in government is predominantly limited to personal benefits and advantages, the fragmented self can here be said to be a client, rather than citizen, of government.

Finally, it bears repeating that the fragmented self as consumer is pacified by material comfort through its erroneous identification with social agency. Moreover, in the United States, this fragmented individual is a proud consumer of the very myths which associate liberalism, capitalism, and calculative rationalism with "American" moral pride. Associating U.S. material dominance—from which she benefits and with which she complies—with the values of democracy and equality, the fragmented American feverishly defends the former as the latter.

Thus, the fragmented self is economically liberal. She believes that a minimally regulated market produces global material benefits, that competition culminates in human progress. She equates material comfort with social agency, even consequential power, and she perceives global economic dominance as moral dominance. Possessing rational

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52 A conversational analysis by Ellen Barton further demonstrates that while "asymmetries [of power] between medical professionals and patients/families span all classes" (Gorzelsky 314), "those without cultural capital . . . seem to be systematically constructed into adversarial relationships" (Barton 431).
agency only in limited spheres, she believes in opportunity and merit, equates her professionalism with (at least potential) membership in a rational power elite, and perceives her authority over subordinates, i.e. workplace inequality, as well as material and social inequality, justified in light of her rational self-determination. Thus by a cultural paradigm she herself accepts, the fragmented self is unwittingly transmogrified into a self determined by the demands of the market.

Hers is a circular reasoning culminating in a self-enclosed system of ethics in which ethics is reduced to balancing what she thinks is good for her against what you think is good for you. Her dominance over you is merely evidence of the rightness of her dominance. Even when motivated by seemingly non-individualistic ethics, this individual engages in a cost-benefit analysis in which the expense of her altruism is measured, not against the benefits conferred upon others but toward the goodwill or spiritual reward reflected back upon the giver. Even notions of a greater morality come to be reduced to a profession of faith guaranteeing a place in the afterlife. Taken to its extreme, so long as these individualistic circles of ethical reasoning (which begin and end at oneself) do not intersect, ethics are indeed irrelevant. The fragmented self thus harbors no concept of ethical responsibility to the non-human living world which sustains her. And, in fact, this non-ethic is often taken to just such an extreme—as our water, air, even our stratosphere, are perpetually poisoned to meet the needs of the individual or collective "me."
Meanwhile, the individual's sense of duty is satisfied so long as she behaves as expected, so long as she believes herself to possess the virtues which manage the human foundation which supports this status quo.

In the following chapter, I will employ the Platonic cardinal virtues as an analogy to present constructs of virtue which define the fragmented self. I will argue, by means of association with the virtue sophrosyne, that these virtues impose upon the masses the marks of the determinate self, a construct which is at odds with the myths of opportunity and merit which uphold our national ethos. I will then examine the ways in which sophrosyne works within the Culture War to undermine the efforts of counter-traditionalists toward a more democratic society. From there, I will discuss an alternative way to envision rationality and sophrosyne, theorized from the fragments of Protagoras, which holds promise for reconnecting the individual to the collective needs of democratic
society, as well as for empowering the individual toward socially consequential action within and without the workplace.
Chapter Four
Autonomy, Excellence, and Democratic Virtue

Successful and fortunate crime is called virtue.
—Seneca

If ignorance and passion are the foes of popular morality, it must be confessed that moral indifference is the malady of the cultivated classes. The modern separation of enlightenment and virtue, of thought and conscience, of the intellectual aristocracy from the honest and common crowd is the greatest danger that can threaten liberty.
—Henri Frederic Amiel

Men of most renowned virtue have sometimes by transgressing most truly kept the law.
—John Milton

All government—indeed, every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and prudent act—is founded on compromise and barter.
—Edmund Burke

Good company and good discourse are the very sinews of virtue.
—Izaak Walton

Confirm thy soul with self-control, thy liberty in law!
—Katherine Lee Bates “America the Beautiful”

To this point I have engaged in a rather harsh critique of the dominant Euro-western paradigm of knowledge which culminates in rational liberalism, pointing out disparities in both theory and application, including certain unsettling implications for rhetorical practice and incentive to civic virtue. Now at issue is whether aspects of this tradition can be recuperated, whether a theory can be developed which takes what is best from this history while also benefiting from the more neglected tradition which has long stood beside it.

Let me point out, in keeping with my focus on democracy as the supreme practice of rhetoric, that my purpose is to explore rhetorical virtues—those which apply to communicative actions in the public arena, in short, the virtues of democratic deliberation. Let me also point out that, unlike ancient Athenians, contemporary Westerners seem to
agree that virtue may be taught, in fact, that it must be taught. Despite this difference, Classical perspectives may shed light on present concerns, for Athenians, like ourselves, grappled with the need to balance autonomy, democracy, and political stability. With this in mind, I will draw an analogy between the Platonic cardinal virtues and the rhetoric of the Culture War to illustrate ways in which implicit cultural constructions of virtue presently hinder individual agency in ways which diminish democracy. From there I will offer a neo-Protagorean reconstruction of these virtues which holds promise for enabling individual agency to reinvigorate democracy.

These virtues—justice, wisdom, sophrosyne, and courage—are notable because each may be defined as the virtue of a rhetor. Of interest concerning justice is its bearing on the right of deliberative participation; concerning wisdom is its formulation as a complex marriage of knowledge and deliberative skill. Of foremost interest is sophrosyne, self-knowledge/self-restraint, as each of the others may be said to embody this virtue. Hence, of interest with regard to courage is the tension between self-restraint and "the capacity to risk harm or danger to oneself" (MacIntyre Virtue 192). That is, a citizen must judge when to express bold, unpopular positions (courage), when to refrain (sophrosyne), or when to "hold her tongue" in face of pressure (courage as sophrosyne).

Sophrosyne

To begin, let me define sophrosyne personally. "Jorgensen" is a Norwegian name. In my "Iowegian" culture, men are measured by the size of their garages, tools, and cars; women by the artistry of their "hot dishes." At gatherings, men discuss tools and cars in the garage or den, while in the kitchen women discuss children, recipes, and the taciturn stubbornness of men. Iowegians neither emote, argue, discuss religion and politics, nor air their dirty laundry. Being contrary, I prefer to sit in the den, ardently arguing religion and politics in personal terms. To those at home, I lack sophrosyne. I stand in stark contrast to the paradigmatic Norwegian who "loved his wife so much he almost told her."

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1 "Iowegian" is a regional term used to indicate Iowans of Norwegian descent. On the one hand, it declares our cultural difference from other Scandinavian groups in Iowa. On the other hand, it distinguishes us from Minnesotans. For some odd reason, this has traditionally seemed important.
Defined by classicist Helen North\(^2\) as "the harmonious product of intense passion under perfect control" (x), the concept of *sophrosyne* is somewhat slippery, having evolved to reflect the ethos of successive generations. Literally "soundness of mind," *sophrosyne* has been associated with "doing one's own work," that is, not meddling in the affairs of others (156), as well as a variety of more public behaviors. Among the earliest associations of *sophrosyne* is with *aidos*, shame or respect (5)—a narrow view but which, in the Christian era, takes on the sense of humility. The first formal definition comes from Antiphon who gave greatest importance to its function as control of the passions (86), a "rule and conquest of self" (70) which reflects on one's reputation (88) and serves personal advantage (90).\(^4\)

The first suggestion that *sophrosyne* bears rhetorical import is perhaps attributable to Gorgias. Defining *sophrosyne* as the ability to achieve fine things, Gorgias associates it with *kairos*, defining this as the opportune time to achieve what one desires. Simply, it is *sophron* to act when advantageous. Gorgias also points out that the heroes possessed *sophrosyne*, associating it with *to prepon*, due measure, right proportion, or fitness to the occasion (North 92-95). Turning from the individual toward the *polis*, Isocrates\(^5\) more directly adapts *kairos* and *to prepon* to rhetoric, again relating them to *sophrosyne* which he further associates with *phronesis*. Because *phronesis* is the wisdom to manage practical situations, the practitioner of *phronesis* must employ both *to prepon* and *kairos*, acting in the right season, the right time, or the critical moment. For Isocrates, stimulation of *sophrosyne* is the primary task of the educator (142-149).

Plato connects *sophrosyne* with justice by naming both among the cardinal virtues required for rule and assimilation to God. He, too, associates *kairos* with *sophrosyne*. *Kairos* underlies Plato's definition of virtue as a mean (Kinneavy "Neglected" 82), rendering *sophrosyne* as moderate behavior and rational, orderly thought. Relatedly, Aristotle evokes *sophrosyne* in his discussion of *to prepon*, calling upon the orator to emote proportionately to the subject matter and to distinguish between "opportune or inopportune usage" (*kairos*) (Rhetoric 1408a30-1408b1). His preference for linear, logical...

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\(^2\) I am in debt throughout to North’s *Sophrosyne: Self-knowledge and Self-restraint in Greek Literature*.

\(^3\) See Homer *Odyssey* 4.158-60 (in North 5).

\(^4\) Sophist, fifth-century BCE.

\(^5\) Orator and educator, 436-338 BCE, sometimes listed among the Sophists.
argument also embodies *sophrosyne*, discernible in his theory of *taxis* or “arrangement.” But as Aristotle relates all moral virtues to pleasure and pain, the physical import of *sophrosyne* dominates the intellectual. *Sophrosyne*’s “specific function is to find the Mean with respect to *hedonae* (pleasure)” (North 201), in particular food, drink, and sex. As Aristotle cannot attribute moral virtue to the always contemplative Divine, he maintains that assimilation comes not from moral virtue, but from exerting one’s divine element of reason. Plotinus⁶ later reconciles *sophrosyne* with reason, suggesting that while God has no use for moral virtues, virtues purify mortals on the path to divine reason. *Sophrosyne* is consequently appropriated by Aristotelian Christianity (238).

Two contrasting interpretative patterns ultimately emerge. The first posits *sophrosyne* as a kind of knowledge; the second, as a moral virtue:

**Sophrosyne as Virtue (Arete)**

- *hagneia* – purity, chastity  
- *aidos* – modesty  
- *enkrateia* – self-control  
- *sophronikos* – disposed to temperance, moderate, under self-control  
- *eunomia* – good order  
- *hasuchia* – quietness  
- *katharotes* – cleanness, purity  
- *kosmiotes* – propriety, decorum

**Sophrosyne as Knowledge (Episteme)**

- *systasis* – “compromise”  
- *symphonia* – “agreement”  
- *taxis* – “arrangement”  
- *sophronizein* – “to bring to one’s senses, to discipline”  
- *sophronisma* – “discipline, prudent counsel”  
- *autarkeia* – self-sufficiency, independence  
- *synsophronizein* – “to join in being sane or moderate” (rare)

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⁶ Egyptian-born Roman philosopher, 205?-270 CE
Thus perhaps the richest interpretation can be traced to Plato, who joins these patterns to define *sophrosyne* as a union of *arete* and *episteme*: "knowledge of itself... knowledge of other sciences and of itself, knowledge that one knows and does not know" (North 57). The first echoes the Delphic Oracle; the second, *sophia*; the third, *phronesis*.

In *Charmides*, Plato defines *sophrosyne* as a *techne*—a distinctly human practice of acquired skills (North 158)—the purpose of which is to rescue public decisions from private interests. Moral virtue bears on knowledge in that these "skills" are social behaviors. Hence, not only does Plato see *sophrosyne* as *some* kind of knowledge, he also defines it as a *social* knowledge—one of the intellectual virtues comprising to form *phronesis*. In *Protagoras*, Plato associates *sophrosyne* with the ordering of passions, both within the individual and within the greater society, which "leads to an analysis of the parts of the soul...and permits *sophrosyne* to be defined as the harmony of these parts" (North 159). In *Gorgias*, Plato reaffirms this theory of a composite soul, subjecting the soul to his concept of nature as an ordered system. *Sophrosyne* becomes a virtue of orderliness and pleasant arrangement of the conflicting parts of the soul—a hierarchy by which the rational part of the soul "rules" the irrational. Finally, Plato posits that the individual who possesses an orderly soul has the wisdom necessary to order civil society, that is, *phronesis*. *Sophrosyne* is linked to statecraft because only he who understands and controls his passions can understand and control those of others. Simply, the *sophron* ruler can benefit the state if he "knew what he knew and what he did not know and could observe this condition in others, because every man would then do what he knew how to do and the State...would be ruled well" (158 cf. *Charmides* 172a).

Not only did the Greeks contrast their *sophrosyne* to the behaviors of rivals, they also discriminated the concept within their culture by rank, class, and gender. Examples that *sophrosyne* is an aristocratic quality abound in Greek literature. Certainly the root *sophron* carried conservative, aristocratic, or oligarchic connotations distasteful to democrats (North 102). Aristophanes, for one, links *sophrosyne* with *apragmosyne* "the gentlemanly aloofness and detachment so highly prized by Greek conservatives" (98).

While Aristotle does not confine *sophrosyne* to aristocracy, he defines it differently for rulers than for the ruled. As the soul, like the household and the state, has both "a ruling

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* A prophesying medium mythically located at the city of Delphi, the oracle's message is "know thyself."
* Athenian dramatist, 448?–380 BCE.
and a ruled element... each has its different goodness... the ruler must possess moral
virtue in its full and perfect form"; others need only "the extent required for discharge of his
or her function" (Politics 1260a). Aristotle also classifies to prepon in accord with genus,
"things like age... or woman and man or Spartan and Thessalian" and moral state, "the
principles by which someone is the kind of person he is in life" (Rhetoric 1408a24-25).
Modesty, silence (Politics 1277b17-24), and obedience to rulers, political and domestic, are
thus more characteristic of female sophrosyne than of the self-restraint needed by a
governing citizen. Likewise, the virtue of the non-citizen consists in "performing his
function": as his work is "ignoble and inimical to goodness" (1328b30), he must remain
silent in the public arena. As to age, Aristotle elaborates on Plato's notion of virtue as a
mean, arguing that old men have lost their desires, appearing sophron when no self-restraint
is needed, while youth have not yet acquired the habit (Rhetoric 1389a-1390a). Plato, too,
claims that virtue varies "according to each activity and age" (Meno 72a), again associating
this virtue with kairos and to prepon: sophrosyne is acquired in the right season; it is a virtue
of one's prime. Thus the Athenian stranger describes "the dangers inherent in giving supreme
power to the young as a neglect of due measure that leads to disorder, hubris, and injustice"
(North 191 cf. Laws 691c).

In sum, Classical moral philosophy is a "synthesis of moral quality and social
position" (Wood and Wood 143)—not only does each social class possess virtues "peculiar
and appropriate to it" (143), but the virtues necessary to rule are bound to a specific life-
situation. While Plato arguably envisions a meritocratic society, he nonetheless attributes the
ruling virtues only to those who maintain "the proper position in the social division of labor"
(145). Those whose lives are conditioned by material need, who must work for their living,
become "warped by a life of drudgery" (Wood and Wood 159);9 "their particular and sole
virtue is temperance" which "chiefly means obeying their governors" (161 cf. Republic
389d-e). By contrast, the wealthy possess the leisure to pursue the liberal education necessary
to development of the ruling virtues.10 Indeed, the liberal education Plato describes is

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9 The Greeks generally saw "banausic," i.e. manual, occupations as undignified because they suggest that one is
vulnerable due to lack of self-sufficiency. To sell one's labor or the fruits of one's non-agricultural labor
implied that one did not possess sufficient property to independently sustain the oikos, an economic family-
based organization which predates the polis as the primary economic, social, and political unit, and which
includes family members, slaves, and free servants. See Austin and Vidal-Naquet.

10 Schole, from which our word "school" is derived, can be translated as either "leisure" or "school."
"clearly an aristocratic one, unmistakably based on the traditional education received by the upper-class youths of Athens, before the "new education" of the Sophists" (148).

Not only does a privileged life-situation provide the necessary conditions for cultivation of virtue, the ruling virtues are themselves "the ethic of an urbane leisure class whose fundamental moral distinctions correspond to the contrast between aristocratic style and common vulgarity" (155). Indeed, Plato's "enumeration" of the Guardians' virtues is "little more than a catalogue of the qualities held in esteem by the aristocrats and anti-democrats of his time" (157), particularly their "form and style in living" (Ehrenberg 97 in Wood and Wood 159). Style and bearing take on the import of moral excellence as "grace and seemliness of form" (158 cf. The Republic 396c) come to be seen as outward evidence of virtue. Such an association of style with virtue is not limited to Plato but is found in numerous literary examples. In Birds, for example, Aristophanes notes Poseidon's horror toward the barbarian god who wore his coat in the wrong way (Wood and Wood 157 cf. Ehrenberg 102). Likewise, Aristotle criticizes the democratic leader, Cleon, for speaking with "his cloak girt up about him," in contrast to those who spoke in "proper dress and manner" (Wood and Wood 157 cf. Constitution of Athens 28). More significantly, Aristotle "attaches to style and bearing as essential moral qualities" (Wood and Wood 157) in the Nichomachean Ethics. For example, the "high-minded" individual, according to Aristotle, walks with a "slow gait," speaks with a "deep voice," and a "deliberate manner" (1124a14 in Wood and Wood 225). This "high-minded" individual "is justified in looking down upon others for he has the right opinion of them," while "the common run of people do so without rhyme or reason" (1124b5 in Wood and Wood 224). Similarly, the "magnificent" individual, that is, the individual who spends "suitably" on a "grand scale" in public spirit, "has the capacity to observe what is suitable and to spend large sums in good taste" (1122a35). Thus, "a poor man is unlikely to be magnificent for he does not have the means" to (1122b26) "equip a chorus or a trireme or give a feast for the city in a brilliant fashion" (1122b24). What Aristotle fails to consider is that magnanimity does not seem like much of a virtue if the magnificent individual gained her wealth by benefiting from an oppressive and exploitative system. Nor does magnanimity appear virtuous if gifts are wrapped up in strings, meet a "need" determined by top-down authority, are insufficient to alleviate need, are oriented toward the giver's posterity rather than the recipient's, or in any other way increase
the giver’s influence while diminishing the recipient’s agency. Meanwhile, Aristotle fails to consider that the poor man may be magnificent relative to his means in ways which avoid the above pitfalls.

Indeed, this association of virtue with social class pertains to the relationship between classes as well. Plato draws an analogy between harmony and the state. Envisioned as a mathematically hierarchical order, harmony comes to serve as “his basic principle of justice” (Wood and Wood 161). For the ruled, sophrosyne becomes respect for their inferior position in this order and the obedience to governors respect entails. Justice lies not in the individual, but in “the polis in which he lives” (161), a hierarchical life system avowedly modeled on divine cosmic rationality as exemplified in music.

**Justice as Sophrosyne**

The description of justice as excellence in Chapter Two may well be taken as a description of sophrosyne in the context of Platonic/Aristotelian teleology. Justice is knowing one’s place (self-knowledge) and maintaining one’s place (self-restraint). There is thus a complementary relationship between their functions: sophrosyne is to the soul what justice is to the State (North 189). In this sense they are “at the highest level . . . identical” (189)—the sophrosyne of the individual embodies the justice of the State.

Take the notion of “doing one’s own business,” which Plato offers as a definition of both sophrosyne (Charmides 161a) and justice (Republic 433a). Read in light of liberalism, this may simply mean we should keep our noses out of other people’s matters. But in light of Plato’s ascription to social hierarchy, it is more fruitfully read as “performing one’s role”—which, of course, means staying out of the business of rulers. In short, just as sophrosyne allows the rational part of the soul to deter the irrational, it allows the State to be ruled by its rational part, namely, the leisure class who, unencumbered by material need, can bracket personal interests to benefit the many. Platonic justice is thus founded upon “a hierarchical social division of labor in which each man performs the function proper to his class, and only that function, and in which the ruling class is a non-producing, non-labouring class that commands the labour of others” (Wood and Wood 156). Of course for this ruling class, “doing one’s own business” is an insufficient definition for justice, as the business entrusted to them is precisely “minding everyone else’s business” (Hyland 72).
While Aristotle draws no direct equivalence between justice and *sophrosyne*, his approach to "deliberation" nonetheless evokes such a quality. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle associates deliberation with law-making, defining it as "advice" or "counsel" (1358b5). Elsewhere he tells us that we deliberate about "things that are in our power and can be realized in action" (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1112a31); that "the slave is entirely without the faculty of deliberation"; and that "the female indeed possesses it, but without full authority" (*Politics* 1260a16). On this note, woman's authority to deliberate and to act upon her deliberation is limited to the domestic sphere, while the slave possesses only enough deliberative rationality to understand his master's commands and thus "realize" them in action. But Aristotle's arguments for exclusion do not stop at women and slaves. Distinguishing between the "parts" of the state and the "conditions" of the state, he identifies the former as the "non-labouring propertied citizens who . . . share in the good life" (Wood and Wood 232), the latter as the "labouring non-propertied farmers, artisans, tradesmen, and household slaves, who provide and maintain the material basis for the good life" (232)—enjoyed, of course, by the "parts" of the state. The cooperation of these "conditions" in maintaining the "just" social order certainly requires a class-based definition of *sophrosyne*. as does the wisdom the "parts" require for rule.

**Wisdom as Sophrosyne**

Evidence that *sophrosyne* is an intellectual as well as moral virtue lies in its affinity with three designations of wisdom—*sophia, phronesis, and krisis* (decision or judgment). As Socrates argues for the unity of virtue, a strong connection between these virtues is found in Plato, who alternately names wisdom as *sophia* (*Republic* 504a 4-6) and *phronesis* (*Laws* 631b-c). In *Protagoras*, Socrates directly equates wisdom and *sophrosyne*, presenting *sophrosyne*'s opposite, *aphrosyne* (folly), as *sophia*’s opposite. Since "to act foolishly is the opposite of acting with self-control (332b9) . . . self-control and wisdom are the same" (333b50). He also names *sophrosyne* "good sense," which characterizes it as *phronesis* and connects it with "good counsel" in pursuit of justice (333d). Hence Socrates pronounces *sophrosyne* and justice "the greatest and fairest aspect" of *phronesis* because each "concerns

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11 Much of *Protagoras* is devoted to demonstration that the virtues are not only unified but that each is a form of wisdom.
the regulation of cities and habitations” (Symposium 209a9-10). In fact, Plato maintains that aristocracy “degenerates” into less just forms of government precisely because the rulers lack *sophrosyne*. Aristocracy degenerates into timocracy.\(^\text{12}\) as “guardians” ignore the “geometry” of procreation, allowing couples to bear children “unseasonably”—resulting in a lack of “fine nature” or “fine fortune” in the offspring. Such offspring, lacking *sophrosyne*, cannot harmonize with one another, nor with their elders, and so upon coming into power “beget faction,” war, and hatred (Republic 546-547).\(^\text{13}\) From here Plato proceeds to describe further constitutional degeneration—all of which stem from a lack of *sophrosyne*,\(^\text{14}\) both in the state and in the individual. At bottom, he argues that “the democratic man lacks even the semblance of unity, and in his indulgence of the unnecessary desires his soul is prevented from attaining *sophrosyne* and *phronesis*” (North 176 cf. Republic 559b-c).

As Aristotle reduces *sophrosyne* to control of bodily appetites, he does not fully equate this virtue with wisdom. Yet from Aristotle we gain the etymology “saving *phronesis*” (Nichomachean Ethics 1140b10), indicating that while not the same, *sophrosyne* is necessary to wisdom. It is significant, then, that Aristotle most commonly names wisdom as *phronesis*. For Aristotle, *phronesis* is a process of deliberation which culminates in *krisis*, or judgment (Rhetoric 1377b21),\(^\text{15}\) “the starting point of action (*proairesis*)” (Nichomachean Ethics 1139a31),\(^\text{16}\) “deliberate choice . . . directed to an end” (1366a1). *Sophrosyne* becomes “wisdom in choosing”:\(^\text{17}\) as

choice is guided by an understanding of the relationship between conduct and desired outcomes . . . virtuous action will be guided by reason and appetite functioning in harmony or balance precisely because choice is conceived of as ‘rational desire.’ (Johnstone 3)

\(^\text{12}\) Government in which love of honor is the ruling principle.

\(^\text{13}\) Plato fails to explain just how or why such rational guardians may come to err in procreative calculation.

\(^\text{14}\) Noting that “Socrates made no distinction between *sophia* and *sophrosyne*” (Memorabilia 9.4 in North 128), Xenophon excludes both *sophia* and *phronesis* from the cardinal virtues—piety, *kallon* (“the fair,” moral and aesthetic), justice, *sophrosyne*, and courage. Naming “irrationality” as the opposite of *sophrosyne*, he thus allows *sophrosyne* to substitute for both *phronesis* and *sophia* (North 124).


\(^\text{16}\) Action is opposed to a wish, opinion, appetite, or passion—which may be held while not acted upon.

\(^\text{17}\) The early Stoics, too, considered *sophrosyne* to be wisdom “in choosing” (North 216).
Proper choice consists in "observing the mean... by reference to two vices... excess and... deficiency" (Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* 1106b36-1107a2). Moreover, as the purpose of deliberative rhetoric is action in the name of justice, under this model, moral reasoning falls within the province of rhetoric.

Indeed, by means of these definitions, Aristotle accommodates the tradition of practical reasoning initiated by the Sophists, a distinction between theoretical and moral truth not made by Plato. Thus he maintains that "mathematical works do not have moral character because they do not show deliberate choice" (*Rhetoric* 1417a19-20). He further asserts that choice, which is "very closely related to virtue," seems "a more reliable criterion for judging character than actions are" (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1111b5-6). Here choice is a particular kind of action, not only voluntary but reasonable, as opposed to voluntary actions driven by "appetites" (1111b14-15). Choice belongs to the individual who displays *enkrateia*, or self-control, a word which carries much of the meaning of *sophrosyne*. But despite his accommodation of practical reasoning, Aristotle, too, makes an undemocratic distinction with regard to wisdom, for he tells us that "the form of goodness peculiar to subjects cannot be [*phronesis*]" but only "right opinion" (*Politics* 1277b27). Therefore, "mechanics," i.e. manual laborers, should not be citizens for they cannot attain the excellence that is *phronesis* (1277b35-1278b4).

**Courage as Sophrosyne**

At first blush, courage and *sophrosyne* may seem to be contraries, as self-restraint may cause one to hold back needed action. Plato certainly contrasts them, equating *sophrosyne* with the contemplative life which he sees as superior to the active life where courage may be demanded (North 171). Aristotle also distinguishes courage and *sophrosyne*, noting that "a man is not called ‘self-controlled’ because he can endure pain" but

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19 Aristotle also argues that "the highest good attainable by action" (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1095a16), consists in activity of "the best part of us" (1177a13) that "conforms with virtue" (1095a10), i.e. *theoria*, the life of contemplation rather than political life (1177a17). As such a life requires the self-sufficiency and leisure enjoyed only by aristocrats, Aristotle tells us that "a state with an ideal constitution... cannot have its citizens living the life of mechanics or shopkeepers... nor engaged in farming" for these occupations are "ignoble," "inimical to goodness," and lack leisure (*Politics* 1328b 4 – 1329a 1).
for “not feeling pain at the absence of or abstinence from his pleasure” (Nichomachean Ethics 1118b 29-35). These virtues, then, stand in complex tension, reconciled in the judgment characterized by sophrosyne—“knowledge of what is . . . and . . . is not to be feared” (Plato Protagoras 360d). At minimum, both Plato and Aristotle tell us that sophrosyne must attend courage so the individual does not act rashly.

In fact, the association of courage with sophrosyne has a rich history in Classical literature. Thucydides, for one, forges a strong link between sophrosyne and courage, noting that Spartan bravery “sprang from their “well-ordered” temper,” a quality of self-control which is “the chief element in a sense of shame,” in turn, “the chief element in courage” (Farrar 182 cf. 1.84.3). This “rigorous self-control” was essential to the “remarkable internal orderliness and discipline” (183) of Sparta as it imparted strong obedience to law. Contrasting Spartan disciplinarity with Athenian reliance on “inventiveness and self-reliance” which “in the form of recklessness . . . were the cause of devastation” (Farrar 180). Thucydides lauds the former for serving to maintain the hierarchy necessary to political stability. On this order, sophrosyne marks “a way of life as much as a quality of character . . . associated with oligarchy” (184). That is, rigorous obedience to the law-making few forestalls change, particularly democratization.

In the Laches, Plato variously characterizes courage as “resisting desires and pleasures,” “endurance of the soul,” and “wisdom”—“implicit characterizations of sophrosyne in the Charmides”—and as “knowledge of the past, present, and future” as well as “knowledge of good and evil”—“explicit characterizations of sophrosyne in the Charmides” (Hyland 69). For Plato, courage, here nearly equated with sophrosyne, is thus a form of knowledge. Moreover, he identifies wisdom and courage as “the characteristic virtues of the two highest classes . . . significantly describ[ing] courage as politike, being distinguished from the quality . . . found in animals and slaves” (North 172 cf. Republic 430C).

Aristotle also seems to consider courage as knowledge as he declares that the courageous “will fear what is fearful” (Nichomachean Ethics 1115b12). Knowing what is fearful, the courageous individual “will endure in the right way and as reason directs for the sake of acting nobly” (1115b13); will fear “the right things, for the right motive, in the right

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20 Thucydides attributes this claim to the Spartan king Archidamus.
manner, and at the right time" (1115b19)—conditions which evoke *kairos* and *to prepon*. As with *sophrosyne*, Aristotle makes clear that courage is not the same for a woman as for a man (Politics 1260a 27),
 noting the uselessness of courage "in all life's ordinary affairs" (1269a 47). For a woman, then, courage pertains to "serving" (1260a 28); it is a *sophron* quality which renders her submissive. Indeed, though Aristotle counts courage among those virtues acquirable by all individuals,
 given his correlation between *genus, moral state* and virtue, it seems within bounds to suggest that courage as *sophrosyne* serves to facilitate obedience in the lower classes as well. In sum, whether defined as justice, wisdom, or courage, in the Classical rationalist tradition, *sophrosyne* is conceived so as to ground political theory on a professed necessity for a non-producing, non-laboring ruling class.

**Sophrosyne and Rational Liberalism**

As may be expected from a philosophy which forsakes the affinity between virtue and practical rationality, liberalism proper has little use for *sophrosyne*. Yet even in the Classical world this virtue could be interpreted in liberal terms. Recall Gorgias, for one, who associates *sophrosyne* with advantage and power, competence to "manage the affairs of his city . . . benefit his friends and harm his enemies, and . . . avoid suffering harm himself" (Plato Meno 71e). More relevant to our purposes is the way in which *sophrosyne* operates in Modern liberalism where virtue is reduced to rule of law. Here *sophrosyne* becomes a condition of the state rather than a quality of individuals insofar as law, rather than personal virtue, serves as social constraint. At this level, individual *sophrosyne* thus consists merely in loyalty to the virtues said to be embodied in the state.

Yet there is a sense in which liberalism does conceive of a virtue much like *sophrosyne*—the virtue of productivity. With economic activity privileged as the consummately human activity and material development conflated with human progress, self-interest and self-discipline combine to produce a virtue embodied in hard work. Yet there is a certain irony in our privileging of production, as boundless consumption, easily seen as a violation of *sophrosyne*, is likewise seen as virtuous as it keeps the endless cycle of production and ostensible progress in motion.

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21 Aristotle attributes this observation to Socrates.
22 These are courage, self-control, gentleness, friendliness, truthfulness, witiness, and shame (Wood and Wood 224 cf. Nichomachean Ethics Books III and IV).
Moreover, the emotional bracketing which characterizes Modern rationalism clearly evokes sophrosyne. Such is apparent in Descartes’ mind/body distinction which subordinates sense and emotion, the qualities of body, to reason, the quality of mind (Meditation Two). Through the ensuing self-knowledge of his incompleteness, fallibility, and dependence on the Divine, Descartes comes to see God as author of his veracious thoughts (Meditation Six). At bottom, Cartesian doubt is as apt a description of rationalist sophrosyne as may be found in modern philosophy. Indeed, it may be said that under the dominant Modernist paradigm, it is by means of this rational sophrosyne that liberalism proper becomes proper liberalism. That is, by means of rational self-knowledge and the self-restraint which accompanies it, the excesses of liberalism may be brought into check.

Yet while notions of self-knowledge and self-restraint command certain respect, demands for such may serve to silence individuals who do not appear sufficiently rational and sophron to the dominant culture. Hence, though sophrosyne may be seen as a kind of dharma, or spiritual humility, it may also be seen as a means to exclude the masses. It is not difficult to connect common arguments against democracy—mob rule, tyrannical majorities, an ignorant, prejudiced, and politically irrational public, the banality of mass culture, democracy’s dangerous history, and the impossibility of democracy in a diverse, global economy—with an implicit sense of sophrosyne. Again, maintenance of this elitism hinges on the public/private split. Case in point: the need for quality daycare for working families was dismissed as a private interest until lines of rhetoric developed regarding consequences to the larger society. Even now, many family issues continue to be marginalized upon arguments that government must not interfere in private issues. Another example of the silencing effect of the public/private split is the United States Army’s policy of “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” Though gag orders are justified on the basis that one’s private life is no one’s business, opponents understand that this policy is not about private sexual acts but about public identity. Meanwhile, sophrosyne is often invoked by moral-traditionalists to discredit the research and pedagogy of counter-traditionalists.

**Sophrosyne and the Culture War**

Moral-traditionalist arguments bear strong echoes of sophrosyne as defined by all three self-concepts associated with rational liberalism. Indeed, by clearly distinguishing
between mass and elite, they clearly mark out the boundaries of the fragmented self. Allan Bloom, for example, distinguishes between the self-determined and the determinate self, clearly linking the former with wealth. According to Bloom, liberal education exists primarily for the few elite students of “comparatively high intelligence, materially [my emphasis] and spiritually free to do pretty much what they want” (22). As wealth allows such “gentlemen” leisure to appreciate the “beautiful and useless” (279), they are more “open” to great ideas and “will spend their lives in an effort to become autonomous” (21), so serving as the “civilizing” force our society requires (21). The remaining majority “will be content with what our present considers relevant” or will see their “spirit of enthusiasm” diminish as utilitarian concerns determine their lives (21). Bloom goes so far as to suggest that intellectually superior individuals must employ the “gentle art of deception” (279) as self-protection from and guidance for this majority. Harold Bloom likewise envisions a high-brow aesthetic education for “the few who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers,” an “abandonment” of all others to the “politicized curriculum” he so deplores (17). While arguing that anyone may join the intellectual elite, he nonetheless asserts that the “alliance of sublimity and financial and political power has never ceased, and presumably never will” (31). After all, “very few working-class readers ever matter in determining the survival of texts” (36).

This is not to suggest that all moral-traditionalists associate sophrosyne with wealth. Kimball, Cheney, and D’Souza decry theoretical or curricular emphasis on class just as they do an emphasis on race, gender, or ethnicity, arguing that the study of the canon levels the playing field, rendering such personal attributes irrelevant. Meanwhile, Bennett looks not for cultivation of aristocratic but of middle-class values, censuring the so-called liberal elite for questioning “the American Dream” (De-Valuing 12). Here arguments regarding lifestyle supplant those regarding life situation. So Allan Bloom laments opening the university to “all sorts of lifestyles” (27), while D’Souza objects to the “new diversity of pigments and lifestyles” (13). Meanwhile, if culture may be considered analogous to lifestyle, these commentators clearly associate sophrosyne with the “unique” spirit of the European West. as

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23 My association of the current educational paradigm with Greek aristocracy is by no means new. Nearly a century ago, John Dewey likewise argued that the division between elite and mass education was a legacy inherited from the Greeks and contrary to the “realization of democratic ideals” (Democracy 192).

24 While calling for cultivation of elite intellectual values, Kimball, too, sees counter-traditionalism as “a violent attack on middle-class culture and society” (98).
is apparent in the names they give this quality—"introspection" (D'Souza 88), "self-scrutiny" (Kimball xvii), "self-examination and correction" (Bennett De-Valuing 172), and a unique "need for justification of its ways and values" (A. Bloom 39).

But in castigating "leftist" faculty for criticizing Euro-western texts while lauding the West's self-critical tradition, moral-traditionalists contradict themselves. Moreover, they commit what Martha Nussbaum calls "descriptive chauvinism," an attempt to interpret the unfamiliar by "recreating the other in the image of oneself" (118). That is, claiming the canon embodies universal truths, moral traditionalists elide the diverse perspectives which constitute the Euro-western conversation in favor of their position. There is, in fact, something disingenuous in moral-traditionalist claims of political neutrality— as Bennett and Cheney have served in politically appointed positions and, as Cheney admits. Allan Bloom and D'Souza have been supported by "foundations with a conservative agenda" to play "high-profile roles in debates about American culture" (Truth 109).

Meanwhile, moral-traditionalists draw a strong "contrast between aristocratic style and common vulgarity" (Wood and Wood 155). As an example, D'Souza scorns the style of I Rigoberta, which he asserts merely "details the mundane" and is difficult to follow due to "lavish" use of Latino and Indian phrases (71)—going so far as to ridicule Menchu's "tribal garb" as a ploy to "elevate . . . her place in history as a representative voice of

25 Nussbaum cites translation of Aristotelian eudaimonia as "happiness," which reduces Aristotle's notion of "a complete and flourishing human life" to a mere "state of being pleased or satisfied" (118), so attributing to Aristotle an allegiance to utilitarian effectiveness inconsistent with his general philosophy. This error has also led to specious parallels between the economic structures of the 7th, 6th, and 5th centuries BCE and those of the 14th, 15th. and 16th centuries CE (Austin and Vidal-Niquet 5).

26 In this respect, it is ironic that moral-traditionalists uphold the Greeks as exemplars—for Modern liberal democracy abhors many of their beliefs and practices. We do not, for example, endorse slavery and eugenics or consider "foreigners" and women sub-human. Meanwhile, in denouncing Gay/Lesbian studies, moral-traditionalists erase the notable influence Greek attitudes toward and practice of male homosexuality exerted over Plato’s philosophy—reflected in his powerful analogy between philosophy and same-sex eros.

27 D'Souza serves as an example of descriptive chauvinism, as he argues that "the open market [equated with Western morality] is emancipating . . . millions . . . previously dependent on the government" (86), ignoring many governments, at times in collusion with the West, which have destroyed indigenous lifestyles that allowed self-sufficiency. While accurate that millions need emancipation, he sees only Western practices as liberating. In fact. Western relief programs have often suffered from descriptive chauvinism—including application of Western agricultural practices to environments and cultures where unsustainable. Commodity row-cropping to produce animal feed, for one, does not serve the needs of many Third World populations for whom grains provide more sustainable and sufficient food value for humans than does meat. In the U.S., the USDA Women, Infants, and Children program largely distributes dairy products to poor families, although many come from ethnic backgrounds where dairy is not a dietary staple, thus enzymes needed for dairy digestion may not be present or sufficient.
oppression” (73). Meanwhile, Cheney draws a corollary between truth, beauty, and excellence, employing selective examples of contemporary art to arouse moral sympathies and further the idea that the aesthetic realm has become pervaded by the ugly and immoral. Here descriptive chauvinism transforms into “normative chauvinism”—a move from inaccurate description to inaccurate evaluation.²⁸

But normative chauvinism may exist even in the presence of accurate description. For example, while D’Souza accurately describes Menchu as a product of oral culture, he proceeds to condemn her work because she did not write and translate it herself (17). D’Souza thus assumes that rhetorical artistry depends on the written literacy of an individual author. That written literacy is requisite to the conceptual development necessary to formulate complex thoughts regarding one’s own experience. Under such analysis, neither Menchu’s text nor the analysis it displays belong to her—a product of an “illiterate” culture, she is but a “mouthpiece” for “Marxists.” Normative chauvinism is likewise apparent in Allan Bloom’s apparent condemnation of most art, literature, and music of the last 50 years, as well as the general moral-traditionalist claim that the term “culture” ought to be reserved for what they have already identified as “high” culture.

Meanwhile, style is used to substantiate assertions that counter-traditionalists lack rational sophrosyne. For example, Kimball castigates religion scholar Cornel West as “histrionic” for employing “the fervor of a political rally or revival meeting” (81), so neglecting due measure and fitness to the occasion. Likewise, D’Souza depicts counter-traditionalists as imbued with “ideological fervor” (217), persistently employing the term “victim” to make their claims appear overwrought. In similar fashion, Bennett asserts that outrage over censorship “lacks any sense of propriety, proportion, or reality” (De-Valuing 17), while Kimball attributes the rise of counter-traditionalism to a “fear of being unstylish” (181), resulting in a taste for “hermetic jargon” (xiv). Indeed, a favorite sport of many of

²⁸ Nussbaum particularly cites as descriptive and normative chauvinism Allan Bloom’s claim that the West is unique “for justification of its ways and values ... for discovery of nature ... for philosophy and science” (39). She maintains that Bloom “neglects rich critical traditions in many non-Western philosophical cultures and, of course, the everyday critical rationality of most human beings in all places and times” (132), thereby treating Western culture as normative, as “relating or conforming to, or prescribing norms” (Webster), and so ignoring the normative power, as well as the resistance, of other cultures. Lynne Cheney also makes the claim that “the American system has uniquely nurtured justice and right” (Truth 30), while chastising Nussbaum for being suspicious of too much patriotism.
these authors is to discredit such scholarship by quoting provocative, irreverent titles of much counter-traditional scholarship without sufficiently representing their content.

Allan Bloom devotes a considerable portion of his book to demonstrating that students lack *sophrosyne*—evidence that "histrionic" (325), radically democratic (326), and relativistic (327) educators neglect the responsibility of cultivating the "self-knowledge" (21) which would arm their students against the pervasive influence of popular culture (64) and "democratic relativism" (67). Condemning books and music popular among youth, he admonishes youth for a "contempt for the heroic . . . a perversion of the democratic principle that denies greatness and wants everyone to feel comfortable in their own skin" (66). Bloom asserts that youth look only to rock stars for heroes, seduced by the "barbaric appeal to sexual desire" (73) embodied in their music. Certainly he here condemns the content of "propaganda," "trash," and rock lyrics, but his censure goes beyond substance to style as he denounces rock's "orgasmic rhythms" (75), as well as the stage behavior (79) and costumes (81) of rock musicians. Surely he has forgotten criticism of his beloved Mozart's personal taste and the critical abuse Beethoven suffered in response to the angry and erotic passion of the Sonata Pathetique.

Yet it is not only the style but the rational substance of counter-traditionalist arguments which comes under attack. Kimball labels such scholarship "totalitarian . . . simple-minded and philistine" (xvi), "formulaic criticism that never engages its subject" (xviii), "exhibit[s] a species of skepticism that is essentially nihilistic" (2), and is no more than "commentaries on commentaries" which rely on "primary texts only to furnish illustrations for their pet critical "theory"" (11). D'Souza likewise condemns such scholarship, often citing extreme examples which counter-traditionalists may question as well.²⁹ In general, moral-traditionalists depict counter-traditionalist thought as "asserted rather than argued" (Cheney *Truth* 18); a "suppression of reason" (A. Bloom 379) brought about by "disposition, sentiment, bias, and ideology" (Bennett *De-Valuing* 12).

As moral-traditionalists generally contend that counter-traditionalists lack reason, it is unsurprising to find them arguing that their targets do not "know their place." As to feminist argument, Allan Bloom, for example, baldly bemoans a past when male and female roles were clearly distinguished, when "the husband's will [was] the will of the whole" (126)—

²⁹ See Chapter Four "In Search of Black Pharaohs" in D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*. 
even intimating that changing sex roles interfere with male virility (124). To Bloom, feminists have not only destroyed the family, they are “the latest enemy of the vitality of classic texts” (65). Cheney seems to agree that to criticize the canon is to step out of place, further arguing that affirmative action threatens to push minorities and [other] women out of their rightful place in the hierarchy of merit—a position universally shared by moral-traditionalists. In D’Souza’s terms, affirmative action renders some individuals “more equal than others” (24), placing the “last” first by diluting academic standards to accommodate the intellectually inferior (157).

Accordingly, counter-traditionalists not only overstep their social place, but in failing to “do their own work” they overstep their intellectual place as well. In Kimball words, they seek to transcend the traditional divisions between academic subjects so that professionals trained in English can pretend to be philosophers, philosophers can pretend to be literary critics, and everyone can absorb large doses of sociology in order to overcome the ingrained habit of regarding any academic subject as worthy of study in its own right. (60)\textsuperscript{10}

Meanwhile, in questioning the canon and the aesthetic/moral standards it allegedly represents, literature professors are seen as violating their proper places as purveyors of the transcendent truths these texts reveal. Writing teachers are seen as violating their proper places as grammarians who correct “ugly mistakes” and “improper” usage. A primary consequence, according to the moral-traditionalist line, is that students no longer know their place in deference to authority. Above all, they implicitly argue, counter-traditionalists violate the place of the university by failing to treat it as a museum of the “best that has been known and thought” detached from mundane political concerns. Such arguments draw on the public/private split in contradictory ways—on one hand, the socio-political concerns of teachers are seen as private matters unsuited to the public space of the university; on the other, the university is seen as a realm of private inquiry detached from the public arena.

While the above arguments are underwritten by overlapping concepts of determinate and rational selves, additional arguments from moral-traditionalists draw on a liberal self-concept as well. For one, Bennett’s argument that the appropriate values include \textit{Rocky}, light

\textsuperscript{10} Kimball seems to contradict his claim that “everything in [counter-traditionalist] cultivation of specialization and attitude of professionalization conspires against the preservation of great art” (55).
beer, and Disney World (De-Valuing 13) suggests that the good life consists of access to Western products. While others do not make such an implication, nearly all seem to clearly define the good life in terms of a consumer economy and worry that Marxism or its offshoots are perverting scholarship. Above all, an underlying assumption of these arguments is the paramount autonomy of the individual and the intrinsic value of meritocracy. Indeed, much of their allegiance to the determinate self-concept hinges on the notion that those so determined have demonstrated insufficient rationality to merit autonomy—in fact, that counter-traditionalists deny them autonomy by withholding or unfairly criticizing the source of rational agency, the Euro-western canon. Armed with such assertions, Cheney, Kimball, D'Souza, and Bloom thus accuse counter-traditionalists of being illiberal. By this, of course, they mean two things—one, that counter-traditionalists do not privilege the human individual as the chief ethical subject (a characterization many counter-traditionalists may accept); two, that counter-traditionalists are intolerant. As to the latter, they are unfortunately often correct.

Indeed, “political correctness” may suppress speech. Hyperskepticism does risk nihilism. Over-differentiation and hyperpluralism do risk widening the gulf between the many cultures which make up the United States. Reducing women and minorities to victims may reaffirm this status: painting them as weak and powerless while ignoring forms of oppression which may exist between members of the same socio-politically defined group. This reduction, as well as over-extended claims that humans are socially constructed, asserts a determinate self-concept which absolves individuals of liability for their circumstances. Meanwhile, to argue for alternative “ways of knowing” to the exclusion of Euro-western rationalism suggests that women and minorities are incapable of linear thought while denying them opportunity to develop it, so denying them multiple options for approaching problems. Moreover, to teach in the name of subverting students’ beliefs, to push students to adopt their teacher’s viewpoint, is to become equally hegemonic as those counter-traditionalists accuse. It is to deny students the very socio-political agency they advocate. In fact, counter-traditionalists often stand on elitist, rationalistic arguments, painting their students and the public at large as ignorant and banal. Likewise, they often deride popular culture as banal and bourgeois.

As a matter of fact, just as moral-traditionalists are prone to descriptive chauvinism, counter-traditionalists are prone to “descriptive romanticism”—a longing for the exotic that
causes one to view "another culture as excessively alien and virtually incomparable to one's own" (Nussbaum 124). For example, in critiquing Euro-western thought as excessively rationalist, binary, and individualist, counter-traditionalists often pose it against spiritual, non-binary, relational traditions often attributed to non-European societies, so neglecting a variety of logical traditions, "complex debates about perception and knowledge," as well as diverse atheistic and materialist traditions of these societies (126). Such thinking likewise overlooks the Euro-western humanist tradition which has resisted narrow rationalism since the Sophists. While the humanist tradition, too, is subject to critique regarding imperialist truth claims, counter-traditionalists who ignore the tensions embodied in the traditional canon are equally guilty of reductionism as their opponents. But neither are moral-traditionalists immune to descriptive romanticism. "Happy family" multiculturalism, for example, tends to focus only on colorful, intriguing, surface differences, ignoring deeper differences these surfaces may represent in favor of emphasis on aesthetic commonalities. Here culture is often reduced to folk ways, exploration of social context or behavioral norms denounced as too "political."

Meanwhile, descriptive romanticism underwrites a normative vice to which counter-traditionalists are prone—"normative Arcadianism" which "consists in imagining the other as untouched by the vices of one's own culture" (Nussbaum 134). Such errors inhibit our critique of other cultures by blinding us to dishonorable practices within a culture we admire.

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1 Under descriptive romanticism, we may falsely assume that only the strange elements of a culture belong, that similarities between the European west and non-Europe are products of Westernization. Or we may not even notice or seek out the familiar, assuming we will not find it, so overlooking the real variety of a culture's traditions. We may also exaggerate differences, assuming that others cannot rather than may not understand our way of thinking or that familiar moral standards need not apply. As to the former, Nussbaum offers Indian feminist Veena Das' claim that Indian women are incapable of distinguishing their own well-being from that of the rest of their family, despite abundant research indicating that Indian women who go hungry while their families eat "take note of this fact" and when forbidden to work outside the home "view this as a constraint on their ability to feed themselves and their children" (124). As to the latter, Nussbaum offers Madame Butterfly, whose protagonist sees the submissiveness of a Japanese woman as indication that Western morals need not apply, that "she is a delicious plaything, to whom loyalty and promise-keeping are entirely unnecessary" (124). Meanwhile, descriptive romanticism distorts the European west by "selling short" Euro-western religions, music, poetry, and art (125).

2 One of the most redeeming aspects of some moral-traditionalist critiques is the recognition of descriptive romanticism among counter-traditionalists. D'Souza, for example, points out the history of oppression within non-Western cultures—although in doing so he practices chauvinism by attributing moves toward emancipation as solely the product of Euro-western ideas (86).

3 Nussbaum derives her terminology by reference to the ancient Greek district Arcadia which is said to have embodied a way of life characterized by simplicity and contentment. "Arcadian" has come to mean rustic, simple, contented, evoking a spiritual innocence synonymous with "Edenic."
For example, counter-traditionalists practice normative Arcadianism when they equate slavery with Euro-western racism, ignoring both historical and contemporary practices within cultures where slaves and owners are of the same race or ethnic group. Descriptive arguments which too starkly contrast the hierarchical, oppressive elements of Euro-western rationality to non-European, allegedly non-hierarchical, ways of knowing are often applied to social structure as well, rendering invisible oppressive social hierarchies in non-European societies. Likewise, contrasting Euro-western rationalism with non-European spiritualism often results in valuations which overlook oppressive tenets and practices in non-European religions. Similarly, merely opposing feminism to patriarchy overlooks historical and contemporary oppression of poor, powerless women by comparatively wealthy, powerful women, just as merely opposing multiculturalism to racism overlooks the oppression of the poor, weak, or powerless within racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, when normatively Arcadian, counter-traditionalists, while certainly not foolish enough to mistake poverty or victim status as Arcadian contexts, nonetheless imbue “victims” with a romantic innocence that absolves them of any responsibility for their circumstances or for changing them. Meanwhile, moral-traditionalists are likewise subject to normative Arcadianism, characterizing our intellectual past as idyllic.

Unfortunately, the struggle to strike a balance between normative Arcadianism and normative chauvinism often culminates in “normative skepticism,” which simply “narrates the way things are, suspending all normative judgment about its goodness and badness” (Nussbaum 136). Allan Bloom points out such an error when he claims that students can only “point out all the opinions and cultures there are and have been” (26) rather than evaluate them. In fact, moral-traditionalists often ground their arguments on the premise that counter-traditionalists are normative skeptics—radical relativists who forsake moral foundations. Doing so, they mistake tolerance and self-scrutiny for skepticism. As Nussbaum points out, “the tolerant person may have, and usually does have, definite views about what is proper and improper, right and wrong” (136). As to religious belief, for example, U.S. citizens treasure a long tradition of tolerating other views even as they teach their views to their children. As a matter of fact, our tradition dictates that we be intolerant of those who interfere with others’ free exercise of religion through “bigoted or violent acts” (136). It follows that normative skepticism should not be mistaken for the respectful suspension of
judgment when one does not yet understand a culture and thus lacks grounds for judgment. Normative skepticism, rather, is marked by a dismissal of understanding grounded in the premise that “this form of life is so alien and bizarre that it cannot expect to be measured by the same set of standards” (138).

In the end, it may well be that the remedy for these vices requires a quality such as sophrosyne, a spirit of self-scrutiny which entails knowledge of “what one knows and does not know” as well as the self-restraint to withhold judgment until one better understands. Indeed, within both moral- and counter-traditionalist camps are those who laud Socrates for just this characteristic. Allan Bloom, for one, notes Socrates’ awareness of his own ignorance as the quality which makes possible the examined life. Nussbaum, too, calls for Socratic “self-examination,” pointing out that Socrates the arguer must be distinguished from Plato the philosopher, who “was certainly an elitist about reason, and openly hostile to democracy” (26). This commonality suggests that moral- and counter-traditionalists need not be so ultimately polarized, that perhaps the virtue sophrosyne can be reclaimed so as not to be marked out by such a narrow view of rationality as characterizes the liberal tradition. As I see it, the possibility of this reclamation resides in a tradition which has stood alongside the rationalist. This tradition, which Susan Jarratt labels “historicist” (11) and Stephen Toulmin calls “humanist” (24), is embodied in the few remaining fragments of the thought of Protagoras.

**Protagoras**

Protagoras of Abdera, the oldest and most influential of the early Sophists, speaks across the ages only in the pages of other authors’ works. Most notably, he appears or is discussed among Socrates’ interlocutors in a number of Platonic dialogues—Theaetetus, The Sophist, and, of course, the dialogue which bears his name. We know he was a stranger in

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34 Some readers may judge that I too hastily name Nussbaum a counter-traditionalist, citing her laudatory reading of Plato and her negative reading of Protagoras as promoting “the debilitating notion that ‘my-law-is-as-good-as-his’” (Mendelson 25). However, moral-traditionalist Lynne Cheney places herself in opposition to Nussbaum, who responds likewise. Meanwhile, Nussbaum’s treatise on democratic education is a rigorous defense of multicultural education and critical scholarship.

35 The texts in which Protagoras appears or in which his doctrines are discussed include: Aristotle, Metaphysics III, 1046b 29, 997b 32, 1007b 18, 1062b 13, Rhetoric 1402a 23, 1407b 6, Poetics 1456b 15; Diogenes Laertius 9.50; Plato, Protagoras, Theaetetus, Meno 91d-e, Hippias Major 282d-e, Cratylus 266d-267c, Euthydemus 286b-c, Phaedrus 266ff., Sophist 23d-e; Pyrrhonius 1.216; Sextus Empiricus, Adv. Math. 9.55-6, 7.389, 7.60 (Diels-Kranz 3-28).
Athens, arriving around 460 BCE; that he served Athens at Pericles’ behest by writing the
laws of Thurii; that he taught the young men of Athens how to reason and speak well; that he
was the first teacher to be paid for his efforts; and that he was well-versed in a wide variety
of subjects including theology, wrestling, government, mathematics, and particularly,
argumentation and debate. We also know that his view of moral knowledge as “subjective,”
that is, a matter of personal conviction in particular social contexts, has brought scorn upon
him throughout Euro-western history. While we cannot know for certain how his moral
philosophy was fleshed out, the few fragments of his doctrine brought to us by other ancient
writers provide significant clues to the ways in which his philosophy stands in contrast to the
rationalist tradition. Significantly, Protagoras stood at the point of a profound historic shift
from oral to literate culture. If Homer is taken to be representative of the mythic-poetic
tradition and Plato of the rationalistic tradition, Protagoras can be said to bridge these worlds.
He is thus a liminal figure whose doctrines glean from mythic, conventional, and rationalistic
insights. His perspective thus promises to be fruitful for redefining rationality in ways
account for ethical and pathetical, i.e., non-rationalistic, ways of knowing, so overcoming
the limitations of the fragmented self and allowing us to redefine our notion of the virtuous
citizen.

The Protagorean Self

In discussing Protagorean philosophy, we should take note that the concept of
rhetoric as a “discipline distinct from other verbal activities or arts” (Schiappa 40) does not
fully emerge until the fourth century BCE, where it comes to mean specifically the art of
political speech. Fifth-century Sophists like Protagoras saw themselves as concerned with
logos, a much broader concept inclusive of stories, conversation, speech-making, argument,
reason, and thought. It was only upon the coinage of rhetorike that the narrower description
of the Sophistic art as persuasion came to be cemented in contrast to logos, the professed
search for invariable truth. This coinage, attributed to Plato, served to clearly distinguish

36 Appeals to emotion.
37 My intention is to enact what contemporary philosopher Richard Rorty calls a “rational reconstruction” of
Protagoras’ thought, described by Stephen Makin as an attempt to “treat . . . a thinker . . . as within our own
philosophical framework” (in Schiappa 66). However, so as not to distort Protagoras’ viewpoints, it is necessary
to provide a brief “historical reconstruction” which “give[s] an account of what [he] said, or would have said, to
his [or her] contemporaries” (Makin in Schiappa 66).
philosophers from Sophists, thereby disparaging the latter as committed to a doctrine of political effectiveness. But as the early Sophists did not themselves make this distinction, their association of the Sophistic art with logos places them among the philosophers concerned with the nature of reason and truth. As such, they, like Plato, are instrumental in the shift from the Homeric view of the self, largely externally driven and determined, to a more rational and autonomous view of the self—a "self-conscious sense of agency" which led Athenians "to think reflectively about themselves as autonomous agents in a political community" (Farrar 15).

Although this newfound sense of autonomy invigorated focus on the needs and desires of discrete individuals, unlike Enlightenment rationalists, Athenians did not view human society merely as means to contain war and competition, but increasingly as cooperation in mutual self-interest. The need for democratic expression and decision-making thus resided not in a negative notion of individual rights, but in a positive belief that "the wisdom of a large group was inherently greater than the wisdom of any of its parts" (Ober Mass 163). Such a view lies in direct contrast to that of Plato. Convinced as he is that common members of the group perceive only shadows of the truth, Plato rejects the notion that humans can arrive at truth collectively. He thus looks beyond human experience for political order. Protagoras, by contrast, sees political life, embodied in our capacity for justice and mutual respect, as definitive of humanity's ability to achieve order. His first premise is the controversial and often misunderstood fragment.

Humanity is the measure of all things, of things which are, that they are; of things which are not, that they are not. (From Sextus, see DK80 B1)

The Measuring Self—The Human-Measure Fragment

In claiming that "humanity is measure," Protagoras rejects three basic claims of Parmenides and, by extension, Plato: that "being itself is one and consistent" (Mendelson 5); that a truly rational human is independently "capable of deep and accurate insight into the nature of being" (Farrar 48); and that humanity in general "exhibit[s] seriously defective judgment about such matters" (48). Protagoras does not "challenge the Parmenidean

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38 For a complete argument see Edward Schiappa, "The Invention of Rhetoric" in Protagoras and Logos.
39 Havelock's The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics provides an extensive discussion of Greek autonomy.
dichotomy between what is unified, stable, and unchanging and what men experience" (48), but contests the notion that human insight can be stable, unified, and invariable and, therefore, consistently applied to social and political matters. Nor does he offer an alternative cosmology. In fact, there is evidence that he is not all that interested in cosmology (48), for he tells us that "concerning the gods, I am unable to know, whether they exist or whether they do not exist or what they are like in form" (Schiappa 141). While this statement is inconclusive as to whether the gods are non-existent or inaccessible, Protagoras does away with transcendental authority and with it, "final guarantees and permanently fixed principles" (Mendelson 7), leaving only human perception as our guide. As any "theory of knowledge must at least begin from what we ourselves can know" (7). Protagorean measure thus reverses the Platonic/Aristotelian emphasis on the nature of the object known—for we cannot know the ontologically prior nature of the object—in favor of an emphasis on humanity, the knowing subject. The human-measure fragment thus casts off the constraints of the determinate self, granting humanity the agency to establish social norms, so making way for the equality assumption upon which democratic thinking is founded.

But if humanity is measure, does this mean there is no "vantage point" from which we may assert that human-measure is "true for all" (13)? Not at all, for this "peritrope" or "turning-of-the-tables" (13) reflects "the ironic status of Protagorean thought: from the outset it has been reformulated by those who would refute it" (14). That is, the argument that human-measure is a universalist and therefore self-refuting claim depends on the very metaphysical, epistemological, and alethic assumptions that Protagoras rejects. Grounded upon the assumption that human-measure concerns "the ontological status of the object of knowledge" (19), rather than human capacity for knowledge, this peritrope requires a "paradigmatic shift" which "supplants" "knowledge for A" with "knowledge of X" (19). Therefore, neither does human-measure promote a radical subjectivism which violates the law of non-contradiction, for this notion, too, assumes that truth corresponds to the

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40 This fragment is "quoted in whole or in part by Diogenes Laertius (9.51), Hesychius (DK 80 A3), Sextus Empiricus (A12), Cicero (A23), and Eusebius (B4); it is mentioned or paraphrased by Philostratus (A2), Philodemus (A23), Diogenes of Oenoanda (A23), and Plato (Theaetetus 162d) (Schiappa 141).
41 This premise is attributed to Protagoras by Sextus Empiricus, Democritus, and Plato and continues to hold sway as an argument against human-measure.
42 Concerning truth.
ontological status” of objects. At bottom, as no ontological status holds for Protagoras, truth is not bivalent, a simple matter of true and false excluding any middle ground, but multivalent—“an expression of the variations that distinguish the human community and our diverse ways of knowing” (5).

But Protagorean multivalence should not be construed as relativism, at least not as commonly understood, as relationalism, the idea that “true” simply means “true in L(k) (for some particular language, perspective, habit of mind, social practice, convention or the like, selected from among a set of relevant alternatives)” (Margolis 8). As this position holds that “any belief on ‘any topic’ or on ‘a certain topic’ is ‘as good as every other’” (57), it is not difficult to see how it may be refuted, for it precludes criticism, partaking of normative skepticism. It is nihilistic, abandoning both ethics and knowledge. As noncognitivism, which holds that “ethical commitments . . . express attitudes of their possessors” (Blackburn 264), relationalism professes that horror toward September 11th events stems not from knowledge of good and evil, but from a mere attitude toward the killing of innocents—so depriving us of grounds for judgment. Meanwhile, as cultural relativity, relationalism demeaned other persons and cultures by placing them beyond critique. Cultural relativity is irrelevant to ethics, addressing only factual questions rather than legitimative ones (Margolis 14)—whether a belief, perspective, etc. exists, not whether it is right. At bottom, under relationalist constraints, neither moral- nor counter-traditionalists can supply tenable arguments for persuading others to accept their views.

How then can we read the human-measure fragment? Certainly Protagoras cannot mean that reality is what it is only for a particular individual, for as we have seen, such a proposition is philosophically untenable. Nor could he mean that all appearances exist, for this position negates the possibility of coherent discourse and thus community. In some way, then, Protagoras must mean “‘society-at-large,’ thereby positing cultural knowledge (nomos) as the ‘measure’ of all things” (Mendelson 4). Nevertheless, he cannot only mean humanity as a whole, for such measuring must be inclusive of individual perception—humans certainly do disagree. So taking into account both collective humanity and the individual, human-measure suggests that knowledge of the world stems from both personal and collective.

The law of non-contradiction may be stated thus: “if I say the wind is cold, it is not possible for you to contradict me because the perception of any experience is always relative to the percipient” (Mendelson 13).
experience. our interaction with the world and with each other. In human interaction, the
variables of individual perception are brought to bear on one another, they are made public,
such that analysis and comparisons can be made and individual perceptions judged “in terms
which explain what appears to every man and to all men” (Farrar 49). Such a process is
always steeped in controversy; thus Plato sought truth free of context while Thucydides
succumbed to despair in the face of power. Protagoras, by contrast, sees in this multiplicity
and controversy the very source of human reason and the agency which attends it. That is,
from a Protagorean perspective, human reason stems from our very capacity to perceive
differently, to recognize differences in perception, to make sense of these differences, and to
gain from them insight into human problems. Rather than cling to the imminently despairing
distinction between metaphysical excellence and political effectiveness. Protagoras
establishes a middle ground upon which excellence is constructed as a particular context for
political effectiveness. As we shall see, this context is necessarily democracy.

Meanwhile, the things we “measure” are not limited to physical objects, nor is our
measurement limited to whether or not they exist. “Things” may be “circumstances” or
“affairs.” “what is the case” (Schiappa 128) in any particular context. Unlike dog-faced
baboons. pigs or tadpoles (Plato Theaetetus 161c-d), we do not simply react. we inquire and
judge. we engage in “analysis and comparison of the experiences of individuals” (Farrar 50).
Our “measuring” is not limited to sense perception: it stems not from “immediate exposure
to things-as-they-are-in-themselves, but through the mediation of our perceptual horizons and
histories” (Mendelson 6). Human perception therefore includes our cognitive capacities for
“memory. intuition. emotion. imagination, reason. or any synthesis of these in an effort to
achieve both invention and judgment” (8). Less certain than discovery of ontologically prior
truth and more certain than individual reaction to phenomena, “Protagorean ‘measurement’ is
thus best conceived of as a hermeneutical act. a process variously represented as
interpretation. evaluation, and judgment” (8). Unlike Plato. Protagoras “did not distinguish

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44 Protagoras offers an analogy to wind: wind is not merely cold or not cold, for these truth-claims must
consider individual difference. Plato may have agreed with this depiction of sense perception. However, while
Protagoras built upon this observation his analogy for human-measure. Plato took it as evidence that sense-
perception is an untrustworthy foundation for truth (Schiappa 127). Meanwhile, Socrates attempts to limit
perception to sense-perception in an effort to debunk human-measure.

45 Chrematon (things) “can be used to indicate “goods” or “property” (concrete usage) and “matter” or “affair”
(more abstract usage). That “chrematon is preceded by panton (all. every, manifold)” suggests that “Protagoras
had in mind the widest possible range of objects” (Schiappa 118).
the various aspects of human understanding, namely perceptions and judgments, but tied them equally to experience," both individual and collective (Farrar 55). Taking this variety into account, bivalence cannot begin to account for the full range of human experience: it is "itself irrational; it not only ignores the contingent and approximate nature of human cognition, it also refuses to acknowledge the legitimate claims of knowledge constructed through discursive exchange" (Mendelson 23). Seen this way, any "effort to claim absolute authority for a single \textit{logos}" is "as much a political act as it is an alethic claim" (20).

Of course given this political context, the question arises as to just how we are to determine truth from diverse accounts of reality. No doubt this requires that our experiences be in some way coherent with those of others. It is not merely that we must share a common language, we must also share basic human qualities and needs (Farrar 46) which lead us to experience the world in similar ways. Upon these commonalities are grounded our customs and beliefs, that is, our \textit{norms}. Indeed, to be considered capable of measure, the individual must exhibit intellectual and moral capacities within the range marked out by these norms. Plato attributes to Protagoras an analogy to bodily health:

food appears and is bitter to the sick man... the opposite... to the man in health. Now neither... is to be made wiser than he is—that is not possible—nor should the claim be made that the sick man is ignorant... or the healthy man wise... but a change must be made from the one condition to the other.

for the other is better. (\textit{Theatetus} 166e-167a)

Two conditions are here implicated on the part of the patient. First, he must have some criterion for judging "sweetness" or "bitterness." some prior experience with the particular food at hand, which must likewise be shared by the doctor that he may establish \textit{his} norm in relation to general norms. Second, unless he is to be treated without his knowledge or consent, he must be rationally capable of taking the doctor's advice: "he is expected to have consistent beliefs and to be responsive to rational argument" (Farrar 74). So while the exchange between doctor and patient may entail substituting one truth claim (this medicine tastes bad) for another (it will make you well), the doctor's purpose is not to make his patient wiser, but to restore him to a normal condition "derived from human experience and answerable to it" (73). The task of the Sophist or educator, accordingly, is to make the stronger claim appear to be the case, to "restore... men to the condition of proper measures
... capable of exercising their own capacity to gauge and interpret experience, guided by the informed experience of others” (72).

With these things in mind, the sophrosyne of the measuring self can be thought of as ongoing critical examination of one's personal beliefs, one's judgment of personal experiences, the norms of one's community, and the expressions of others. Sophrosyne is a form of wisdom which places focus on knowing subjects, real human beings in real circumstances—their wants, needs, beliefs, values, and the contexts out of which these arise.

It is the wisdom to recognize that knowledge is not a static body, a product to be deposited in a willing mind, but a process toward excellence in concrete, contextualized action. Wisdom is both a process and an achievement of intellectual negotiation, with oneself as well as others. Protagorean sophrosyne is the wisdom to hold one's judgments tentatively, to avoid dogma, to fully examine, without prejudice, the arguments of others. In short, the sophrosyne of the measuring self is wisdom conceived of as phronesis rather than sophia, an inquisitive and critical spirit which refuses to leave the status quo unexamined. The autonomy which makes possible this critical spirit serves human measuring to check elite manipulation of the mob, mob psychology, and tyrannical majorities. Such autonomy depends on critical education, for the rhetorical artifices which contribute to socially destructive ends depend on mass ignorance and naivety.

Consider this: students must learn to recognize common tropes, figures of speech which suppress trite assumptions, that they may analyze them to identify ways in which they reinforce troublesome beliefs, negate analysis, and silence unpopular perspectives. Just as "victim" has become a trope for D'Souza, "racism" and other -isms have become tropes for counter-traditionalists. In fact, moral- and counter-traditionalist tropes not only run parallel to one another, but often intersect. As to the former, moral-traditionalists employ as tropes: Marxism, the 60's, equality, and feminism; while counter-traditionalists employ as tropes: capitalism, the establishment (in the form of the canon, traditional scholarship, hierarchies of merit, etc.), inequality, and white male dominance. This is not to suggest that argument grounded upon such premises is invalid, but to suggest that such premises are themselves often asserted rather than argued, employed without sufficient analysis, or invoked simply to silence opposing viewpoints.
For example, moral-traditionalists employ the trope of the 1960's as a time of lawlessness and relativism to discredit counter-traditionalist arguments without analysis of either the intellectual gains made in the 1960's or of arguments which build upon these gains. They likewise employ the trope of equality, covering over the problematics of merit and the conditions of the playing field. Feminism, too, becomes a trope, effectively conflating the many feminisms which make up scholarship and practice and which often bear conflicting interests. Conversely, counter-traditionalists employ the trope of the establishment, thus failing to recognize themselves as benefiting from this establishment. In like manner, the trope of inequality too often covers over forms of oppression within non-dominant groups. Meanwhile, the trope of white male tradition too often serves as a means to avoid engagement with this tradition. At any rate, as Iris Marion Young points out, invoking economic metaphors (whether Marxist or capitalist) as tropes simply limits debate to a distributive paradigm which is insufficient to either theorize or diminish oppression. In fact, moral- and counter-traditionalist tropes often intersect in undemocratic ways—in particular those relying on assumptions about the banality of pop culture or the ignorance of a particular group.46

No doubt the literacy education necessary to enable students to analyze such tropes, to engage in informed and reasoned discourse, and thus to contribute to collective decision and action, requires that they engage diverse perspectives, including texts from multiple viewpoints and multiple readings of a given text. Nevertheless, Lynne Cheney and, following upon her lead, Cal Thomas have seized upon the current terrorist crisis as opportunity to further their arguments against counter-traditionalist scholarship and pedagogy.47 Thomas, in particular, employs the tropes of “patriotism” and “external threat” to suggest that multiculturalism, cultural criticism, and so forth diminish American commonality, incite

46 The group so identified often consists of those in the middle—often seen as shallow and bourgeois.
47 While agreeing that students should study other cultures, Cheney chides NYC Deputy Chancellor for Instruction Judith Rizzo for saying, “we have to do more to teach the habits of tolerance, knowledge and awareness of other cultures.” Cheney argues that “to say it is more important now implies that the events of September 11th were our fault, that it was our failure to understand Islam that led to so many deaths and so much destruction . . . that somehow intolerance on our part was the cause.” She goes on to argue that our real “failure . . . is lack of commitment to this nation’s history” (“Veep’s Wife”). Here Cheney dismisses a substantial body of scholarship which indicates that, while not responsible, U.S. failure to understand Islamic cultures and their socio-political contexts has made us vulnerable. Meanwhile her comments suggest that counter-traditionalists ignore U.S. history, when, in fact, much of their scholarship deeply engages American history, often bringing to discussion events and perspectives traditionally overlooked.
moral relativism, and so threaten our way of life. But if, as Cheney suggests, more focus is placed on American history—either uncritically toward the purpose of instilling patriotism or to the diminishment of multicultural education—how shall students, not to mention the general citizenry, understand Islam and its perversion by terrorist collectives? How shall they understand the hostility much of the world, including non-Islamic groups, bears toward the U.S? How can we collectively strive toward excellence, avoiding the use of force to the greatest extent we are capable? With these concerns in mind, perhaps we can see criticism of America’s foreign policy as a correspondence of humanitarianism and patriotism, for the answers are not merely moral or political, but strategic.

Thomas calls upon educators to “make Americans out of American children, not multiculturalists who accept the fiction that all systems and all beliefs are equally good” (“Defend”). Rather than engage multiculturalist arguments, he diminishes them as relativist. Meanwhile, he binds himself in a paradox by pointing out that those “who seek our destruction are... brainwashing their kids about the supposed superiority of their beliefs” (“Defend”). While Thomas’ plea is itself a call to teach “kids about the... superiority of [our] beliefs,” he fails to acknowledge that a fundamental American belief is freedom of inquiry, thought, and expression—which necessitates that one scrutinize one’s own values and contextualize their application.

Should one operate from a normatively chauvinistic position, Pashtunwali may be interpreted as a more primitive form of ethics from our own, so fueling moral-traditionalist arguments that valuing their system promotes a form of relativism. However, the moral code claimed for the U.S. is also grounded in notions of honor, vengeance, and hospitality. As to honor, U.S. leaders approach the September 11th attacks as an attack on our values, our “way of life.” Similarly, military action is viewed as a means of avenging the innocent victims at the WTC and Pentagon. Meanwhile, the U.S. frequently conducts hospitable relations with economic “hosts,” military allies, and producer “guests”—often even in light of oppression and terrorism within these regimes.

The need for multicultural education in values, as well as the rhetorical import of these values, is nowhere better illustrated than the difficulties the present administration faced in dealing with the Taliban, the majority of whom are Pashtun, an ethnic group whose ethics are grounded in an “austere code of conduct known as Pashtunwali” (Jafri and Dolinsky 1). Central to Pashtunwali is the belief that death is preferable to life without nang, or honor. According to Hasan Jafri and Lewis Dolinsky, both journalists with extensive experience covering the Mideast, to issue ultimatums while employing force is to “despoil” nang (1). As I interpret, ultimatums suggest that the threatened party is inferior; use of force suggests that they are so inferior that any concession to discourse is mere charity on our part. As Jafri and Dolinsky describe it, ultimatums coupled with bombs add “insult to injury” (1). The proper Pashtunwali response is to redeem honor through badal, or revenge. Thus, to combine ultimatums with military action only furthers perceptions that we are infidel, inflaming desire for revenge and so reinforcing Taliban influence. Meanwhile, bin Laden has exploited Pashtunwali’s third tenet, melmaiya, or hospitality—a “complex etiquette [which] surrounds the treatment and status of guests” (1), requiring that one provide “refuge to anyone within the confines of one’s home or country... a host gains honor by serving and protecting his guest... [and] must sacrifice his life in the course of extending protection or refuse to a guest” (1). Yet melmaiya obligates the guest “to obey the national law and not to do something that endangers his host” (1). Meanwhile, Osama bin Laden has exploited the Pashtun Afghans by broadcasting his hateful messages in Arabic, rather than Pashto or Dari, the languages of Afghanistan. As most Afghans receive their news from Pashto radio broadcasts of the Voice of American and BBC, Jafri and Dolinsky argue that U.S. and coalition leaders “must tailor those broadcasts so that they are understandable within the Pashtun’s code of honor and hospitality... [must] convey that bin Laden... is abusing melmaiya” (2).
At bottom, collective judgment depends on individual judgments—autonomous critical thinking is necessary to the collective. Because of this interdependence, the measuring self, unlike the liberal autonomous or rational selves, is an inherently social creature, quite unlike the solitary philosopher: a creature who "notices his neighbor and who moves through life and interacts with others as a human being, with all that implies about basic needs, responses, and capacities" (Farrar 76).

*The Social Self—The “Concerning the Gods” Fragment*

While the intellectual autonomy of the Protagorean self serves to check manufactured consent and tyrannical majorities, this self-concept nonetheless holds that individuals are constantly "shaped and tempered by . . . social interaction even as they control . . . it" (Farrar 78). This interaction produces a collective wisdom which draws on all humanity’s cognitive resources: stories and myth, conventions and law, reasoning and argument. Unlike the liberal rationalist self, then, the Protagorean self does not achieve truth in isolation by the lights of her own mind, but brings her ideas to the light of the minds and experiences of others. The very process of social interaction "lead[s] to social order—and perhaps even prudence and justice" (78). Political order is thus a collective human achievement, the effort toward which is itself ennobling.

The Protagorean self is therefore unlike the liberal autonomous self as well, for she is defined by her membership in the collective rather than by her competition with other autonomous individuals. She is, in fact, integral to the order: the polis is impossible without her. But she is equally impossible without the polis, for only collective life holds promise for self-realization. It is not that she lacks self-determination nor that she has no self-interest, but that self-determination and self-interest both require social context and are modified by this context. From this angle, our perspectives are not developed in isolation but are "formulated in and shaped by the complex network of relations (historical, familial, cultural, political, economic, etc.) that make up our social environment" (Mendelson 30). Social life is thus both "transformative" (Farrar 90), facilitating those very qualities (aidos, respect and dikē, justice) on which social life depends; and "constitutive of a fully human life," providing not only security, but "development . . . genuine autonomy and freedom" (95). Outside the collective, life is no more than survival; from interdependence springs those very things
which make life human. Seen thus, as autonomy is not philosophically prior to community.

human-measure refers not to “man qua man” but to “man qua citizen” (98). Ethics attaches
not to the individual, as in individual rights, but to the polis which makes autonomy possible.

Necessarily then, the virtue of the Protagorean self is grounded in an “epistemological
pragmatism.” a “distrust [of] intellectual pursuits too far removed from concrete experience
and practical utility” (149)—as reflected not only in human-measure but in the fragment
often taken as evidence of Protagoras’ atheism:

Concerning the gods. I am unable to know, whether they exist or whether they
do not exist or what they are like in form.52

Were we to read this statement as an assertion about the object known, i.e. the gods.
Protagoras certainly does appear to assert atheism or, at least, agnosticism. However, as
human-measure reverses epistemological emphasis from known object to knowing subject,
“concerning the gods” appears rather to be an explication of religion “as a social practice
that furthers the goals of civilized people” (Schiappa 148).53 Seen this way, although religion
cannot claim the status of knowledge, it serves knowledge by reinforcing those skills and
virtues which most benefit humans—those which make up “the art of living in the polis”
(148). Simply put, for Protagoras the purpose of human knowledge (as well as belief) is
human utility and human utility is bound to social complexity and contingency. Religion,
regardless of any metaphysical truth it may bear, serves the utilitarian social end of fostering
order. So challenging the traditional authority of mythos. Protagoras “prepares[es] the way for
what now would be called an anthropological approach to theology.” which calls for
“arguing rather than merely telling” (Schiappa 56). From this perspective, the only means of
even tentative certainty relies on discourse—comparison and contrast of the multiple

51 This “epistemological pragmatism” is reinforced in reported accounts of Protagoras’ distaste for theoretical
gometry and mathematics. Schiappa cites Aristotle’s (Metaphysics 997b35 – 998a4 ) reference to Protagoras
when drawing his distinction between geometry and surveying—the former theoretical, the latter practical—as
evidence that Protagoras saw theoretical geometry as defying utilitarian common sense. As further evidence.
Schiappa cites Philodemus’ assertion that Protagoras considered mathematics “unknowable and the terminology
repugnant” (80 B7a) and Plato’s portrayal of Protagoras “as scorning the advanced study of geometry and
calculation (Protagoras 318e)” (149).

52 According to Schiappa, the fragment is “quoted in whole or in part by Diogenes Laertius (9.51), Hesychius
(DK 80 A4), Sextus Empiricus (A12), Cicero (A23), and Eusebius (B4); it is mentioned or paraphrased by
Philostratus (A2), Diogenes of Oenoanda (A23), and Plato (Theaetetus 162d)” (141).

53 Indeed, the view of religion as an absolute, as well as accessible, truth has been at the root of war and
oppression throughout history. Thus, our country’s founders likewise took an “anthropological view” of
religion, establishing religious tolerance as a fundamental tenet of our government.
experiences of diverse individuals in search of intellectual and moral resonance (48-53). To make possible this discourse, civil society requires “certain social, civic qualities” (Farrar 78) such as *sophrosyne*, the self-restraint represented by willingness to judge collectively, which itself entails awareness that survival depends on our mutual dependence, that “society not only require[s] social harmony, but also foster[s] it” (78).

Moreover, if we accept Diogenes Laertius’ version of this fragment—which calls attention to the “many hindrances to knowledge, the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life” (9.51)—*sophrosyne* can be said to be self-restraint in light of one’s personal intellectual limitations. On one hand, this self-restraint entails awareness of the need for judgment in the face of contingency and uncertainty. *Although* we can never be sure, often we must nevertheless act. On the other hand, it entails awareness of one’s interdependence on the knowledge and judgments of others. *Because* we can never be sure, we must share the burden of decision. Hierarchy gives way to network—an exchange of perspectives, experiences, and expertise which bear on and modify one another. Meanwhile, as self-restraint, Protagorean *sophrosyne* also can be said to be awareness of the limits of human knowledge in general. Unlike the rational self, then, the Protagorean self holds her optimistic faith in rational progress in check, distinguishing between scientific knowledge and its appropriate realms of application and moral knowledge and its realms, as well as conceding human limitation in either. While the possibility may continue to be held that operations of nature or the cosmos are indeed unified, stable, unchanging, and therefore, predictable, these operations cease to be viewed as rational in themselves for rationality is itself conceived as a contingent *human* process which entails persistent and continual reinterpretation of all that we perceive.

Hence, together with the human-measure fragment, the “concerning the gods” fragment suggests that the Protagorean self is rational and social, autonomous and integral to community, consistent and open to new interpretation, self-interested and concerned for others. As Peter Euben points out, “philosophers reason in a world they inhabit alone or that is full of their own speculations; citizens think in a world of opinion peopled by many speeches and speakers” (Corrupting 39-40). For the Protagorean self, *logos* is thus intrinsically tied to the *polis*, rather than to a *physis* somehow removed from human’s ordinary existence. The Protagorean self, in short, is not rationalistic and calculating, but
open-minded and capable of judgment in the interest of the collective. As her wisdom and the collective wisdom are interactive, ethical appeals, that is appeals to conventions and mores, i.e. nomos, are equally as valid as logos. Logos, as argument rather than some form of metaphysical truth, "is the means to excellence, consensually constructed law (nomos) being one manifestation" (Schiappa 185).

Moreover, while it has been thought that Protagoras represents a decisive move from the mythic-poetic world to the rationalistic, Protagoras does not entirely do away with myth, for it, too, is part of the collective wisdom. What Protagoras does is to alter the function of myth, from instructional on its face to usefully interpretable (Untersteiner 59). No longer affecting "hypnotic mystification" (Jarratt 51), myth becomes subject to the activity of reason, an "externalized form of thought" (51 cf. Untersteiner 58). In his Great Speech in the Platonic dialogue which bears his name, Protagoras indeed employs mythos to illustrate a logos, i.e. rational argument. Arguing that Zeus, by way of Hermes, gave to humanity the gifts of dike, justice, and aidos, respect, Protagoras builds an argument that favors his anthropological approach to knowledge. In this "transition from story to its application," Protagoras thus "blurs the line between mythos and logos" (51). Myth ceases to be "repeated maxims and lessons of customary behavior," becoming a instrument by which to develop "new solutions to the problems of social organization posed by democracy" (51). At bottom, pathetical appeals, stories both traditional and contemporary, are likewise seen as valid components of the reasoning process. Indeed, if one uses the word logos in the broadest sense, Protagoras defines an epistemology of probability which draws its reasoning from the traditions and stories (mythos) as well as customs and laws (nomos) of particularized, yet collective, human experience. Thus, Jarratt suggests that rhetoric "occupies a sort of boundary status between the two worlds" of mythos and logos, for which she suggests nomos as the middle term (39).

Originally identified with land distribution, nomos, meaning law or convention determined by community agreement, was indeed the subject matter claimed by the Sophists. While the structure implicit in nomos contrasts with the subjective mythos of the fading poet culture, more starkly, the democratic undertones of this formulation contrast with the aristocratic, objectively rational truth of the Platonic and Aristotelian logos which, finding reinforcement in the Enlightenment, came to dominate the European West. These things in
mind. Perhaps it can be said that counter-traditionalists are resisting the calculative *logos* which limits democracy and contributes to oppression, by reintroducing *mythos*, in the form of stories about individuals and cultures which expose negative consequences which have followed upon certain assumptions of rational liberalism; as well as *nomos*, in the form of community agreement that such consequences are intolerable. Jarratt's recasting of *nomos* works well to embody the spirit of these efforts, for as a "coalescence of the public and the private" (53), *nomos* accounts for individual perception while "demand[ing] a social context in which to take effect" (53). Certainly such a process entails "both collective self-expression and collective self-restraint" (Farrar 77), for to "come to grips with what is 'true for N' requires... that we restrain a natural attachment to our own *logos* and seek... to understand 'where the other guy is coming from'" (Mendelson 50-51). Thus to achieve coalescence, *logos*, now conceived as *human* reasoning, must give public airing to the many private voices that make up a community. In short, the search for truth must consist in dialogue: the consideration of multiple points of view toward a judgment satisfactory to all or most.

The Dialogic Self—The "Two Logoi" Fragment

Indeed, as lived reality is inevitably "measured" in diverse ways and as transcendent authority is either non-existent or inaccessible. Protagoras was the first to postulate that on every issue there are two arguments (*logoi*) opposed to each other on everything. (DK 80 A1)54

With this move, Protagoras establishes disagreement as "the substratum of human reasoning, the material with which thinking must grapple and out of which knowledge is constructed" (Mendelson 44). But of course disagreement is the very reason Plato and Aristotle, along with the Athenian citizenry, held a wary eye toward rhetoric. For while democracy is grounded in discourse, and while exposure to theatre, poetry, and the verbal activities of democracy rendered the average Athenian "competent to judge both the merits of an argument and the style" (Ober 159), he was not fully literate. As an educated elite came to dominate the courts and Assembly, Athenians, concerned that among two or more arguments

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54 *Logos* may mean "a) reasoning, thinking or accounting for; b) speech, discourse, or even specific statements; and c) the organizing principles formulae, or laws of the world itself" (Mendelson 47). Here it can be read as "reasoned speech" or "argument" (47). See Schiappa and Mendelson for a full discussion on translation of this fragment.
presented, only one could be right, came thus to fear that jurors and Assemblymen may be persuaded by eloquence rather than truth.

To a certain extent, their concern takes root in their view of arete, i.e. virtue. Descendants of the Homeric tradition, Athenians, at least in part, viewed virtue in heroic terms, as excellence in a competitive arena. Although by the 5th century, Athenians also had begun to view arete as cooperative virtue, their distrust of rhetoric is at least partially grounded on the view of argument as eristic, a contest of wits in which the goal is victory. In fact, eristic matches served as a form of public entertainment to which Athenians “flocked . . . as eagerly as we might to see a boxing match” (De Romilly 81). In such a context, as victory supercedes any commitment to truth, no tactic is off-limits (Mendelson 59). Moral excellence gives way to verbal effectiveness; antithesis seen as an obstacle to overcome rather than an opportunity to critically review possible options. The potential for rhetorical abuse is endemic. So while Athenians delighted in seeing their favorites verbally obliterate their opponents, they feared that use of unscrupulous tactics would spread to the Assembly and other democratic institutions. Indeed, their distrust was bolstered by a focus on rhetoric as persuasion—a contest between elites to “win” the minds of an audience.

Such is the view of argument fleshed out as Aristotle defines the purpose of rhetoric as “defense” and “attack” (Rhetoric 1354a2), its function “to see the available means of persuasion in each case” (13355b2). Here argument is one-sided, directed from rhetor to silent audience. An argument appears as a pre-existing object, “a discursive artifact designed to assert a justified belief” (Mendelson 49). As artifact rather than social process, an argument is therefore capable of destroying contrasting objects, “marketable” to a consuming audience, and vulnerable to those who would dismantle it. Antithesis appears as a threat, for to accept the validity of antithetical claims is to destroy the artifact. Indeed, as artifact, or object, the “shape” of an argument is clear; it “exist[s] as a complete, two-dimensional visual construct” (Jarratt 27), the components of which, i.e. premises and conclusions, are known from the outset. For Aristotle, argument thus takes the form of hypotaxis, a propositional structure in which subordinate premises build in hierarchical fashion toward an overriding thesis. a conclusion “prefigured from the beginning” (27).

\[55\] We might note here the contemporary fascination with shows which feature hosts such as Rush Limbaugh or Maury Povich.
By contrast, Protagoras is portrayed by Plato as employing *parataxis*, "the loose association of clauses without hierarchical connectives or embedding" (51), the options presented loosely coordinated, placed side by side, toward the purpose of examining the familiar from a variety of perspectives. Approached thus, antithesis, rather than threatening an opposing truth-claim, "creates an openness to the multiplicity of possible causal relations" (21). So while Aristotle's "formal" approach to argument "tends to isolate ideas from the intricacies of their situation for the purpose of generalization and clarity," the Protagorean view of argument as *antilogic* is "immersed in the distinct and fully historical world out of which the discourse develops and in the psychological nature of the living human beings involved" (Mendelson 50); it has a "social rather than an epistemological purpose, strictly defined" (Jarratt 27). At bottom, the Protagorean self may be a measure unto herself, but her measurement must be placed alongside those of others that the merits of each may be weighed. Argument thus entails dialogue rather than monologue as "dialogical exchange among people with varied conceptions of the world" comes to be viewed in itself as "a victory because the circumference of what is known is potentially enlarged by the addition of each argument to the pool of resources" (Mendelson 60). From this standpoint, argumentation is analytical and cooperative rather than propositional and oppositional.

Again, an analogy to music may be helpful. In classical music, phrases, movements, themes, even each chord and note, are laid out in a linear fashion rigorously followed to achieve the effect determined by the composer—they are hypotactic. Solos are likewise carefully structured and embedded within the hierarchical form as a means to feature a particular instrument rather than to feature a new interpretation of the structure. Consequently, a classical composition may be memorized as is, either aurally or visually, by performers and audience alike. The music is abstracted from its present context, its excellence residing in the faithful rendition of the composer's intent. Jazz music, on the other hand, disrupts the hierarchical structure of the form, allowing new voicings of a particular chord, of a melodic line, even the metric flow of the composition—it is paratactic. Solos emerge as more than accentuation of a particular instrument, featuring instead the particular "argument" of the soloist. In the practice known as "trading fours," two or more musicians improvise upon a four-bar phrase, alternately reinterpreting the phrase to provide new perspective. Their "arguments" are placed side by side in such a way that both performers
and audience are illuminated by new meanings. Unless recorded, no given jazz performance can therefore be memorized. The music is created by its context, its excellence residing in individual reinterpretations which resonate with other players and the audience. In fact, too frequent repetition of the same interpretation marks the jazz musician as lacking innovation, as having nothing new to say. Likewise, in antilogical exchange, participants are expected to contribute fresh perspective rather than dogmatically hold ground.

Of course it may be argued that dialectic bears a dialogic quality, as it, too, reasons toward truth from opinion in a "give and take of converse and redefinition," placing thought "in terms of its opposite" (Mendelson 62). However, unlike antilogic, dialectic pursues knowledge in the abstract, "removed from its context in the world" (63) and is "predominantly concerned with appeals to reason rather than to persons" (63). It seeks and employs the voice of authority and "tends to make formal entities out of fluid, operative relations and to atomize information into discrete and separable units, all for the purpose of generalization and precision" (63). This is well illustrated by Socrates’ use of the elenchus, "cross-examination . . . by rapid-fire questions which solicit abbreviated responses" (63 cf. Grote: see Protagoras 332a-333e). Though Socrates’ self-proclaimed purpose is to "disabuse" his dialectical partners of falsehood (64 cf. Apology 29e), "the cooperative impulse of the elenchus is clearly subordinate to the drive toward conceptual correctness and conformity to procedure as dictated by the questioner" (64). The contradictory arguments inherent in complex issues are thus abstracted "from the pluralistic, contentious, chaotic exchange that conditions public discourse and . . . subject[ed] . . . to formal analysis" (65).

By contrast, employing both antithesis and parataxis, antilogic aims not to discover the unknown, but to "rearrange" the known so as to explore possible interpretations. The "pretense to objectivity" which characterizes the formal methods of Plato and Aristotle gives way to "an open acknowledgement of a value orientation: any realignment is made for a purpose" (Jarratt 28). Certainly the negative potential of this value orientation is precisely what concerned Plato and Aristotle. If antilogic is seen only as "a rhetorical tool for turning the tables and converting alternatives into justification for one’s own stand, antilogic will indeed decline into eristic" (Mendelson 59). However, in light of Protagoras’ commitment to
the collective, a neo-Protagorean theory of argumentation may be formulated that avoids the traps of eristic.  

Indeed, if it can be accepted that Protagorean *sophrosyne* in its guise as wisdom is *phronesis*, antilogical argument, that is, argument from many sides, can be said to be the form this wisdom takes in practice. As Aristotle tells us, *sophrosyne* “saves” *phronesis*. This is especially true for the neo-Protagorean, for whom the end of discourse is not certainty but beneficial action toward the interest of the collective in whatever “reality” they find themselves. As I have argued, this substratum of disagreement requires both a critical spirit and the self-restraint to apply this spirit to one’s personal standpoint as well as those opposed. To approach argument as dialogue therefore, again requires *sophrosyne*—in this instance conceived as courage or risk.

Given that antilogic concerns topics “in which certainty is indeterminate and controversy hence immanent” (Mendelson 48), the potential for intimidation of the weak by the powerful is clear. Unless the weak are to kowtow to decisions made by the strong, antilogic necessarily requires the courage to dissent against the dominant view. Clearly this opportunity for dissent is the very purpose of the First Amendment. But First Amendment rights notwithstanding, a given social climate may indeed require great courage. For example, in the aftermath of September 11th, dissent has been met in both our legislative houses and the media with charges that those so dissenting are unpatriotic, even treasonous. In particular, those who suggest that U.S. foreign policy may have contributed to these tragic events have been labeled “subversive” (Feeney 2), “communist” (Feeney 3), “anticapitalist,” and “anti-American” (Kurtz 1). Some have even been fired from their positions. Certainly to face the loss of one’s livelihood takes courage. And, in light of the fact that certain accusations, if demonstrated in a court of law, can lead to imprisonment, willingness to dissent in such a climate requires further courage still. Moreover, as antilogic blurs the lines between the public and the private, requiring that personal perspective be weighed and measured collectively, it requires the courage to publicly expose the details of one’s private experience and the perspective which emerges from it. We must tell our stories even at the risk of our privacy and credibility. The personal is political.

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But the courage to speak our convictions is not the only variety of courage required by antilogical exchange, for true dialogue also requires that we engage with views that dissent from our own. "to admit, or even solicit, an alternative, an attack, an antilogos to our own perspective" (Mendelson 11). Indeed, antilogic is "not merely a mechanical process of constructing countless arguments" but holds "critical potential for engaging and shaping political thought and action" (Jarratt 104-5). Viewed this way, the confrontation of thesis and antithesis which seems "gratuitous and artificial" in the context of eristic may be employed as a "rigorous means of assessment" (De Romilly 86) of the multiple needs and perspectives of the individuals who make up our community. To so engage, we must "emancipate" ourselves "from dogmatic preconceptions" to proceed in "negotiation of mutually acceptable benefits" (Mendelson 60). Antilogical exchange requires therefore the courage to examine conflicting beliefs to arrive at the "true facts of a complex situation" (De Romilly 88), for "the means of discursive participation by many is connected to the intended end of good judgment" (Schiappa 184). In this way, critics of the government (as well as critics of the canon) may be seen as patriots who refuse to let our desire for justice lead us down the garden path.

Of course as alternatives emerge from dissent, we must also possess the courage to admit when we are wrong—even to anticipate that we may be wrong. As such courage requires self-examination, we must think antilogically, privately "contemplate the relative merits of opposing views on any contentious topic" (Mendelson 49) that we may come to respect "the socially generated categories in the context of which the 'other side' makes sense" (50-51). Granted, our options for dealing with contrasting points of view are many: "we may revise, accept, or accommodate the arguments of the other side; but . . . we cannot remain unmoved. for antilogical exchange in itself serves to extend the circumference of understanding" (57). We must hence possess the courage to change our minds, to acknowledge that from antilogical exchange may emerge "a truth more elaborate than either thesis" (De Romilly 89). In fact, we must possess the courage to both critique and dissent from those we may count among our allies. Finally, to solve problems by means of antilogic requires the courage to act in the face of less than ideal certainty, in the face of continuing disagreement. While antilogic "seeks coherence among opposing beliefs sufficient to justify provisional conclusions and sanction consensual action" (Mendelson 64), it is "not a dyadic
preliminary to some kind of synthesis, nor is it intent on the end of the dialogue” (50), for consensus denies the possibility of other logos.

Unfortunately, the debate which characterizes the Culture War too often fails to proceed antilogically: dogma too often rules the day. Clearly, moral-traditionalists utterly reject antilogic, declaring themselves to be the protectors of absolute truth. But counter-traditionalists are not immune to dogma. Indeed, one of the strengths of moral-traditional arguments is that they often point out the dogmatic, even knee-jerk, responses of counter-traditionalists. Lynne Cheney and Dinesh D’Souza offer as one example the attacks against Rosalind Rosenberg, associate professor of history at Barnard College (whom D’Souza identifies as a feminist scholar [203]), who testified for the defense against charges that “Sears discriminated against women in hiring for commission sales jobs” (in Cheney Truth 116). Rosenberg’s argument that women hold different “interests and aspirations regarding work” which lead them to jobs “more compatible with family life” (116) was quickly assailed by the American Historical Association Women’s Coordinating Committee for using feminist scholarship “against the interests of women struggling for equity in our society” (116)—though much of this scholarship itself emphasizes male-female differences. Rather than acknowledge the potential conflicts or controversy in any field of study, such a position simply covers them over, dogmatically insisting that feminist research must be used only for the “emancipation” of women—conceived quite narrowly as a career outside the home. Though moral-traditionalists often use such examples to promote their own dogma, their indictment of some counter-traditionalist reactions reveals much.

At any rate, honest dialogue requires sophrosyne as courage in all its many forms. A courageous scholar does not disregard or discard the canon but engages with it, nor does a courageous scholar condemn those works that fall outside the canon, but engages with them. A courageous scholar does not dismiss opposing points of view, nor label those who hold them traitors—whether to contemporary scholarship or traditional. A courageous scholar is not afraid to buck the party line, to confront the possibility that women may have different needs and desires than men, that a minority individual may not only be disadvantaged by discrimination past and present, but by skill level, even attitude toward education. Indeed, among my own students I have had numerous women express that home and family take priority over career. That emancipation for them does not mean reaching the top of the
corporate ladder, but being skilled enough to support their families in the absence of paternal support. Meanwhile, many minority students and first-generation majority students have expressed ambivalence toward higher education as it sometimes changes their relationships to their communities. Thus they sometimes resist scholarship which contradicts home beliefs—canonized or otherwise—as well as language that marks them as "educated." It takes courage to express such views as well as to hold them in check when necessary. Such resistance likewise requires courage in the educator, for she must be silent long enough to hear her student and bold enough to disrupt his position.

At any rate, I do not intend here to concede to moral-traditionalist arguments that the playing field is equal or that the words of dead white men are greater than those valued by counter-traditionalists, for the playing field is not equal and that inequality is often best expressed by voices outside the canon. The bottom line is, dialogue requires a democratic, not dogmatic, approach to issues. It thus requires a sufficient sense of justice to make way for voices seldom heard. Protagorean justice, therefore, can likewise be conceived as sophrosyne.

**The Democratic Self—The "Stronger/Weaker" Fragment**

In rejecting human capacity for insight into the nature of being as well as its complement that most individuals are defective in such insight, Protagoras likewise rejects the trope which follows from these assumptions—namely that only a few gifted individuals are capable of sufficient reason for rule. His argument is laid out upon four premises illustrated in the myth contained in his Great Speech—1) humanity requires cities to fend off the savagery of the wilderness; 2) cities are impossible without the art of government; 3) government is a process of discourse among citizens; 4) discourse is impossible without the divine gifts of dike, justice, and aidos, respect. Upon these premises, Protagoras concludes that cities cannot exist if only a few have these gifts, for without them, the many would turn on each other and on the few (Protagoras 320c-322e).

As a matter of fact, since it is membership in the social collective that makes us human, "what is at stake is not merely the greatest possible exercise of freedom compatible with order" (Farrar 96) but "the highest form of self-realization" (96). As even tyranny can provide liberty and self-realization for a powerful few, Protagorean justice is necessarily
democratic. Justice stems from intersubjective wisdom or *phronesis*, "the ability to interpret experience, generalize from it, appreciate its implications—and . . . to communicate this understanding to others" (95). Democracy, the rhetorical process of shared deliberation, is itself the source of virtue, "a commonly shared expertise" (Wallach 335) which involves "capacities for civic participation, cooperation, and sound political judgment about the welfare of [the] community" (333) which, in turn, involves "knowing what counts as a virtuous practice in public life" (334). Such a concept of virtue holds not that we should follow laws in order that others' vice not be wreaked upon us, but that we be virtuous because our social order depends on it, because we are bound to other human beings through both necessity and affinity. The divine gifts of justice, *dike*, and respect, *aidos*, "become qualities of human behavior"—*dikaiosyne*, "a capacity for justice," and *sophrosyne*, "the capacity for [self] control" (Schiappa 148). Justice and *sophrosyne* become flip sides of the same coin, for justice stems from respect and, like respect, numbers among the bonds of friendship (Protagoras 322c) which make community and liberty within the community possible. Moreover, because majorities may tyrannize minorities, Protagorean *sophrosyne* as justice requires not only that we recognize the existence of opposing arguments, but that we seriously consider arguments that are not presently dominant—in the words attributed to Protagoras, that we "make the weaker argument the stronger."

Of course this is just the practice for which Plato and Aristotle condemned the Sophists. For in their eyes, it is to "make the worse case seem the better."57 The implication here, of course, is that falsehood would be made attractive, that citizens would be lured by deceit. However, such a reading removes this fragment from the full context of Protagorean thought. Given the limitations of human-measure, as a "companion to the two-logoi fragment" (Schiappa 107), the weaker/stronger fragment is better read as an argument for "the substitution of a preferred (but weaker) *logos* for a less preferable (but temporarily dominant) *logos* of the same "experience"" (109). Indeed, as Protagorean virtue is cooperative, defined as ""excellences deemed most likely to ensure the success, prosperity, and stability of the group"" (182), Protagorean *sophrosyne* as justice can be seen as recognition that powerful individuals may manipulate the majority or silence the minority;

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57 For a full discussion of the positive reading of this fragment, see Schiappa 103-114.
that the majority may be wrong; and that minority viewpoints may offer insight that reveals the true complexities of a circumstance.

Thus, the stronger/weaker fragment suggests that antilogic is more than a method of argument; it is a method of inquiry mounted upon the assumption that dominant paradigms may cover over legitimate answers to problems. Antilogic requires “that all positions be examined in relation to their opposite numbers, that the authenticity of the other side be understood and respected, and that the construction of one’s own position involves some response to the collision of alternatives” (Mendelson 57). Antilogic requires that the individual recognize the ways in which counter-arguments require adjustments to one’s initial position: “an intermingling of alternatives... where each position is the subject of critique and each critique, in turn, receives critical response” (57). In other words, it requires that we verbally “trade fours” to illuminate new answers to mutual problems. The matter is again one of utility. In keeping with the human-measure fragment, Protagoras “maintains that we can make distinctions between knowledge claims... with regard to the advantage... they hold for those who accept them” (Mendelson 20 cf. Theaetetus 172b). Antilogic thus asks us to step into the shoes of the other, to “strengthen both sides of a question” so as “to make clear... what [is] at stake in a controversy” (Farrar 63-64). “mak[ing] it possible to distinguish the true facts of a complex situation in a perfectly objective fashion, and thereby render them intelligible” (De Romilly 88). Upon this view, social harmony and stability are strengthened by our very consideration for others.

Indeed, this requirement to strengthen the weaker argument stems from Protagoras’ view of justice as “service and help to others” (208). Even as Protagoras tells us that “whatever seems right and honourable to a state is really right and honourable,” he calls upon the wise individual to cause the good, instead of that which is evil to them in each instance, to be and seem right and honourable” (Plato Theaetetus 167c). Certainly here Protagoras points to the possibility that the state, or the dominant view, may erroneously maintain a harmful view. Hence, Protagorean justice requires the wise individual to persuade her fellow citizens to take the better course even when arguments which support this course momentarily seem the weaker. In sum, justice conceived antilogically is other-oriented; “it insists on the need to counterpoint dominant logoi with those voices that have not been heard.
that one cannot imagine on one's own, the constituencies not yet at the table, the quiet
student in the back row” (Mendelson 52).

Indeed, unlike the liberal, autonomous self, the Protagorean self does not view her
primary activity as economic, that is, in her own self interest, but political, in the interest of
all. As the interest of the community is at heart the interest of the individual, justice is not
merely an effort toward effective control in the midst of competition, but a collective quest
for excellence defined in dialogic, democratic, and therefore perpetually modified ways.
Certainly, when man *qua* man measures, rhetoric may be manipulative, as the individual
seeks personal advantage, but when man *qua* citizen measures, rhetoric holds the possibility
of operating in the interest of all. Indeed, it is not merely that minority voices must be heard
to prevent their unjust treatment, but that minority opinion may provide fresh insight that
may hinder us from mistakenly subjecting the many to an unforeseen injustice. In other
words, democratic justice requires that we consider the possibility that minority perspectives
may be in the interest of the many—if only we take time to explore their full implications.
Indeed, history is replete with examples of minority viewpoints which, if heeded, would
likely have staved off catastrophe. While it may be granted that justice for the many may
nonetheless result in injustice for a few: “antilogic creates an opportunity for conventionally
“weaker” positions to be heard . . . for the dominant order to be challenged and even
overturned if the alternative case can be made to the satisfaction of those involved”
(Mendelson 56).

Of course such democratic deliberation does not preclude the possibility that some
individuals may be wiser than others. In fact, Protagoras allows for a distinction between
“two levels of ability which characterize all forms of human action: . . . between those
qualities essential to the existence of the *polis* and those which are not” (Farrar 83). Toward
those essential qualities, all citizens must be educated: “those who are themselves competent
teach the basics . . . the talented few teach those who are already competent but wish to be
proficient” (83) Even so, as wisdom is drawn from experience, some individuals may have
different or broader experience which can be brought to bear on a given matter. Likewise,
some individuals may have greater capacity to understand the experience of others. Such men
“teach everyone, by interaction in the assembly and on the council” (84), so facilitating
competence among the many. As excellence and competence exist in symbiotic relationship,
the democratic process is itself an education, as "universal competence is . . . both complemented and made possible by the excellence of a few" (Farrar 86).

Of course to achieve such a democratically collaborative polis, each citizen must receive an education which demonstrates and facilitates these virtues. Such an education must not mistake truth for judgment, must not fragment the citizens' knowledge into narrow disciplinary realms, must not privilege top-down authority over collaborative construction, must not privilege the individual over the community, and must not present discourse as a battlefield. It must examine truth-assumptions to reveal dogma. It must negotiate among disciplinary knowledges as well as between disciplinary knowledge and experiential knowledge. It must unpack privilege and oppression. It must have as its aim humanitarian good. It must be dialogic and democratic. In short, it must embrace the contradictions of the fragmented self, re-seeing them, reviewing them, and revising them as relations of power which may be collectively mediated.

In the following chapter, I will examine just such an approach to education embodied in the theory and practice of Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire. I will contrast the assumptions of Freirean pedagogy—alternately called "critical" or "radical pedagogy"—to presently dominant pedagogical assumptions to argue for a "liberatory pedagogy" which holds promise for mediating the fragmented self, so enabling the agency of diverse humans to engage in socially consequential action. Meanwhile, I will recontextualize this liberatory pedagogy from the streets and rural passages of Brazil to the American university and examine its results in my classroom in the aftermath of September 11.
Chapter Five
Teaching and Learning Democracy in the
Wake of September 11th

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold his deliberate decision.

—John Stuart Mill and
Harriet Taylor Mill
“On Liberty” (1859)

It is the province of knowledge to speak. And it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.
—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Understanding is a two-way street.
—Eleanor Roosevelt

The shepherd, qua shepherd, acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be ‘identified’ with a project that is raising the sheep for market.
—Kenneth Burke

Education is the sleeping pill that makes dreams happen.
—Peggy Hill
TV sitcom

In The Virtue of Philosophy, classicist Drew Hyland signifies Socrates as history’s paragon of the sophrosyne needed for scholarship and teaching—again calling attention to the distinction between the subversive Socrates and the rationalist Plato. So doing, he provides useful language for distinguishing Socrates’ approach to inquiry from both extreme rationalism and extreme relativism. Hyland argues that, beginning with Descartes, the rationalist project increasingly took on a “stance of mastery” (3). This he contrasts with the dangers of nihilistic relativism—the “stance of submission” (3). Drawing on the Charmides, he attributes a third stance to Socrates, the “stance of interrogation” or “stance of wonder”¹ (13), which he closely associates with sophrosyne.

¹ “μαλα γερ φιλοσοφον τουτο το πατησι, το θεαμαζετιν” (“For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher” [Plato Theaetetus 155d2]).
While Hyland's language resonates with my arguments, I maintain that Socrates the teacher, at least as depicted by Plato, does not go far enough. While he does, indeed, challenge his interlocutors to interrogate their own assumptions, he does so that he might lead them to his desired end. From a Protagorean viewpoint, the teacher cannot possibly have knowledge of the "true end." for the truest end consists in the juxtaposition of multiple viewpoints in a given context. It is neither true, if true is to mean absolute, nor is it an end, if end is to mean finished, discussion over.

Meanwhile, Protagoras' description of the traditional teaching of his age brings to mind starkly the moral-traditionalism of our own:

when they have learnt their letters and are getting to understand the written word . . . [they] are furnished with works of good poets to read . . . here they meet with many admonitions, many descriptions and praises and eulogies of good men in times past, that the boy in envy may imitate them and yearn to become even as they. (Plato Protagoras 325e-326a)

As discussed, Protagoras challenged this vision of education just as do counter-traditionalists today. Treating logos as both thought and language, his view of rhetoric, "did indeed include the art of reasoning, discussing and reaching a conclusion" (De Romilly 73). So while his methods "often involved the critical evaluation of literary models" (Mendelson 55), he was not bent on "contemplating the wisdom of 'divinely inspired poetry'" (55 cf. Schiappa 162) or "dissecting the 'barren subtleties' of abstract philosophy" (55 cf. Isocrates Antidosis 262-69), but on the development of "sound judgment [eubolia] through direct engagement with concrete rhetorical situations" (55 cf. Isocrates Antidosis 262-69). From this approach, the study of literature serves as an "exercise in practical reasoning 'transferred to the realm of poetry'" (55 cf. Protagoras 339: Quintilian 2.20.5).

Students of Protagoras also composed opposing speeches on a variety of topics (Mendelson 55 cf. DK 80A), presented alternative arguments in formal debate, and examined these alternatives through "verbal exchange" in "small informal discussion group[s]" (Kerferd 34 in Mendelson 55). As "such activities immerse students in local detail . . . requiring them to identify appropriate rhetorical strategies in response" (Mendelson 55), the end of antilogical teaching is "not a skill divorced from a
consideration of human needs and ends, but rather a way of analyzing and promoting them” (Farrar 87). Antilogical pedagogy is thus grounded in praxis, literally “a doing, acting, or action” (Liddell and Scott), which in turn “offers a theory of how groups work...” suffused with assumptions about authority, identity, responsibility, and value” (Mendelson 55). From this angle, pedagogy cannot be “conflated with teaching” or “used to signify the theory preceding and informing practice...” but must be understood to “encompass both theories and practice at once” (Stenberg and Lee 328).

The critical or “radical” pedagogy advocated by many counter-traditionalists is likewise “concerned with how knowledge is produced through specific practices and processes, as well as the values and assumptions that inform those interactions” (328). Language use, as well as language education, are viewed as “social practices used to critically study all social practices including the social practices of language use and education” (Shor “Critical Literacy” 10)—which in turn “involves questioning received knowledge and immediate experience with the goals of challenging inequality and developing an activist citizenry” (11 cf. Dewey Moral). Such a view of literacy goes beyond functional or utilitarian writing skills, encompassing “social action through language use that develops us inside a larger culture” (1). To “measure,” so defined, is to become “conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson and Irvine 82 in Shor 11). This sort of literacy, with which the individual may engage her world and act upon it, is necessary to agency, to transforming the student from passive object to meaning-making subject, to reintegrating the fragmented self, to completing her humanity (Freire Oppressed 47).

Indeed, in the absence of such critical reflection, current standards and practices in composition education run the risk of reinforcing the contradictions of the fragmented self. As observed by Lynn Bloom, a major role of writing instruction is to assimilate students into the “middle-class values that are thought to be essential to the proper functioning of students in the academy” (“Middle-Class” 656). The correspondence between many of these virtues and the liberal rational conception of sophrosyne is clear in translation—“self-reliance/responsibility” (autarkeia); “decorum/propropriety” (kosmiotes, to prepon); “moderation/temperance” (sophrosyne, enkratia); “order” (taxis);
“respectability” (hagneia); “cleanliness” (katharotes). Self-reliance, for example, invokes the autonomous self, privileging independence over interdependence. In turn, to gain rhetorical autonomy, that is, to be seen as an “author,” the student must demonstrate her “rationality” in coherent, “orderly,” and “well-integrated” prose which possesses a “single guiding purpose” toward which she “march[es] step by step” (Marius 55-56 in Bloom “Middle-Class” 664). While such guidelines have come to seem as common sense, as Lester Faigley maintains, textual coherence may reduce contradictions in experience “to a matter of textual tensions” which must be resolved for the writer to present herself “reasonable, authoritative, and objective,” thus unified (162). Paradoxically then, while the text represents the writer as an autonomous agent, she is nonetheless determined by expressive limits which attach to a rationalist view of the self. This paradox is compounded when standards of coherence are examined alongside those of decorum and respectability—for the former tend toward formality, distance, and subordination in the relationship between writer and reader, while the latter mediates against authentic content in writing by encouraging students to conceal experiences which may meet with disapproval. Thus determinism may extend beyond the act of writing. For example, the call to suppress self-reference “is not a matter of stylistic preference” but “voluntary assent” to “subjectivity with the dominant ideology” (142). Meanwhile, cleanliness not only mitigates against slang, dialect, and other uses of authentic voice, but outrage, irreverence and other strong responses to experience—as does moderation/temperance.

Moreover, as Susan Miller points out, because pedagogical focus has shifted to the process of writing rather than purposes toward which a written product may be put, students are “expected to experience processes, activities, strategies, multiple perspectives, peer groups, and evaluations that have no articulated relation to actual

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2 As she draws her catalog from Benjamin Franklin, Bloom also includes “thrift, efficiency... punctuality, delayed gratification, and critical thinking” (“Middle-Class”).

3 Emerging in the early 1960’s and reaching full steam a decade later, the process approach to composition has been, in part, grounded in an impulse to treat students as already writers “entitled to self-expression, capable of inspiring and being inspired, and interested in writing about themselves for an audience larger than their teacher” (Schreiner 85); it thus attempts to mediate between students and the institutional “atmosphere seen to be unresponsive to their needs” (102). As its name indicates, process method approaches writing as a process, “like thinking itself, rather than the end product of thought” (85). It thus represents a “shift in the teaching of writing from an emphasis on the product of writing, especially form, style, and usage, to an emphasis on the mind of the individual writer” (Faigley 29 cf. Hairston “Winds”).
results" (100) in the world outside the classroom. This vision of writing as a private act of expression rather than a public act of agency is rife with contradiction. On the one hand, as literacy so confined is not addressed "in the senses it has most often been measured, as an indication of capacities to transmit property, create it, or take political action" (95), process pedagogy may reinforce a determinate self construct. On the other hand, focus on process may buttress the liberal separation of the individual from the civic context, for it privileges the notion of a "true self" which speaks from outside the messy, human context.4 Certainly process theory has contributed much to our understanding of writing as a reflexive activity and thus marks an important step away from excess and often debilitating emphasis on "correctness" and toward valuing student voices. Yet it nonetheless runs the risk of encouraging a "personal voice" that speaks to no one in particular, in no particular settings, and to no particular purposes" (103), so undermining student agency as well as ethical responsibility.

Emphasis on personal voice also raises concerns that the teacher-student relationship may be intrusive, as it "tends to honor particular constructions of the students’ character and to encourage the evaluation of students’ lives instead of their work" (Spigelman 70-71 cf. Faigley). This concentration on the past rather than on "the contradictions of present experience" suggests that students "achieve rationality and unity by characterizing former selves as objects for analysis" (Faigley 129). Under such assumptions, "success in teaching depends on making a student aware of the desired subject she will occupy" (129)—which of course means that students "will be judged by the teachers’ unstated assumptions about subjectivity" (128). Personal writing thus risks becoming a sort of "confessional."

4 Faigley maintains that the notion of a "true self" is bolstered by a "pair of seemingly contradictory metaphors"—1) the rationalist notion "that language can transmit directly what is signified in external reality:" and 2) the romantic notion "that emotions could be transmitted directly as well" (112). Faigley argues that this notion denies that "the self is constructed in socially and historically specific discursive practices" (128).
requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes.

(Foucault History 63 in Faigley 130)

Under such circumstances, self-scrutiny tends to be characterized by the notion of “emotional distance,” which tends to “diminish the political significance of [personal] experiences” even as it “moderates strong responses” to controversial issues (161). In the end, students are expected to speak authentically, but as authenticity is marked by the presentation of an autonomous, rational, and unified self, the student may be unable to express the contradictions which threaten to determine her.

The upshot is that we can’t accomplish the task of facilitating the skills needed for negotiating cultural differences “simply by teaching humanities texts and skills (such as close reading, historical research, or cultural analysis) because negotiated democratic practices don’t lie prefabricated in such texts or skills” (Gorzelksy 320). Nor can we facilitate democratic, dialogical skills if we reduce composition teaching to grammatical correctness and development of style, for to do so is to absolve ourselves of any consideration of what the written word may be used for. Instead we must “ask students to take critical postures toward their own language uses as well as toward the discourses dominating school and society” (Shor “Critical Literacy” 19). Critical pedagogy thus “questions hegemonic conceptions of disciplinarity, where bodies of knowledge take precedence over activities of engaging knowledge with others” (Stenberg and Lee 327 cf. Slevin “Disciplining”). Facilitating “the ability to address questions of difference and achieve acceptable resolutions” (Mendelson 58), such pedagogy bears potential for “the liberation of the knowing subject from the claims of unchallenged assumptions” (57) as well as for “consensual action” (58). Of course this is just the sort of education that has raised charges of “moral relativism” and/or “ideological abuse” among moral-traditionalists. But moral-traditionalists are not alone in their concern, for counter-traditionalists are equally concerned that ideological abuse stems from the unexamined claims of moral-traditionalism.

In keeping with these concerns, Brazilian educator Paolo Freire offers a pedagogy which embodies the neo-Protagorean shift in focus from the known object to the knowing
subject while palliating the risks of rationalism, relativism, and ideological abuse. Recognizing, as does Protagoras, that the names of things are human inventions, Freire’s aim is to enable students to “name the world” (Oppressed 88), to create their own histories. To do so, Freire tells us, students must learn to perceive their limit-situations. the objective conditions which limit their ability to act on the world. As Freire describes, “limit situations imply the existence of persons who are directly or indirectly served by these situations, and of those who are negated and curbed by them” (102). As limit situations are cultural “givens,” humans become “submerged” in them, “domesticated” (51) by a “false consciousness” which “internalize[s] the image of the oppressor” as “their model of manhood” (46); “[t]heir ideal is to be men: but for them, to be men is to be oppressors” (45). Freire aims to make students aware of this “existential duality” (48) as they come to “perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (49). Upon this, Freire defines the goal of education as conscientizacao or “critical consciousness,” the ability to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (35).

In the case of my majority middle-class students, false consciousness directly corresponds to the fragmented self. As in any context, here the goal of Freirean pedagogy is to enable the individual to mediate between competing self-constructs. With regard to the determinate self, laying bare the individual’s limit situations enables her to recognize that she is “conditioned but not determined” (Freedom 26), that she possesses a capacity to exceed the forces which determine her. In turn, as the “pure product of genetic, cultural, or class determination has no responsibility for . . . action in the world” as it

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5 Freire takes part in a tradition of Christian-Marxism, a tradition which conceives of Marxism as furthering democracy. Christian Marxists, as well as many other contemporary Marxists, extend the philosophy beyond the distributive paradigm, that is, the realm of external goods, to include social, spiritual, and psychological internal goods such as respect, peace of mind, and governing influence. Nonetheless, contemporary Marxists, like their predecessors, largely perceive the social world “in terms of categories of class as defined by relationships to economic and productive processes” and reject “the exploitation inherent in private control of productive processes” (Blackburn 232). Contrary to popular rhetoric, Marxism ought not be associated with the fascism of modern Communist states, but with democracy, for Marx envisioned a very small central, and almost entirely administrative, state in which citizens directly participate in policy deliberations, in the workplace as well as in the greater society. For Marx and his followers, therefore, the division of labor is determined democratically prior to production. Contemporary Marxism thus places emphasis on the deliberative agency of individuals in their diverse contexts. Marx himself emphasized that change in social relations precedes change in productive force and control.
is therefore "impossible for [her] to speak of ethics" (26), Freirean pedagogy seeks to reconnect the individual with the world, mitigating the excesses of the autonomous self and so reinforcing the individual's ethical and thus political responsibility. As Freire argues.

Education as the practice of freedom . . . denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world: it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it. (Oppressed 81)

Finally, education for liberation mitigates the excesses of the rational self by redefining the practices of decision-making from agonistic and competitive to dialogic and problem-solving. Taken together, greater individual agency, increased personal responsibility, and dialogic practice hold promise for transforming social, economic, and political institutions in ways which promote both greater effectiveness, that is, the means by which we manage external goods, and greater justice, that is, the objective of internal good.

The concept of the self thus envisioned by Freire is the embodiment of neo-Protagorean sophrosyne. This "liberated" self balances internal social goods against external personal goods, engages in practices which promote internal goods, and challenges institutions which limit these practices. She possesses the wisdom to understand her limitations, even as she strives to overcome them, as well as the self-restraint to listen to the wisdom of others. She understands the coalescence of the public and the private, sustaining her autonomy to benefit the collective. Understanding truth as multivalent, she makes way for the least heard. She possesses the courage to voice her convictions, the courage to hold her tongue, the courage to admit her error, and the courage to change her mind. She attaches justice to means as well as ends, to practices and institutions as well as to judgments and consequences.

Liberatory pedagogy therefore perceives students as capable of measure, contextualizes measuring to their concrete social existence, engages students dialogically, and poses education as democratic problem-solving. Such an approach as intensely
focuses on the relationship between teachers and students as on program content. This relationship entails not that we speak to students about “our own view of the world,” nor “attempt to impose that view on them,” but rather that we dialogue with them about their view and ours, understanding that “their view of the world,” as our own, “manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world” (Oppressed 96). Posed in an interrogative stance alongside her students, the teacher is thus a collaborator in the ongoing project of temporal situated understanding, rather than the source of authoritative interpretation: “the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers” (80). At bottom, the liberatory educator is called upon to model the democratic, dialogic sophrosyne she wishes to facilitate in her students.

Though liberatory pedagogy originated among Brazilian peasant-farmers, it may be re-invented for our comparatively affluent American student body—for they, too, suffer under a false consciousness. Corresponding to the fragmented self, this false consciousness consists of “manipulated action and reflection which lead people to support their own oppression” as they “police themselves by internalizing the ideas of the ruling elite” (Shor Critical Teaching 55). Conforming to prescribed behavior, “the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another” (Freire Oppressed 47), they take all the “necessary” steps to achieve their aspirations all the while complicit in maintaining the structures which dominate them. One consequence is that students tend to “construe a careerist fast track as the only sphere within which individuals make choices, exercise power, or have control” (Elshtain 128) and “turn to ‘striking it rich’ as the most lively fantasy of liberation” (Shor Critical Teaching 56). In keeping with this fantasy, most students construe the purpose of college education as to acquire the skills and bodies of knowledge which will aid them professionally and, therefore, materially. They enter college accustomed to, expecting, and seeking transmission of these skills and knowledges under what Freire calls the “banking” model of education, wherein the master-teacher
"deposits" a body of knowledge into the intellectually empty vaults of submissive students. 6

By now the correspondence of banking pedagogy to moral-traditionalism should be apparent. But in fact, because our students are comparatively so privileged, counter-traditionalists are at risk of identifying them with oppressors and succumbing to the temptation to "bank" a new set of beliefs. Certainly because oppression is usually thought of in distributive terms, it may be difficult to think of our well-fed, well-dressed, typically middle-class students as oppressed. Yet it bears repeating that our vision of oppression must not be limited to the distribution of external goods, but must extend to the practices which comprise our institutions—for, as I have argued, the average citizen has little input into the practices and institutions which determine their lives. 7

Students are also oppressed because they are young, inhabiting a culture that fears them instead of fearing for them. Labeling them incorrigible, we close down their gathering places. 8 interpret groups of them as gangs. 9 denigrate their culture as ignorant, over-sexed, or violent. 10 We rear them on violence and apathy, then increasingly try them as adults at younger and younger ages. Perceiving government as deaf to their needs, they rarely participate. so policy favors their elders. When they do participate, we ridicule them.

Freire outlines the assumptions of the banking model: "(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught; (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly; (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined; (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher; (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students . . . adapt to it; (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the students are mere objects" (Oppressed 73).

As the Enron bankruptcy has recently demonstrated, well-fed or not, the non-elite continue to be at risk for exploitation by those with greater socio-economic agency. Moreover, it needn't take something as monumental as Enron to identify our students as at risk of exploitation—one need only observe trends toward downsizing, reduction of benefits, and the increasing use of contract workers. When the profound corporate influence over government policy is taken into account, middle-class Americans, not to mention lower-class Americans, have little voice in the decisions that most effect them.

In my community, young people are actively discouraged from gathering in parks even for legitimate activities. Meanwhile, a well-supervised drug and alcohol-free coffee house which catered to high school and college students was closed down by neighborhood activists although the same neighborhood housed a very busy tavern. Their main allegation was "drug abuse," evidence for which was the style of hair, clothing, and jewelry sported by some of the young people.

Des Moines once attempted a policy in which three youth gathered in public were suspected of being a gang.

See Allan Bloom.
for idealism or pointless activism.\textsuperscript{11} We lecture instead of listening. We remediate rather than mediate between them and the world. Overwhelmed by the demands of jobs or careers, we mollify them with external goods. Recognized only by the ad industry, they ameliorate their boredom with clothes, CD's, and video games. Then they come to college to get a job to get more stuff because stuff seems to fill the hollow. Too often, when they arrive at college, we denigrate them as shallow and so contribute to their voicelessness. Meanwhile, as Composition is configured as a remedial first step into an "imagined continuous and sequenced collegiate curriculum" (S. Miller 87), even the non-traditional student is constructed as "a young beginner... presexual, preeconomic, preliterate" (87).

Meanwhile, there are among them students easily recognized as exploited. The football player recruited despite his lack of college preparedness, pushed to excel on the field at the expense of his studies, his dream of fame and fortune potentially exploding with his patella. The ag student who dreams of taking her knowledge home to the family farm, only to graduate after her farm is swallowed by factory farms—for whom she becomes an underpaid employee. Just as we cannot equate our students with Brazilian peasants, we cannot reduce their diversity to something we label the "typical" student, for behind every image is a story. The essence of my argument is that our teaching should begin with these stories, with exploration of our limit-situations.

\textsuperscript{11} In April 2000, in response to the march on D.C. against the IMF and World Bank, the media often cited the alleged youth of protesters to discredit them. The Washington Post, for one, inaccurately generalized protesters as sporting "body piercings and color-splashed hair" (April 14 B1)—reporter Michael Kelly referring to "tens of thousands of magenta-haired nose-ringers" (April 29 A27). Likewise, the San Francisco Chronicle identified protesters as "mostly twenty-somethings, some wearing nose rings and blue hair" (April 17 A15), while the L.A. Times noted that some protesters "taped down the rings in their pierced eyebrows to guard against having them torn off in a melee" (April 16). Given their assumption that protesters lacked a legitimate cause, the press explained these events as resulting from "the fad factor," an attempt to reach "a higher state of cool" (Montgomery Post April 16 A1). On this note, the protest was characterized as "spring break" (New York Times April 14: Washington Post April 18 B1) and as an "Evils of Globalization protest party" (Wall Street Journal April 14 A20). Michael Kelly sums up the general assessment, "actually kids... it must by now occurred to the swifter among you that you don't possess anything that can be coherently called a cause" (Washington Post April 19 A27). In fact, peoples of all ages, classes, ethnicities, national origins, professions, etc. participated in the protests which were, despite media reports, largely non-violent. I am deeply in debt to my son Aaron Jorgensen's news analysis, documented as "Re-imagining A16." Unpublished senior paper. Hampshire College. Amherst. MA (2001).
Rhetorical and pedagogical scholarship should also include stories, for “theoretical discourse itself ... must be concrete enough to be clearly identifiable with practice” (Freedom 44). Narrative, therefore, seems a fitting device to narrow the “epistemological distance” between my “practice as an object of analysis” and my “lived experience” (44). As Freire argues, “the diminution of the distance between discourse and practice constitutes an indispensable virtue, namely that of coherence” (63)—by which Freire means that one should practice what one preaches. In other words, if I fail to reveal myself to my audience, including my audience of students, my theory is nothing more than words. At the same time, writing or telling a story yields “a dynamic and dialectical movement between ‘doing’ and ‘reflecting on doing’” (Freedom 43). The very process of selecting what to leave in and what to leave out requires engagement with my own internal contradictions. Perhaps most importantly, personal story-telling situates me in my social contradictions that my audience may glimpse my students and me alongside one another. In a sense then, narrative affords an opportunity to enact neo-Protagorean sophrosyne, testing my courage to endure collective scrutiny, my willingness to expose my limitations, and my self-restraint in fairly representing other voices. These things in mind, for the remainder of this chapter. I will proceed antilogically, punctuating my theoretical discussion with a narrative of the aftermath of September 11 in my classroom.

Before the Terror

Fall 2001 started out like any other semester. When you teach at a place for a number of years, you start to catalogue students even though you don’t approve of cataloguing. The aspiring lawyers and executives with their polo shirts, testosterone, and scrubbed good looks. The quiet scholar, with her bare not-yet-beautiful face and quizzical expressions. The arty one with black clothes and hand-made jewelry. The ROTC men, bristle-haired, square-shouldered, gigline straight even in civvies.\(^{12}\) The swaggering, crotch-grabbing athlete. The muscular farm girl in cowboy boots. The impeccable sorority sister. The rumpled, ball-capped, frat boy. The pink-haired kid. Earth boy with beads and beard. The Young Republican. The Young Democrat. The outspoken feminist

\(^{12}\) There are ROTC women, too. I just find them harder to pick out when not in uniform.
they both lust after. More rarely, the single mom or displaced worker. At my school, most are young. Most are white. Most are middle-class. Most are Christian. Most come from small communities. Most did fairly well in high school. I wondered—who would they be this year? Who would they become? Who would I be and become?  

When I first started teaching, I admittedly resented the apparent affluence and shallow material aspirations of many of my students. I wanted to transform rather than liberate, fearful that I would merely free them to exploit and oppress others. Meanwhile, I was appalled at their poor reading and writing skills, in part convinced that their low literacy was further evidence that they neglect the meaningful for the comfortable. Even as I have come to see their false consciousness as evidence of oppression, temptation remains to “bank” my point of view, particularly when I present a moment in history which casts doubt on their illusions and am met with a collective “Nuh-uh!”  

Like the peasant farmers Freire worked among, middle-class students clearly prefer security to the “risks of liberty” (Oppressed 20). It’s probably fair to say that their very reason for attending college is to establish security rather than to exercise liberty, for they tend to conflate money with both. Because they do not yet perceive their limit-situations in their “totality,” they “apprehend . . . only . . . epiphenomena and transfer . . . to the latter the inhibiting force which is the property of the limit-situation” (104). As an example, because students do not yet perceive the inequality concealed by the American myth (the limit-situation in totality), they view the conditions of poverty (the epiphenomena) as evidence (transference of the inhibiting force) that the unfortunate among us are “unworthy” or “deficient.” Fearing that freedom leads to anarchy (35), they thus “erect defense mechanisms and rationalizations which conceal the fundamental, emphasize the fortuitous, and deny concrete reality” (104)—the elite deserve the fruits of their labor, college is the path to elite membership, corporate interest is the people’s

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13 This narrative is itself a process of reflection rather than a product of documentation. It is not my purpose to precisely reenact each moment, but to expose both my practice and reflection. This narrative is thus best regarded in the vein of creative nonfiction, rather than case study or ethnography. Two liberties were taken to increase narrative cohesion and mask the identity of individual students. First, the narrative classroom is a composite of three classrooms of twenty-six students each. Therefore, particular exchanges may not have taken place in the same classroom. Second, I created character composites of students from different classrooms. So while the dialogue is representative of each exchange, the input of any given character cannot be attributed to a single student. Nevertheless, the content and style of group presentations are reconstructed from extensive notes I took for the purpose of grade evaluation, rather than for research.
interest. When faced with ways in which their prescribed behavior sustains this limit situation, “their tendency is to remain on the periphery of the discussion and resist any attempt to reach the heart of the question” (104). Armed with culture war rhetoric, they often refuse to engage in or with analysis they see as “political.”

Hence, to achieve liberation they must come to perceive the ways in which the narratives of rational liberalism maintain their privilege at the expense of others as well as maintain the privilege of the elite at their expense—for the goal of liberatory pedagogy is to free both the oppressor and oppressed within each individual. However good our intentions, we cannot accomplish this task by banking, as banking merely reproduces the conditions liberatory pedagogy poses to remedy.

I'm also the mother of young adults, so I'm not only drawn to my students. I understand many of their limit-situations and recognize their capacity for incipient critique. Sometimes they see me as a mother figure, a rare adult connection in a world of huge lecture halls. I am not only old enough, but small classes and my personal approach to writing create a sense of intimacy. Relatedly, non-traditional students often connect with me as parents. My students have stories and I, the lover of language, appear to them a collector of stories. As they share these stories, we begin together to see the forces that determine their lives and their resistance against these forces.

To claim that students are subject to false consciousness is not to say they don't possess a “true” consciousness as well, nor is it to lay claim to an exclusive “true consciousness” possessed by the educator and scholar. Education for liberation requires that we recognize our students' ability to measure—as says Freire, that we “trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason” (Oppressed 66). Students' expectations do have merit, for assimilation will certainly invest them with greater economic agency, which is likely to bring about greater cultural and political agency. To deny these reasonable expectations is to deny what they know. Moreover, when engaged dialogically, students frequently reveal a latent “feel” for their limit situations. The student who switches majors from engineering to education knows his future earnings have dropped. The student rejected from an elite institution knows her resume will carry less weight. The student working his way through school knows his college experience is vastly different from that of his peers. We cannot “name the world on behalf of [them]” (89), for we thereby rob
them of the act of creation, their attempts to resist the forces which determine them. The new education major may be resisting forces that equate job satisfaction with income. The rejected student may be aiming for an elite graduate school. The working student may be avoiding debt or pressure from parents in selecting a major.

Youth are also proficient language learners. Far from being unsophisticated, they master complex and ever-changing vocabularies of their culture—which express nuances and contexts inaccessible to and inexpressible by their elders. This language reveals their incipient critique, as well as their resistance to an adult world they often see lacking in values. It also reveals their need for belonging, identification with an elite. Their language therefore speaks to them of power in ways our language cannot.

Meanwhile, I suffer from my own false consciousness. I want to believe that I have socio-political agency—that in teaching and writing I am naming the world. I want to believe I understand my students better than they understand themselves. I want to liberate my students from the demands of market assumptions and I want to believe I can do so without diminishing their agency in the marketplace.

Like Protagoras, Freire reminds us that "one of the requirements for correct thinking is a capacity for not being overly convinced of one's own certitudes" (Freedom 34). We must therefore approach teaching with recognition of the limits of our knowledge and we must not confuse our authority with the authority of knowledge (Oppressed 54). In our attempts to unsettle our students' subject positions, we must be willing to and expecting to upset our own; through our reflective practice come to grips with ways in which we misinterpret both the nature and degree of false consciousness in our students as well as ourselves. Education for liberation therefore requires a problem-posing pedagogy in which in which intellectual growth stems from "acts of cognition" rather than "transferrals of information" (79). The mutual goal of students and teacher is to "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves... to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (83). Teacher and student become "coinvestigators" (81), who create together "the conditions under which knowledge at the level of doxa [subjective opinion] is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of logos" (81). In this way, the classroom becomes a microcosm of the greater democracy, a space in which students and teacher
together try out their roles as equal citizens faced with mutual problems in the midst of diverse needs and perspectives.

I also bring to my classroom a deep concern for social justice, a need for my students to recognize our complicity in global injustice. I want them to perceive oppression and to remember that the people of the United States came together to escape oppression: that our government is founded on principles contrary to oppression: that we have a moral imperative to dismantle that which reproduces oppression. I want to believe that liberated students will share my views.

It is not the goal of the liberatory educator to transform students but to work with students to transform objective reality. Freire points out, "[i]n its desire to create an ideal model of the 'good man,' a naively conceived humanism often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people" (Oppressed 93). At bottom, we are not in the classroom to "save" our students or to "win them over," but to "come to know through dialogue with them both their objective situation and their awareness of that situation": to "fight alongside [them] for the recovery of [their] humanity" (95).

At the same time, I am responsible for passing on the skills which will provide for them in the market. I do not wish to replace one manifestation of oppression (false consciousness) with another (no money). But I am painfully aware that insistence on rigid standards may silence them. I am also poignantly aware that learning to write Standard Academic English may represent assimilation to the middle-class virtues of academia and/or the workplace—behavioral expectations which may conceal conflict, silence outrage, and generally reconstruct the passive, fragmented self. Faced with this dilemma, education for critical consciousness seems the only ethical alternative.

By analogy to cooking, Freire points out that all practices "presuppose[s] certain kinds of knowledge" (Freedom 29). One must know how to light the stove, regulate the flame, etc. As do cooks, writers must also learn to "balance the ingredients in a harmonious and pleasing synthesis" (29). Likewise, both cooks and writers must "be immersed in existing knowledge" even as they remain "open and capable of producing something that does not yet exist" (35). It is, therefore, simply "good sense" to recognize the teacher's authority to direct activities, assign tasks and set goals (60).
The teacher also has a responsibility to pass on the "methodological exactitude" (33) of inquiry, to facilitate students' movement from "ingenuous curiosity" (37), which we naturally possess, to "epistemological curiosity" (32)—a capacity for reflection, for self criticism, for "restless questioning" (37) which moderates "the excess of a rationality that now inundates our highly technologized world" (38). This, in turn, requires that we respect the "aesthetic linguistic and syntactical" diversity of students' curiosity, encourage their lines of questioning, and be "respectfully present in the educational experience" (59), even as we expose students to divergent points of view. Liberatory education thus "recognizes not only the possibility of making a new choice or a new evaluation but the right to do so" (39). Moreover, because the critical thinking (44) which follows from this imperative requires a capacity for "comparing, evaluating, intervening, deciding, [and] taking new directions" (38), "the teaching of contents cannot be separated from the moral formation of the learners" (39). We should not, therefore, "confuse authority and authoritarianism, freedom and license" (60), but understand freedom and authority as bound in cautious tension. At bottom, we have an ethical imperative both to avoid authoritarianism and to impose standards—both disciplinary and moral.

The writing class is a particularly appropriate place for such an education, for thinking critically is "not an isolated act or something to draw near in isolation but an act of communication" (42). Critical thinking requires not only that students learn the surface practices of "good" writing, but that they reflect on these practices, what they represent, and how they operate in the world. Certainly such reflection will bring about change, for critical thinking "implies the existence of subjects whose thinking is mediated by objects that provoke and modify the thinking subject" (42). Moreover, this change must not be "simply rhetorical" (Freedom 39), for "[t]here is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis" (Oppressed 87). Words without action are no more than "idle chatter," mere "verbalism . . . alienated and alienating 'blah'" (87), just as action without reflection is mere "activism . . . action for action's sake" (88). Praxis is action; words are praxis.

Meanwhile, although I've finally risen to the status of homeowner, I have only precariously reached the middle class. I am temporarily employed, therefore vulnerable to

14 Although Freire alternates the use of "critical thinking" and "correct thinking," I prefer "critical" as it does not bear epistemological baggage which I deem contrary to Freire's position.
recession, student enrollments, and institutional politics. While my socio-economic agency is clearly strained, I meanwhile do not possess the classroom agency of a tenured professor, either in the eyes of the institution or, if self-revealing, in the eyes of students. As liberatory education challenges traditional assumptions, I run the risks of losing my job or, if not my job, my classroom authority. In short, I bring into the classroom multiple selves, as clearly at risk of fragmentation, exploitation, and oppression as my students. As I enter the classroom on this hot August day, I wonder which of these selves will, despite my best efforts, dominate this semester. I wonder which students will trigger my resistance and which will test my patience. I wonder what they will teach me.

**Fresh Faces**

As I look around at the faces, little surprises me. Minority representation is, as usual, minimal—either the respective x, y, and z percentages of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans who populate our state aren't attending college, went to other colleges, or ended up in another class. Of course, I have a hunch where they are—

and, as usual, it will be difficult this semester to address issues of race, class, and ethnicity without feeling counterfeit. A quiet little Asian kid who lacks American trappings sits in the corner. One girl looks vaguely Latina. A woman about my age stumbles into the back row. Even were her face not careworn, I'd recognize her as a "non-traditional" from her look of bewildered panic—first semester, for sure. Two more non-traditionals, a man and a woman. A young black man—international by name. One fashionably American Asian girl.

A blond Iowegian motormouth makes it hard to move through introductions. It isn't long before his classmates and I know more about this kid than anyone needs to know—how his car broke down on the way to LA, the make/model/year of the car, the one he later bought, how he modified it, why he sold both of them, and what he drives now . . . a maestro of irrelevance, he will require my patience and everyone else's this semester.

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15 In 2001, only 7 Native Americans, 27 African Americans, and 18 Latinos from Iowa were reported taking the SAT test (www.collegeboard.com). Des Moines newspaper publisher Jonathan Narcisse reports that "fewer than 15% of African American students leaving Iowa schools (graduates and dropouts) are prepared either to enter the military and not get expelled; college or a vocational education program and complete the course of study; or to get a job and keep it" ("State").
I go through my usual introductions, share my credentials, talk about my family. This year I'm an empty-nester for the first time. They laugh sincerely when I tell them that their parents, like me, have probably already taken their bedrooms for office space. When I announce that we will be addressing socio-political issues in education, the aspiring lawyer pipes up. "So what are you? A liberal?"

"Honey," I respond with the moniker I always use when I cop an attitude, "I'm so far to the left I'm coming around on the right."

"Figures," he mutters.

"I take it you're not," I raise my eyebrow and smile. "Don't worry, some of my best students have aggressively disagreed with me. I've even taught them how to do it better. You'll be surprised how much we have in common."

Moral-traditionalists suggest that by revealing my position I impose upon my students a set of beliefs they may not share, that I "politicize" the classroom. But as Freire points out, the teacher must also deal with her own freedom and authority, while at the same time preserving the freedom of students and attending to development of their autonomy—"not forgetting that they are also in the process of building up their own authority" (Freedom 88). Should I "omit or hide my political stance by proclaiming a neutral position that does not exist." I deny my own "capacity to analyze, to compare, to evaluate, to decide, to opt, to break with" (90) even as I deny my students the "right to compare, to choose, to rupture, to decide" (68). Indeed, because the ethical subject cannot live "without being permanently exposed to the risk or even the choice of transgression" (25), it is my responsibility to engage in this risk alongside my students. At the same time, the democratic context demands that I not transform my classroom into "either a campaign for political revolution or a space totally given over to an analysis of what is going on in our world" but create a space in which together we "try out, with conviction and passion, the dialectical relation between a reading of the world and a reading of the word" (79). The educator who considers education to be "no more than an instrument for unmasking [the dominant] ideology" is equally in error as the educator who sees education as "simply an instrument for the reproduction of the dominant ideology" (91)—for liberation entails the capacity to peer behind the mask of any and all ideology.
Meanwhile, Freire reminds us that “dialogue cannot exist . . . in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people” (Oppressed 89). An act of courage, this love cannot be sentimental” (90). for it requires sufficient respect to challenge the subjects of our love. An act of freedom, “it must not be a pretext for manipulation.” for to manipulate is to dominate. Dialogic teaching thus requires humility (90), for dialogue assumes a willingness to learn. It also demands “an intense faith in humankind . . . their power to make and remake. . . . their vocation to be more fully human” (90). This is not a naïve faith, but a critical faith which takes on individual impairment of this power as a challenge rather than as conflict (91). Dialogue therefore also requires hope, for to see disagreement as cause for despair negates the possibility of humanization.

Over the course of the next two weeks, I begin to sort out my cast of characters as they sort me out. The atmosphere is amicable. As is my custom, I alternate content and practice days with issue exploration. At this point, content and practice are focused on principles of argument and rhetorical analysis. I balance the mandated Classical approach with a neo-Protagorean Freirean “problem-solving” approach that I call “reasoning together.” Exploration days are spent in group discussion—some in response to readings about reasons for writing, language and social class or ethnicity, the purposes of liberal education, the purposes of Composition class, the relationship between rhetoric, philosophy, and politics. Most of them aren’t particularly thrilled that my focus is political, yet some are relieved that they don’t have to read “literature.” Not many of them like “English”—it’s too hard, too subjective, never finished.

September 11

I’m on the way out the door when the phone rings—must be EJ. only my sister would call at this time of the morning. “Turn on the TV right now!” she commands in that voice that always make me want to dig in my heels. “Something just hit the World Trade Center! I think it’s a small plane!”

“An attack?” My voice breaks like a boy, fourteen. I’m awash in memories of “duck and cover,” the gold and black shield on the Penney’s store. EJ called me on the grounded line, but I don’t want to separate from her: I nearly pull the phone out of the wall, trying to reach the remote control. There’s nothing we can say anyway. “I gotta
go," I blurt and hang up. As the TV blinks on, I stare slack-jawed, then scream, "Oh God, oh God, oh God!" Phone rings. EJ. "Another one just hit! A big one!" Like a knife through soft butter, a diver through water, Alice through the looking glass. Only with flames. We ramble a thousand things we will repeat a hundred times in days to come but never remember as part of this moment. One thing I remember, my best friend Stephanie’s husband John. Is he at the towers? Hang up. Try Stephanie. E-mail Stephanie. Stare some more in dry-eyed stupor. Phone rings. "They just hit the Pentagon!" EJ sounds like she wants me fix it.

All I can do is pace. smoke cigarette after cigarette. Pete’s at a gig. Does he know? Is it safe to go to Ames? Will they attack the federal labs? Is it an attack? I have to see Pete first. My kids are in class and at jobs, hundreds of miles away. What are they thinking? Is Eva crying? Is Jorgen angry? Can Aaron stand more tragedy? I pretend to get ready to leave, repeating motions, overpacking my purse. I call Mom. For the first time in memory. I hear her fall apart. "The children," she weeps, "things will never be the same for them." I know she especially means her nearly forty grandchildren and great grandchildren. She doesn’t need to say a word for me to understand she remembers Pearl Harbor. I tell her I am afraid to go to school, then kick myself for worrying her. "You have to go," she almost whispers. "Your students need you."

I call to cancel office hours, promising myself to be on time for class as long as nothing else happens. Pete sweeps into the house. I stumble into his arms, but I can’t sit still. I look into his brimming eyes and we start pacing together. He points at the screen. "They think Tower Two is leaning."

"It is! It is!" I cry. "Look at it bow." Then it happens. Then the other. I begin listening to reports intently, taking notes to share with my students. Mom is right, as usual—I will be there for them.

Twelve miles out of Ames. I see rolling black smoke ahead in the distance. I go cold, slowing almost to a stop, ready to rip off my muffler crossing the median to turn around. Somehow. I convince myself to go to the exit. As I pull closer to the smoke, I see the highway patrol. then an old pick-up in flames and I start to bawl.

I pause outside my building, waiting to read the sign a student is taping on the door. They closed the federal labs. Oddly, I’m relieved that I wasn’t being silly. I am
amazed to find nearly all students present. I offer to let them go, but they stay, the need to be near others outweighing all else. Billie, a non-traditional student, has been in class all morning and isn’t yet sure what has happened. She’s heard, but doesn’t quite believe until she hears it from me. Our weathered faces drawing needed connection. She blurts what I’ve been thinking all morning—“I need to call my son!”

The class is electric. I am shaking and crying as students fire questions and comments across the room. I do my best to coordinate their thoughts: the natural collaboration of thoughtful individuals in crisis does better. A shaven-scalped boy at the back of the room punches out a partisan jab. something about China and Hillary Clinton. For a moment, I am frozen, torn between a red-faced admonishment and my need to educate. Something of both seems to happen as I stumble through a segue that feels like minutes, then breathe relief when the momentum of the class takes over. “Yeah, like Hillary Clinton signed up the terrorists.” I hear a male voice say.

I get stronger watching their self-restraint in the midst of confused terror. They take turns. They listen to one another and respond germanely. Then I notice the absence of my Asian, perhaps Muslim, student and wonder why. I manage to direct the class to consider their Islamic peers and teachers, to extend an extra hand of friendship through these next weeks. I pause to reconsider the shaven-scalped boy. He needs to lash out. What can I do for him?

“Motor Mouth.” who by now I know as Bradley, provides a wealth of information—CNN junkie, it seems. He reminds me that just last week I was trying to explain the Taliban to students and he had to remind me what country they’re in. Mostly my students want to know if this means we’re going to war. One kid pipes up. “I’m scared. If they reinstate the draft, my mom will shoot my foot off.” By the end of class, I’m pretty certain the only thing I conveyed is. “I’m scared.”

Finally. I return home. drained but animated. I only want to talk to my kids. I dial Eva, my heart clenched at the thought that her casual idealism might die. We spend an hour, she firing questions I cannot adequately answer, never losing her compulsive curiosity, compassion, and relaxed confidence. She mentions Nostradamus and I shrug. This, too, she will process through her mill wheel of common sense.
Jorgen calls. On fire with this as he is with everything. This one will die for peace if someone doesn’t save him. I think of Eva again and realize it is not in her nature to remain casual for long. She, too, may die for peace. I think about my students—how many of them may die for retribution?

I finally reach Aaron. I ramble, the day’s dialogue spilling out in a desperate purge. He wonders how to speak of this to the two little boys he nannies. I talk about security. He talks calmly about U.S. culpability and for a moment I wonder how he can be so callous. He seems too calm. Then he talks about making peace from crisis. I realize he is calm because he has been fighting a non-violent war for so long. I find myself thinking, as I have so many times before, “Be careful what you teach your children. They may listen.” This one, above all, may die for peace. Until now, I have been frantically seeking something to do, something to make the world change back again. Now it is all so clear. Make peace. Create it in my classroom. Do not go on as usual. Do not go back to normal. Live this moment as a community struggling to find meaning among the ashes.

Freire recommends that the educational experience begin with a “coded existential situation,” a “representation of that situation, showing some of its constituent elements in interaction” (Oppressed 105). A “codification” may be a sketch, a photograph, an essay, any illustrative item in which the subjects in the classroom can imagine themselves. “Decoding” consists of moving from the abstract representation of a situation to the concrete situations in which students find themselves along with others. As the group breaks down this situation into its constituent parts, individuals begin to “exteriorize their view of the world,” generating themes about “the way they think about and face the world” (106). The task is to reflect upon these themes, to identify links between themes, to consider their “historical-cultural context,” and to pose them as problems (108). The teacher in this context both listens to and challenges students to see as problems both “the codified existential situation and their own answers” (118). From this process emerge the contradictions which define limit-situations. In “divid[ing] and reintegrat[ing] the whole,” the group approaches more closely “the nuclei of the principal and secondary contradictions” (112). As this process is dialogical, “the teacher-students also have the

16 The author’s son is an activist with the International Movement for Tibetan Independence, as well as a number of other global justice organizations committed to non-violent social change.
right to participate by including themes not previously suggested" (120). By means of these “hinged themes,” teachers “may either facilitate the connection between two themes in the program unit, filling a possible gap between the two; or they may illustrate the relations between the general program content and the view of the world held by the people” (120).

The vision of those planes cutting through the towers is one lulu of a coded situation.

September 12

Missives ride the electronic highway from everywhere. John was in Manhattan, but is safe. He and Stephanie were to fly to Paris Tuesday. Debate breaks out on the departmental chat list as to whether to cancel classes. “Don’t give in! Then they’ve won!” I still wonder who “they” are and what the hell they could have won. My fellow peaceniks offer crucial information people should know before beating war drums. War drums, how ironic. Drums. The voice of my beloved. The sound of home. I forward e-mail and turn to redesigning my syllabus.

I can’t imagine working on my dissertation. On the one hand, current events seem excessively relevant to my work. On the other hand, my dissertation seems somehow irrelevant to current events. A pointless and futile task of hyper-theorization when we have to live with the specter of war. I begin to realize that I may not graduate this term. Then I realize I don’t care. I either have to throw the whole thing out or make it relevant. I can’t do it in eight weeks. How can my students help but be as fatalistic as I am?

Like the Brazilian peasants among whom Freire worked, our students often respond with “What can I do? I’m only a ________.” These students are accustomed to seeing the problems of government and economics as out of their hands. They know that our wealth exploits others. But they either can’t figure out how to carry out their lifestyles without the products these “others” provide or they feel powerless to do anything about oppression. As Freire points out, “oppression is domesticating” (Oppressed 51) and in this case, the domesticating factors are a combination of “stuff” and a sense of futility. Indeed, Freire warns that “[i]f individuals are caught up in and are unable to separate themselves
from these limit-situations, their theme in reference to these situations is fatalism, and the
task implied by the theme is the lack of a task” (113).

Freire also reminds us, however, that “[f]atalism in the guise of docility is the fruit
of an historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people’s
behavior” (61). Obviously, this “historical and sociological situation” is more immediate
and threatening than any we have ever experienced. Nevertheless, as “immobility
represents a fatal threat” (84), we must seize this moment to develop the critical capacity
to examine this situation, to find a means to act. As the teacher, I must pose the limit-
situations represented by this crisis as problems, rather than “as fetters or as
insurmountable barriers” (84). The task ahead of us may not transform the world in which
terrorism takes place, but by untying this particular Gordian knot, by looking beyond the
received interpretations, we can identify the contradictions in our own experience. By this
means, we can replace “immobilist fatalism” with “critical optimism” (Heart 58) and so
transform our immediate world.

September 13

So here we are faced with a nightmare image, a coded existential situation in
which grief, terror, and anger vie for primacy. Thrust instantly into the same reality, I
have had no opportunity to establish a predetermined starting point (Oppressed 108). We
simply start with the questions that plague us. Will there be another attack? Should we go
to war? Why do they hate us? What will life in the U.S. be like now? What are the effects
of trauma? Are we prepared for another catastrophe? Do we have enough blood,
equipment, and heroes? Patriotism quickly emerges as a generative theme. Retribution
quickly follows. “Bomb them back to the Stone Age!” a student pronounces. I assign a
PBS documentary on Afghanistan—they need to see that Afghanistan is the stone age. I
prod them to examine the motivations, as opposed to motives, of the terrorists, reminding
them that argument is the alternative to flying planes into buildings.

A young woman, Gail, identifies herself as the girlfriend of an Islamic student and
gingerly suggests that from the terrorists’ perspective we may be the evil ones.

The aspiring lawyer, Richard, spits out a response. “We don’t fly planes into
buildings full of innocent people!”
Gail is quickly cowed, but Sam, whom I labeled “ROTC” speaks out, “Look, I went through basic training. They break you down until you have only a single vision. These terrorists have been even more indoctrinated, so they believe what their leaders tell them.” I find myself a bit taken aback. I expected this one to be unquestioningly patriotic.

“Yeah, at least we represent freedom. We still think for ourselves. We just have to follow orders.” Judging from the “we.” this one, Bobby, must also be in the military.

I begin to speak about the treatment of soldiers returning from Nam—the shame of blaming the soldier. I repeat that, whatever they did, they were following orders.

Richard pipes up. “So you don’t think soldiers don’t support war?”

“That’s not what I mean.” I almost stammer. “What I mean is that a soldier must follow orders no matter what. And even a war hero might change his mind later.”

“My dad was in Viet Nam and he never changed his mind.” James replies, smoothing his hair as he replaces his baseball cap—backwards, naturally.

I realize how hard it will be to be a pacifist in this classroom, in this country, in this moment. But I’m pleased to see a major contradiction emerging—an attack on our own soul, our victimization, stands posed against our country’s history of violence and occupation. I provide a “hinge-theme.”

“Perhaps we should explore the relationship between religion and the current crisis. My religion makes me a pacifist. Right now, it’s really hard to be a pacifist because I’m angry and scared. I’m also afraid people will think I want to do nothing.”

“Religion’s a big part of this.” Billie affirms. “But there’s a lot more to it than that. We eat, often at their expense, while they starve. Why wouldn’t they hate us?”

The class picks up steam as further concerns emerge. I suggest we use the major themes to form small research groups for the semester project—class presentations exploring the contradictions surrounding September 11. They will pose their issues as problems, present a diversity of viewpoints on causes, contexts, and remedies in an effort to find a direction for action which balances these diverse concerns.

As I look around and see who is grouped together and what issues they have chosen. I’m glad to see that the wiry, elfin redhead seems to have befriended the young
man from Africa\textsuperscript{17} whose name I practice over and over. I feel an inward smile when I realize they and two other classmates have chosen “U.S. culpability” as their approach to the question “Why do they hate us?” I presume—perhaps too much—that an international student will bring perspective to the group. Unsurprising, Bobby and Sam have recruited another pair of students to explore “How should we respond?” Richard recruits three other students to address the same question. “Fine.” I tell them. “As we work out the details over the course of the next few weeks. I’m sure we can find different angles to take.”

Billie and Gail form a group to explore the Ibramic religions and their history of conflict. Later that day Billie tells me how excited she is to have another “old hippie” teaching the class. “Being face to face with these kids, just makes me want to bring out my beret, Army jacket, and bell bottoms.” I’ll have to be careful this semester so students don’t think the two of us are ganging up on them.

Another group selects U.S. energy policy. Another, the economic downturn. Finally, I’m left with three young men who seem at a loss. “What worries you?” I ask.

“What’s going to happen to the World Series?” Dan, the pudgy arm-chair ref smirks. I’ve seen this before. Subvert the teacher’s plan with something superfluous. Justin, the shaven, tattooed kid, smirks too.

“I’m sure a lot of people are wondering what life in the U.S. will be like now.” Cut ’em off at the pass. I always say. Take them where they are and push it. Dan reddens. He really didn’t expect me to turn this into a topic. “A lot of issues are at stake. Should we gather for large public events? Do people really want to watch movies about terrorists right now? I’m sure you can make this topic work.”

Paul, a very bright and eager student, is intrigued. “Yeah, let’s do it, dudes.”

If learning is to be genuine, students must produce and act upon their ideas, instead of consuming those of others (Oppressed 108). When a student attempts to subvert the teacher’s program by presenting what he sees as a ridiculous or irrelevant idea, often he has merely failed to see the contradictions, thus the complexity, of the context to which

\textsuperscript{17} To mask the identities of international students, I refer to them by continent or region rather than country of origin.
his idea applies. But as Freire points out, "[E]ven if the people's thinking is superstitious or naïve, it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change" (108).

It's been a long day. I'm exhausted but rejuvenated. My students are beginning to see the possibility of their action on the world. Though I know that the weeks to come will be painful, they seem to have hope again. So do I.

September 16

Seventy-eight students are too many to get to know quickly, so I sit down to read the autobiographies I asked them to write. I realize that the elfin redhead, Elvis, is himself a international student, perhaps Islamic—must I always look for brown skin? I kick myself for not ferreting this out sooner, for not reaching out more. Who else needs me to reach out? I should have read the bios days ago. At first I am delighted to have more than one international perspective in the group. Hours later, listening to Dan Rather beat his war drum on Letterman. I realize the huge risk my international students are taking. I wonder whether I am strong enough to protect them. I wonder what I might protect them from. As Rather, in an astonishing moment, breaks down. I realize even he can't think straight.

To recognize the subjectivity of inquiry and education is not to deny objective reality, but to recognize the reciprocity of objective and subjective. As Freire points out, "[t]here would be no human action if there were no objective reality, no world to be the 'not I' of the person and to challenge them" (Oppressed 53). At the same time, "[t]o deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world... is to admit the impossible: a world without people" (50). It is precisely because the objective world imposes itself upon our subjectivities that humans inquire and take action to transform this imposition. The capacity to "transcend" our subjectivity, "to perceive reality and understand it in order to transform it" (53), is the very capacity which distinguishes us from other animals. Reflective response, rather than reflexive reaction, is essential, for "action is human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation, that is, when it is not dichotomized from reflection" (53).
September 18

As this objective reality has overwhelmed the subjectivity of even those on whom we depend for both information and perspective, a number of my students are displaying misgivings about the press. Janna, a lovely and comic boy-pal, is particularly outspoken.

“Hey! What’s with CNN and this ‘New War’ crap? It’s like they’re takin’ it upon themselves to declare it!” Janna marches into the room and takes her usual place between Tom and Bill. “Ya ready to go fight in Reallireallibad, Afghanistan?” She softly punches Bill in the arm, grinning. Ahhh! Incipient critique. We have found our “text.” I hardly have to say a word all day.

Freire reminds us that perhaps our greatest responsibility in dialogic pedagogy is listening: that having something to say imposes upon us a duty “to motivate and challenge the listeners to speak and reply” (Freedom 104). On the one hand, our silence allows for our internal voice “to speak from the depths of its own silent listening” (104), so expanding our self-knowledge. On the other, our silence allows us “to hear the question, the doubt, the creativity” of the person who listens to us; by this means we “learn to speak with him or her” (106). Listening “is a permanent attitude . . . of being open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other” (107) that “does not diminish my right to disagree” but “prepare[s]” me to “situate myself vis-à-vis the ideas being discussed as a subject capable of presence” (107).

September 20

Justin marches into my classroom, red-faced. “Did you hear about those fuckin’ peace protesters in Des Moines this week? They fuckin’ marched on the Capitol to protest bombing Afghanistan. Are we supposed to sit still and do nothin’? If they don’t like our country, why don’t they fuckin’ move?” I was at the peace vigil but I keep silent. I’m not sure whether it’s self-protection or an attempt to avoid silencing my student.

Richard speaks up. “Yeah, we should nuke ‘em!” He seems somehow delighted to see me pale. He laughs, a “noodge-noodge” on his face. I laugh, too, realizing he’s just trying to get my goat.

Today, we’re learning about neo-Aristotelian analysis—the identification of appeals to emotion, values, credibility, and logic. Students are apt to be a bit suspicious of
my motivations at first as I am so vocal about my political and ethical commitments, so I try to counteract their suspicion somewhat by analyzing documents which express a viewpoint I share. Today I've chosen a Michael Moore commentary on Viet Nam addressed to today’s college students. They are incredulous as they read about the Tonkin Gulf and Ho Chi Min’s request for U.S. help in setting up a constitution. I hear a lot of “Nuh-uh!” today. We explore how these claims work as appeals and I encourage them to research his claims. A student asks, “You believe this guy, doncha?”

“Yes, I do. What does that tell you about Moore’s audience? How does that fit in with what I say about audience?” It doesn't take long for them to suggest that Moore may be preaching to the choir.

“I don’t think he’s going to persuade anyone who disagrees with him,” the bookish girl, Linda, points out. “He’s really sarcastic.”

“But he says he’s writing to college students, so maybe he’s trying to persuade people who don’t have an opinion, you know, giving them new information.” offers the quiet farm kid, Tom.

“At any rate, what he says is true.” Elvis speaks up. A couple of kids glare.

“What do you have to do to be sure?” I proffer. We’re off and running. For the rest of the class they bandy back and forth. I see trust building, not only between students, but between myself and the students. It will not be until weeks later that Justin will tell me how he could hardly even read this article because of his dad and Viet Nam. Standing before me in his Army Reserve uniform, he tells me he was angry with me for trying to indoctrinate him. He lifts his hat to scratch his head “Thanks. I get it, now.”

Submerged in their socio-historical contexts, students have great difficulty critiquing received knowledge. Give them an essay that reinforces the received view and they are unlikely to move beyond identifying that which appeals to them. Thus they will not perceive the manipulative dangers of rhetoric. They may even emulate them in ways we wish they wouldn’t. Give them an ad, a genre they recognize as manipulative, and they are likely to see these dangers as limited to particular genre. They often fail to connect literature with their limit-situations and tend to look to the teacher for authoritative interpretation. But give them a clearly assertive challenge to received knowledge and they tear into it like crows into garbage. In the process, they encounter contradictions—
America's bidding is to spread democracy; we denied Ho Chi Min. As a result, they "confirm some of the things they already know, correct others that they do not know so well, and gradually open up the way" to new knowledge (Freedom 35).

**Anthrax**

The Ames strain. No one in this engineering lab turned English classroom can forget how close we sit to dangerous research. I tell them about my sister's postman who "chirps" as he delivers mail. Students talk about being afraid to open mail. We all feel like canaries. We talk about the value of knowledge, what we do at this university. I don't have to pose the question for them, they're already thinking, "perhaps not all knowledge is beneficial. Perhaps all motives for research aren't virtuous."

When one teaches at a land grant university, it is impossible to forget the potentially ominous scientific and social scientific research in which our students may one day be engaged. To be wary of the rationalistic paradigm upon which this science is allegedly grounded is not to demonize science or technology, but to "consider [it] from a critically curious standpoint" (Freedom 38). Humans beings are persistently "unfinished," in the process of becoming. Our knowledge is likewise unfinished, becoming. And because "the process of becoming" involves "observing, comparing, evaluating, choosing deciding, intervening, breaking with, and making options, we are ethical beings, capable of transgressing our ethical boundaries" (92). We can neither "claim transgression as a right" nor "sit idly by and fold our arms in the face of such a possibility," for to do so, as Freire warns, is to risk a "fatalistic quietude, which, instead of condemning transgression, tries to absorb it as if it belonged to 'right' thinking" (92).

**Blame America First**

Have you no sense of decency sir. at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?
—Senator Joseph N. Welch
Army-McCarthy hearings
June 9, 1954

*By November, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni—which boasts among its founders Joe Lieberman and Lynne Cheney and among its advisors, both*
Cheney and William Bennett—produce a report declaring the faculty of America's colleges and universities the "weak link in the war on terrorism" and accusing faculty and administration across America of anti-Americanism. As evidence they cite a "vast number of colleges and universities" which "sponsored teach-ins and other fora which have been distinctly equivocal and divided in their response" (8). Blame America First—me. That tiny third grader who learned to love America so much because she's free to critique, because it's America who first gave her the principles of critique. Moral equivalency? I merely see my rights as human rights. I simply see liberty, democracy, and equality as "a universal human ethic" (Freedom 25). As Freire warns, one of my biggest difficulties this semester will be to do "everything in [my] power to sustain a universal human ethic without at the same time falling into a hypocritical moralism" (25) which fails to recognize my students' autonomy, their right to reach their own conclusions.

Meeting in the computer lab. I ask my students to log on and read the report. Richard speaks up first. "Guess that's you they're talkin' about. Like you're much of a threat. I mean. I can tell where you're coming from. It just seems like you have a different way of looking at things."

"I dunno." James remarks. "sometimes I feel like she is anti-American."

I opt not to defend myself, but let the class take over the debate. It isn't long before they start to discuss the nature of the evidence. Joshua speaks softly, looking down at his crucifix. "About half these things I was taught in Sunday School."

"Seems like a lotta name-calling and guilt by association." Will's voice flies out from behind a computer screen.

Linda, already showing herself to be my best writer, looks up. "Aren't you supposed to identify the speaker?"

"The way they got this set up makes it look like it's going on all over the country, but there's only a few colleges here. There hasn't been that much at Iowa State."

Richard's been working hard on arrangement lately. "Not that I agree with the protesters, but . . ."

"C'mon, what happened to 'united we stand'? We should really be pulling together right now." James is mildly indignant. "Sure, some things happened in history we're not so proud of, but . . ."
"Jesus, James!" Justin has had it. "Don't tell me she's even brainwashed you!"

"C'mon, Justin. America's done some not-so-good things," James starts to defend himself. "You can love..."

"I don't have to sit here and listen to this shit! Does anyone but us know what the hell you do in this class?" He slams his hand on the table and turns to march out.

I try to maintain composure. "Justin, please sit down, calm down, and show some respect for me and your classmates. If you have something to say, you can say it when you're calm." Justin slumps into his seat with a huge sigh. I thank him for staying. He rolls his eyes.

Respecting the autonomy of students certainly does not mean that I should "submit myself to the arrogance and stupidity of those who do not respect me" (Freedom 109). It does, however, require that I respond with dignity. At the same time, I must recognize that "I cannot make education into an indisputable instrument of social transformation just because I desire it" (110). Every student is entitled to his position and I am obligated to listen to his position, to speak with him "even if at times it should be necessary to speak to him" (110). To do so is not authoritarian, but a legitimate exercise of my authority as teacher. As Freire points out "there is no room for discipline either in authoritarianism or unbridled freedom. both lack rigor, authority, and freedom" (83).

My students continue to sling comments across the room. a few getting a bit heated, but no real storms. Justin is sullen and silent.

"Big deal," someone says.

"It's pretty repetitive."

"What's the big deal anyway?" Now I identify the "big deal" voice as Hannah. "Aren't we supposed to have free speech?"

"Sure, but the Constitution allows speech to be suppressed in the interest of national security." James looks a bit cornered. I'm surprised. Have I silenced his allies by admonishing Justin?

"Perhaps I've misled you into thinking that only government critics or the Left is being silenced." I intervene. "In fact, ultra-conservative Ann Coulter was just fired from the National Review for her views. And a Florida professor was fired for putting up a website calling for a strong military position."
Freire discusses the common fear that “critical consciousness” may lead to fanaticism, that the oppressed, made aware of their situation, will fly planes into buildings. The contrast between my students and the terrorists should be argument enough against such concerns. Having “banked” a vision of the United States which makes no distinction between the actions of a government and the actions of its people: between beneficial intervention and malignant; between the intentional and the unforeseen, terrorists rob others of humanity because theirs has been stolen. They have become sectarian and, as Freire points out, sectarianism “is an obstacle to the emancipation of mankind” (Oppressed 37). It “mythicizes and thereby alienates” (37), turning “reality into a false (and therefore unchangeable) reality” (37). While “the rightist sectarian . . . attempts to domesticate the present so that . . . the future will reproduce this domesticated present” (38), the leftist sectarian “considers the future pre-established—a kind of inevitable fate, fortune, or destiny” (38). Both are reactionary “because, starting from their respectively false views of history, both develop forms of action that negate freedom” (38). Committed to their “circles of certainty,” both “end up without the people—which is another way of being against them” (Oppressed 39). By contrast, while my students remain fervently patriotic, they are moving from incipient critiques to critical consciousness, retrieving their humanity by overcoming sectarianism.

Office Hours

My office hours are packed. Many students come to work on papers. others just to pick my mind. To my delight, often the mind-pickers are those who strongly disagree with me. Here among the photos of my family, I learn their stories. Maria reveals herself to be a first-generation American, fiercely annoyed with me for criticizing her family’s country of hope. James is called to active duty at semester’s end. Just airport security—but there wouldn’t be a need for security if his job wasn’t dangerous. Justin’s dad is called up, too—the Mideast. Billie is tempted to take her son to Canada. Tom offers to sell me organic lamb and talks about how hard farming is these days. He can hardly afford college. Linda has to cancel plans for study in the United Arab Emirate.

One young man grieves doubly, the attack on his country following only days after an accident claimed his best friend. Two girls lose grandmothers they are very close to.
Another girl loses her mother. Still another is rushed home for her father's emergency heart surgery. The husband of a non-traditional student loses his job, forcing her to get a job—but he still expects her to run the house. An African student shares newspapers from home, giving me new insight into the conflicts of his region. One girl, struggling mightily to learn to write, admits to a learning disability, but refuses testing or counseling for fear of being labeled. A half dozen other girls struggle to learn to write concretely and directly. Their faces light up and they shake their heads in sudden recognition when I ask, "Do good girls have strong opinions?" I, too, have suffered from Iowa politeness. Other kids are frustrated by my standards. I shrug off their resentment and, over time, most lose their spite and learn to write. A couple even thank me, while a handful eventually just disappear from class. One kid comes to office hours twice a week to work on his writing, but in the end, hands in nothing despite my assurances he's passing the course. Some kids hang around a lot, seeming to need comfort in these difficult times. Seeing pictures of Pete and Jorgen with their respective drums and guitars, a few young men confess they'd rather be in music school or playing in a band. After one young man meets my daughter at a U-Iowa frat party, a few others show up just to see her picture. A number of students take time to tell me how grateful they are that I focused the class on September 11. It gave them something to do. A lot happens during these office hours. Sometimes we cry. At others, we laugh, confess, work hard, gripe. We come together. We become a community.

Students as Teachers

Weeks passed with difficulty. As I looked out on the faces in my classroom, I saw dark circles under eyes, sometimes smiles came hard. But every day I saw students' eagerly share research, plump for approaches to their presentations. The results were remarkable.

One group gave a complex economics lesson in such clear layman's terms, it compensated for a semester of high school econ. Another presented our options for airline security—complete with a mini-documentary on current security procedures at our local airport, accompanied, no less, by James in uniform. A group of American and international students gave an historical outline of the ways in which U.S. policy has inflamed international hostility—without laying blame—examining it as a failure of
understanding and communication. They followed by proposing a number of steps toward remedy from diverse international perspectives which often conflicted. Another group invited an Islamic student to share his experiences with the terrorist investigations. Students were humbled and somewhat ashamed to hear of their peers being awakened for interrogation in the middle of the night. Yet they did not hesitate to weigh together the pros and cons of racial-profiling and other security measures. A pair of architecture students examined the Trade Center—whether design, engineering, or construction played a role in the collapse. Concluding they did not, they followed by outlining the dangers of excavation, the threat of the Hudson River. They finished by debating the merits of a number of designs for future construction which take into account the terrorist threat.

Janna, Bill, Tom, join Hannah to produce a hysterically comic newscast demonstrating the ways in which the media both aggravates and mediates the heightened emotions of the public. They pondered some collective and individual consequences of media influence and explored various options and their consequences for containing the media—ultimately concluding that legislated restraints impose too great a risk. At semester’s end, I was compelled to tell my students, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that subsequent classes are likely to remember them with spite—as they raised the bar in terms of commitment, depth, breadth, and concrete results.

A few presentations in particular stand out. Sam, Bobby, Joshua, and Will presented the U.S. case for bombing Afghanistan, then offered strategic, economic, diplomatic, and moral reasons why it may have been a mistake. They pointed out that we were not attacked by a government, not even Afghanistan. They compared the terrorists to Timothy McVie, arguing that sectarianism in any port can lead to tragedy. They gave consideration to the possible destabilization of India and Pakistan. They raised the specter of escalated Israeli/Palestinian hostilities. They speculated that the difficulty in managing tribal conflicts might undermine Afghanistan’s new government. They expressed concern that innocents might be killed: that relief might be cut off and thousands more die than in the Trade Center. They examined reasons why military response could harden the Islamic world against us.

They made it clear that action had to be taken. They made clear that the Taliban and Al-Qaïda are evil. They suggested a diplomatic approach to capturing bin Laden
based on multicultural understanding. They talked about the effectiveness of education and aid. They discussed the use of special forces to root out terrorist cells. They promoted tightening our borders, particularly our air borders. Through the image of Bertrand Russell, they reminded students that great Euro-western scholars have often been firmly committed to non-violence. It seemed to me they talked about winning the hearts of the world.

In the past, I've had students who played my line to buck for grades. Often I foil them, for they may not give equal time to other views or their presentation is shallow or lacks sincerity. How do I know these young men weren't merely bucking for grades? Because they dug out histories, contexts, and possibilities I had not considered. They became my teachers. They approached the crisis as a problem and came to shared solutions based on consideration of multiple arguments. They presented their case without sectarianism as patriots and lovers of humanity. Had I any doubt, the small tears, the brief, hushed snifflngs of their classmates cast it away.

Of course we did bomb. And many of my students' concerns are playing out. We can't be certain that bombing Afghanistan is causal of certain current events, but we can consider the possibilities raised by these young men. More importantly, we can look to them as examples of the possibilities that emerge when we shift our paradigm from agonistic to problem-posing, from attack and defense to dialogue, from liberal and rational to democratic and reasonable.

Richard's group took a vastly different stance, presenting the class with the various military resources at our disposal. They described in detail the aircraft to be used, the challenges faced by special forces, the methods of the various branches and units who would carry out the war. In the midst of their presentation, a fellow group member leaped up from his seat among the class, shouting, "Break the cycle of violence! No more war!" After a brief exchange of peacenik platitudes and their dismissal by the presenting members of his group, he sat down.

My response to these students was. I'm certain, a lower grade than they had hoped for. The reasons I gave are that they did not engage in argument, but rather, presented

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18 I have my students to thank for the information on the Afghani principles of nang discussed in Chapter Three.
their position as a given, reinforcing it with multiple tellings, covering over their essential agreement by presenting "means" to fulfill the ends of their perspective as "perspectives." I watched Richard as he read my comments surrounded by his partners looking over his shoulder. I heard him mutter, "I knew it," then throw up his hands and pass the paper roughly to his peers. I'm not sure what Richard "knew," but he did not protest the grade and he continued to treat me amicably and with respect. I have a hunch his knowledge concerned himself and his peers rather than me.

While these students resisted both my political position and the parameters of the assignment, they, too, named the world. In the face of my resistance and my attempts to shift their subject positions, they claimed their space. At the same time, in their individual interactions with me and their classmates, they showed good will, a willingness to consider other points of view with gravity. Even more than my students who shifted their views, these were my measures. I am deeply moved that they could rise to this level of resistance, for doing so they demonstrated the trust I seek. What I am most proud of is that these students learned, and I learned again, that we can disagree with our opponents without rancor, that even if we succumb to rancor that we can do so in such a way that the rancor does not "assume[s] proportions greater than the reasons for the original disagreement" (Freedom 40). At the same time, I am disappointed that they didn't engage other views—for each of them had the capacity to do so while maintaining their resistance. They seemed to remain afraid—not of disagreeing, for they did that successfully—but of inquiry, and that can only mean they were afraid of learning. Yet when all was said and done, these students individually produced final research papers which maintained views in contrast to my own, while thoroughly engaging, not only my view, but diverse others.

Other would-be disappointments emerged as well. At the last minute, my southeast Asian student was abandoned by his entire group. One kid in particular had seemed so chummy with him. He nonetheless managed to present his thoughts on the global and U.S. economies with dignity and new insight. Paul was nearly abandoned by his group, too. Dan stayed out of contact with him until the night before the presentation. Justin contributed more, but really didn't take the project seriously enough. But Paul stayed up late, got the job done, and was rewarded for his effort.
Over the course of the semester, I discovered a lot. Sometimes the best critical thinker is one who doesn’t write so well. Sometimes the numbers don’t add up in ways that seem fair to a student. I followed the numbers and they noticed, so for the first time, I amended my grades after handing them in. Others fell under the impression that their hard work, my respect and encouragement should add up to a higher grade. I offered honest explanations satisfactory to me, satisfactory to academic criteria—but some of these students will not understand, for they either were not ready or I put them off somehow. I wish to but can’t successfully engage them all. Sometimes because of my limit situations, sometimes because of theirs. I’m only one teacher and I’m human, so the only thing I can promise is that I won’t leave the classroom unchanged.

I have no doubt that some students find my class too “political” and “controversial.” On one hand, the natural impulse when faced with issues and perspectives that make us uncomfortable is to turn a blind eye. On the other hand, many students are simply disinterested in issues of government and economics. But the fact is, few students go on to majors where they will write literary research papers. My class is by definition a class in research writing, which entails that it is a class on argument. Argument entails ethics: ethics entails politics. By addressing political issues which have direct impact on their lives, I provide an opportunity for them to engage with their world, to see the possibilities for change as well as their potential in bringing about change.

Meanwhile, I am aware that many students expect me to adopt a “neutral” posture, they are uncomfortable dialoguing with me. But I cannot lie to them, neither about the neutrality of knowledge nor about my own. Certainly Socrates did not lie, nor did Plato, Aristotle, and Protagoras. I also teach in response to my own educational experience, for I had many experiences where the teacher’s adoption of a neutral position merely covered over a set of assumptions that fueled the teacher’s criteria. I also had many experiences of being silenced when my view challenged the teacher’s. Perhaps I have not yet reached the maturity as a teacher to gain the trust of most students. Thus, it continues to be my challenge to make way for the least heard as I grow and learn.

Certainly the process we undergo in my classroom is not a comfortable one, for it strips away the illusions upon which we build our sense of security. The liberatory educator is poignantly aware that a change in consciousness will unsettle a student’s
subject position and must balance this need against the aim of facilitating student agency. This dilemma is particularly poignant at a predominately white, Midwestern institution where the student population is so unlike the illiterate agricultural workers among whom Freire worked. It is one thing to liberate learning when the “oppressed” are hungry, exploited peasants. It is quite another thing to liberate when the “oppressed” are well-fed American consumers. Critical consciousness is unwelcome when it serves to destabilize one’s comfort zone.

Spring

Autumn 2001 was a time of unspeakable violence, but the violence is not ended. The root causes remain. As the months have passed, the violence seems once again very far away. My new crop of students has lost their interest or lost their nerve. They don’t want to look at world or national problems. But again, I will push them to inquire, for as Freire tells us “[a]ny situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence . . . to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (Oppressed 85). I tried, and will continue to try, to engage in “practices where authority and freedom are found and preserved in their autonomy . . . in a relationship of mutual respect,” that we may “speak of a disciplined practice as well as a practice favorable to the vocation “to be more” (Freedom 83).

In the end, despite some disappointments, we came together and none of us are the same for it. We are better.

Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence? How could they be the sponsors of something whose objective inauguration called forth their existence as oppressed? . . . It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves. It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent, who with their power created the concrete situation which begets the “rejects of life.” It is not the tyrannized who initiate despotism, but the tyrants. It is not the despised who initiate hatred, but those who
despise. It is not those whose humanity is denied them who negate humankind, but those who denied that humanity (thus negating their own as well). Force is used not by those who have become weak under the preponderance of the strong, but by the strong who have emasculated them. For the oppressors, however, it is always the oppressed (whom they never call “the oppressed” but . . . “those people” or “the blind and envious masses” or “savages” or “natives” or “subversives”) who are disaffected. who are “violent,” “barbaric,” “wicked,” or “ferocious” when they react to the violence of oppressors. (Freire Oppressed 55-56)
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