

In This Issue...

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Anyone who thinks that the ideas of ancient and classical writers are irrelevant in the early twenty-first century need only look at this current issue of the *Agora* to stand corrected. In core text and liberal arts programs in North American colleges and universities belonging to the Association of Core Texts and Courses (ACTC), ideas of great writers of the past are alive and well. The essays in this twenty-first issue of the *Agora* demonstrate that undergraduate students in institutions belonging to ACTC are actively engaged in analyzing core texts and applying the key concepts they find there to issues of our modern world.

The author of the first article, **Ben Blanks**, a recent graduate of Lynchburg College, won the Kendall North Award for the best essay in this issue of the *Agora* with his paper, “The Conditional Acquittal: On a Supposed Contradiction in Plato’s *Apology* and *Crito*.” Ben, who presented an earlier version of this paper at the ACTC student conference held at Pepperdine University in March 2011, tries to reconcile Plato’s interpretation of Socrates’ stance on civil disobedience in the *Apology* with his willingness to follow the laws of Athens in the *Crito*. Ben provides a convincing explanation for this apparent contradiction by analyzing Plato’s discussion of Socrates’ attitudes to the law.

Taylor Thompson, a student at Columbia University, also focuses on Plato in his paper, “The Problem of Freedom.” Taylor elaborates on the inherent dangers of freedom that can be seen in states where democracy has turned into tyranny. Taylor agrees with Plato’s conclusion that the only way to prevent this deterioration is to impose limits on political freedom through the law, which needs to be developed and implemented by well educated leaders.

Kate Flinchbaugh, a student at Luther College, continues with Plato's emphasis on education in her essay, "The Cave of Education." Kate is concerned that many current students are so focused on their job prospects after graduation, their future financial security, and their material well being that they have lost sight of the true purpose of education, namely to foster enlightenment. Kate suggests that revised college curricula and careful reading of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" could help students to see greater value in their education.

Daniel Gibson, another student at Luther College, interprets Plato's views on education from a similar point of view in his essay, "Education: People or Products?" Daniel also claims that instead of supporting only materialistic values that equate money with success, our educators should be challenging today's students with the humanities to develop their critical thinking abilities so that as future citizens, they will be equipped with the necessary skills to maintain and protect our democracy.

Mikala Gallant, who studies at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, has written an essay entitled "The Totality of Christian Justice: Aquinas's Three Spheres in David Adams Richards's *Mercy Among the Children*." As her title indicates, Mikala is applying Thomas Aquinas's view of Christian justice to the characters of Richards' contemporary novel. Mikala explains that Richards is questioning Aquinas's model because it seems too difficult for any one person to implement Christian justice consistently in all three spheres of human life: the divine, the family, and the community. Only one character in the novel offers a glimmer of hope that the rare person might be able to meet Aquinas' standard of true Christian justice.

Another writer who focuses on moral issues is **Zachery Sandberg** of Pepperdine University. In his paper, “Where There’s a Will, There’s a Way,” Zachery compares the claims of Immanuel Kant and Benjamin Franklin relating to free will and morality. Both Kant and Franklin start with individual choices made by free will influenced by reason, but they use very different approaches to determine the power of free will in strengthening morality in the society at large. Kant’s approach, using the categorical imperative, seems to have some advantage over Franklin’s.

Amir Safavi of Columbia University also explores social morality. In his essay, “Of Earls, Kings, and Dons: Examining the Interplay between Individual and Collective Interests in Families,” Amir uses William Shakespeare’s *King Lear* as his core text, comparing it to Coppola’s film, *The Godfather*. In both sources, we can see tension between the desires and interests of individuals and the well being of the families they belong to. When this tension develops to a breaking point, it destabilizes the life of the entire family. Amir then draws a parallel between individuals and their families on the one hand, and families and the society they belong to on the other. In both cases, increased tension and refusal to compromise can lead to disasters, which in the case of families and the society they belong to, can be monumental.

In writing “Glory and Companionship: Motivators of Life that Lead to Demise,” **Win T. Matsuda**, a student at Pepperdine University, has chosen John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as his core texts. Win explains that in both Milton’s and Shelley’s eyes, being motivated by the desire for either glory or companionship will not lead to personal fulfillment of any kind. In fact, Win interprets both authors as coming to the conclusion that

these sources of motivation are illusory and that we would all be better off to abandon these ambitions and to seek contentment in our current situations instead.

Katie Petrik, a student at the University of Notre Dame, has used Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to write her essay, "All Shall Be Well: Anatole's Elevating Love." Katie interprets the relationship between Natasha and Anatole as an indication of Tolstoy's optimistic view of life, even in the face of evil and despair. Katie explains that although Anatole's seduction of Natasha at first seems to be a disaster in her life, ultimately, Natasha benefits tremendously from this relationship, so we can conclude that Tolstoy is presenting hope and faith as paramount.

Grace Mattox, a student at Lynchburg College, in her essay, "Ways of Seeing Art," has used John Berger's ideas in *Ways of Seeing* to explain the contrasting forms of expression used by Impressionist and the Cubist artists. Grace extends the comparison between these two schools of painting to the experience of the viewers who appreciate these two types of art: both the creators and the viewers have unique experiences with a piece of art because of the varying factors that each individual brings to the process.

Emma Kinsey, another student at Lynchburg College, has won the Peggy S. Pittas Lynchburg College Symposium Readings Award with her essay, "The Impersonal World of Facebook." Emma concedes that advances in computer technology have brought many benefits, but she is also concerned about the accompanying problems: large amounts of time spent on social networking, threats to privacy posed by online interactions, a decrease in direct interpersonal relationships, and reduced skills in creative and critical thinking.

The final three essays in this issue of the *Agora* were written in Senior Symposium, a general education course in which Lynchburg College students interpret Lynchburg College Symposium Readings and public lectures on contemporary issues in terms of their own experiences and opinions. In his paper, “Total Education,” **Callom Harkrader** outlines his ideal secondary education experience; Callom would like to add the strengths of the home schooling movement to the public schools by making sure that the high school curriculum includes topics that are relevant to students’ future careers, by promoting interactions between students and members of the general community, and by encouraging the development of critical thinking skills.

In her paper, “Beautifully Sustainable,” **Lisa Gervasoni** poses questions about the definition of beauty: is true beauty found in manmade objects or in the natural world? Lisa favors the natural world, but she fears that unless we adopt proactive approaches to sustainability, much of the beauty of the natural world could be lost in the near future.

In the final essay, “Exploitation through Small Decisions: How Quick Choices Destroy the Aesthetic World,” **Melissa Jennings** continues with the themes of environmentalism and sustainability, explaining that we often take our natural resources for granted and make seemingly insignificant decisions without thinking about their long term repercussions on the environment. Melissa’s suggested solution to this dilemma is that we should turn our exploitative relationship with the natural world into a collaborative one by appreciating all the practical and aesthetic benefits that nature has to offer.

All these *Agora* writers have generously shared their insights with us, but the instructors who supervised the writing of these papers also deserve thanks for encouraging their students’

intellectual development. From Lynchburg College, they are Dr. Tom Brickhouse (Blanks), Dr. Delane Karalow (Mattox), Professor Beth Packert (Kinsey), and Dr. Will Briggs (Harkrader). From Columbia University, the supervising faculty members are Dr. Giovanni Ildefonso (Thompson) and Dr. Staphane Charitos (Safavi); from Luther College, the supervisor is Dr. Amy Weldon (Flinchbaugh and Gibson); from St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, the supervising professor is Dr. Andrew Moore (Gallant); from Pepperdine University, the supervisor is Dr. Michael Ditmore (Sandberg and Matsuda), and from the University of Notre Dame, the supervisor is Dr. Francesca Bordogna (Petrik). We hope that these professors and others at ACTC institutions will continue to encourage their students to read, to think, to write and to share their work for the benefit of future readers of the *Agora*.